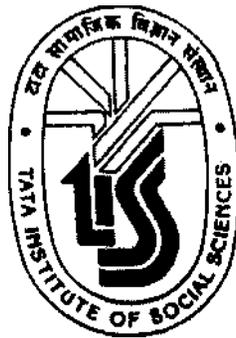


The nature of violence faced by lesbian women in India

A study conducted by

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Chapter 1 - Conceptualizing the nature of violence faced by lesbians

1.1 Introduction

This study examines the nature of violence faced by lesbians in Indian society. Although there has been substantial theoretical and practical work on violence against women in India, the manifestations of violence against lesbian women have not yet been recognized, let alone articulated. Indeed, the very existence of lesbians in our society is only beginning to be publicly acknowledged. The recent emergence of lesbian groups in Maharashtra (*Stree Sangam* in Mumbai, *Olava* in Pune) and other parts of the country (*Sakhi* and *Sangini* in Delhi, *Sappho* in Calcutta, *Prerana* in Bangalore) has contributed to this public recognition. These groups have accumulated anecdotal evidence of the often violent situations lesbians encounter in society, which is supplemented by brief newspaper reports. However, no systematic study has yet been initiated to analyse the nature and extent of the violence faced by lesbians.

The importance of this study is not only because it would be the first of its kind, but also from the perspective of working towards freedom from violence for *all* human beings. From this perspective, the urgency of such a study is precisely because of the invisibility of violence against lesbian women.

The next five sections of this first chapter outline the conceptual contexts within which this study is framed. We begin with a brief discussion of the complex intersections between gender and sexuality, and how people who transgress socially ascribed gender and sexuality roles become vulnerable to violence (in 1.2). We then outline theoretical frameworks analyzing violence against homosexuals (in 1.3). We make the argument that institutional proscriptions against homosexuality act as a mandate for violence against lesbians and gays. Specifically, the legal and mental health institutional classifications of homosexuality as 'illegal' and 'abnormal' are examined, with reference to the Indian context (in 1.4 and 1.5). We then discuss the intersections and the points of difference between the discourses on violence against women, and violence against lesbians (in 1.6). Drawing from these discussions, we then delineate the research objectives and questions (in 1.7 and 1.8). The concluding section (1.9) provides an outline of the report's structure

1.2 Gender and Sexuality

In this section, we would like to foreground some theoretical considerations about gender and sexuality that inform this study. A generally accepted distinction between "gender" and "sex" posits them as social and biological constructs respectively. Sex refers to the physical differences between 'male' and 'female' (the genetic, hormonal and reproductive differences), while gender refers to the 'masculine' and 'feminine'

1 We use the word "lesbian" to describe women who are in, or desire to be in, emotional and/or sexually intimate relationships with other women. (This definition therefore does not exclude women who are bisexual, or women who do not use the word "lesbian" to describe themselves).

social roles and characteristics attributed to one's physical sex or the other. Moore (1999) points out that gender can be 'social' or 'symbolic'. Social gender is the explicit and implicit rules that govern the clothing, roles, behaviour, norms, attitudes, thoughts, feelings, and relationships 'appropriate' for members of each sex. What is considered 'masculine', 'feminine' or 'gender neutral' varies according to location, class, culture, occasion and historical period. 'Symbolic' gender is the cultural or religious signifier of status, and is not necessarily always aligned with social gender. For instance, in India, the 'symbolic' gender signifiers of mother goddesses give women an elevated status that women's 'social' gender does not match.

The above distinction between 'sex' and 'gender' is contested on two fronts. On the one hand, some, like biological anthropologists, insist that there are core physical determinants of gender. On the other hand, theorists like Judith Butler (1990) argue that sex is already always constructed as gender. She does not deny the existence of biological differences, but argues that the importance given to reproductive biological differences over other physical differences is politically and culturally constructed. Butler notes that there are often more biological and physical differences between persons of the same sex (such as differences of age, reproductive capacity, skin colour, height) than there may be between people of different sexes. Challenges to the binary conceptualization of male and female physical differences are also offered from the point of view of the 'third sex' (eunuchs) and 'inter-sex' people (male and female hermaphrodites) (see Ann Fausto-Sterling, 1993).

Sexual identity and gender identity are similar in that both refer to how one thinks of oneself and both are 'embodied' concepts, physically rooted in the body. Sexual identities are often constructed in complex intersection with different gender identities. Sexuality can be diverse, incorporating a range of behaviours and identities. Although many societies define procreative heterosexuality as the 'normative' sexuality, a plurality of sexual behaviours has always existed, and includes: homosexuality, bisexuality, and pansexuality.

Butler suggests that gender is a performative act, continuously constituted (rather than a fixed construction), thus exposing the fluidity and instability of not only gender identity, but also of sexual identity. However, as Moore (1999) points out, despite Butler's historically specific analysis, many later theorists have interpreted this 'fluidity' and 'instability' of gender as the opening ground for highly individual, voluntaristic agency in the 'subversion' of gender norms. In their lived realities, most people do not find gender identities particularly fluid or open to choice (whether they are accepting or rejecting norms). As Butler acknowledges, gender performativity is never only about conscious wishes and desires. It is formed in conjunction with conditions not of our making: language, the symbolic, the realm of the inter-subjective and the relational.

The existence and perpetuation of violence towards particular gender identities and sexual identities is based at least in part in the historic and continuing oppression of people who do not conform to society's 'normative' sexual and gender roles.

1.3 Homosexuality and Violence

Mason (2001) observes that violence in the inter-locked systems of gender and sexual identity is not bound by the immediate injury due to the act of violence. The violence runs deeper, and shapes acts of both compliance and resistance by people who 'do not conform' to these norms. Acts of resistance include changing or subverting 'normative' gender and sexual identity. Compliance includes behaviours that seek to hide gender and sexual identity in order to reduce visibility as a 'deviant' sexual subject and avoid the threat of potential violence. As Mason argues, violence is partially contingent on the 'visibility' of the transgressive sexual subject. That is, since people are normatively 'presumed heterosexual', only those who indicate otherwise (through their clothing, behaviour, speech etc.) are vulnerable to direct violence. In her discussion of how 'visibility' centrally shapes the incidence and effects of homophobic violence, Mason points out that for lesbians and gay men, safety from violence is never a static condition, but a context dependent form of negotiation (*ibid*, 37). She further examines the how the 'visibility' of lesbian and gay behaviour shapes the effects of violence, and suggests that the knowledge of homophobic hostility interacts with other factors such as class and ethnicity to engender deeply embodied practices of self-surveillance as a means of negotiating safety.

In recent decades, there has been considerable research in Western countries on understanding the nature, causes, extent and consequences of violence against lesbians and gays². Steven Onken (1998) provides a useful summary of Van Soest and Bryant's (1995) different categories of violence; which he then applies to a conceptualization of the nature of violence against lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people.

Violence is a complex phenomenon with diverse manifestations. The categories Onken reviews construct violence in terms of *levels*, *types*, and *dimensions*. A further category that we discuss is the *domain* in which violence occurs. All these are not discrete categories, but overlap and are inter-linked aspects of violence. A single incident or situation can manifest several mutually re-enforcing aspects of violence. The following sub-sections will outline these categories. Wherever possible, examples from the Indian context will be given to illustrate the category.

1.3.1 Levels of Violence

Onken discusses three levels of violence:

Individual- "harmful acts against people or property". This would include taunting, harassment, violence and even murder of people on the grounds of their sexual orientation.

Institutional- "harmful actions by social institutions... that obstruct the spontaneous unfolding of human

2 See Garnets et.al. (1990), Gay Task Force (1990), Herek and Berrill (1992), Stanko and Curry (1997), Sloan and Gustavsson (1998).

potential". The expulsion of two women constables Leela and Urmila from the police constabulary in 1988 would constitute an example of such institutional violence.

Structural-Cultural - "normative and ideological roots of violence" that undergird and give rise to the institutional and individual levels of violence. Prevailing religious beliefs (particularly in Christianity and Islam) that "homosexuality is unnatural and immoral" are examples of such structural norms.

1.3.2 Dimensions of Violence

Here, "dimensions" relates to the perpetrators of violence.

Inter-personal - "a person or small group doing harm to others". When family members force a lesbian woman to go to a psychiatrist to "cure" her, or forcibly marry her off - they would be perpetrators of inter-personal violence.

Intra-personal - "a person doing harm to self. Women who attempt suicide would be committing intra-personal violence.

Collective - "an organised group or mob doing harm to others". Shiv Sena members attacking movie theatres where *Fire* (a film depicting a lesbian relationship) was being screened are an example of extreme homophobic collective violence.

1.3.3 Types of Violence

These are the practices or behaviours that constitute violence:

Omission - "failing to help someone in need". Women's reproductive health programmes, or youth sex-education programmes that do not take into account lesbian/gay sexuality would be responsible for omission.

Repression - "depriving people of their rights". Dismissal from a job, or evicting someone from a home because of their sexual orientation would constitute repression.

Alienation - "depriving people of self-esteem and identity". When the domestic partnerships of lesbians and gays are not given legal and social recognition, it would be a practice of alienation.

1.3.4 Domains of Violence

In this study, we have identified 'domains' as the arenas within which violence occurs.

Domestic

The parental family most often perpetrates domestic violence faced by lesbians (unless she is married, in which case it is the husband). Lesbians are subjected to physical and verbal abuse when parents or other family members find out they are lesbian. The violence experienced has included battering, house arrest, coercion into marriage and expulsion from the family home. In other instances, to avoid violent situations or compulsory marriage, women have had to run away from their natal families. There are several reported and unreported instances of such violent situations.

Another disturbing trend within the domestic domain is that of lesbian suicide pacts. In the past few years, there have been brief newspaper reports of young women who commit suicide together because they feel that their families and society will not allow them to live together (see Annexe 1 for details of newspaper reports). This is a phenomenon alarmingly on the rise in different parts of the country, particularly in Kerala. Maharashtra also has its share of such suicide pacts. In September 1998, the **Urdu Times** reported the joint suicide of two young college girls, Madhuri Patel and Varsha Jadhav, whose parents were opposed to their relationship. Students at Nanavati College, in Mumbai, the girls lived in Andheri and Malad respectively. Their bodies were found on the roof of a building in Virar, with two empty bottles of Baygon and their letters to each other, including a note that said that since the world would not let them live together, they were dying together to become one. More recently, in November 2000, **Lokmat** reported of another young lesbian couple in Gadchiroli district, who committed suicide by jumping into a well. Reconstructing the coercive situations that forced these women to take such an extreme step would be a challenging task, since there are no survivors.

We have no estimate of the number of unreported cases of lesbians committing suicide, either individually or as couples. A potential source of statistical information regarding violence could be from the records of suicide prevention centres and crisis counselling centres, assuming these indicated the reasons for distress calls. However, often such records provide an inadequate picture of the causes and extent of the distress experienced.

Social

Neighbours, ethnic and religious communities, and the workplace constitute the social domain. The violence encountered by lesbians within this arena would be ostracization and discrimination. There have been instances of lesbians being thrown out of their rental accommodation, or out of their jobs, when landlords or employers have found out about their sexual orientation. Further, harassment and violence on the streets is often directed at women who dress in a typically "masculine" way.

Institutional

By institutional violence, we refer to the explicit prohibition of homosexuality within the domains of law, mental health and religion. This includes criminal laws that make homosexual behaviour 'illegal', religions (specifically Islam and Christianity) that consider it 'immoral', and mental health classifications that consider it 'abnormal'. How the police, mental health, medical, legal and educational institutions "treat" lesbians is yet to be analysed.

For instance, despite the fact that Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code criminalises penetrative anal sex and not 'homosexual identity', or even lesbian sexual activity, it is often used by the police to intimidate lesbian women who try to "get married" or elope. Another consideration within the institutional context is

the attitude of medical and mental health professionals and the "treatment" they may prescribe to lesbians. There have been instances reported of homosexuals being subjected to shock therapy. Some women have been advised to have sex-change operations, not necessarily because of gender dysphoria, but because they are forced to the conclusion that the only way they can love another woman is by becoming a man. The next two sections discuss in further detail the ways in which legal and mental health institutional proscriptions on homosexuality sanction violence against lesbians and gays.

1.4 Homosexuality and the law

Although homosexual behaviour has generally received tacit acceptance in a predominantly gender segregated society, a defining reality of homosexuality in India is Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code, which criminalizes male homosexual behaviour. The British introduced the law in 1869, and though the equivalent statute has been repealed in the U.K. it persists as a relic of Victorian morality in post-colonial India. Similar statutes in other countries have also been repealed, because they contravene the rights of homosexuals to equality and privacy. Lesbian and gay organisations and human rights organisations are campaigning for the decriminalisation of homosexuality by the repeal or modification of Section 377. Although legal protections need to be secured against *coercive* sexual behaviour regardless of gender (including child sexual abuse, rape and sexual harassment), the *consensual* sexual behaviours of adults should not be the subject of prohibitory state legislation. Even though cases are rarely filed under Section 377, the consequence of its existence in the law books is the persistence of the common understanding of homosexuality as "illegal" and wrong.

This perception is apparent even from newspaper reports. Two recent examples from rural Maharashtra illustrate the point. In October 1999, **Samna** carried an article about an "illegal", "unnatural" lesbian relationship. The article described Jaya, as an educated, Christian woman who approached the local police station to get her married to Ramabai, with whom she said she had had a relationship for the past 17 years. The local police made a mockery of Jaya's demand for marriage by arresting Ramabai under Section 377. More recently, in January 2001, **Lokmat** reported that when two young women got married in a Hindu temple by exchanging garlands, the police followed and forcibly separated them.

Legal discrimination is also perpetuated against lesbians and gays when they are denied the right to privacy, equal rights to employment and the right to domestic partnerships. More life-threatening discrimination is when they are denied the same legal protections from violence, abuse and hate crimes as any other citizen.

- 3 Gender Dysphoria - is a condition in which an Individual feels (over a continuous period of at least two years) that their physical body does not match their gender Identity. Transformative surgery and hormonal treatment is then performed to align the physical body of the Individual with the internal/mental-emotional gender experienced.
- 4 Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code punishes with imprisonment "Whoever voluntarily has carnal intercourse against the order of nature with any man, woman or animal... Penetration is sufficient to constitute the carnal intercourse necessary to the offence"
- 5 See Alok Gupta (2002).

The criminalization of homosexuality and the absence of rights against discrimination or rights to partnerships renders lesbians and gays vulnerable to violence. This violence is direct when they are criminally prosecuted for homosexual behaviour. It is indirect when the law (or the absence of it) provides social sanction for discrimination, abuse and hate crimes directed against lesbians and gays.

1.5 Homosexuality and Mental Health

In different periods and cultures, there have been varying levels of acceptance and tolerance of homosexuality. The variations range from it being a completely accepted, even favoured practice to it being considered immoral or a crime. However, the construction of homosexuality as a *mental* illness, disorder or abnormality is of recent origin, dating to the nineteenth century. Even so, early and important psychologists like Havelock Ellis and Sigmund Freud did not consider homosexuality abnormal. In an oft-quoted 'Letter to an American mother' in 1935, Freud wrote:

"Homosexuality is assuredly no advantage, but it is nothing to be ashamed of, no vice, no degradation, it cannot be classified as an illness; we consider it to be a variation of the sexual function produced by a certain arrest of sexual development. Many highly respectable individuals of ancient and modern times have been homosexuals, several of the greatest men among them (Plato, Michelangelo, Leonardo da Vinci, etc.). It is a great injustice to persecute homosexuality as a crime, and cruelty too.... "If [your son] is unhappy, neurotic, torn by conflicts, inhibited in his social life, analysis may bring him harmony, peace of mind, full efficiency whether he remains a homosexual or gets changed..."⁶

Freud's theories were based on the assumption that the human being is essentially bisexual, and that a person's upbringing determines whether they will become heterosexual or homosexual. However, later psychoanalysts pathologized the explanation of homosexuality as arrested sexual development due to incomplete bonding with the parent of the opposite gender, and cited case histories of clients as evidence. This point of view has had considerable influence not only in psychology, but also in society.

The problem with psychoanalysts basing their theory on a clinical sample was made evident in later studies in which *non-clinical* samples of homosexual men (Hooker, 1956) and lesbians (Freedman, 1971) were compared with heterosexual men and women. These studies concluded that homosexuality as a clinical entity does not exist and that homosexuality is not inherently associated with psychopathology. The weight of this evidence, and the pressure from the gay rights lobby resulted in the American Psychiatric Association (APA) dropping homosexuality as a classification in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM) in 1973.

6 Sigmund Freud, In Jones, E. (1964, 195-196).

However, the new diagnostic classification *ego-dystonic homosexuality*, was created for the third edition of DSM in 1980. Ego-dystonic homosexuality was indicated by: (1) a persistent lack of heterosexual arousal, which the patient experienced as interfering with initiation or maintenance of wanted heterosexual relationships, and (2) persistent distress from a sustained pattern of unwanted homosexual arousal.

This new diagnostic category was criticised as a political compromise to appease those psychiatrists who still considered homosexuality a pathology. Others argued that the psychological problems related to ego-dystonic homosexuality could be treated as well by other general diagnostic categories and that the existence of the diagnosis perpetuated anti-gay stigma. Moreover, widespread prejudice against homosexuality meant that "almost all people who are homosexual first go through a phase in which their homosexuality is ego-dystonic", as the APA finally admitted in 1986, when it removed the diagnosis entirely from the DSM. The only vestige of ego-dystonic homosexuality in the DSM-IV occurred under *Sexual Disorders Not Otherwise Specified*, which included persistent and marked distress about one's sexual orientation (American Psychiatric Association, 1987). The Psychiatric Associations of other countries like Japan (in 1995) and China (in 2001) have also removed homosexuality from their diagnostic classifications.

The other widely used diagnostic classification is the International Classification of Diseases (ICD) of the World Health Organization (WHO), which classified *homosexuality* as a mental disorder until 1993. The ICD-10 still contains the code F66.1 for ego-dystonic sexual orientation, while the ICD-10-Clinical Modification maintains the code F66 for other sexual disorders, which includes ego-dystonic sexual orientation. This code is for individuals who are certain about their sexual preference and who seek treatment because of psychological and behavioral disorders associated with it.

A significant distinction in the ICD-10 is that it uses the term *sexual orientation* in conjunction with ego-dystonic, as opposed to *homosexuality*. This is a 'neutral' term, which can be interpreted to mean ego-dystonic *heterosexuality* as well. That is, technically, even heterosexual persons could say they were experiencing distress, and they wanted to change and become homosexual (or even a sexual). The critical question is whether Mental Health Professionals (MHPs) would notice these subtleties of language. It is highly probable that the majority of those who follow ICD-10 would equate sexual orientation to mean only homosexual orientation. In India, MHPs generally follow the ICD-10, so this is pertinent to the issue of institutionally sanctioned violence against lesbians and gays, through the psychiatric labelling of homosexuality as a disorder and conversion therapy practised by many mental health professionals.

In India, the emergent lesbian and gay movement has begun to take up this issue. In May 2001, the Milan Project, a program of the Naz Foundation India Trust in Delhi, filed a formal complaint with the

7 American Psychiatric Association, http://www.psyh.org/public_info/homose1.cfm

8 See Narain and Khaitan (2001).

National Human Rights Commission of India (NHRC)⁹. Complaint diary 3920 concerns a case of reported psychiatric abuse involving a patient at the All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS) who received almost four years of treatment aimed at the conversion of his homosexuality. The treatment reportedly involved two components: counselling therapy and drugs. During counselling therapy sessions, the doctor explicitly told the patient that he needed to curb his homosexual fantasies, as well as start making women rather than men the objects of his desire. The doctor also administered drugs intended to change the sexual orientation of the patient, providing loose drugs from his stock rather than disclosing the identity of the drug through formal prescription. The complaint filed with the National Human Rights Commission has two objectives. One is to get it to formally recommend to all relevant Indian psychiatric bodies, the issuance of an official statement that homosexuality is not a disease that requires a cure. The other is to recommend to the National Commission to Review the Working of the Constitution (NCRWC) that a clause providing protection from discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation be included in the Indian Constitution.

1.6 Violence against Lesbians

Lesbians are vulnerable to the violence faced by all women - rape, battering, sexual harassment and child abuse. However, lesbians not only have to contend with violence *as women*, but also *as lesbians*, and different frameworks need to be evolved for understanding the latter¹⁰. This could be compared to the specific kinds of violence women face on the basis of their identities as Dalit or adivasi, in addition to gender-based violence. There are significant limits though, to drawing such a comparison. First, the epistemic root of the violence faced by lesbians is in the denial of their very existence in Indian society. Lesbianism is often described as a "western import", and allegedly restricted to the urban elite of Indian society. However, the indisputable evidence of same-sex love in different historical contexts in India (the *Kama Sutra* and Khajuraho temple carvings being two commonly cited examples) and the increasing number of news reports from small towns and rural locations of women attempting to marry other women, are facts that contradict these oft-repeated denials of lesbian existence.

Second, lesbian sexuality is an aspect of a woman's identity that is not necessarily immediately apparent from her name, physical features or social practices, and a woman can, to some extent, choose whether to reveal her sexual orientation. Some women might indicate their sexual orientation through their subversion of gender by the adoption of "masculine" clothes and behaviour (although "masculine" women are not automatically lesbian). Other lesbian women may simply state that their relationship is more than a

9 Personal communication from *Milan Project*, NAZ India, New Delhi.

10 For Instance, the analytical frameworks for rape in Brownmiller (1975) or Lenore Walker's (1984) "Cycle of Violence" framework for battered women would *not* be adequate or appropriate to examine the violence faced by lesbian women.

11 See Ruth Vanita and Saleem Kidwal (2000) for a rich documentation of these traditions.

friendship. Many lesbian women may choose to *not* indicate their sexual orientation. In such instances, unlike in the case of caste or religion (where name, outward appearance and/or behaviour are often signifiers of identity) lesbian women are not "identifiable".

Third, the continued criminalisation of homosexuality in India under Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code can be read as an implicit sanction of violence against lesbians. This is in contrast to legal protections from violence available to Dalit and adivasi women under the Prevention of Atrocities Act.

Fourth, in a patriarchal society where compulsory heterosexuality and control over a woman's sexuality are the norm, the position of lesbians is inextricably linked to the status of women in society. Regardless of sexual orientation, a woman's sexual freedom is often predicated on her economic independence. In India, women's sexual choices are constricted: marriage is compulsory, and women rarely have any say in the choice of partner, in the nature and frequency of sexual contact, number and spacing of children etc. Recent studies have shown that women report higher incidence of domestic violence over sexual relations, particularly due to their refusal of sexual contact.

In such a hetero-patriarchal context then, for a lesbian to assert her sexuality becomes doubly difficult, even potentially dangerous. A woman who has an intimate sexual relationship with another woman implicitly challenges male control over her sexual life, and is often the target of violent misogyny. This is not to say that other women do not face misogynist violence, but to state that when lesbian women "transgress" the patriarchal boundaries on sexuality, the *reason* for violence then differs.

The violence that lesbian women experience is gender violence - not only because they are women, but also because it is specifically directed towards controlling their sexual autonomy. Freedom from violence for lesbians is, therefore, inextricably linked to the issue of sexual autonomy for *all* women.

1.7 Research Objectives

The main objectives of this study were to:

1. Understand the nature of the violence (physical, emotional, mental, and sexual) experienced by lesbian women, in domestic, institutional and social contexts.
2. Understand the impact of such violence on lesbians.
3. Explore the perceptions and knowledge of MHPs about violence against lesbians
4. Understand the therapeutic interventions of MHPs with lesbians.

The decision to focus on the specific institutional context of mental health (objectives 3 and 4) was made with the intent of first, understanding the situations in which lesbians sought mental health care. Second,

12 Marriage is compulsory for men too, and they too have little say in the choice of partner, however, they do have relatively greater freedom to manoeuvre than women.

13 See Jaiswal (1999).

it was to understand the knowledge, attitudes and interventions of MHPs in such situations. In both cases, the purpose was to examine the extent to which the situations and the interventions were violent.

1.8 Research Questions

In this section, we outline the areas of investigation within the two main categories of interviewees, i.e., lesbians and MHPs.

1.8.1 Lesbians

The questions here were to understand the nature of the violence, the conditions that produced, increased and decreased it, and the women's coping strategies. Further, we explored the consequences of violence on the physical, mental and emotional health of the women. That is, we wanted to understand the extent to which women felt shame, guilt, fear/threat, isolation, "immoral", "abnormal", low self-esteem, anxiety, anger, rejection, self-blame, frustration, etc. We explored the associations the women made vis-a-vis the cause of their distress; and the consequences on their behaviour in terms of depression, aggression, withdrawn behaviour, and suicidal ideation or suicide attempts. We also attempted to identify the positive coping strategies of the women, their sources of emotional support and strength.

1.8.2 Mental and Medical Health Professionals

With MHPs, the purpose was to understand, first, the nature and effect of the "abnormalisation" of lesbian sexuality by the mental health profession on the women, their families, and the MHPs. In a situation where lesbian sexuality is viewed as a mental or sexual "disorder", and further, where such a "disorder" is sought to be controlled by violent or coercive methods, the mental distress, anxiety and trauma experienced by lesbian women would be a result of the "disorder" labelling, rather than the symptom.

Our underlying assumption is that the psychosocial distress induced by the violence faced by lesbians in society should not be equated with the standards of mental illness/disorders. That is, the mental disorder experienced by lesbians was not necessarily intrinsic to their homosexuality, but would in most instances be a result of social stigma and victimisation. In adopting such a perspective, we follow Davar's (2000) general argument that normative constructions of female mental health obscure and justify structural and institutional violence against women. Thus, given the prevalent attitudes to homosexuality, one of the questions of this study was to understand if lesbian women and/or their families approached MHPs because they viewed homosexuality as a mental disorder, or because they experienced symptoms of anxiety/tension or other mental illnesses.

A second objective was to understand the attitudes of mental health professionals to homosexuality and the kind of therapy they provided. In a context where violence against women is barely recognised by the mental health establishment, the violence experienced by lesbian women would be doubly invisible. A

related objective was to understand the extent to which women who may be lesbian were counselled to undergo sex-change operations, even though they did not necessarily suffer from gender dysphoria. The investigation focused on the nature of counselling prior to sex-change operations, and the post operation follow-up and counselling services provided.

1.9 Outline of report

The next chapter (Chapter 2) delineates the research design and the methodologies used. The next four chapters present the data: Chapter 3 discusses the findings from the interviews of MHPs, Chapter 4 is a report of the quantitative survey of lesbians, Chapter 5 presents precis' of the in-depth interviews of eight women, while Chapter 6 offers a narrative analysis of these in-depth interviews. Chapter 7 summarizes the findings, triangulates the analysis from each of the research components and reflects on the emergent issues and areas for future inquiry.

Chapter 2 - Methodology

The research methodology of this study is situated in a feminist standpoint epistemology. It is informed by the principle that who you are and where you are situated makes a difference to your point of view and consequently the research or knowledge you produce. Such a methodological choice can expose research to critiques of being "unscientific" or "impressionistic", not only because all qualitative research suffers from this negative comparison to positivist, empirical research on these grounds, but also because feminist standpoint research runs the additional risk of accusations of "bias". The (simplified) response to such a contention is that *all* research is located in a context and is informed by a perspective. Positivist/empirical research does not identify either of these, deliberately or because of the default assumption of "objectivity". Feminist researchers have revealed that the norms of 'objectivity', 'neutrality' and 'rationality' which form the validation criteria of empiricist scientific methodology conceal sexist and androcentric biases. Some feminist empiricists argue that better adherence to these norms and criteria would produce 'better' science, while other feminist researchers question these norms (Harding, 1987, 182-185). The latter argue that there is no interpretation-free reality (Nielsen, 1990, 18-19), and that, to paraphrase Haraway (1991), 'objectivity is the view from nowhere'. They call for reflexive research that makes explicit the researcher's position, and the context of the research. The contours of these theoretical debates have been well mapped in two decades of feminist research (Stanley and Wise, 1983 & 1993; Fonow & Cook, 1991, Harding, 1992), and do not need to be elaborated further here.

However, the post-empiricist questioning of objectivity also poses the dilemma of relativism and returns us to the question of how to decide between a proliferation of theoretical frameworks. Does the lack of epistemological agreement about criteria for validation of knowledge imply that one adopt the relativist position that all frameworks (including therefore, the androcentric ones) are equally valid? Feminist theorists have been at some pains to argue *against* relativist method, because relativism is adopted as a strategy by dominant groups when their hegemony is challenged (Harding, 1987, 10). For these theorists, Hartsock's (1983) conceptualization of a feminist standpoint epistemology' offers a viable route out of the dilemma of relativism. Using (but also in the process transforming) Marxist analysis, Hartsock (1983) makes a specific argument that the sexual division of labour provides a *standpoint* for the female experience of social reality, which leads to more complex and accurate knowledge.

While Hartsock's specific argument has been critiqued as unproductive, since it forces a hierarchy of knowledge based on degrees of oppression (Nielsen, 1990, 25); the general argument of a *feminist standpoint as a politically engaged and interested position* can be deployed as a criteria for the validation of theoretical frameworks. That is, *what is feminist about methodology would be the politics of feminist intervention it permits*. With this preface, we now foreground the ways in which we have attempted to use

feminist methodological principles in this research.

First, this research examines the intersection of public, private and personal discourses on intimate, sexual relationships between women. We use definitions of the terms public, private and personal as set out by Rosalind Edwards and Jane Ribbens (1998) to indicate

- *Personal* - as the realm of individual identity, body image and emotions
- *Private* - as the realm of family, kin, and other close social networks
- *Public* - as the institutional realm of work, education, health, governance and other systems

Edwards and Ribbens point to the difficulty of locating the position of the feminist researcher, given the inter-relations between these three arenas. In the Indian context of sexuality, when one considers that there is no recognized language to talk about women's sexuality in general, let alone lesbian sexuality, uncovering the textures, connections and the layers of overlap between these arenas becomes an even more complex task.

Another primary principle of feminist research is to make transparent all aspects of the research process - the whys, hows and whos. Related to this is the principle of self-reflexivity, i.e., considering how the first decisions influenced the research process itself.

So, we take the risk - not only "public" (as professional researchers, liable to be charged with 'bias'), but also "personal", when we state that we bring to this research our identity as lesbian and bisexual activists. The choice and design of the research itself was propelled by our life experiences, and by our concern about the distress we observed among women who were attracted to women. In particular, the rising trend of lesbian couple suicides evoked a strong response. This research is then part of our ongoing search for language and constructs to articulate a subjugated experience - first to ourselves, but also to the "public".

"As Violi (1992) argues, we need to produce for ourselves our own social and collective forms of self-representation, and to make visible a different, alternative, social and cultural order within which to define our identity and subjectivity. In that sense, we are seeking to transform private knowledge into a more publicly based resistance, or at least a diversification and undermining of hegemony. The challenge is to remain sensitive to the diversity, given the power of the hegemony."

"Who" we are and "why" we chose this research impacted on the "how", both in designing the methods and in the negotiation of the "personal" and the "public" in different components of the study. Central to the "how" was the principle of self-reflexivity, particularly in the component of narrative analysis (elaborated

in section 2.3.2), where we evolved the theoretical framework for understanding violence against lesbians from the experiences of the women interviewed, and tested the framework against our own experiences.

2.1 Research Design

This study is part of a larger research project on violence against women in Maharashtra conducted at the Tata Institute of Social Sciences. In order to address the two sets of research questions on lesbians and MHPs (see Chapter 1, section 1.8) the research was designed with three components, and generated four data sets.

	Research Component	Location	Data Set Generated
1	Semi-Structured interviews of MHPs	Mumbai	MHP (22) views, knowledge & interventions Lesbian client profiles (70)
2	Structured Questionnaires for Lesbians	Mumbai, Pune, Delhi, Calcutta	Quantitative data (50 women)
3	In-depth interviews of Lesbians	Maharashtra	Narratives (8 women)

The semi-structured interviews of MHPs were expected to generate information about the MHPs views, knowledge and interventions; as well as secondary data about the experiences of violence by the larger universe of lesbian women. With the MHPs, the interviewer's self-presentation was as a professional researcher, rather than as lesbian, since we thought it would make the MHPs more comfortable and open in their responses. (See Annexe 2 for Semi-structured Interview Guidelines for MHPs)

The other two components of the research had lesbian informants. The structured questionnaires were expected to illuminate the questions about the nature and scale of violence experienced, while the in-depth interviews were expected to provide insight on the patterns of violence. An attempt was made to obtain a cross section of women of different age, class, religious and ethnic backgrounds in order to also explore the variations in terms of access to information/knowledge and resources, as well as their ability to negotiate their circumstances and situations of violence.

Our identity as lesbian activists was a point of entry with other lesbian women for the second and third research components, i.e., the structured questionnaires and the in-depth interviews. We have been members of *Stree Sangam* (a collective for women who love women) and have been in contact with a network of lesbian organisations in Pune, Delhi and Calcutta. Our status as 'insiders' of the lesbian community enabled us to contact lesbian participants for the study from this network. To an 'outsider', the issues of confidentiality and trust would have rendered this group invisible and inaccessible. Therefore, a key issue was sensitivity to maintaining their confidentiality, while simultaneously ensuring that the

15 All names and identifying information of participants have been changed to protect confidentiality.

diversity of their experiences was represented (as the quote by Violi above recommends) without being exoticised or objectified.

2.2 Mental Health Practitioners

2.2.1 *Semi-structured interview design and administration*

Open-ended interviews with MHPs were conducted following a guideline with 9-10 key topics which included:

Lesbian client profiles: The experiences of lesbian clients, although filtered through the memories and perceptions of the MHPs are representative of the total universe of lesbian women. Questions focused on the nature of their presenting problems, the kinds of violence experienced, and the therapeutic interventions. Specific questions were also addressed to the issues of clients who wanted to undertake female-to-male sex change operation.

MHP Views, Knowledge and Therapeutic intervention: Probing, clarificatory and hypothetical¹⁶, questions were asked to understand MHPs' knowledge, views and therapeutic interventions (diagnostic classifications, homosexuality, lesbianism, ego-dystonic homosexuality, sex re-assignment surgery, support resources).

Sample Selection

The 22 mental health professionals selected were from Mumbai. The sample was identified primarily from the directory of the Mumbai Association of Mental Health. The selection process accounted for gender (male/female), types of practice (psychiatrist/psychologists/psychiatric social workers/sexologist), and number of years of practice. After 2 interviews with MHPs who did not have any lesbian clients, the sample criteria were modified to include only those MHPs who had some lesbian clients, since the data was much more grounded and detailed if they had such experience. Out of the 22, one person was a counselor on a suicide help line, and one a sexologist. Two of the MHPs were selected because of their professional work with lesbian and gay organisations.

The table below indicates the distribution of MHPs interviewed:

	Female	Male	Total
Psychiatrist	5	8	13
Psychologist	6	1	7
Sexologist		1	1
Psychiatric Social Worker	1		1
Total	12	10	22

16 See Sidhi Hirve and Bela Ganatra. *Qualitative Data Gathering - the use of In-depth Interviews*. MacArthur Foundation for Population Innovations.

Data Analysis

A team of research assistants transcribed the interview tapes. Since the interview was semi-structured, the coding reflected the "a priori" approach - descriptive or interpretive data was coded into pre-determined categories. This *a priori* coding was then analyzed for emergent patterns in the content. The total data was divided into two sets. One set dealt with the lesbian clients and their profiles. The second dealt with the interface of the MHP and the client.

2.3 Lesbians

Lesbian participants for the Structured Questionnaires were contacted through city based lesbian networks and organizations. In-depth interviews were conducted with lesbian women whom we knew to have had some experience of violence, either from interventions or from newspaper reports (See Annexe 2 for Structured Questionnaire and In-depth Interview Guidelines).

2.3.1 Structured Questionnaire design and administration

The structured questionnaire¹⁸ was selected as a research tool to obtain a quantitative profile on the universe of lesbian women, and the incidence of violence they face. It was divided into five different parts

- Background information
- Expression to others about sexual orientation ("out" to)
- Suicidal ideation / attempts
- Types of violence faced (emotional, physical and sexual)
- Termination of violence / abuse (whether terminated, means of termination and support)

The questionnaire was designed primarily as a closed tool, and gave the respondents pre-listed choices, with limited opportunity for open-ended answers. It was designed for self-administration, in order to facilitate responses from women in other cities, as well as to protect confidentiality.

Sample Selection

Since the questionnaire was administered through the network, the sample only consisted of women who had disclosed their identity to an organization. Further, as these are city-based groups, the women are urban, literate and English-speaking.

This sample therefore does not represent rural and small town women (whose suicides are the ones that have come to public light), illiterate women, women living in poverty, women with reduced mobility or women from other marginalized groups.

Identifying women from the total universe would be an impossible task, given their isolation, "invisibility"

17 See Sidhi Hirve and Bela Ganatra, *Qualitative Data Management - Coding, the first step In Analysis*. MacArthur Foundation for Population Innovations.

18 See Annexe 2 for the Questionnaire.

and vulnerability. Despite this limitation, we believe that the current sample has the potential to highlight phenomena that were previously hidden and open new areas of enquiry.

Data Analysis

The data from the questionnaires was then tabulated on excel sheets and simple frequency tables were generated.

2.3.2 In-depth interview design and administration

Of the eight women interviewed in depth, we had prior contact with seven of them. The first contact with five of the women chosen for in-depth interviews (Paro, Ruksana, Anjana, Vrinda, and Jaya) had been through interventions when they were in crisis. Two women (Shawn and Niloufer) were identified through social networks. So with the exception of Mohan (the only one approached directly for this research), there was some pre-interview knowledge of each of their experiences. This knowledge was reflected in the interviews through shared assumptions about events and other actors in the narratives. It was precisely because of the shared lesbian identity and in some cases friendship, that women were open about intimate details of their lives. All the interviews had untaped "personal" conversations with both of interviewer and interviewee sharing stories - about our lives and relationships with partners, families, friends or colleagues. In all the interviews, we spent some time doing activities other than "interviewing" - cooking and sharing a meal or going for a walk.

Interviews lasted for durations ranging from one to two and a half hours. The initial interview guideline prepared for the in-depth interviews was far too structured and detailed, and it was only after the first interview, we followed Reissman's suggestion to have a list of a few broad questions (See Annexe 2 for In-Depth Interview Guideline). The interviewer tried to allow the flow to be directed by the narrator, with varying degrees of success.

Sample Selection

In the selection of the interviewees, an attempt was made to obtain a cross section of women of different age, class, religious and ethnic backgrounds in order to also explore the variations in terms of access to information/knowledge and resources, as well as their ability to negotiate their circumstances and situations of violence.

Narrative Analysis

We used Catherine Kohler Reissman's¹⁹ theory and techniques of narrative analysis as the most appropriate data analysis method for the in-depth interviews. In this approach, as Reissman points out, "*respondents narrativize particular experiences in their lives, often where there has been a breach between the ideal and real, self and society*" (p.3). Such an approach was particularly important for several reasons.

19 Catherine Kohler Reissman, **Narrative Analysis**, Qualitative Research Methods. Vol.30.

First, it was open to the intrinsically exploratory nature of the interview process. Second, it is rooted in the "grounded theory" approach to research, which gives primacy to the "voices" of the women. This made it possible to "hear" the narration of complex experiences and articulate them without excessive abstraction; to understand the nature of violence in lesbian lives, as women see it, rather than try to "fit" their experience to an existing theoretical framework on violence. Finally, we chose this method because narrativisation assumes the researcher has a "point of view", and offers space for self-reflexivity of the researcher, as well as for the relationship between the teller and listener.

Data Processing

Each interview was transcribed in detail by the research team and then checked for accuracy by the researchers²⁰. Of the eight in-depth interviews, one was in Marathi and two in Hindi while the rest were in English. The re-checking was almost as pain-staking as the original transcribing. There were a number of errors in the first drafts, due to poor tape quality as well as the team's unfamiliarity with the research topic. In checking the transcripts, the researchers heard the stories once again and this was crucial for a more detailed understanding. Although some data cleaning was done, the transcripts do not consistently reflect non-lexical utterances (such as um, er), pauses, or repeated words.

Reading transcripts and listening to the taped interviews showed gaps and discrepancies in the narratives. Ideally, these kinds of discrepancies could be resolved with a second round of interviewing, which had been planned, but unfortunately, due to the shortage of time, were not conducted.

Three of the interviews were conducted in Hindi and/or Marathi. Since the interviewer's fluency in these languages is not perfect, it is probable that subtleties and nuances of word usage in these interviews have been lost in the process of transcribing and coding the interviews into narratives.

Identifying and coding narrative Sections

Once the transcripts were "cleaned", we divided the raw text into narrative sub-sections, using Labov's framework of narrative structures:

Narratives. ...have formal properties and each has a function. A "fully formed" one includes six common elements: an abstract (summary of the substance of the narrative), orientation (time, place, situation, participants), complication action (sequence of events), evaluation (significance and meaning of the action, attitude of the narrator), resolution (what finally happened), and coda (returns the perspective to the present moment).

20 Although the transcriptions attempted to include non-lexical utterances (umm, aah, etc.) as far as possible, this was not always achieved. Variations in recording quality and speech tonalities also made accurate transcriptions difficult.

21 An interesting and telling kind of error was invariably around the vocabulary of sexuality: "orgasms" was transcribed as "organisms", and words like lesbian or homosexuality were often erased from sentences.

22 Relssman, 1993:18

In the selection of the narrative segments, we followed rhythms internally consistent within each narrative style. Narratives were usually a set of dialogues between interviewee and interviewer centering on a particular incident or opinion. They could be "stories" about incidents in their lives, which illustrated their situation, attitudes, feelings and relationships.

We also found that some significant stretches of dialogue were not so clearly demarcated according to Labov's narrative structures, but were what we have called "explications", that is, a series of explanations or reasons offered for an incident or a belief. Bracketing out stretches of narratives from a continuous flow of conversation required close scrutiny of the transcripts, in order to match it with the pauses and voice pitch of the narrator, as well as the larger story. Some tracts of the transcripts were not included in the final analysis for these reasons:

- The content would publicly identify the woman and put her at risk.
- The content was beyond the scope of the study, for e.g. violence faced in an intimate relationship with a female partner.
- Details and explanations that were repetitive and could be represented in the final narrative pool by another story.
- Details of place, age and context that were included in the precis and were not narratives.

Each selected narrative segment was pared down to a core narrative, which contained all or some of the above elements. The challenge was pare down the narratives into core narratives without losing the "voice" of the woman. The sentences of the narrative sections were first divided into discrete clauses and sequentially numbered. Next, the lines were edited and re-organized to form the essential "core narrative".

Below are two examples of core narratives. The first, P-07, contains the typical elements of narrative structure as defined by Labov. The second, M-09, is a series of explications which track the reasoning behind Mohan's identity formation.

P-07 (about mom's "psyching" her for being "abnormal")

abstract

05 you know 30 days spending with your mum who was giving you...

06 you know psyching you out by

08 saying that you are abnormal, you are a lesbian, you are...

complicating action

12 she quoted some stuff you know...

13 there are doctors who say it's abnormal.

14 I mean, okay my sister was a doc - my elder sister,

19 she had opened all her books.

- 21 General practioner's books - it's an abnormality apparently,
 22 she had highlighted that and stuff.
 23 Gay, lesbian it's a... aberrant behaviour and stuff.

resolution / coda

- 24 So, she was like okay, that is IT.
 25 That is the last word and that is what you are. You are abnormal.

evaluation

- 26 She can get very nasty when she talks.
 29 Which is something I never knew my mum could do.
 30 She is very dignified and decent
 31 but when she gets angry she can really talk wild I mean...

M-09 – (core narrative on identity)

abstract

- 01 बी-तो अपने आपको लडके समझते हो, ऐसी बात है ?

explication 1

- 02 भगवानने हमे जो हनजे ही डाल दिये, शरू से ही —
 04 बी — guts बोलके क्या समझते हो ?
 06 gents के जो hormone बोलते,
 07 sex बोलो, एक प्रकार —
 09 gents के उपर मेरा कुछ भी संभव नहीं —
 12 उससे — उस हिसाब से
 13 मैंने आज तक के किया ही नहीं — gents मे ।
 14 और वही अगर ladies हो —
 15 ऐसे सामने आ गये
 16 तो फिर मेरा दृष्टीकोण अलग हो जाता ।

evaluation

- 17 तो बचपन से फिर मेरेको ऐसे ही रखा गया
 18 तो मेरेको लडका ही होना था ।
 19 बचपन से वो ही आदत मुझे गिर चुकी है ।

explication 2

- 20 बी — लेकिन ऐसा भी हो सकता ना,
 21 की आप मे ladies के उप्पर आकर्षण है,
 22 बी — लेकिन इसकी मतलब नहीं है की आप gents होना ही है,

- 23 उनके उपर आकर्षण होने के लिय —
 25 नहीं ।
 28 यानी, पटता ही नहीं
 30 क्या मुझे बहुत गुस्सा आता है ।
 35 उसमे जमते नहीं ।
 37 जैसे ladies बनके
 38 ladies पे आकर्षित होना,
 40 नहीं जमता ।
 43 याने, वो आकर्षण होता ही नहीं ।
 48 मेरे को उसका गुस्सा आता है

evaluation

- 49 बी — लेकिन कभी सोचा की, गुस्सा क्यों आता है ?
 55 कारण मेरे को भी मालुम नहीं ना ।
 56 मेरे मे नहीं है वो ।
 59 यानी अलग सा लगता है ।
 60 एक ladies ladies पे आकर्षित होना,
 61 वो अलग सा लगता है ।
 63 बिलकूल भाता नहीं ।

explication 3

- 68 और आधा भगवानने मग से बना दिया ।
 69 याने, पुरा देना तो था, तो अच्छा होता था ।
 70 उसमे आधा याने, gents का ही दे दिया ।
 71 बी — आधा क्यों ? क्योंकि महावरी नहीं है आधा समजते हो ?
 72 महावरी नहीं है ।
 73 ये सबसे main problem
 78 ladies की एक शरीर की रचना तो है ?
 80 मैं नहीं कहा बोला ?
 81 लेकिन मेरे मे वो guts
 82 साला, वो ही बोला गुस्सा आता ।

evaluation

- 84 बी — किसको गुस्सा आता है,
 85 वो guts से या आपके शरीर से ?
 86 शरीर से ।

explication 4

- 89 बी – तो आपने कभी *sex change* का सोचा था ?
92 नहीं ।
94 वो होता है आजकल लेकिन मेरा ठीक है ।
95 जो भगवान ने दिया, वो ही ठीक है ।
96 बी – अभी तो बोला की वो आपको उसपर गुस्सा आता है ?
97 गुस्सा आता तो सही ।
98 देखो उसके बारे *paper* में आया था ।
99 एक *ladies* ने लिंग लगाया था ।
103 तो वो लिंग उसका *loose* हो गया ।
108 और उसकी *death* हुआ
109 जिसने लिंग लगाया था ।
112 बताओ फायदा क्या हुआ उसका ?
113 कुछ भी नहीं ।

evaluation

- 116 इच्छा तो हुई आदमी होने को,
117 लेकिन जब *paper* में पड़ा,
119 यानी, इच्छा मर गयी थी ।

Core narratives were then examined for language (word choice, metaphors, tense used, repetition etc.), thematic patterns and structures connecting different events. Why a story was told in this way, to this listener, the underlying assumptions taken for granted by the teller and the listener were also explored within each interview.

Identifying Linked Narratives

When we compared the core narratives across the sample on key themes like “identity”, “family”, “work”, “violent/crisis incidents” etc, we found that some are discrete story units, while others were linked, and flowed into cycles over a period of time.

This process of coding and analysing core narratives facilitated a close reading of the text, and gave us an insight into patterns in experiences. It is a methodology that we found particularly suited to understanding the nuances of women’s emotions when they faced violence in their lives as well as to articulating the way women negotiated their expressions of sexuality over time in their self-conception, in relationships with people who were significant, and in particular contexts.

Evolution of the theoretical framework on violence against lesbians

In examining the narratives, there were a few critical turning points, invariably catalysed by narratives that did not “fit”. The first was when we were trying to understand or “place” traumatic events in some women’s lives that did not “fit” the traditional understanding of violence. Indeed, the woman who experienced the

traumatic event may not even have constructed it as "violent". Yet, these were events that were undeniably destructive, and a consequence of being lesbian. Consequently, we were compelled to deepen our conceptualisation of violence to an epistemic level.

The second turning point was articulating the levels of a woman's *agency* in disclosing her sexual identity. Disclosure (or the lack of it) is determined by whether or not a woman is forced to reveal her sexual orientation, her internalised suppression due to fear of consequences, her desire for acknowledgement and validation, or her desire for privacy.

Another insight came while we were struggling to differentiate between the kinds of responses to disclosure. We had to identify criteria for distinguishing between reactions that were punitive, tolerant or accepting. As we uncovered the layers of complexity in the narratives, we had to formulate new patterns for representation in the framework. When the narratives were analysed, some segments were prioritised and others rejected as the framework evolved section by section. We grouped **the narratives** in two ways. The first was to list the narratives in their sequence of occurrence (rather than sequence of narration), which led to the discovery of natural cycles of linked narratives. The **second was to collate the** stories across different domains - family, work, etc. Within each domain, and **then within narrative** cycles, we attempted to examine the interactions between the women and the people **they were relating** to. Thus, the framework on violence against lesbians (described further in Chapter **6**) **evolved as an** *outcome* of the narrative analysis process, configured and refigured to accommodate **nuances**.

Chapter 3 - Mental Health Professionals

The data presented in this chapter is based on the interviews of twenty-two mental health professionals (MHPs). It is organized in three sections: first, we discuss the lesbian client profiles; second, we present the views and therapeutic interventions of the MHPs with an analytic comment in the final section.

3.1 Lesbian Client Profiles

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Almost all the MHPs had at least one lesbian client²³, and the median number of clients was five. Client histories for 70 women were recorded (For details, refer to Annexe 3). Two of the MHPs who were affiliated to specific counselling services for lesbians/gays had a comparatively high percentage of lesbian clients - both reported that they had about 2 new clients per month. However, three to five clients over the entire span of the average MHP's career is a relatively low number of clients. Some MHPs commented on the fact that the incidence of lesbian clients was lower than the incidence of gay male clients.

3.1.1 Client concerns

Several striking features emerged from the lesbian client profiles. The single most disturbing feature in the client histories was the number of women who were forced to visit the MHP. Fifteen women (21%) were compelled in this manner. Twelve young women had been brought by parents who found out they were lesbian. The remaining three women had been taken for therapy by their husbands.

Second, none of the women had come to the MHPs requesting to "become heterosexual". That is, although four or five women were exploring their sexual orientation and were consequently confused²⁴, guilty or anxious, there was no distress expressed about their lesbian sexuality per se. They reported distress, grief, anxiety and or depression about a range of other issues such as break-up of relationships, pressure to marry, bad marriages etc. As three of the MHPs observed, this is in marked contrast to some of their gay male clients who approach them specifically to "become heterosexual". The explanation offered was that although both men and women faced pressure for marriage, the pressure on men to "perform" sexually was far greater.

As mentioned earlier, several MHPs observed that lesbian clients were generally more comfortable with their sexual identity than male homosexual clients. From among the self-referred clients, the typology of clients concerns described by the MHPs included:

- Young women who were exploring their sexuality with other women ("teenage crushes"), and who had questions about whether it was "normal", "right" etc. They would express feelings of confusion and guilt.

23 Two MHPs had no lesbian clients.

24 Two of the women were identified as being "latent lesbians": i.e. women who the MHP thought were lesbian, but they had not reached the same conclusion.

- Women who were married into large joint families, have conjugal relations with their husbands and are in a relationship with another woman in the family (MHP 9). Most of these women perceive the relationship as peripheral to their reasons for consultation (career, children etc.)
- Bisexual women who were involved with both a man and a woman, and wanted to sort out their confusions regarding relationships.
- Women with concerns due to separation, break-up or dysfunctional relationships with their female partners.
- Women who are survivors of child sexual abuse and had, (according to the MHP) "learnt" homosexuality.
- Women who wanted Sex Re-assignment Surgery (SRS).

25

Third, the incidence of depression is predictably high at 21% of the total sample. Four of these women were clinically depressed, and had taken anti-depressant medication for some duration. Six women had suicidal ideation or had attempted suicide. Four women had problems of drug or alcohol abuse, and three women had problems of poor scholastic performance.

Another significant feature of the client histories is that none of the 10 women (7% of the sample) who had approached MHPs because they wanted sex-reassignment surgery (SRS) were evaluated as meeting the criteria for SRS. These were typically "masculine" women (wearing men's clothes and hairstyles), who were in relationships with other women. Three of them had been referred by plastic surgeons for psychiatric assessments. Often, these women wanted to undergo SRS not because of gender identity disorder (feeling like they were men trapped in women's bodies), but because they felt that they would be able to get married and live as a heterosexual couple with their women partners, once the surgery was carried out. Most of these women did not have a clear understanding of the physical and emotional implications of SRS for themselves and any partner they were currently with. They were also unaware of the time and expense involved in the SRS operations.

3.1.2 Violence faced by lesbian clients

Many of the client histories recorded incidents of both physical and emotional violence and aggression experienced within the families. Nine women had experienced familial pressure to get married.

Among other instances of violence: one woman had been physically confined to the house by her parents, one woman had been evicted from her parental home and one woman was forced to undergo aversive therapy.

Only five of the MHPs noted that they had not observed any violence in the lives of their lesbian clients. This was partly due to the fact that many clients had not disclosed their sexual orientation to others. As

²⁵ Since it is a sample drawn from MHP clients, rather than the general population

three MHPs observed, the incidence of violence and discrimination is predicated on disclosure, i.e, clients did not report experiences of ostracization, because most of the self-referred clients had not told anyone other than their partners.

Almost all the MHPs recognised, to varying degrees, familial and social violence faced by lesbian women. The degree of recognition depended on the definition of violence used. The interviewer clarified that the definition of violence being used was both physical and emotional abuse. However, while some of the MHPs recognised that lesbians faced social stigma and ostracization, they said that they would not necessarily label it as "violence". Further, as one MHP pointed out, some of the women came from dysfunctional families, therefore it was difficult to distinguish if the aggression or violence was because of sexual orientation per se, or existing familial dysfunctionality.

Some significant observations were made by MHPs regarding violence. The first was on the double-bind women faced: "If they choose not to hide, then they face the ostracism that's there. If they hide, then there's whole shame of that relationship, they can't tell other people, they can't hold hands in public..." (MHP 6). This double-bind of silent shame vs. ostracisation produced situations where if women disclosed their sexual identity, they ran the risk of violent reactions from family and society. And if they chose to keep their sexuality a secret, then they were likely to internalise the social stigma in the form of shame, guilt or, taken to the extreme - in forms of self-abuse (suicide or addiction).

The second significant observation is that while there was comparatively less physical abuse reported, the incidence of emotional violence was high, mostly within the family. One possible explanation for this was *"because, if the family wants to hide it,... [they would not] start beating and shouting... the whole society will come to know about it."* (MHP15)

3.2 Views and therapeutic interventions of MHPs

3.2.1 Views about homosexuality

There was a clear awareness among all of the MHPs that homosexuality is no longer considered a mental or sexual disorder. Almost all of the MHPs unambiguously expressed the opinion that homosexuality was "normal". They described it variously as a sexual "preference", "practice", "inclination", "identity", "way of life", or "routine behavioural pattern". Three of the MHPs cited statistics from studies indicating that homosexuals were a small minority in society. A discussion on whether homosexuality was "learnt" or "genetic" was engaged in by five of the MHPs, with some saying it was inborn, and others arguing that it was a combination. There was also an articulation by four among the sample that there needs to be greater awareness and acceptance of homosexuality in society.

Four MHPs discomfort with the topic indicated that they implicitly did *not* think homosexuality was 'normal', although they did not explicitly say they considered it 'abnormal'. All four were MHPs who had been

practising for 20 years and over, so their ambiguity and discomfort may be explained by the fact that twenty years ago homosexuality was classified as an abnormality. Underlying their comments was a perception that the *source* of homosexuality was in some aberrant situation such as a dysfunctional father-son relationship or childhood sexual abuse. Situational homosexuality, of the "passing phase" variety found in hostels or among adolescent boys was also viewed as more acceptable than long-term, confirmed homosexuality: *"Many of them are normal individuals; it is circumstances which pushes them into this."* (MHP13).

A subtle extension of this perception was expressed by two other MHPs, who, while they categorically stated that homosexuality was normal, thought that homosexuality *resulted* in "not-normal" or "problematic" behaviour. This was illustrated by the following comments:

"I have seen many people who have had some psychiatric problems because of this behaviour. If it is not exactly psychiatric problems, then para-psychiatric ... problems with their relationships in the family, some personal problems, some sort of an adjustment problem does come in these people." (MHP3).

"..that commitment which a heterosexual couple would give, that commitment which is expected, which naturally comes through - is somehow not very much there in a homosexual relationship. That's the reason why many of these people have problems." (MHP2).

3.2.2 Views about Lesbian Sexuality

The distinctions MHPs made when specifically talking about lesbian sexuality were related to the perception of women as tending to get more emotionally than physically involved, compared with homosexual men. Another observation made was that lesbian women have space in the private arena for greater freedom of physical intimacies - such as grooming hair, bathing together, massages, and shared confidences. This was contrasted to the public arena that homosexual men inhabit.

Several of the MHPs spoke of lesbian clients typically in terms of "dominant" and "passive" partners, the former being the one who wore "masculine" clothing and hair styles, the latter being the "feminine home-maker".

Again, there was a common perception that childhood sexual abuse resulted in lesbian behaviour. For example, MHP10 located the source of lesbian sexuality in dysfunctional families. Her observation on 4 of her clients was that:

"somewhere they had a very confusing identity about their fathers...It is very important that you have a parent of your own sex who is strong. And at the same time, you also need the opposite sex to be strong to develop a role model... o.k, so this is how I

behave like a woman, and this is what I would want a man to be. So when I don't see those roles being fulfilled, somewhere it could develop a change in my own sexuality."

However, there were also points of view that were a departure from the usual stereotypes:

"If sexual abuse made women lesbians, a lot of women would be lesbians". (MHP 11)

"Just because you are lesbian doesn't mean you can't be a good mother. I'm sure many of them would like to adopt a child" (MHP 19).

3.2.3 Knowledge of Diagnostic Classifications

Significantly, all of the MHPs knew that homosexuality was no longer classified as sexual or mental disorder in the ICD-10 or the DSM-4. Depending on which system they followed, there was varying degree of knowledge about the precise classification of homosexuality in that system. Three MHPs mentioned how the gay and lesbian lobby in the U.S was active in pressurizing for the declassification of homosexuality as a sexual disorder in the DSM 3. Two knew that ICD-10 had declassified homosexuality ; only as recently as 1993.

More generally, four of the MHPs expressed scepticism about the system of diagnostic classifications. Their reasons varied - from believing that such classifications were reductionist, and, therefore, not useful for diagnosis and therapy; to believing that they were structured to benefit profit-making by pharmaceutical companies.

3.2.4 Views on classification of Ego-dystonic Homosexuality

Only two of the MHPs had a completely clear understanding of the differences between the ICD-10 and DSM-4 classifications of homosexuality with regard to ego-dystonic homosexuality²⁶.

With the exception of four MHPs, the others (81 %) believed that it was necessary to retain a classification of "ego-dystonic homosexuality". Two of the four who advocated removal of the classification, also did not believe in classifications in general. All four were of the view that *"How many would be naturally very happy being homosexual? Not many, because the environment is such that it is not very encouraging for homosexuals"*(MHP12)

A detailed examination of the different rationales offered for retaining the classification of ego-dystonic homosexuality revealed a variety of opinions. In the first rationale, two of the MHPs drew a comparison between ego-dystonic homosexuality and alcoholism (MHP15 and MHP9). *" You know it's sort of equivalent to an alcoholic saying I feel excited when I see a glass of rum... there are so many people who have one drink and stop ...So alcohol per se is not bad, it is when people are attracted to it against their will."* (MHP9).

²⁶ Ego-dystonic sexual orientation is a classification retained within the ICD 10. The DSM3 had this category, but the DSM4 dropped the classification of ego-dystonic sexual orientation in 1986.

The second perspective focused on the use of the phrase *ego-dystonic*. "The word to emphasise is ego-dystonic, not homosexuality. Anything to do with ego-dystonic would be abnormal" (MHP15). To illustrate his point, he said that even scratching would be "abnormal", if the person was very distressed with the behaviour. MHP14 articulated this in his statement saying - "*A person may be unhappy with their heterosexuality - with sexuality totally, and go in for asceticism. We have to cover all possibilities.*" That is, if one were to accept that people could be unhappy with themselves because of any behaviour, or any sexual orientation, the classification should be ego-dystonic ___(blank) behaviour, or ego-dystonic sexuality, rather than only ego-dystonic homosexuality. In such a categorization, even a heterosexual person could experience ego-dystonicity about their sexuality and would want to become homosexual.

In the third, emic perspective: "*Client is boss, I would not impose and say, you are biologically attracted, you jolly well stay a lesbian...*" (MHP9). This client-centered perspective would ostensibly support the woman to change her sexual identity if she was unhappy about being lesbian, particularly if the level of the client's distress was extremely high: "*If she is so disturbed that she wants to go and kill herself, then definitely I would help her out of it.*" (MHP10).

Two MHPs recognized that the existence of distress in a lesbian client did not equal dystonicity about homosexuality. The causative factors for distress are externally induced, as MHP22 pointed out: "*There are people who call up and say they want to change, but they always give a reason - they're lonely, there are more advantages being heterosexual, the security of marriage - and that's why they want to change.*" This MHP recognized that it was not being attracted to women per se which was distressing; it was the *impact* of such an attraction which produced distress. Further, that in situations when fear of factors inducing distress were internalised the client experienced self-hatred or was self-abusive.

Finally, as MHP5 pointed out, "We have to start thinking about the classifications. What is thought to be ego-dystonic might be social expectations. In India, a gay woman would want to have a child and a husband. So what component of ego-dystonicity is because of social norms?"

3.2.5 Views on classification of Gender Identity Disorder

MHPs were divided almost equally into those who were adequately informed about the exclusion criteria for Gender Identity Disorder (GID), and those who did not have any clarity on these criteria . Again, only three had total clarity on the exclusion criteria for GID. Of these three, MHP20 (along with other psychiatrists) had conducted a study on transsexuals while she was at K.E.M Hospital in the 1970s²⁸.

27 See Annexe 5 on the DSM4's Diagnostic Criteria for *Gender Identity Disorder*

28 See Doongaji et. al (1978). The study was of 12 transsexual clients (both FTM and MTF); only 6 of whom were finally assessed as being genuinely suffering from Gender Identity Disorder. The others were excluded either because they were adjudged to be not 'true transsexuals' - i.e.. either they were homosexual, or they exhibited some psychosis.

3.2.6 Assessment Tools

The majority of the MHPs used the clinical interview and the clients' self-reporting as their assessment tool. Two psychologists reported using other assessment methods such as the Rorschach, MMPI, and TAT battery of tests. However, these evaluation methods were not routine procedure for them, but were used only in instances where such evaluation was specifically requested (for e.g. to assess a client for SRS). Two of the MHPs observed that such screening instruments were more useful for research purposes where exclusion criteria had to be maintained. According to them, these tools are less useful for diagnosis and counselling practice.

3.2.7 Therapeutic interventions

Confusion, self-esteem, anxiety, depression, grief, non-acceptance, turmoil, anger, guilt, fear of sexuality, fear of rejection, worry about future, addictions, drop in scholastic performance - these were some of the main problems that the lesbian clients came to MHPs with. Most of the MHPs clearly expressed that their priority in therapeutic interventions would be to address the presenting symptoms of anxiety, depression, grief etc. MHP9 reflected on building the client's trust in the MHPs: she observed that some of her clients initially checked out what she looked like, and whether they thought she would be likely to accept or reject them on the basis of sexual orientation. Counselling, psychotherapy and rational-emotive therapy were the primary techniques used by the MHPs. In cases of clinical depression, this was combined with anti-depressant medication.

Four of the MHPs unambiguously spoke about helping clients suffering from confusion and guilt to come to terms with their sexual orientation:

"Reduce the guilt, try to make them more accepting... that it's o.k to be in a same-sex relationship. Trying to help them see the family's perspective... help them reduce their anxiety." (MHP16)

"Then I just counsel them like how one would counsel someone who has any other problems. Be more supportive." (MHP 22)

Two of the MHPs also spoke about the importance of family counselling. The purpose of this was to help the parents (who may have forced their daughter to visit the MHP) come to terms with her sexual orientation.

3.2.8 Services and Resources for Lesbians

29

Over 50% of the MHPs (13) had heard of the Humsafar Trust, and mentioned it when asked about services/resources for lesbians in Mumbai or India. Only four MHPs however had heard of a lesbian organization, of whom only two were aware of the name of the organization (Stree Sangam).

30

Similarly, 2 MHPs knew that a book for lesbians in India had been published, but did not know the details. Psychology textbooks and booklets on sexuality was the other reading material that four of the MHPs said they would offer if clients asked for information on sexual orientation.

29 In 1990, Mumbai based gay activist Ashok Row Kavi established the *Humsafar Trust*, India's first organisation for gays and lesbians

30 Ashwini Sukhtankar (ed), *Facing the Mirror - Lesbian writing from India*. Penguin India. New Delhi: 1999.

MHP9 actively advocated bibliotherapy as a means of a questioning client educating herself about lesbian sexuality. She and three other MHPs reported that they would also refer clients to the Internet and websites with information for lesbians.

3.3 Analytic Comment

3.3.1 Comment on Lesbian client profiles

The data on these women is second-generation, having passed through the filters of the MHPs' perceptions and memories. Nevertheless, it is valuable because it is the only data on the larger population of lesbian women (compared to the questionnaire and interview samples). Second, it is useful for triangulation of key concerns with the other two smaller data sets (quantitative and narrative) on lesbian women.

When we examine the question of why there are so few lesbian clients, the immediate inference that could be drawn would be that lesbian clients have fewer problems. Conjectures that are more realistic are: first, in general women are less likely to seek mental health services than men. Gender bias as well as the fear of the stigma of being labelled "mentally ill" may dissuade them. Further, the pervading social stigma attached to homosexuality as an abnormality and their apprehensions about the attitudes of the MHP (as MHP9 pointed out above) could be a reason why such few lesbian clients voluntarily meet MHPs. It is also interesting to note that the incidence of depression in this sample (21 %) is comparable to the figure for women in an urban population.

Given the hetero-normativity in society, it is remarkable that none of these women wanted to change their behaviour and "become heterosexual". However, it is perhaps too simple to imply (as some MHPs have) that the reason for this is less pressure on women to sexually perform in a marriage. We need to view this finding against the fact that all of the women who wanted SRS were evaluated as not meeting the criteria. This may lead to the conjecture that, rather than change their *behaviour* (or their desire for women), women may be more likely to consider changing their *bodies* in order to meet heterosexual social norms.

The low level of reporting on violence could be, as pointed out, due to the double-bind of silent shame and ostracization. However, it could also be in part due to the MHP's differing perceptions about emotional violence, and their lack of awareness of the emotional pressures faced by lesbian clients. In such a situation of silence around violence therefore, communication with women who are undergoing these experiences, and support of them becomes difficult.

3.3.2 Comment on MHP views and interventions

Despite their overt proclamations about the normality of homosexuality, a nuanced reading of the MHP statements uncovers other ambiguities and persistent stereotypes. For instance, the perception of some MHPs that homosexuality *causes* maladjusted or "abnormal" behaviour problematizes homosexuality,

31 See Annexe 5 on the DSM4's Diagnostic Criteria for *Gender Identity Disorder*

Chapter 4 - Quantitative Analysis

A quantitative survey was completed by lesbian women who were contacted through the lesbian social networks in the cities of Mumbai, Delhi, Calcutta and Pune. Fifty questionnaires were self-administered. The data collected through the questionnaire is presented in this chapter. The following four sub-sets of data were collected:

1. Background information
2. Disclosure of sexual orientation to others ("out" to)
3. Violence faced (Suicide, emotional, physical and sexual)
4. Termination of violence / abuse (whether terminated and means of termination / support)

4.1 Background Information

4.1.1 Demographic Profile

Information about the location of the respondents, their age, education status, religious background and practice, education and employment details were collected. All the respondents were urban, and the maximum number of participants was from Mumbai (21), followed by Calcutta (14), Delhi (8) and Pune (7). Further, most of the women were highly educated (92%) and were employed (88%), and English-speaking. Therefore, the sample does not represent lesbian women who live in rural areas, are poor, unemployed or non-English speaking. Although the sample distribution is not representative of the universe of lesbians in India, given the relative 'invisibility' and inaccessibility of lesbian women, even this data set can provide considerable insight into an hitherto unexplored reality.

Age

The age of the respondents approximated a normal distribution, with half of the women between 26-35 years, while 10 were between 19-25 years, 9 were between 36-45 years and 6 of the respondents were between 46-55 years old.

Education Level

A majority (92%) of the women were college educated: 19 were graduate, 19 were post-graduate, 5 were Mphil / Phd, and 3 had professional training. Only four women had merely completed secondary or higher secondary education.

Religious Background and Practice

The sample had a cross-section of women from different religious backgrounds. A high proportion of women (66%) did not practice their religion (See Table 1, Annexe 4).

Employment and Income

The majority (88%) of the women were employed, and 50% of the full-time employed were self-employed (See Table 2, Annexe 4).

4.1.2 Personal status

The second set of background information focused on partner status, current living status, sexual orientation, marital status, arrangement of marriage and children. 78% of the women were not living in their natal homes. A sizable percentage of women (40%) were living with their woman partner. Thirty-two women identified themselves as lesbian, while 6 identified themselves as bisexual. A majority (82%) of the sample had never been married. Four of the 9 women who were currently married had arranged marriages (See Table 3, Annexe 4). A majority (92%) of the women were never married and 3 of the 9 women who were married have children (See Table 4, Annexe 4).

4.2 Disclosure of lesbian identity

The maximum number of women (48) had disclosed their lesbian identity ("come out to") to their friends. This figure is predictable, given that the sample has been identified through lesbian social networks.

A surprising percentage of women (64%) were out to their mothers. Of the 32 women who were out to their mothers, 19 were also out to their fathers. However, 13 were out only to their mothers, thus pointing to a trend of women being out to their mothers, rather than their fathers.

Three women were out to both brother and sister. The 29 women out to their extended family represent a composite figure (including brother-in-law (1), sister-in-law(1), aunt (5), uncles (6) and cousins (8)) which accounts for the high figure.

Of the 9 women who were ever married, only one was out to her husband. All 3 women who have children were out to them.

Of the total sample, 7 women were out in public, i.e. they had disclosed their sexual orientation in a public forum or in the media (See Table 5, Annexe 4).

4.3 Violence

The questionnaire sought information on four types of violence experienced as a consequence of being lesbian:

- Suicidal ideation and action (self-inflicted harm)
- Physical violence
- Emotional violence
- Sexual violence

A significantly large percentage of women (39 out of the 50, i.e. 78%) indicated that that they had experienced some form of violence or had felt suicidal (See Table 6, Annexe 4). All the women who experienced physical or sexual violence had also faced emotional violence. Reporting of violence from the public was relatively low.

Violence from others was linked to disclosure, since the 11 women who did not report any violence had

disclosed their sexual identity to fewer people (on average 3) than the women who had experienced violence (average disclosure to 6 people).

The family was the primary domain of violence for 77% of the women who experienced violence. Most of the physical violence centred on eviction, imprisonment and deprivation within the family. Most of the emotional violence centred on acts of silent hostility, denial of sexual orientation and relationship, neglect and violation of privacy. Sexual violence within the family was less easy to track, partly due to ambiguity of the responses, and partly because the question did not differentiate childhood or marital sexual abuse and sexual violence due to expression of lesbian identity. Sexual violence was most severe from male partners and was often accompanied by physical acts of violence like battering.

4.3.1 Suicide

Ten women indicated that they had suicidal ideation or felt suicidal. None of them had required medical attention. Of them, 8 had experienced emotional violence. Six women had experienced sexual violence and 4 experienced physical violence. Only 2 of these women had not experienced any other form of violence. One of these 2 had only come out to friends.

4.3.2 Physical Violence

The section on physical violence focused on four different types of physical violence.

- Battering, hair pulling, throttling, kicking, pushing, burning, cutting, binding (referred to as battering)
- Physical confinement (confinement)
- Depriving of basic necessities (deprivation)
- Forcible Eviction (eviction)

Location and Incidence of Physical Violence

Nine of the 12 women who reported physical violence, reported it within the family, while 3 indicated that they had suffered violence only outside the family (See Table 7, Annexe 4). Two of them needed home remedies for the physical injuries. Most of the women had experienced more than one form of violence (See Table 8, Annexe 4).

Physical Violence within the family

The most significant form of physical violence centred on eviction and loss of home. Of the 6 women evicted from their homes, 3 women indicated that they had been evicted by parents (once), mother (twice) and family (a few times). One woman was evicted by her brother and the last was denied access to her house of birth by her uncle.

Two women experienced confinement over years, while the third experienced total confinement over a period of four and a half months.

Three women indicated that they faced physical deprivation from their parents. Two of them faced this over a period of years, one of who was denied access to her house of birth including food, education, etc

by her uncle. Books and photographs of the third woman were burnt by her mother.

Both experiences of battering were over a period of years, one by her father and the other by her mother.

Physical violence outside the family

Four women experienced battering episodes as a consequence of being lesbian. One woman was battered by her friends, who turned on her once. The second indicated that her boyfriend pulled hair and pushed her once. The third was pushed by strangers a few times while the fourth was battered by her woman partner, and she reported that the frequency decreased over a period of time.

Two women were evicted by their housing co-operative society.

One woman experienced things being thrown at her twice on the streets over a 3-year duration.

4.3.3 Emotional Violence

The acts of emotional violence included

- Taunts / put downs / personally demeaning comments (referred to as Taunts)
- Swearing and verbally abusing (Verbal Abuse)
- Threats to abandon, imprison, disclose sexual identity to others, to harm self or others, etc. (Threats)
- Controlling and compelling actions (Control)
- Extorting money or property (Extort)
- Allegation of mental illness / abnormality (Allegation of abnormality)
- Taken to medical or psychiatric doctor for abnormality (Psychiatric Treatment)
- Blackmail
- Isolating by restricting socialising with family / friends / neighbours (Restricting socialising)
- Invasion of privacy - opening letters, entering personal space, etc. (Invasion of privacy)
- Silent contempt and hostility (Silent hostility)
- Non-recognition or denial of lesbian sexual orientation (Denial of sexual orientation)
- Non-recognition or denial of relationship with woman (Denial of relationship)
- Neglect - disinterest in emotional, physical and financial well-being, ignoring, lack of communication (Neglect)
- Continuous distrust / suspicion (Distrust)

Location of Emotional Violence

A majority of women (37, i.e., 74%) indicated that they had faced some form of emotional violence. One

respondent has indicated neglect that has occurred a few times and says the duration is difficult to state, and has not indicated the perpetrator of the abuse. Of the 36 women, 83% had faced emotional violence by the family, while 5 had faced abuse only outside the family.

The distribution of violent incidents indicated that taunts had the maximum frequency (25) of occurrence. Of the 25 incidences, 12 were within family and 13 outside family.

Incidence of Emotional Abuse within the family

Two constellations of emotional abuse within the family emerged from the data based on the frequency of acts (See Table 10, Annexe 4). *Constellation 1* refers to acts of denial, ignoring and acts of silent hostility, where the perpetrator refuses to engage with the woman. *Constellation 2* included directly confrontational, punitive acts.

The clustering of data based on frequency of occurrence indicated that there is potentially a third constellation distinction that could be identified from last three acts (psychiatric treatment, blackmail and extortion). The criteria for such a constellation would be that such acts involve financial resources, and may involve public exposure. However, the question design (and consequently the ambiguity of the data collected) was inadequate to justify these criteria for a third constellation.

Constellation 1 had the highest frequency of abuse. The maximum incidents were denial of orientation and relationship, and invasion of privacy (the last act has been included in this constellation, because the perpetrator does not have to directly confront the woman and can carry it out in secrecy). ***Constellation 2***- centred on direct controls, verbal violence, punitive and remedial action exerted on the woman.

Incidence of Emotional Abuse by non-family

Of the women who reported incidents of violence against them by others, the highest number (13) reported taunts (See Table 11, Annexe 4).

4.3.4 Sexual Violence

Information was collected on the following acts of sexual abuse:

- Forcibly showing sexual images (referred to as Sexual images)
- Making sexual threats (Sexual threats)
- Derogatory sexual name calling (Sexual name calling)
- Pornographic interest - for e.g. a third person forcing the respondent to have sex with a woman (Pornographic interest)
- Unwanted sexual touching
- Unwanted sex
- Unwanted sexual language, songs and gestures (Unwanted sexual language)

Location and Incidence of Sexual Violence

Here incidents of violence were almost equally divided between family and non-family. Additionally, 3 women had faced violence from their male partners (husband and boy friend) (See Table 12, Annexe 4)

Incidence of Sexual Violence within the family

The total number of incidents of sexual violence perpetrated by the family was 5 (See Table 13, Annexe 4). The distribution of episodes of sexual violence indicated that 2 women faced sexual name-calling from parents - one from her mother and the other from her father. One woman faced incidents of forcible showing of sexual images and of sexual threats from her uncle. One woman faced incidents of unwanted touching by cousins.

Sexual violence was inflicted on four of the respondents by their male partners. Two women experienced display of pornographic interest - one from her husband and the other from her boyfriend. One of the women who experienced display of pornographic interest, also experienced unwanted sex over a period of years from her husband. The other woman experienced rape by her ex-boyfriend.

Sexual Violence from non-family

Nine incidents of sexual violence were reported to have originated from non-family sources. Six women experienced unwanted touching from friends, colleagues, and strangers. Two women experienced sexual name-calling from a stranger once, and from friends a few times; and one woman was sexually threatened (See Table 13, Annexe 4).

4.4 Abuse Termination

Of the 39 women who indicated that they had suffered from some form of violence, 15 indicated that the abuse had not terminated, while 14 indicated that it had (see Table 14, Annexe 4). Of the 15 women who had indicated that the abuse had not terminated, two had left the abusive situation and the third defined abuse as that faced in 'public'.

Of the 14 women who indicated that their abuse had terminated, only 3 women indicated it was due to the acceptance of their sexual orientation, and one of them had supportive family members. She did not indicate who this family member was.

Six women left the abusive situation, of which one had the support of her mother and brothers.

Two women indicated that they negotiated a termination of abuse by not talking about their orientation any more, while one woman terminated the abuse by reassuring the abuser that she was not a lesbian, and therefore "continued with a lie." One woman indicated the support of her mother as the means for termination of her abuse.

Of the 2 women who managed to negotiate a lessening of abuse, one stated that three factors were responsible for the lessening of abuse - she had left the abusive situation, there was acceptance of her

sexual orientation and because of the intervention of supportive friends.

The other woman who indicated reduction in abuse indicated that it was mainly because she had gained economic independence and because she remained firm in asserting her sexual orientation.

4.5 Support

Highest on the list of people who provided support were friends (22). Nine women indicated that they received support from lesbian/gay/bisexual/transgender (LGBT) organisations. Mothers were the source of support for 7 women, followed by 5 women who derived support from their sisters. Four women had approached an MHP and an equal number received backing from support organisations. Three women received support from their colleagues. Brothers, cousins, teacher and partners each provided support to two women. Support from extended family, employer and father were the least, for one woman each (See Table 15, Annexe 4).

4.6 Analytic Comment

A majority of the respondents were urban, highly educated and employed. Further, the sample represents the women who are in contact with the city-based lesbian social networks, and as such, cannot represent the total population of lesbian women.

Disclosure of sexual identity to friends was predictably the highest frequency, followed by the mothers. Significantly, fewer fathers knew about their daughter's sexual orientation. This trend was corroborated by the fact that friends and mothers were a primary source of support for the women who experienced violence, while only one father was a source of support.

Disclosure of sexual identity can be either voluntary ("coming out"), or forced ("being outed"). The latter is violent since it doesn't involve the consent of the woman. Unfortunately, a gap in the question design was the absence of a differentiation between these two methods of disclosure.

Disclosure of sexual identity was linked to incidence of violence. The 11 women who did not experience violence had disclosed their sexual identity to fewer people (on average to 3) than those who had experienced violence (average disclosure to 6 people). However, the design of the questionnaire was inadequate to establish linkages between the person to whom disclosure was made, whether the disclosure was forced and whether violence was a consequence.

The data clearly established that all the women who had experienced physical and sexual abuse had also experienced emotional abuse. Emotional violence could therefore be considered the "foundational" violence, which for some women extended into physical and/or sexual violence. Most of the women who reported emotional violence experienced more than one form of violence.

There are clear indications that suicidal ideation exists in conjunction with emotional violence (in the

majority of cases), and extreme isolation (in the case of one woman). The data collected functioned as a measure of the extent of self-inflicted violence. Unfortunately, the questionnaire did not differentiate between suicidal ideation and suicide attempts; neither did it question the origin of the ideation, i.e., whether the respondent felt suicidal specifically because of her sexual orientation.

Another major trend the survey underscored was the maximum incidence of violence in the family domain. The only emotional abuse that was higher outside than within the family was taunts faced in public.

Within emotional abuse, there was a concentration of violence in *Constellation 1*, which involved acts of denial, silent hostility and neglect. Confrontational emotional violence (*Constellation 2* - i.e., taunts, emotional blackmail, etc) occurred to a lesser degree.

Acts of emotional violence that involved control over resources, and people outside the family structure (psychiatric treatment, blackmail, extortion) had the lowest frequency of occurrence. Acts of physical violence primarily involved exertion of physical control over resources and avoided open confrontation (deprivation, eviction and imprisonment). Acts of physical battering were relatively fewer.

There are potential linkages indicated by these patterns around control of resources and public disclosure, which offers scope for future study. A possible hypothesis is that violence is contained within the family because families are not willing to disclose the woman's sexual identity to the outside world for fear of social stigma and ostracisation. To illustrate the point, only 5 women were forced to go for psychiatric treatment, in spite of the fact that 11 faced allegations of abnormality or mental illness. Further exploration could also be on the nature and extent of control over resources post disclosure.

Sexual violence and battering was mostly present in the context of male partners, which underscores the vulnerability of women within a patriarchal society.

A disturbing trend is the continued violence experienced by 50% of the women who reported abuse. Further, abuse termination for most women depended on their leaving the abusive situation or denial of their sexual identity. This would indicate that severance of relationships with the family or eviction from the home is the woman's primary means of escaping violence. Unfortunately, only three of the women who reported abuse termination indicated that it occurred due to acceptance of their sexual orientation.

Further enquiry could be made to establish connections between women's economic autonomy, disclosure of sexual identity and the incidence of violence. Some findings that point to possible linkages: that a majority of the women were employed (88%) and many of them self-employed, 78% of women were not living in their natal homes (due to forcible eviction or choice), a majority (82%) of the women had never been married, and 40% of them were living with a woman partner.

Chapter 5 - Interview Context and Content

Eight women were interviewed at length, and in depth, for the narrative data presented in this chapter. The interview was based on a relationship of trust, which allowed each of the women who agreed to be part of the research to share intimate stories from their lives. Interviews lasted for durations ranging from one hour to two and a half hours. The interviews were semi-structured, thus keeping them flexible and allowing the interviewer to explore the depths of the experience of the interviewees.

This chapter presents the context of each interview, i.e., how we got in touch with each woman, the location and duration of the interview. We also include some extracts of impressions of the interviewer from an Interview Diary. We also present a summary case study or precis of each woman's life story. Each interview is presented here in the first-person, as indicative of the reflexive relationship that the interviewer constructed with the interviewee during the course of the interview.

32

33

The 'raw data' of the interview transcripts was then processed³², and narratives identified³³. The narrative analysis of the interviews is presented in the next chapter. This chapter is organized with the interview context, interviewer's diary, and precis being presented for each of the eight women.

5.1 Anjana

Interview Context and impressions

I met Anjana first in an encounter with the police, when the Special Cell for Women (in the Crawford Market Police Station) facilitated the police in getting her parents to release her from confinement.

Subsequently we met once socially, and then I approached her to do an in-depth interview. The interview with her was an hour long, and was conducted in the home she shares with her partner, Vrinda. I spent a day and a half with them, and got a sense of what their daily lives were like.

Interview Diary

Intense emotional connection and identification when she talked about the sense of cut-off from her family, where they don't want to know anything about her life, despite her trying to give them a chance.

Anjana is less than 10 years older to Vrinda's daughter Seema. This does not stop her from taking on the role of a parent- or maybe older sister - towards Seema.

Precis

Anjana is in her mid twenties and is the third daughter of her family. Her two sisters are married. Despite a strained and cold relationship with her parents in the years she was growing up, she was close to her second sister. Their bond was strengthened by Anjana's support of her sister's decision to get married to a man their parents disapproved of.

32 See Chapter 2, Section 2.3.2 for methodology.

33 See *Annexe 6* for narratives of each woman.

Anjana was aware of the possibility of same-sex relations even before she met Vrinda, her partner. She believed that such relations were not for her. Anjana first met Vrinda when she was 17 years old. Vrinda was a relative of a close friend of hers. At that time, though, she was not aware of Vrinda's interest in her. Vrinda did not express this interest because she thought Anjana's was too young. After her graduation, Anjana stayed with Vrinda who was then in Baroda. At that time, they got close to each other, and Vrinda indicated her interest in a deeper relationship. Anjana did not respond. She felt that she was not attracted to women. They decided to be friends.

Anjana, however, did feel that her relation with Vrinda was special, and thereafter initiated their relationship. Vrinda had, by then, shifted to Pune, both for being closer to Anjana and for economic reasons. Anjana and Vrinda decided to work together, and so underwent training in beauty treatments, and opened a salon. Anjana travelled back and forth between Pune and Mumbai. When in Pune she stayed with Vrinda, Vrinda's daughter and husband. Although they lived together, Vrinda and her husband were separated. Initially Anjana's parents had no objections to her working and living in Pune. At the same time, they were looking for a match for her. However, as their clientele increased and Anjana spent more time in Vrinda's house than with her parents, they began to have problems.

Things came to a head when Anjana insisted that she had to return to Pune for work during Ganpati. Her parents tried to prevent her, so Anjana left Mumbai leaving a message that she would be back once she had finished the work appointments that she had.

When she reached Pune, she waited for Vrinda to pick her up. However, her father had, by then, caught up with her. He had reached the station in a Tata Sumo and forced her to come back with him to Mumbai. The next day Anjana's father tried to hit her with a stick when she refused to stay in Mumbai. He quoted many reasons as to why she should not go back. One was that it did not look respectable if she stayed with a married woman. Also, he knew Vrinda smoked and thought it an indication of her bad moral character.

With Vrinda's help, Anjana left Mumbai and filed a police complaint against her father for harassment. For the next two to three months, she only maintained long-distance contact with her mother. In the meantime, one of Vrinda's relatives disclosed Vrinda's orientation to Anjana's parents. When Anjana went home for 2-3 days, her father asked her if what he had heard about Vrinda was true. She confirmed it, though at the time she denied that she herself had any relation with Vrinda.

Following this, when her mother asked her to come back to Mumbai to sign some investment papers, Anjana went back. In a confrontation with her family, she disclosed that she did have a relationship with Vrinda. With this began her four and a half-month confinement to her home.

Her father or mother used to be at home during the day to prevent her from leaving. One of her father's workers was employed to keep watch outside. Her communication with Vrinda was monitored. Her father

confiscated all the letters she wrote to Vrinda, and she was not allowed to speak with her on the phone. Once Anjana tried walking out of the house but was caught by her father's worker. There was a scene outside the house, and she was dragged back home and beaten inside the house. She felt afraid to try and escape again. She could not eat, and felt her physical and moral strength weakening with the constant emotional pressure from her family.

She was completely isolated and watched, and was only allowed to go a family friend's house, from where she tried to make phone calls to Vrinda. This 'family friend' was one of the few people she was allowed to have contact with. This man took advantage of her vulnerability and sexually harassed her.

She was taken to a friend of her father's - Vivek - so he could talk to her about her choice of relationship. He introduced her to a social worker, Anjali, who provided some form of support to Anjana. Anjali told Anjana's father that he could not force her to stay. Anjali in turn put her in contact with Geeta, who worked in a human rights organisation. People from the human rights organization, a woman's organization and the Special Cell for Women then intervened. A notice was sent to her father from the Special Cell. He went with Anjana to the Special Cell, and presented his side of the story. Anjana was extremely shocked to discover that her father had managed to intercept the letters that she had posted to Vrinda, and that he displayed the whole bunch of letters to the police. She remained firm in her resolve to return to Vrinda. The police then called for a joint meeting with Anjana, her parents, Vrinda, and representatives of the Special Cell.

At the second meeting in the Special Cell Vrinda and her daughter had also come from Pune, as well as representatives from the women's group. This time round the inspector was extremely rude to Anjana, and with her father's encouragement, referred to both her and Vrinda in extremely derogatory terms. However, he was forced to acknowledge that as an adult, she had the freedom to leave her parent's home. Her parents asked her to return some share certificates and jewellery that she was wearing, which she did in front of the police. Finally, Anjana left with Vrinda and returned to Pune.

On two different occasions, post this confinement, Anjana faced active harassment from her family. On one occasion, she was berated by a relative to whom her parents had disclosed her choice. The other event was an anonymous phone call made to Vrinda's daughter, asking her to note down the address of a lesbian meeting. Anjana suspects that her father or uncle was responsible for the call.

Over a year after these incidents, Anjana has had minimal contact with her family. She initiates all contact with her siblings. Her communication with her mother is restricted to the various ailments that her mother suffers, which she indirectly blames on the tension caused by Anjana. Her family refuses to come to Pune to see her.

Anjana does not feel any trust towards her family, and does not feel capable of visiting Mumbai, without undertaking severe risk. She is deeply anguished by the complete breakdown of relations with her family.

5.2 Jaya

Interview Context and impressions

Samna was the first newspaper to publish a version of Jaya's story³⁴ in October 1999. In the report, the article describes Jaya, as an educated, Christian woman who approached the local police station and asked them to get her married to Ramabai, with whom she said she had had a relationship for the past 17 years. What was perplexing in the report was that the police arrested Ramabai and her husband under Sections 377 and 376. In Mumbai, we were very concerned because this was the first time a woman was jailed under Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code . *Forum Against Oppression of Women (FAOW)* and *Stree Sangam* tried for a week to find out through local contacts if help was required. However, because contact was not established, a colleague of mine and I decided to make a visit.

We first approached the local police station, where we were informed that Ramabai and her husband were still in the District jail, but that they would be brought to the district court that day, since the sessions court-hearing date was to be determined. We went to the court, and identified Ramabai from the crowd of people milling around because a woman police constable accompanied her. Her husband and a couple of other police constables stood at little distance. We approached the police constable, and asked if we could speak with Ramabai. Though the constable agreed, she didn't move out of hearing range. Ramabai is a typical rural, Maharashtrian woman, wearing her sari *kashta* style, and with all the insignia of marriage (bangles, *sindur*, *mangal sutra*). We introduced ourselves and tried to explain that we had come to help her if she needed it. We asked her to tell us what had happened. She was obviously reluctant to talk. All she said was that she was innocent, and that she did not understand what was happening because she was illiterate. We asked her if Jaya was also present, and she pointed her out. We did not have more than five minutes of conversation with her before their case number was called and she and her husband were escorted to the court room, and from there back out to the police van.

Jaya, who was with her teenage daughter, had been following us as we walked with Ramabai to the police van. There was an intense but indefinable exchange of looks between the two women. After the van pulled away, we introduced ourselves to Jaya, and asked if we could talk with her. She agreed, and we sat under a tree in the court grounds. We explained that we had come to find out what had happened, and to help if it was required and possible. She started out by asking many questions about us. She also asked us what Ramabai had told us, and asked why we had made contact with her. With some reservations (because we were still unsure how the case of Section 377 on Ramabai had come about) we identified ourselves as lesbian to her, with the explanation that this was the reason why we felt compelled to come and see what help could be provided in this situation.

34 *Samna* is the Shiv Sena daily circulated in Maharashtra. The front page article headline was "Another 'fire' in—".

35 See discussion in Chapter 1, section 1.4 on homosexuality and the law in India.

We spent almost two hours talking with her, during which she talked about her great love for Ramabai. She also apparently felt a strong sense of having been 'wronged' by Ramabai, but it was not clear exactly why. She showed us a handful of suicide pills saying that she was constantly thinking about suicide, and only the thought of her children held her back. At points in the conversation when she was talking about sex, she would make her daughter go and stand out of earshot. Throughout the conversation, her constant refrain was her desire for Ramabai ("*Mala Ramabai pahije*"-I want Ramabai,). To illustrate the seriousness of her intentions, she took out a *mangal sutra* from a purse, which she wanted Ramabai to wear, to symbolize their union. Since it was clear that she wanted to be with Ramabai, we told her that allowing Ramabai to be charged under Section 377 would certainly not achieve that goal, since not only was Ramabai at risk of a prison sentence of 7 years, even if she was released, her understandable anger would put an inevitable distance in their relationship. We advised her to drop the case, and planned with her to meet her lawyer the next day.

The following day, my colleague attempted (unsuccessfully) to meet with both the lawyer and the police inspector who had filed the case. I went to the jail to try and meet Ramabai. The police inspector in charge of the jail was more receptive than I had expected, and allowed me to speak with her privately in the corridor when I requested it. While we were waiting, he commented that this case had been unnecessarily made into a criminal case on the basis of unconvincing evidence, and further that the police inspector who had filed the case did it for political mileage.

In the limited time we had, although I explained to her that I was lesbian, and had come to help her, Ramabai was extremely reticent in the conversation. This was understandable: given the 377 case, it would be impossible for her to admit to a sexual relationship with Jaya, particularly to a stranger. She was wary of a 'trap', and denied any sexual relationship, but she also did not offer any alternative explanation for why Jaya had gone to the police in the first place.

Finally, I went to meet Dr. Sonetakke at the District Hospital, to find out why a medical test of the two women had been ordered, and what the result was. In a brief conversation, she said that the purpose of the test was ostensibly to establish whether penetration of the vagina had occurred. However, she said that the results of the test were expectedly negative, since even if there was penetration with fingers, it was not recent, and would certainly not leave "imprints" on the vagina walls.

After this first visit, there was a gap of about one and half years, before my second visit to interview Jaya for this study. In between, we had written her a letter from Mumbai, in which we once again advised her to drop the case by not attending when she got a court summons . We received a reply from her in which she informed us that Ramabai and her husband had been released on bail . She had apparently also

36 Since Section 377 is a cognisable offence, once filed the FIR cannot be withdrawn, but the case is dropped if the plaintiff repeatedly does not appear for court hearings.

37 This was surprising, since Section 377 is a non-bailable offence.

written another letter, which never reached us. Before I made the second visit, I had written her a letter telling her I was coming. I actually reached two days later, and she had given up expecting my arrival.

Jaya lives with her aged parents, and two teenage children. Her home is in the dalit area of a large village (with a population of over 10,000). In the monsoon, one has to wade across a stream to get to her house. We sat in the fields behind her house for privacy during the interview. I spent two days with her, and both days she offered me lunch. Most of the domestic work seemed to be done by Jaya's teenage daughter, because Jaya works long hours as an attendant at a local private hospital. I also conversed with her parents, both of whom were quite aged and physically dependent on Jaya and her daughter. They were devout Christians, and asked me to join in their hymns and prayers in the evening.

Jaya was not entirely comfortable with the conversations being recorded, and at several critical points, insisted that I turn off the tape recorder. She also did not fully trust me. From the previous visit, she thought I was a journalist who wanted to make a story for TV. So she asked me several questions about my life, and much time was spent convincing her that I really was lesbian; that her confidentiality would be protected, and that I would not expose her to further public shame.

Jaya's story is probably the most complex and it has been difficult to understand how to place her various narratives, because of the shifting levels of 'truth' and the apparent contradictions. Unravelling the sequence of events that lead to the filing of the case (details in precis) has been difficult, because some facts she disclosed in this conversation she denied during the second visit, and there remain some ambiguities.

Interview Diary

Was completely thrown off by Jaya's decision to come with me to Mumbai, as I was leaving. The suddenness of it - so I was mentally unprepared. I said yes, even though I didn't really want her to come. Being tired, and wanting to just unwind at home - having a guest would be difficult. But I said yes, for two reasons - one, because I felt the importance of reciprocity - she had welcomed me, a stranger, into her life. I was not only a "researcher" in the interaction with her. Two, because I felt the full impact of her desperation to get out of the isolation and pressures of her situation, by any means possible. Meeting other lesbians in Mumbai would perhaps be good for her.

I waited at the bus stop while she went back to pack her bag and return. Nearly an hour and several buses passed with no sign of her. When she came without her bags, my first response was relief. She had got ready to come, but her father would not give her money. I was surprised that she handed over all her money to him, and expressed that to her.

Finally hitchhiked on a lorry, because of the tension of missing the last bus, and my train to Mumbai.

Precis

Jaya was born into the family of a protestant lay preacher in a village. She has had some schooling, though she has not completed her secondary education. As a young girl, her neighbour Ramabai initiated a sexual relationship with her. Ramabai and her husband were contract labourers working in brick kilns in Gujarat. Initially both husband and wife would migrate and work for 6 months at a stretch, and return only for the agricultural season. According to Jaya, later Ramabai would not go, so that she could be with her. Jaya claims that she did not like the relationship initially, but allowed Ramabai to continue. Their relationship continued even after Jaya's marriage. When Jaya returned to her parental home for the delivery of her second child, Jaya said that Ramabai threatened to kill her if she did not divorce her husband and stay on at her parent's home. According to her, Ramabai and her husband are witnesses to her divorce petition.

Jaya maintains that in as much as she cannot live without Ramabai, Ramabai equals her in intensity of feelings. In fact, Ramabai had married her by exchanging garlands and putting *sindur* on her forehead in front of the image of god in their house. Jaya, narrating this story relates how she accepted the marriage by keeping the image of Jesus (rather than the Hindu gods) in her mind.

They were in a relationship for 17 years. The cause of dissension between them appears to have been over their children. In the first visit, Jaya told us that Ramabai's son had harassed her daughter, and Jaya had made a police complaint against the boy. This had been the cause of a fierce altercation between the two families, and a break in the relationship. In her distress over the break, Jaya had gone to the police station and asked the police to get her married to Ramabai.

The second time I visited her however, she did not mention (and denied when questioned) the conflict over the two children. When probed further, she did admit that the case of her daughter was still in court. She was planning on withdrawing the case because the sensational publicity had resulted in "badnami" (public shame), and that she wanted to hush up the matter because they were finding it difficult to get proposals of marriage for the girl.

In the second interview, Jaya also articulated the life-threatening language and coercive actions of Ramabai and her husband, which she had not mentioned the first time. This included the story of their coercing her to divorce her husband. More recently, Jaya claimed that they had threatened to kill her if she did not withdraw the police case.

While the actual events and reasons leading up to Jaya approaching the police are not clear, what is clear is that her feelings for Ramabai oscillated between intense love and longing for her, and a deep sense of being wronged by her. What is also clear is that the police distorted her complaint against Ramabai

(which was also simultaneously a demand for marriage to Ramabai) to serve their own interests. The police inspector manipulated her demand for marriage into a statement making her the victim of an offence under Section 377. The coercive role of the police is clear not only because they forced Jaya to make an FIR against Ramabai under Section 377, but also because they called a press conference, subjecting them to sensational media exposure.

In Jaya's reconstruction of the sequence of the incidents with the police leading up to the filing of the case, there are several ambiguities surrounding her interaction with Ramabai, and the police. What follows is an attempt at tracing not only the events, but also interpreting the ambiguities.

Jaya first went to the police station on October 4, 1999 and made a written complaint (as mentioned, the reasons are unclear) against Ramabai, and asked the police to resolve their conflict .

The police inspector Sangle listened to her, and cross-questioned her about their relationship. He asked her why she wanted Ramabai, and if she would not prefer a more beautiful, graduate woman. Jaya replied that she only wanted Ramabai, because the latter had ruined her life by forcing her to leave her husband. And that she could not live without Ramabai.

J-02, lines 31-36

- 31 ते मला सांगण भागच होतं.
- 32 तिन माझं जिवन खराब केलं.
- 33 नवरा सोडायला लावला,
- 35 माझ्या तारुण्यात.
- 36 ज्यू शकत नाही.
- 37 मला कासुबाई पाहिजेच.

Further, she told the police that Ramabai had threatened to kill her. According to her, the reason why the police arrested Ramabai was that Ramabai had destroyed Jaya's life, by forcing her to divorce her husband under a death threat. Jaya had a letter from Ramabai as "proof, which Sangle then told her to keep safely for future use in court.

J-02, lines 51-65

- 51 शेवटी मारुन टाकायचीच धमकी का देते.
- 52 या अटी वरुनच अटक केलं,
- 53 खास इतकं नुकसान करुन
- 54 त्या बाईला जीवानशी मारणार
- 55 म्हणून तिला अटक केली,
- 56 नंतर मी सांगलेला

38 This action should be seen in the context of the common practice of the police being approached as agents of local, non-criminal conflict resolution in rural areas.

- 57 ही तिची चिठ्ठी दाखवली.
 58 की तु फारकत दे
 59 नाहीतर मी तुझे तुकडे करून टाकेल.
 61 सांगलेनी सांगितले की ही तुमची केस चालवा
 62 आणि हया चिठ्ठया तुम्हाला जबानीला कामाला पडतील.
 65 त्या चिठ्ठया खूप संभाळून.

When I questioned Jaya about how Ramabai could write a letter if she was illiterate, she replied that the letter was written by the husband or children, but signed by Ramabai. In unrecorded conversation, Jaya said that Ramabai's husband had known about their sexual relationship, and had had no objection as long as his wife did not have sexual relations with another man.

The police came to their village on October 7, and picked up Ramabai and her husband for questioning, and also told Jaya to come to the police station. The police told her to sign a statement they had prepared. She questioned them saying she had already given a written statement. When Sangle asked her if he should put them both in jail, she threatened to commit suicide if he did.

J-03, lines 58-71,130-139

- 58 आणि त्यांनी मला असे सांगितले,
 60 आम्ही लिहतो त्या प्रमाणे तुम्ही फक्त सही करून द्या.
 65 आणि मी त्यांना अजून विचारले
 66 तुम्ही पुन्हा सांगा कशासाठी तुम्हाला सही पाहिजे.
 67 मी तुम्हाला application दिलेलं आहे
 68 application वर मी सही दिलेलीच आहे
 70 आणि ते कोणी हवालदार होते,
 71 त्यांनी request केली की तुम्ही सही द्याच
 130 तुमची काय इच्छा 'अटक करू का?
 131 आता हीला अटक करून घेतो.
 133 दोषा नवरा बायकोना'
 134 मी सांगितले 'अटक करू नाही,
 136 त्यांना आत्महत्याची धमकी दिली.
 138 काय हरकत नाही.
 139 तुम्ही उद्या सकाळी या

That night, Ramabai came to her and threatened to kill her if she went again to the police to complain that she had been forcibly separated from her husband. At first Jaya reacted by saying she *would* go to the police, because Ramabai had been false in her claims of love. When Ramabai physically accosted her, Jaya grew afraid and told her she would withdraw the complaint.

- 49 ते मग तिने अशा घमक्या दिल्या, मी घाबरले.
50 मला असे वाटले,
51 माझ्यापेक्षा तिची शक्ती जास्त होती.
54 हिने मला कोणी नसताना एखादे वेळेस मारूही शकेल.
56 तिला मी नाही, सांगितले
57 की तुझ्याबद्दल काहीच बोलणार नाही.
64 नुकसान केल ना तिने
65 तिच्याबद्दल तील मग lock up केलं मी
66 हयाच कारणामुळे.

At the end though, Jaya re-iterated that the damage wrought by Ramabai was the reason why she caused her to be put in jail. It would appear that Jaya's desire for revenge against injustices suffered at the hands of Ramabai was warring with the equally powerful desire for reconciliation. It is unclear whether these 'injustices' are the relationship itself, the death threats, the altercation over the children or some other unrevealed reason.

Subdued by Ramabai's threats in the night, on the morning of October 8 when Jaya went to the police station, she told them they had reached a "compromise", and that the case was not to be pursued, to which Sangle agreed. However, she said, that the police demanded a bribe of Rs.500 from Ramabai and her husband, which the couple refused to pay.

- 37 पोलिसलोक कुत्रे असतात बरोबर ?
39 कुत्रे म्हणजे त्यांना
41 त्याची अशी इच्छा होती की तुम्ही मला 500/. रु. द्या.

On October 10, Sangle called Jaya to the police station, and told her that the case was more serious than he had thought, and that he would have to imprison Ramabai, and that he needed her signature, which she gave. Later a police havaldar told her that Ramabai and her husband were arrested because they had refused to pay the bribe.

- 69 कॅस तुमची फार वाईट आहे म्हणे.
72 इतके case मला आत्ता परत जळगावला
74 कासुबाईला अटक करणार आहे.
75 तुमची सही घेणार आहे.
81 लगेच तिथ सही केली,

97 एका पोलीसांनी मला सांगितले होते

98 की बुवा त्यांना आज arrest करतील कारण त्यांनी पैसे दिले नाही.

99 म्हणून त्यांना त्यांनी ते असं म्हणजे फार विचित्रपणा केला.

That same day, the police came and took Ramabai and her husband and put them in the lock-up. Jaya went to the police station on October 11, and had an altercation with the police about why they had put Ramabai in the lock-up, when she had not signed any statement. She tried to beat up a police havaldar with her chappal, so that she would also be put behind bars, with Ramabai. She threatened to spend the night in front of Ramabai's cell if the police did not release her, and also took out a mangal sutra and told the police she wanted to marry Ramabai. This act of hers, she claims, was the reason why the police went to the press.

J-06, lines 46-55

46 माझ्या पर्स मधुन काळी माळ हिच्या हातानी गळ्यात टाकायला लावलं

47 हीच माळ माझ्या गळ्यात टाकायला लावा हिला.

49 पोलिस एकदम असे सुन्न झाले

50 इतके म्हणजे इतके संबंध आहे, तुम्ही राहु शकत नाही.

51 म्हणून ते पेपरला आलं,

52 मी काळी माळ जर काढली नसती तर माझ पेपरला आले नसते,

53 तुम्ही इथे आला नसता,

55 बदनाम झाली, बरोबर आहे, ना ?

The police dismissed her as having become crazy seeing Ramabai in the lock-up, but she insisted that she was in complete possession of her senses (J-01). An ambiguity here is whether the police perceived her as having lost her senses because of the "unnatural" relationship (and therefore demanding marriage), or they perceived her as being upset because Ramabai had been locked up against her wishes.

Both Jaya and Ramabai were sent to the district hospital for a medical examination. According to Jaya, the medical report showed Ramabai's fingerprints on her body, and that her womb had shrivelled up inside. When I told her that I had met the doctor, and that she had said there was nothing in the medical report, Jaya found it hard to believe, and insisted that Dr. Sonetakke had told her that the case was "not normal". Apparently, the doctor had taken her apart and told her that what she had done was not right, and that as a Christian she should know better than to mock the institution of marriage in this way.

J-08, lines 104-114

104 केस normal नाही वाटली

105 बी - नाही? तुम्हाला स्पष्टपणे सांगितले ?

108 मला स्पष्टपणे सोनटक्के मॅडमनी

110 तू खिरचन आहे ———

112 तिने मला आत मध्ये बोलावले.

113 रम बंद केला तिने मला स्पष्ट सांगितले

114 काय की "तू समाजाला अनुसरून हे चांगले केलं नाही."

Jaya seems to have interpreted the doctor's judgement of her as "social and morally abnormal" to imply a "medical abnormality" as well.

Finally, when asked about what she perceived to be the effect of the public disclosure, she said that people had not changed in their behaviour towards her, but the only effect was her loss of self-esteem.

J-09, lines 09-13

09 पहिली मी इतकी ताट चालत होती.

10 एकदम गर्वानी,

11 सगळं षडलं तस होवून गेला

12 आणि जी माझी नजर आहे ती खाली पडली,

13 दुसर काही नाही,

On probing further, (in unrecorded conversations) she talked about the shame and anger expressed by her parents and other family members. Her brothers had said that if she had become pregnant it would have been less shameful for the family than this. Another consequence was the difficulty of finding a suitable match for her daughter. At work, she confessed that she had lost the respect of her peers, and even the patients felt they had the right to cross-question her.

The extreme social and familial pressure she felt was evidenced by the desperation with which she wanted to leave her village, and even the security of her job. She wanted to know if I could help her get a job somewhere else, even for less pay, and she would be willing to shift there with her daughter.

At the time of the second interview, she was not on speaking terms with Ramabai and her family, even though they were neighbours. When we walked past to get to the fields, I saw Ramabai sitting in her doorway. When I asked Jaya if I should approach her, she said Ramabai would not talk with me. Again, as during the first visit, when Jaya repeatedly asked how she could get Ramabai back, I urged her to drop the case (by not appearing in court).

We decided to include Jaya's narratives despite the ambiguities for two reasons. One reason was to point to the extent of damage caused (in the self, and in relationships) because of the insidious ways in which

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negative social values are internalised . However, the primary reason was to document the violence perpetrated by social institutions such as the police, the media and the medical establishment.

39 We have not examined the incidence of violence within Jaya and Ramabai's relationship because it is out of the scope of this study, and also because there is not enough clarity of information regarding this.

In tracing the narratives leading up to Ramabai's lock-up, even as Jaya's reasons for the complaint against Ramabai are unclear, her explanations of why the police pursued the case also raise many questions. Certainly, Jaya's acceptance of the explanation that the case was registered because of a non-payment of a bribe is perhaps naive. Was it, as Jaya also claimed at one point, because the police believed that she had been subjected to a death threat? If so, why had they not registered a case of assault, as opposed to a case of Section 377? Then, if the police thought the case was a "serious" offence committed by Ramabai against Jaya, how did they explain the contradiction of Jaya wanting to marry Ramabai?

In this light, the explanation of the police inspector at the District jail seems a plausible reason for why the case was registered, namely, that the case was motivated by Sangle's personal and political agenda. It should be viewed in the context of the Shiv Sena protest against the film *Fire's* portrayal of a lesbian relationship as "unnatural" and "un-Indian" just six months earlier. Perhaps if Jaya had gone to the police a year earlier, they would have merely chased her off, and Ramabai and she would probably have been able to resolve their conflict in a less public and tragic way.

5.3 Mohan

Interview Context and impressions

Mohan's story first appeared in January 2001, in *Lokmat* a Maharashtra daily which reported her marriage to Vijaya. As in the case of Jaya, we attempted to establish contact with the couple through a local women's organisation, to find out if any help was required. At that point, the information we received from a local women's group was that Mohan had gone underground, and Vijaya was being confined by her parents.

A few months later, taking the opportunity of this study and the assistance of the local women's group, I went in search of the two women. Establishing contact with Mohan took almost a day, with no luck when

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we went to her last known residence, and Vijaya's parent's last residence. Finally, it was the police who helped us track where Mohan was working, and they called her to the police station, where I first met her. She was slightly built, dressed in trousers and shirt, and would pass as a young boy, (though her voice was that of a woman). We agreed to meet after she got off duty from the doctor's clinic where she was working.

The first night she came to the office of the local women's organisation for the interview, we spent over an hour and a half talking. She shared her early life history, the events leading up to the marriage with Vijaya and its aftermath. We made a plan to try and meet Vijaya the next morning in her parent's village.

This village is approximately an hour and half away from the district town, and we went together up to a junction village, from where I proceeded alone. Mohan had given me a note for Vijaya, and their wedding photograph to show her. Mohan waited behind, on the understanding that I would try and bring Vijaya out so that they could meet.

However, the situation in Vijaya's home was such that it was impossible to do so. When I arrived, Vijaya was with her mother and grand-mother. I introduced myself in the "Researcher" role only, and asked her if we could go out to the compound and speak privately. The mother and grand-mother got extremely hostile, and said that whatever had to be said should be said openly, in front of them.

At that point, the father also came in. He had been drinking, and was initially very aggressively hostile, just short of threatening. He questioned my credentials and purpose in making an "exhibition" out of them. He also asked if I had met Mohan, and Kunda. I lied and said I had not yet met Mohan, but that I intended to; and that I did not know about Kunda (which was the truth at that point). This was a trigger for them to express further doubt about my authenticity. He then wanted to know how I had tracked them down, to which I replied that the police had given me the information, a plausible reply which he appeared to accept.

40 The head of the local women's organisation and her staff were helpful in this process, particularly since they had a good rapport with the police.

When I said that I was leaving since they would not allow me to speak to her, he said that I could speak to her in his presence, claiming that she had nothing to hide from him, or anyone. He sent the mother and grand-mother out. Of course, there was no question of taping the conversation, indeed, I was afraid he would ask to check my bag and make an issue of the fact that I had a tape recorder.

Though I expressed my doubt about whether she would really be able to freely answer, I proceeded to ask Vijaya questions. For most of the half hour conversation, however, he did the talking, relating his version of the story. The essence of his version was that Mohan was luring young girls like Vijaya and Kunda with the intention of pimping them into prostitution.

I asked Vijaya once, in front of him, what she felt now that she had left Mohan. She said that she had decided in her mind to leave her. At which point again he interrupted to explain that *jadu tona* (black magic) had been done on her. I asked her if she believed that, and she said no. As I was leaving, there was a moment when she was alone and I took the opportunity to ask her again if she had truly given up on the relationship with Mohan or if she wished that, they would get back together. My intention was that if she said yes, or even remained silent or hesitated, I would pass her the note from Mohan; however, she said no. I was faced with something of a dilemma, since if I passed her the note and she showed it to her father, it could endanger Mohan. So I did not.

Her father came with me up to the junction village and was obviously looking out to see if Mohan was around. Fortunately, she was not in sight. He insisted I come with him to his office, which I did. He wanted to probe further and find out if Mohan had sent me, and what my purpose really was.

That evening, when Mohan came to meet me again, I asked her who Kunda was, and a whole new angle to the story emerged, in which Kunda was the woman Mohan was previously involved with. Kunda and Vijaya were friends. Mohan left Kunda for Vijaya. However, by Mohan's account, it was Kunda who had supported her through out the crisis, and who truly loved her. Mohan had not spoken about Kunda the first night because she wanted to protect her.

The next day, Mohan arranged for me to meet with Kunda. She was ill, and it was difficult for her to leave the house for long. She came out with her sister, on the pretext of going to the doctor. We met in a temple courtyard for about an hour. She was extremely wary about being interviewed and thought that I was from the police. At first, she did not admit that Mohan was anything more than a friend. When she realised that I knew many details of the story from Mohan, she cautiously admitted to having been in a relationship with her. She expressed a lot of curiosity about my life (especially in comparison to Mohan's lack of curiosity). This was not only because she was wary, but also because she was surprised that there were other women in relationships with women. Interestingly, when I told her I had gone to meet Vijaya, she expressed concern about her, and asked a lot of questions about how she was doing - whether she looked unhappy

or unwell. When I asked her what she felt about Mohan now, her response was hesitant and mixed. At one level, there was a strong emotional involvement. At another level, there was fear and caution about the implications of such an involvement. At a third level was her compassion and pity for the suffering Mohan had to endure all alone; which was her explanation for why she continued to keep contact with Mohan.

Mohan also took me to her room, which she was sharing with another young man. This man, like her landlord, employer and work colleagues; thought she was a male. I was also witness to a very buddy-buddy interaction between her and the teenage son of her landlord about their "chavis" (implying the women they were in love with, or the film heroine they had a crush on).

It was also apparent as we walked about different parts of the town, that she had a wide social network. People would stop and greet her and were friendly. What was interesting was that some people addressed her as Mohini, and others as Mohan.

Interview Diary

Difficulty in deciding which name (Mohan or Mohini) and which gender pronoun to use when I spoke to her, or refer to her.

Fear and concern for her safety - perhaps projecting some of the fear the Brandon Teena story⁴¹ inspired.

Another part of me finds echoes of the main character in "The complete works of Someshwar P. Balendu"⁴², though perhaps there is the "exoticization of the other" element in it, just because she is so different.

The Kunda story is an interesting turn about for Mohan, so it is hard to figure whether it is because of what happened today, in terms of Vijaya rejecting Mohan, or because her feeling for Kunda was always there and she did not want to bring it into the open. It's hard to tell which part of it is "true".

Precis

Mohan was born in Pusad, Maharashtra, the daughter of a police constable. Her family later shifted to the district town. She had three brothers, and was brought up as a boy by her parents - in terms of clothes and sports played. She has always had only male friends, and is completely comfortable being in their company.

41 Brandon Teena was a young woman in the US who was passing as a man, and considered herself a "man trapped in a woman's body". She was raped and finally murdered by two men when they discovered this. Her story was made into a film. *Boys don't Cry*.

42 Quamar Roshanabadi, "The Collected works of Someshwar P. Bolendu" In Ashwini Sukhtankar (ed) **Facing the Mirror - lesbian writing from India**, Penguin India: 1999.

She has never menstruated, though her father got many medical tests and treatments done. This is her rationale for being attracted to women - that God should have made her a full man, but instead made her half a man. “बनाना था पुरा, बता दिया आधा “ (M-02). She uses the phrase "guts" to describe her desire, and explains it as (loosely) equivalent to "hormones" or "sex".

For her, 'guts' explains why she is attracted only to women. Although her father knew that she was attracted to women, and not at all to men, he got her married in the hope that it would stimulate desire in her. Her husband was a very understanding man, and tried very hard to please her, but she did not feel any desire for him. Within a year of the marriage, she returned to her parents' home.

After her father retired, she was the sole support for her parents, because her three brothers had moved away. She has no connection with the brothers, because they never took care of her parents, and because they disapprove of her.

Although she says she was involved with several girls, she admitted that "real love" was only with a few. Her very first narrative in fact, was about Kunda (because she spoke of the relationship in the context of others, I missed the significance at the time of telling and only made the connection later, when I read the transcripts). At that point, though Kunda was ready to live with her, Mohan had the responsibility of looking after her parents, and so told Kunda it would be better if she got married (M-01). Mohan later got involved with Vijaya, Kunda's friend, and broke off the intimate relationship with Kunda. The three of them continued to remain friends.

Mohan's parents died within a short while of each other. Her mother had died six months before the marriage with Vijaya. In the events leading to the marriage, before leaving with her parents for her father's village, Vijaya had expressed a determination to leave her family and live with Mohan. Vijaya was unable to return from the village in time for Mohan's birthday on January 8. She did not tell her parents that she wanted to come for the birthday, but she threw a tantrum in order that she could return. Her father had called Mohan to say that they would be returning in a few days. The day Vijaya returned, Mohan went to meet her. Vijaya looked very run-down because she had not eaten for two-three days, but re-confirmed her desire to live together.

Later, when Mohan was on duty (she worked in an STD phone booth) Vijaya came to her room. Mohan, Vijaya and Kunda spent three days discussing Vijaya's preparedness to take on the commitment of marriage.

When the decision was taken, Mohan told her (male) friends and they accompanied them to Mahul (a religious place) in two autos. They got married there with the full Hindu rites. After that, they all returned to the district town. Mohan was against leaving without telling Vijaya's family, but from there they went to Chandrapur, because Vijaya wanted to pay a visit to the devi mandir there. Once there, they stayed with

a friend of Mohan. They were forced to wait for a few days because Vijaya got her period, and therefore could not enter the mandir.

A related incident that occurred on the day the couple eloped was the kidnapping of the son of Kohle, who was the landlord of the rooms Vijaya's family lived in. The local police initially assumed that Mohan had kidnapped both Kohle's son and Vijaya. Thus, when Mohan and Vijaya tried to call Vijaya's parents to reassure them that they were fine, the police managed to track them down to where they were in Chandrapur, and forced them to return.

At the local police station, both of them were subjected to intense interrogation about both their marriage, and the kidnapping case. When it was established that the couple had nothing to do with the kidnapping, the police inspector then focused attention on separating the couple. Vijaya remained adamant that she wanted to stay with Mohan. Only when the police threatened to beat up Mohan did she agree to return to her parents.

From this point of separation till I met Mohan 3 months later, they had not had any chance to meet again, since Vijaya's parent's left the town and went to their native village, one hour away. Mohan went through a period of extreme isolation and public shaming. She lost her job, was thrown out of her rented rooms, went hungry for several days, and faced public taunts. She kept a low profile, took new rooms and a new job and has tried to build back her life. Since her parents died, she had no support from family, and little support from friends other than Kunda. The police were in contact with her because she later helped them identify the kidnapper (a local youth) of Kohle's son. Despite the public 'scandal' of the marriage, she had congenial relations with the police, and is planning to try out for the next recruitment of the police force.

5.4 Niloufer

Interview context and impressions

My first interaction with Niloufer was social, at an event organised by Stree Sangam. Later, during a crisis period when she had run away, she stayed in my home for a week. Apart from that period, although I was generally aware of her situation, I never had direct interaction with her.

I chose to interview her because I felt that the crisis she experienced needed to be understood in detail. There was little, if any, overt violence in her life, but she experienced huge trauma and conflict, which had debilitating consequences, especially for her mental health.

The interview with Niloufer was conducted in her home. Since her mother died a year ago, she lives alone in a single room in a predominantly Muslim area in south Mumbai. The language of the interview was English - she is fluent in it, but Konkani is her mother tongue. The recorded interview lasted about one and half-hours, though we spent time chatting both before and after. She had returned from work in the evening, and my presence interrupted her regular routines of cooking (for the next day) and *namaaz*. After the interview, she shared her dinner with me.

During the interview and even during conversation afterwards, I was very moved at a couple of points, when she was emotional and cried. These were points when she was recounting the loss of her children. She was questioning whether her relationship with Deepika ultimately justified such a loss, since Deepika was not prepared to live with her. She has obviously gone through a lot of pain in the past three years. She also mentioned in the unrecorded conversation that she felt erosion of her memory along with the physical illnesses she described.

I found myself taking on the role of "friend and advisor" particularly in the un-recorded parts of the interview. Reading the transcripts, I also realised there were several occasions when I interrupted the flow of her narrative with questions, which created some 'gaps'. It would, therefore have been beneficial to have had a second interview with her, so that these could have been filled.

Interview diary

I am still trying to grapple with the quality of lives where no one knows about the relationship - and what are the reasons why people don't tell, and don't feel the need to tell.

Precis

Niloufer is in her mid-thirties. She is a Pathan born in Tanzania. Her parents shifted to Mumbai because of her father's health. She has a younger brother. At the time of the interview, both her parents had expired, her mother most recently (one and half years ago). She was living alone in her parent's one room chawl in down-town Mumbai.

Niloufer was married in 1987, when she was 21. Her husband was working in Dubai and came down to Mumbai for the marriage. After a short while, he returned to Dubai and used to visit her occasionally. She was unhappy with the situation. During the same time, she had sexual relationships with both her sisters-in-law. The first (and younger) one committed suicide. Niloufer terminated the relationship with the second sister-in-law and then had a relationship with a neighbour. All these relationships were presumed to be secondary to the marriage, and she attributed these relationships to the absence of her husband. Niloufer has three children from her marriage.

Niloufer got in touch with *Stree Sangam* and the lesbian / bisexual community in city. She developed a relationship with a married woman, who was unwilling to commit to a long-term relationship with her. Further, this woman wanted to involve her husband in the sexual relationship. Niloufer was unwilling to get involved on these terms, and ended the relationship.

Post this incident, Niloufer got involved with Deepika, a woman in her 40s living with her parents. Niloufer's husband was not aware of the sexual component of her relationship, but realised that Deepika was increasingly important to Niloufer, and resented it. On the other hand, Deepika was not happy with Niloufer continuing to have a sexual relationship with her husband.

With the conflicting demands placed on her, Niloufer finally told her husband that her friends were more important to her. This resulted in her husband leaving Niloufer with her mother till she changed her point of view. Her mother was unhappy with the situation and wanted Niloufer to go back to her husband. Using the regular fights with her husband as an excuse, when her mother attempted to force her to return to her husband, she ran away. She stayed with several different friends from the lesbian social network for over two months, while she tried to work out what her options were. During this time, her husband gave her *talaq*.

After two months of being unable to reach an alternative living arrangement with Deepika, when Niloufer's husband continued to insist that she return to him, she remarried him, believing that this decision would help rebuild her family, and keep her with her children. Deepika, however, insisted that she could not live without her and that she should come back. Caught between the demands of her lover and her marital family, she finally decided to leave her husband again.

This time, she left with all her jewellery and her money in the hope that Deepika and she would be able to buy a house together. She stayed with friends for awhile, fearing that her husband would try and track her down. She then shifted into Deepika's house. However they had little privacy, and could not live as a couple openly. Deepika refused to financially contribute to an independent living arrangement (either purchase a flat, or live on rent). Her reason was ostensibly because she had no money, and because she believed that they should wait, as her parents were old and when they died, their house would become

hers. Then she and Niloufer could live together. Frustrated with the situation, Niloufer took admission in *Bapnu Ghar*- a hostel for women and took up a job. Meanwhile, her husband once again gave her *talaq*. Niloufer finally returned to her mother's house, where she continues to stay. Her mother died a year ago. Her health has deteriorated because of the stress that she has faced. While she is convinced that her relationship with Deepika is significant, there is continuous conflict. Both of them have now initiated psychotherapy.

5.5 Paro

Interview Context and impressions

Selecting Paro as an in-depth interviewee was an obvious choice because of the physical violence she had experienced. She and her partner first met *Forum Against Oppression of Women* through a lawyer they had approached for help. Again, as with Niloufer, I was never directly involved with any intervention, but I was aware of the broad contours of her story. A year later, she and her partner also stayed at my home during a transition period when they were house-hunting. After that, I lost contact with her and we met for the interview after a gap of a couple of years. Again, there was some mutual catching up on what was happening in our lives; before, in-between and after the "recorded interview".

The interview was conducted in her mother's home where she is currently staying. Her mother was away on a holiday, so we were able to talk till late at night, taking a break for dinner. The recorded interview is over 2 hours, and by the end of the interview, the recording reflects some exhaustion on both our parts (due to both interview fatigue and the lateness of the hour).

In this interview, one of the points I reflected upon was the nature of our "interventions". In her narratives, aside from a few friends, she did not place much emphasis on help from anyone.

interview Diary

Sense that there was the one incident to tell and she jumped right into it. I felt like I should have probed more about her suicide attempts.

She talked more about the reasons for her sister's suicide - she believes it was because her sister was being forced to marry..her mother believes it was because the father's side of the family had a history of depression.

I was disturbed by the strangeness of a mother who keeps her family in control by shock therapy.

Precis

Paro is in her late twenties. She is a media professional. She studied in a girl's school and most of her college friends were women. She felt that she was more comfortable with women. Her early experiences were with women. She did not have any significant relations with men. Part of the reason was her mother's conservativeness. Her family has affiliations with the *Shiv Sena*. Paro's second elder sister committed suicide. Her mother blamed her dead sister and emotionally withdrew from her other children.

Paro had relations with several women when she was in college, though none of them worked out. For this Paro partly holds her temper as a reason. But she also indicates that most of the women she did have a relationship with saw it as a mere "experience". .

She fell in love with her partner Rukmini, with who she was in a relationship for four years. This was her

first experience of a "real" relationship. Part of the reason why she perceived it as a real relationship was the fact that they lived together. Early into the relationship, Paro went to Paris as a part of a student exchange programme. Her mother was to visit her there and they were to travel around Europe.

While Paro was in Paris, her mother read her personal diary that she had left back home. Paro had described her experiences with men and women in it. Her mother called her friends and discussed the matter with them. She then met Paro in Paris. There they had a series of violent confrontations over a period of 30 days. Paro's mother beat her and threatened her. This was the first time she was physically abusive to her daughter. Paro, in an effort to escape the violent cycle she was trapped in, tried to lie to her mother, stating that she would come back to Mumbai and discontinue her relationship with Rukmini. Both mother and daughter did not interact with each other, besides the verbally and physically violent episodes.

During this period, Paro's mother asked her to post a letter to her elder sister. Paro opened this letter and found that her mother was seeking to make an appointment with a psychiatrist to give her electro-shock therapy to "cure" her. When they returned, Paro escaped her mother's company with the help of her partner's friend.

In describing the consequences of being trapped with her mother, Paro expressed shock and bafflement, not merely at the extent of the physical abuse, but also at the kind of language that her mother used to chastise her. This episode was followed by a series of violent interactions between her mother and her. Since she had decided to continue living with Rukmini, Paro needed to retrieve her things from her home. She was beaten up two out of the three times she tried to do this. The third time she went with police protection that a friend of hers had organised. There was one other episode immediately after returning from Paris, when Paro's mother, accompanied by her brother-in-law and a cousin, came to the place where Paro and Rukmini lived, and beat both of them up.

In the process of these cycles, her mother also discussed her personal life with all her friends. Ashamed and angry at having her personal life discussed and judged negatively by her friends, Paro was forced into isolation, with very little support. At that time, her only support was her partner. Looking back, Paro talks about how difficult life was for her at this point.

Although she has now (three years later) separated from Rukmini and returned to living with her mother, relations with her mother are still strained. Her mother still views her with suspicion, and questions her morality. Paro's trust in her mother was seriously affected. The memory of the violence is still fresh. Along with that is the fear that the violence could recur, and therefore she does not communicate with her mother anymore. Underneath this fear is anger about her mother's value systems. Paro was upset about her mother's silence when her brother-in-law molested her. This questioning is more acute when contrasted with the aspersions her mother casts on her morality, and her hostility towards Rukmini.

5.6 Ruksana

Interview Context and impressions

Ruksana is the only woman among the in-depth interviewees who is politically involved with women's groups. We were acquainted not only in this context, but also as colleagues at work. I chose to interview her because, I wanted to explore the specificity of her context (shared with Niloufer) of lower middle-class Muslim, living in close quarters where privacy is difficult and matters become more complicated if one tries to keep a lesbian relationship "secret".

The one and half-hour interview was conducted at her work place. She was somewhat distracted because her colleagues kept interrupting us and she had to get back to work.

Interview Diary

Realized that it is going to be difficult to protect her confidentiality. Discussed the possibility of using parts only ...if she feels it will be too exposed.

Insight that, unlike domestic violence, there is no "cycle" of continuous violence. It is more the "outburst", episodic kind or the structural stuff of discrimination, silence etc.

Precis

Ruksana was born the second of four sisters in a conservative Muslim family, living in a predominantly Muslim area in downtown Mumbai. When she was young, a family "friend" had abducted her older sister, and consequently there was greater repression exerted on the younger daughters. There was tremendous control on their movement and behaviour, and her mother's constantly re-iterated concern was the tension she experienced of getting all her daughters safely married.

Ruksana narrated how living in a very small home with little space for privacy, she and her sisters would sleep close together at night. She would be physically intimate with her sisters at night, but in the mornings, they could not face each other because they were embarrassed and felt that they had done something "wrong". Wrong not because it was with another female, but because they could not control their sexual desire. Sex was, therefore, viewed as something "dirty" and "wrong".

Ruksana's first exposure to the idea of lesbian relationships occurred in the women's group she was part of, where there were ongoing discussions on the topic. She was initially curious about the nature of such relationships. However, she dismissed the possibility of such a relationship for herself, because she perceived heterosexual marriage to be the only way in which she could escape the restrictions of her parental family. She was convinced that her family would never accept a lesbian relationship, and until she was 22, she did not even consider the possibility of autonomously moving out of her parental family. For several years, she scanned matrimonial columns, even advertising for a suitably progressive Muslim man.

Her first relationship was a gradual process of becoming aware of her feelings for another woman. When

she finally got involved with a woman, the comfort and the mutual understanding in the relationship resulted in an instantaneous shift in her perceptions. She realized that she had been deceived all these years, thinking that she needed a man to leave her parental home. She moved out, and for almost two years, she lived on her own.

Her second and continuing long-term relationship is with a woman whom she knew for many years as a good friend. Shabana is a divorcee who escaped a brutally abusive marriage with her daughter and two sons. Ruksana and Shabana have been involved for over three years, and their friends and family have responded in different ways to their relationship. They have had to navigate their way through these responses.

Ruksana's mother and her sister-in-law acknowledge that her emotional relationship with Shabana is important to her, and at one level, they support it, and express this support by always inquiring after Shabana, and sending food for her. At another level, however, they question the degree of intimacy between them. For instance, when Ruksana's sister-in-law came into the room once, she remarked that they were "looking at each other like husband and wife". This interrogation gets acute when they question Ruksana's expenditures. Ruksana's family is economically dependent on her, so her mother cannot openly object if she suspects that Ruksana is spending too much money on Shabana's household, but Ruksana is acutely aware of them constantly watching, and questioning the nature of their friendship. This causes her a lot of tension and frustration. Ruksana feels that both her mother and sister-in-law know, but since she has never been explicit about her relationship with Shabana, she is uncertain about whether her mother would be ashamed if she was to directly claim an intimate relationship.

The relationship with Shabana's parental family is similarly non-explicit, and on occasions, relations have become contentious. For instance, if Shabana's family has not specifically invited Ruksana to a family event, she does not attend until they do invite her. There is, in these interactions, an indirect attempt to get the family to recognize them as a "couple".

When Shabana's teenage daughter Laila discovered their relationship, she reacted with extreme disapproval, saying that it was "un-Islamic". However, since Laila was still economically dependent, when her mother told her she was free to leave the house if she had a problem with her choice of relationship, she stayed and held her silence, but treated Ruksana with silent hostility. This behaviour continued for several months, and finally Shabana and Ruksana attempted to break the impasse by sitting down and having a dialogue with her, an overture that was also rejected by Laila. It was only when Laila got friendly with a young man, and found that Shabana and Ruksana did not place unnecessary restrictions on her, that she began to thaw in her relationship with Ruksana. Gradually, Laila met other lesbian women friends of Ruksana, even got acquainted with their children who were her age and has finally come to fully accept their relationship.

At Laila's engagement ceremony, another interesting acknowledgement of Shabana and Ruksana's relationship was made by Shabana's neighbour and good friend who, when taking a photograph of Shabana and her children asked "Where is Laila's second mother? She should also be in the photograph", and brought Ruksana into the photograph.

With her friends too, Ruksana's engaged in a discussion about her sexual choice over a long period. Initially, when she had acknowledged her sexuality to herself, and had brought up the topic of lesbian sexuality for discussion among her friends, she was directly questioned about whether she was in a lesbian relationship. She denied it then, but persisted in bringing up the topic for discussion. Her friends would object by walking out of such discussions, or would say that such things were acceptable for Ruksana because she was a "non-believer", who smoked and drank alcohol, but not all right for themselves. When Ruksana got involved with Shabana though, their condemnation was openly condemnatory. They said that Ruksana was "corrupting" Shabana who was the innocent, divorcee mother of three children. Dealing with their constant negative judgement was extremely frustrating and isolating for Ruksana. She often felt strained by the effort of dialoguing with them, and felt like leaving the group. Her persistence finally bore fruit however, as her friends gradually came to accept their relationship. Particularly after the movie *Fire* was released, her friends' level of acceptance and understanding increased because of the many conversations they had, as well as the public discourse surrounding the film.

Living as she does in a closely-knit, conservative community, Ruksana is always conscious of "people watching". There is, therefore, a constant fear that neighbours, family, and society will find out about their relationship. Ruksana feels this has a debilitating effect on their capacity to enjoy each other's company as a couple. In their home because of the lack of space, privacy is difficult and they have to constantly restrain themselves in front of Shabana's children. Even when they go out to a movie theatre or public garden, they have to be careful, for fear of who might see them.

5.7 Shawn

Interview Context and impressions

I met Shawn when she first entered the lesbian social network in Mumbai, and at that time, she was actively considering a sex change operation. Over the course of the next three years or so, I met her occasionally, but I had never interacted with her one-on-one. I came to know that she had given up the idea of a sex change.

I chose to interview her because I wanted to explore the reasons why she wanted a sex change, and how she made the transition to coming to terms with being lesbian. We met in her office - she was in the process of setting up a new business company with her intimate partner. We were interrupted a couple of times by her employees, but we talked for over two hours. Her partner was also present but stayed in the background out of earshot. We had comparatively less time for "off the record" conversation after the interview.

Interview Diary

Shawn's ability to make a story funny, her sense of humour, made it difficult to get at the intensity of emotions she must have felt while it was happening.

Some new insights like... the relation of her partner with her mother was on a personal level first - then it would be difficult to "reject" or be "hostile".

Second issue was about the lack of "security" in a relationship that leads to easy break-ups. My doubt was whether I was trying to push too hard the analysis, that the lack of an institution like marriage caused such insecurity.

Precis

Shawn is in her early thirties. She is the third and last daughter of her family. Much of her childhood was spent happily. She is very close to her mother, whose approval is very important to her.

Liking women, and then being attracted to them, has been an integral part of her existence. She has never felt attracted to men. During her youth, Shawn was a "tomboy" and continues to dress only in shirts and trousers. She is uncomfortable with feminine clothes, and often appears like a man.

Her first exposure to the word lesbian was when her sister jokingly called her a lesbian in front of an aunt. Her aunt's shocked and negative reaction created a deep impression in Shawn's mind. This incident critically shaped Shawn's understanding of her sexuality. Shawn refused to own the word as a self-descriptor and spent the next 12 years coming to terms with her desire for women.

As part of this negotiation, she initially identified herself as transsexual, believing that she was a man trapped in a woman's body and, therefore, wanted to undergo Sex Reassignment Surgery. After 10-12

years of severe internal conflict, she eventually came to the decision that she would not undergo the surgery. The decision was based on several factors: the financial implications, the potential risks to the body and the eventuality that she would still not be a 'real' man, and therefore may not be able to find a woman partner and live a 'normal' married family life with children. Also, an important factor in the decision was that she finally managed to contact other lesbian women.

As part of her quest to meet other lesbians, she first attempted to get a copy of *Bombay Dost*, when she was in college. When she did manage to get a copy, she found that the magazine catered mostly to men. The only reference to women was a group in Delhi, a set of people who were too far away for someone in Mumbai. When she finally met the lesbian community presented itself, Shawn still identified as transsexual, but gradually grew aware of the possibility of living as a woman and being attracted to other women.

In the meantime, Shawn fell in love with one of her college seniors and spent a considerable amount of time with her and her family over several years. The woman's mother, however, came to know about Shawn's attraction and restricted her contact with her. Four months later, the woman was married off. Shawn attended her wedding just to make sure that it actually had happened and was severely disturbed by it.

At the same time, she attempted to tell her mother that she was attracted only to women. Her mother had not put pressure on her to get married and Shawn had concluded that, therefore, she would eventually come around accepting it. She talked to her about being attracted. Her mother assumed that it was a man. When Shawn indicated that it was not necessary that it be a man, and could be a woman, her mother reacted extremely negatively, expressing her displeasure through non-verbal communication. Subsequently, her mother began to scrutinise all of Shawn's friends suspiciously.

The first woman Shawn got involved with was apprehensive about social censure. She wanted to marry a man for appearances, while simultaneously retaining the relationship with Shawn. Shawn decided that the relationship would work against her interests. Though both women cared for each other deeply, they decided to terminate it, and the woman went on to marry her boyfriend. In this relationship, Shawn was extremely uncomfortable with accepting her female body, and would not allow her partner to touch her. Even today, she is trying to come to terms with her body.

In one incident, when Shawn went on a trip with some lesbian friends, her mother was extremely anxious and questioned her about her whereabouts. Shawn stated that she was willing to discuss it, if her mother was ready to hear the answer. At this point, her mother withdrew from a possible confrontation. Since then, the relationship with her mother has considerably improved.

Once, a woman who claimed to be lesbian contacted one of Shawn's friends. She and her friend went to

43 India's first magazine for gays, which is available in select bookstores and news stands, or by subscription.

meet this woman in a public park. After the meeting, they realised that a man, who was connected with this woman, was following them. Shawn was afraid for both herself and her friend. They took circuitous routes to avoid him. This experience has made Shawn more cautious about meeting women who are strangers, and claim to be lesbian. She has also become more aware of the potential harassment that she could face.

Shawn then got involved with her current partner, who has now shifted to Mumbai. Her partner lives with Shawn and her family. Her mother, Shawn believes, knows about the nature of her relationship but chooses not to confront it directly. Her partner and her mother have been able to establish a good relationship, based on the premise that Shawn's relationship with her partner will not be discussed openly.

One of Shawn's main concerns is the security of her relationship with another woman. She realises that such relationships are easy to sever and lives under the threat of this potential loss continuously. Shawn has come out to the people she considers important - mother, sisters and friends. In the work situation she is completely silent about her sexual identity, partly because of the nature of her work, and partly because she does not want her private life to intrude on work-relations.

Shawn is resolute that she will not voluntarily bring up the topic of her sexual orientation, but will state the truth if asked by people with whom she has intimate relations. Some of the friends that she has come out to reacted negatively, implying that she was abnormal, while others have looked at her as if she were a freak. She has broken contact with such people.

S.8 Vrinda

Interview Context and impressions

Vrinda is Anjana's partner, and had been called by the police when Anjana's parents were forced to release her from confinement. I met her first in that encounter, and then later for the interview.

I decided to interview her because in the course of untaped conversation she casually mentioned that she had undergone aversive therapy twenty years ago. The interview is not a full one, in the sense that I did not have the opportunity to explore all the issues in depth. This was due to the lack of time, since the original focus of my visit was to interview Anjana. Like Shawn, Vrinda also displayed a sense of humour about what would have been traumatic events when they occurred.

Interview Diary

I was impressed by the emotional maturity of her daughter and the close bond between the mother and daughter, and between the three of them.

Complexities of the "chosen family" where Vrinda's husband continues to live in the same house, and they have a (mostly cordial) relationship.

Precis

Vrinda is in her early 40s. She is the second daughter of a Saraswat Brahmin family. This is significant because the community she belongs to has strong matriarchal traditions.

She believes that she was always attracted to women, even as early as when she was in the first standard, though this was not sexual in nature. Next, she fell in love with Priya when she was in seventh standard.

Vrinda was an introvert till she entered college. In college, she met Malini and had a deep and passionate relationship. They planned to live together. When Malini's parents came to know about this plan they forcibly dragged Malini back.

This scene was enacted in Vrinda's house, and as a result, her parents became aware of her orientation. Vrinda was devastated at the loss of her lover and went into a depression. Her mother provided unconditional support through this phase.

Vrinda went for mental health care in order to come out of her depression. At the hospital, she was given shock therapy as a part of an aversive therapy programme, along with counselling. While the shock treatment itself, as Vrinda puts it, was merely a prick that went "zuck, zuck, zuck", she realised that she was treated as a guinea pig. She was unclear about the actual duration she was in the programme - from two to six months. She recounted that she would blank out and just keep walking. The walking was what finally proved therapeutic.

Once she became aware that her therapy was completely useless in helping her handle her grief she left

the programme. Underlying this whole tragic narration was Vrinda's firm belief that the relationship would not have lasted, that Malini would have eventually left her to be with a man, and that it was better ended sooner than later.

Since that point, Vrinda entered into a series of relationships with women, none of which lasted. She finally decided to get married to a man selected by her parents. She has a daughter from the marriage.

Vrinda in the meantime was attracted to Anjana. They entered into a relationship after a period of four years. Vrinda shifted to Pune to be close to Anjana, who was at that time in Mumbai. Vrinda started a business with Anjana about two years ago. Anjana now lives with Vrinda and her daughter. The relationship between Vrinda and her husband was terminated though they continue to relate cordially and live in the same house.

Chapter 6 - In-depth Interview Report

In this chapter, we present the analysis of the in-depth interviews. Narratives were identified and coded from each interview, which we then sought to categorize in ways that would reflect the multi-layered, i complex experiences they described. We tested the categories both against the data, and our own experiences. Thus, we evolved a theoretical framework to understand violence against lesbians as an *outcome* of the analytic process.

This chapter is organized in four sections. In the first, we present the five key conceptual categories that we use: domain, violence, expression, silence, and narrative cycle. In the second section, we present the framework for understanding violence against lesbians. The next two sections examine the patterns that emerged when we placed the narrative data within the framework. First, in the third section, we focus on the kinds of different coercive and non-coercive relating. The fourth section focuses on the cycles or patterns of relating over time.

6.1 Key Concepts

6.1.1 Domain

We use the term domain to indicate the arenas within which the narratives occur: self, family, intimate partner (female), husband/male partner, friends, work (colleagues and employers), and society/social institutions. This is a primary level conceptual categorization, with distinct boundaries for each category. The narratives were given a code for the domain they were best placed in. Some of the narratives were multi-coded, if they were appropriate to more than one domain.

6.1.2 Violence

At the outset of this research, we had conceptualized violence as deliberate *acts of commission* that have harmful consequences for another person. However, we found this construction of violence inadequate when faced with the experiences of women who love women, because it included only those acts of hate that are *manifest* (identifiable and quantifiable): rape, battering, confinement, emotional blackmail, taunts and so on.

While this recognition of overt violence was crucial, it was inadequate to articulate the violence implicit in *acts of omission* such as denial or silent repression or in acts of self-harm. We were alerted to this inadequacy because of the ambiguities and contradictions in some of the narratives. Confronted with these dissonances in the narratives, our initial reaction was to "individualize", i.e., locate the source of the contradictory or conflictual expressions in the woman's personality or her specific circumstances. We

44 See Chapter 2, Section 2.3.2 for details of the process of coding narratives.

45 See Annexe 7 Notes for details of coding narratives according to domains.

soon realized, however that we needed analytical tools to expose how normative social constructs undergird, in fact *produce*, these contradictions. We therefore broadened the definition of violence to map the manifestations of "normative and ideological violence" or "*Structural-Cultural violence*"⁴⁶. (discussed in the Chapter 1, Section 1.3).

6.1.3 Expression

We use the word "expression" to signify verbal and non-verbal means of communication of sexuality and sexual identity. The concept rests on the premise that freedom to express oneself is an essential human right *as long as such expression does not harm another*. As an essential corollary, such expression should not therefore be considered "criminal/illegal", "immoral" or "unhealthy".

The primary expression of sexuality and sexual identity is to oneself. Seeking words to articulate emotions and desires and developing a sense of self and identity forms a part of this expression.

The second expression is to the outside world, through clothing, physical appearance, words, actions and relationships. Relating to a partner sexually is an integral part of expression.

An individual's capacity for expression is critically dependent on the evaluation of the expression, by her self, and by others. Lesbian women expressing their sexual identity have to contend with the negative valence society accords to homosexuality. This negative valence is encoded in the proscriptions of religion, law, medicine and other social ideologies and institutions. It can be either repressive or punitive.

6.1.4 Violence and Types of Expression

As discussed earlier (see Chapter 1, Section 1.3), violence towards lesbians is shaped by expressions of sexual orientation, or the 'visibility' of lesbian behaviour. Simultaneously, knowledge of homophobic hostility interacts with other factors such as class and ethnicity to engender deeply embodied practices of self-surveillance within women as a means of negotiating safety and the harmful effects of violence.

Thus, our expanded conceptualization of violence was predicated on its intersection with a woman's expression of her sexual identity. Violence is inflicted when a woman's freedom to such expression is denied, repressed, punished or forcibly elicited. Based on this understanding we outlined five different kinds of expression:

Forced Expression - is when a woman is coerced into admitting her sexual orientation to another, or her orientation is divulged without her consent, or when she is forced to self-disclosure in an hostile environment (rather than allowing her to choose the time and space for disclosure). The violent consequences of forced expression are the invasion of a woman's privacy and the use of the knowledge gained to punish or control her.

⁴⁶ Steven Onken. *Conceptualising Violence against Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Intersexual and Transgendered People in Violence and Social Injustice Against Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual People* (Eds.) lacey M. Sloan and Nora Gustavsson. (NY: Haworth Press Inc. 1998)

Suppression of Expression - occurs when the woman is constrained by her fear of punitive consequences (real or feared) and therefore is forced to be silent. This self-suppression reflects the woman's internalization of negative valence accorded to such expression by social institutions and ideologies.

Non-expression - This is the centre point of silence, where the woman has not explored or acknowledged her sexual identity to herself. In this case, the questions of expression (or suppression of expression) and its consequences do not arise. In an hetero-normative society, this is a socially inscribed, *epistemic* violence, since the possibility of same-sex desire is never represented as a valid option.

Non-explicit Expression - occurs when the woman chooses to express her sexual identity in tacit rather than explicit ways. There are two subtly different reasons for this type of expression. In the first, a woman may be in a situation where she does not fear an overt, punitive response as long as she is not explicit about her sexual identity. The conditional nature of the situation is violative, since the woman may not choose to be explicit with the fear of violent or harmful consequences.

The second reason for non-explicit expression may have nothing to do with violent consequences (real or feared), but rather a simple wish for privacy. It involves the recognition that not all experience has to be publicly or explicitly articulated.

Explicit Expression - occurs when the woman chooses to explicitly assert her sexual identity in situations she is comfortable with.

6.1.5 Consequences of Expression

The expression of sexual identity is always in the context of a domain, a relationship. The response or reaction to the expression may be positive or negative, and in either case influences the woman's future expressions. We identified five different responses:

Punishment - is when a person believes that the expression of lesbian sexuality is "wrong" (morally, legally or mentally) and responds with acts of physical or emotional violence towards the woman.

Denial - is when a person believes that the expression of lesbian sexuality is "wrong" and ignores, denies or suppresses such expressions. It is punitive because it seeks to invalidate and isolate the woman through implied negative judgement.

Silence - occurs when a person does not indicate any reaction (positive or negative), sometimes because of lack of knowledge. It is best exemplified by a state of questioning. Such a reaction is usually a neutral space of non-interaction in the relationship.

Tolerance - is when a person has knowledge of the woman's lesbian identity, but does not engage further with her in either negative or positive ways. Such engagement may be inappropriate/ irrelevant or the person may be unwilling or unable to respond positively.

Acceptance - when a person respects and positively engages with the woman's expression of sexual identity, thereby enhancing the relationship and the woman's potential for further self-expression.

6.1.6 Narrative Cycles

Narrative cycles are patterns of expression and consequences that play out over time within a domain. These patterns are not linear but move back and forth in time, and could be characterised as spiral cycles. With each ascent of the spiral, a woman expands self-expression without fear of being punished or denied. Each descent denotes that her expression has been constricted for fear of negative consequences (actual or potential).

6.2 Framework of violence against lesbians

The framework juxtaposes lesbian women's expression of sexual identity with the consequences. The five kinds of expression from forced expression to voluntary explicit expression lie on one axis of the grid. The five kinds of consequences lie on the other axis ranging from acceptance to punishment. Both axes intersect at silence - a zone of non-relating characterised by non-articulation or questioning - when the woman does not express herself, and therefore there is no interaction, no consequence (See Figure 1).

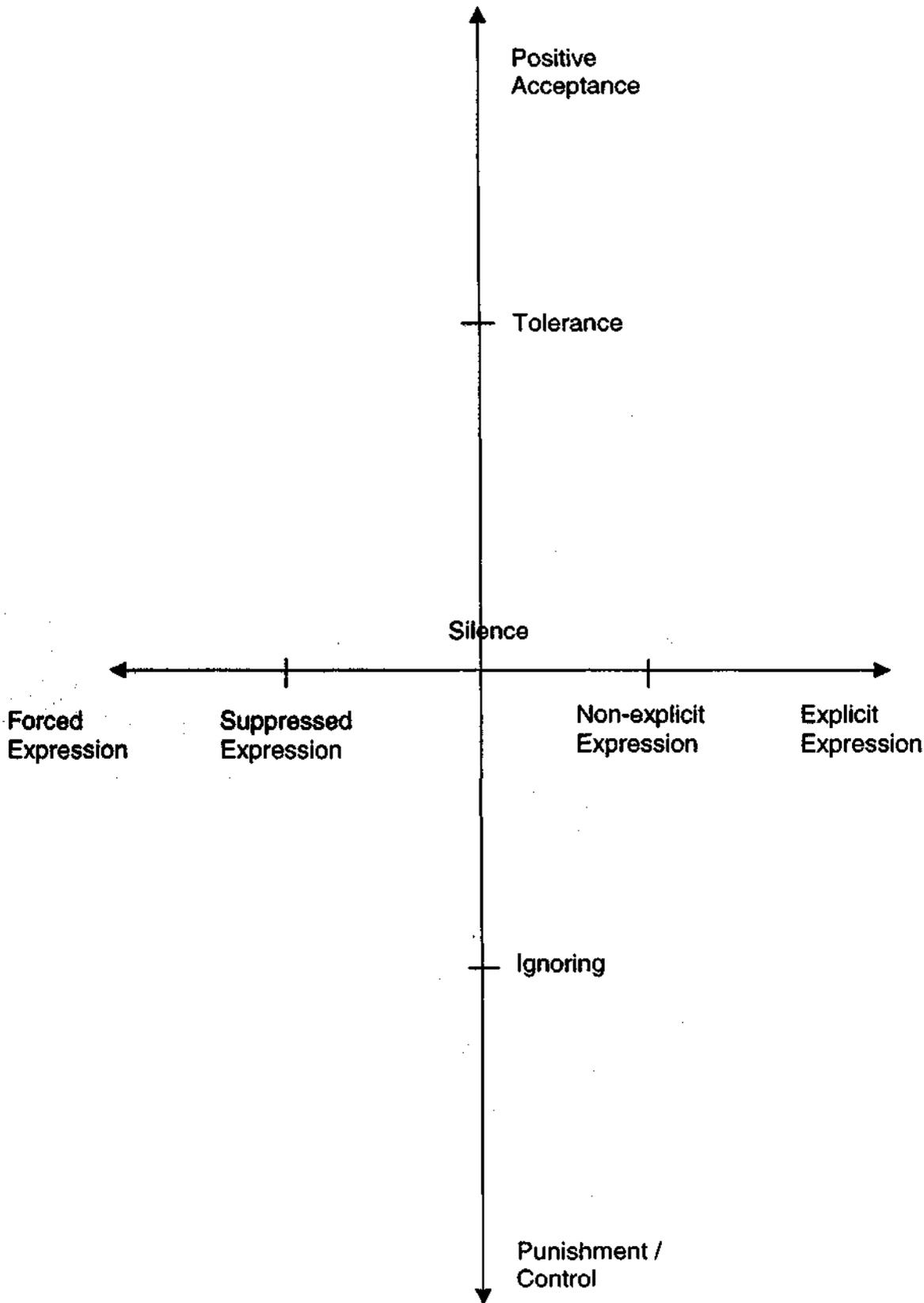
Radiating from this central point of silence two concentric circles representing silence and expression emerge. The latter expands from tacit to explicit expression.

Circle of Silence

This circle is constructed by joining the points of Non-explicit Expression, Suppression of Expression, Denial and Tolerance (See Figure 1). It circumscribes the arena where the woman is silent either by choice (Non-explicit Expression) or due to fear of violent consequences (Suppression of Expression). On the other axis, this circle circumscribes silencing consequences: Denial and Tolerance. There is implicit negative judgement in the Denial, while Tolerance, is placed in the circle of silence because of the absence of positive engagement with the woman's sexual identity. This inner circle represents the arena of silence in which many lesbian women live, without explicit expression or engagement with others. The larger the circle of silence for a woman, the deeper would be her internalization of structural-cultural violence.

Circle of Expression

The outer concentric circle is constructed by joining the points of Forced Explicit Expression, Punishment, Explicit Expression and Positive Acceptance, and represents the area where expression of sexual orientation is explicit. The consequences to these expressions are also explicit and could be either destructive, or positive, affirming expressions.



6.3 Narrative Analysis

In this section, we place the narratives according to the classification of expression of sexual identity and its consequence. Twenty-five combinations of expression and consequence are possible. However, not all of the possible combinations were represented in this collection of 110 narratives which were placed into the grid below :

	Forced Expression	Suppression of Expression	Non-expression	Non-explicit Expression	Explicit Expression
Acceptance					
Tolerance					
Silence					
Denial					
Punishment					

The most visible form of interaction is when explicit expression is punished. If we had restricted the definition of violence to *manifest violence*, we would only have analysed the narratives that focus on this category. However, several of the narratives focus on non-expression, denial and silence, arenas of internalized conflict for the woman (represented by the greyed-out zones). In each of the following subsections, we examine the narratives that fall in each of the intersections of categories.

6.3.1 Punishment

The maximum number of narratives (45) falls into this category. Punishment represents the most intense form of violence experienced by the women. Underpinning it is a negative judgement about the woman's expression of sexual identity. The forms of punishment vary from battering, imprisonment, verbal threats, sexual harassment, stigmatisation and attempts to coerce the woman to change her sexual orientation. While the domain of punishment is largely that of the immediate family, friends and society can often also mete out punishment. The consequences vary depending on the intensity of the punishment and the domain of operation. Often the most severe effects are felt within the family. Disapproval and punitive actions by friends and peers is less intense. In the case of forced expression (often public), the woman faces intense social pressures of isolation and stigmatisation.

Forced Expression and Punishment

Forced expression refers to the invasion of the woman's privacy and disclosure of her sexual identity in an hostile environment. The consequence of forced expression is invariably violative.

For instance, Paro's mother reads her personal diary, finds out she has had relationships with women,

⁴⁷ See Annexe 6 for the narratives of each of the 8 women interviewed, and Annexe 7 for the placement of narratives in the grid for each woman.

and calls up all her friends asking them if they have had sexual relations with her. Implicit in this action is a negative moral judgement not only about Paro's sexual preference, but also about the number of her partners. Paro is unprepared to negotiate the crisis, especially given that she had no role in precipitating it. The subsequent shame Paro experiences because of her mother's action caused the termination of many of these friendships. This episode also triggers a series of physically violent cycles between the mother and the daughter, where Paro is beaten up.

P-02, lines 29-32, lines 34-35

29 *and called all my friends up and she told them about this.*

30 *And not decently or any thing...*

31 *not just told them,*

32 *but she questioned them about "has she slept with you too? And you too? And you too?"*

34 *I can't even imagine...I've not spoken to some of my friends since then.*

35 *It's very embarrassing.*

In the case of Anjana, forced explicit expression follows a more circuitous route. Anjana's cousin exposes Vrinda's (Anjana's partner) sexual orientation to Anjana's family in order to "protect" Anjana (A-03 lines 46-47). Her father reacts by forbidding Anjana to stay with Vrinda (A-04 line 50). As her family's doubts increase, Anjana is forced to admit Vrinda's sexual orientation, which causes her father to forbid her to stay with Vrinda. Finally, her father forces her to admit that she is in a relationship with Vrinda, which results in the escalation of punishment. When Anjana is firm about her relationship through the punishment cycle and moves out of the control of her family, her parents continue to exert pressure on her by disclosing information about her relationship to her relatives without her consent. These relatives in turn attempt to contact and pressurise Anjana about her choices. (A-09 lines 03-04; 36).

Shawn faced her sister's forcible disclosure about her orientation even before she has fully articulated it to herself (S-10, lines 11-15, 46-54). This is a single, apparently insignificant interaction, but the cost is immense, since it propels Shawn into isolation and silence about the fact that she is attracted to women and into a ten-year phase of actively considering a sex change.

Forced Public Expression and Punishment by Social Institutions

Forced exposure *in public* often aggravates the situation. Unlike Paro and Anjana, both Mohan and Jaya faced forcible *public* disclosure. In both cases, the police were instrumental in this exposure, and in subjecting them to public censure and ridicule. Press publicity surrounding Mohan's marriage in the local and state newspapers, without her consent and without protecting her identity made her vulnerable to further violence. She lost her job and shelter and was forced to starve for four days (M-08, lines 14, 24-35, 67- 96). She was forced to undergo a medical test (M-14, line 14). Her friends were forced by their

families to sever connection with her. More severely, she and her partner were subjected to public ridicule and isolation (M-06, lines 23-26).

Jaya's narratives about forcible public disclosure by the police are more complex to interpret, because she has offered different explanations of why she initially went to the police (see Chapter 5, Section 5.2 for details). However, it was apparent that the police inspector distorted her reasons to suit his own agenda of gaining political and personal mileage. He made Jaya's complaint out to be a case under Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code, where she had been "violated" by her partner, Ramabai. He then called a press conference, and it was sensationalized in the press as "*Another Fire in.....*", again without her consent, or protecting her identity. Jaya had no idea that it would be made into such a media event, and blames herself for her "stupidity".

J-02, lines 42-44

42 मलाच भिती वाटायची

43 कारण मला माहिती नव्हतं की इतकं सेपरला देतील.

44 भान नव्हतं मला त्या वेळेस, काही भान नव्हतं.

Suppression of Expression and Punishment

Women often suppress their expression of sexual identity in an attempt to avert or mitigate the violent situations that they find themselves trapped in. The woman is thus forced to manoeuvre around the possibility of violent retribution. If she fails to accomplish this, there may be a resulting violent episode. If she is successful, she may experience grief at being forced to deny her own reality.

Fearing further physical and verbal violence from her mother, Paro reassures her that she will break her relationship with her partner and return to her mother's home.

P-05, lines 215-219, 224

215 ..I will come back home and stuff.

216 I pacified her, because I knew...

217 I don't know what, but when I said it also, I was like, shit man.

218 I know I am not going to do it, I am just lying.

219 And, ummm.... she could see it.

224 literally for about 20 to 25 days I didn't talk to her a word.

Shawn expresses fear and extreme caution about disclosing her identity even to other women who may be lesbians. A man on a bike had followed her and her partner, when they went to meet another woman who claimed to be lesbian in a park.

S-24, lines 19-38

19 I would be wary.

22 *But I would not go out and... I wouldn't go and meet a person.*

29 *A stranger, no.*

36 *what if this person is like, anti*

37 *or a person who will want to destroy you*

38 *or kill you.*

Non-Explicit Expression and Punishment

Non-explicit expression can be manifested through dressing in a "tomboy" or "butch" manner (as with Shawn). It also occurs when a woman is seen to be intimate with another woman (in the case of Niloufer) and people presume that she is lesbian (in the case of Vrinda, Ruksana and Anjana). These tacit expressions usually result in suspicion, disapproval, taunts, and sometimes more extreme punishment.

Shawn's "tomboy" or mannish appearance is a non-explicit expression with negative consequences from both men and women. She was more vulnerable to such harassment when she was younger, but now when it happens, she is able to negotiate the situation better.

S-05, lines 42-54

42 *Negative was earlier,*

43 *when I was like say about 14*

45 *Its like... especially in where I used to stay*

46 *like whole lot of people know me.*

48 *So, sometimes these kind of characters walking behind,*

54 *chal dekho, ladaka hai ki ladaki hai bol,*

Vrinda's early relationship with a college classmate although non-explicit, was the subject of ridicule and disapproval amongst her peers in college (V-1, lines 18-19, 28). When Ruksana got into an intimate relationship with her partner, her friends condemned it as morally wrong for her to corrupt a "good" woman (R-11, lines 11-12, 32-33).

Anjana's family began to suspect her after they discover Vrinda's sexual orientation. Her father presumed she was in a relationship with Vrinda, and attempted to control Anjana by forbidding her to go to Pune, and threatening to beat her (A-02, lines 137-138,164-166).

Although Niloufer's husband did not presume her friendship was a lesbian relationship, he punished her for her refusal of sex with him (N-09) and her prioritization of the relationship with her partner. This resulted in the termination of the marriage, depriving her of shelter, and access to her children.

N-11, lines 77-84

77 *Crisis point was that I am not doing well with him*

78 *and he has a problem with my friends.*

- 79 *So he asked me whom do you want,*
80 *friends or husband?*
81 *I said friends.*
82 *He said, okay.*
84 *You go.*

In these examples, there is a gradation in the degree of punishment meted out to women for non-explicit expression of their relationships. The gradation ranged from "sniggering" and moral judgement to threat of physical beating and actual eviction from the home. Inevitably, the effects on the woman also varied. Vrinda was dismissive, perhaps because the women who sneered at her were casual peers and the punishment was not directly confrontational. Ruksana was more deeply affected by the reaction of her peers, she felt tiredness and frustration to the point where she contemplated leaving her group of friends (R-11, lines 77,82-87). In her desolation over the loss of home and children, Niloufer implicitly blames her woman partner and does not articulate the toll that negotiating a homophobic society in silence takes on her.

Explicit Expression and Punishment

This sector of the grid has the maximum number of narratives. Punishment occurs in all domains, and ranges from women being beaten and imprisoned, to verbal and emotional abuse, to losing their homes, jobs, and their relationships with family and friends. Women are also alienated from their regular social interactions, they are dehumanised and their emotions trivialised or dismissed.

Within families, punishment tends to extend over a prolonged period, with violent episodes of varying intensities, till the woman is forced to physically leave the home and/or the relationships. The consequence of such punishment has an emotional impact that continues to affect the woman well after the violent episode is over. It results in severance of important relations and communication, erosion of trust, persistent fear, and lingering anger and bitterness. The women also feel a sense of failure, shame and guilt in not being able to maintain these significant relations and become increasingly isolated and insecure. For instance, Anjana's imprisonment by her family erodes her physical and emotional state.

A-15, lines 58-75

- 58 *yeah. I lost a lot of weight.*
69 *Yeah. Sleeplessness*
70 *and a very funny feeling in my stomach continuously.*
71 *Kind of, when you usually have during exams and all; the fear.*
72 *The fear was there constantly.*
75 *I did not have the will to live.*

In the case of Paro who currently lives with her mother, the loss of relationship is manifested as non-communication.

P-08, lines 57-71

- 57 *There is a huge line of reasons or whatever that she thinks like that,*
58 *because I don't communicate at all.*
59 *I mean, she has no clue what I am doing in life.*
69 *Okay, its also my fault,*
71 *I think I have this fear that she would get it up in a fight and she'll get it out very nastily.*

Punishment meted out by the family often increases the vulnerability of these women to further violence from others, adding to their burden of guilt, shame and insecurity. When Anjana is locked up at home, she is forced to secretly use the phone of a family friend to attempt to escape the situation. He takes advantage of her vulnerability and sexually molests her.

A-14, lines 1-4, 26

- 1 *And there was this one guy*
2 *who was the only one who was allowed to meet me*
3 *when all... I was locked at home.*
4 *He also tried to act smart with me.*
26 *But he also started acting funny physically.*

Shawn narrates her loss of humanity when she expresses her orientation, wherein she becomes reduced to her sexual preference.

S-23, lines 17-22

- 17 *You are some oddity,*
18 *you are something different.*
21 *Ya.. So you all of sudden turned into a freak.*
22 *The person starts looking at you.*

Punishment of Explicit Expression by Social Institutions

Social institutions with prescriptions against homosexuality (i.e., religion, mental health institutions and the law/police) have the power to severely punish explicit expression. For instance, negotiating the strictures of religion can have deleterious effects and these are intensified if the woman practices her faith. Shawn and Ruksana are not practicing Christian or Muslim, but are affected by the hostility of family and friends' negative judgement (usually implicit) of them. Niloufer, as a practising Muslim woman faces severe internal moral conflict, to the detriment of her mental and physical health.

When Vrinda approached a mental health institution for help to deal with her grief over the forcible break-

up of her first relationship, she was subjected to behaviour modification therapy. Vrinda recognised that she was being treated as an object of experimentation, but was too emotionally numbed to protest until after a few months of "treatment", she eventually stopped going.

V 03, lines 33-128

33. *I became a guinea pig there,*
43. *Then they showed me nice looking girls' photographs girls*
44. *and gave me some electric shocks, (laughs)*
47. *And then they showed me nice muscled guys, (laugh)*
75. *but it must have been for few months,*
89. *I knew it won't help.*
90. *I told them also,*
92. *But they wanted to experiment.*
122. *This little thing, this little pin prick.*
127. *or somewhere, they had strapped it, between here and here,*
128. *And it comes zuck... zuck it comes (laughs).*

In some of the narratives, a discernible pattern occurred when the negative prescriptions of one institution were sought to be re-enforced through referral to another institution. Thus Anjana's father colluded with the police inspector in condemning and shaming his daughter (A-07, lines 86-89,113-115) and the police sought "medical reports" or negative media to make a case, in the instance of Jaya and Mohan.

Mohan, Jaya and her partner Ramabai, were forced by the police to undergo "medical tests". In Mohan's case, the test was to establish her gender (M-14), and while Mohan had anticipated (even welcomed) such a test, what was deeply upsetting for her was the ridicule that her marriage was subjected to by the police. Her bitter comment was that, if a boy and girl get married, they get showered with blessings, but in her case, they just got mud flung at them (M-14, lines 52-71).

In Jaya's case, the medical test was supposed to establish whether Ramabai had been "penetrated with fingers" (J-07). When interviewed, the doctor who examined Jaya and Ramabai admitted that the medical report was "normal", however, during the examination she had taken Jaya aside and berated her saying that as a married, Christian woman she should not be engaging in such an unnatural relationship (J-08, lines 108-121).

6.3.2 Denial

Denial falls within the Circle of Silence. The concept includes silent hostility, ignoring as well as denial of a woman's expression of lesbian identity. This denial is premised on a negative valence attributed to homosexuality. Unlike the punishment category, however, denial is manifested through non-engagement

and ignoring rather than direct, violent action. Continuous denial invalidates the expression of lesbian sexuality and ultimately erases the identity of the woman. Since denial is in the zone of the "unsaid", often it is difficult for the woman to negotiate or directly confront these acts.

We found no narratives from these interviews to place in the intersection of Denial and Forced Expression, but believe it is theoretically possible.

Denial and Suppression

When a woman or others who know about her sexual orientation denies it, it constitutes a suppression of expression. For instance, when questioned about her sexual orientation by her friends, Ruksana denies having a lesbian relationship.

R-09, lines 44-46

- 44 तो उससे बोलते थे की क्या तेरे साथ में किसी का है क्या? किसी लड़की से?
45 तो मैंने उसको बोला की क्यु मेरी बातों से ऐसा लगता है?
46 तो मैंने शुरू शुरू में नहीं बोला

Denial and Non-Explicit Expression

Denial in the face of non-explicit expression occurs when the person believes homosexuality to be "wrong", avoids direct confrontation on the issue with the woman, and expresses his/her disapproval through silence. It is most evident in relationships where there is an effort to maintain status quo, wherein the person who denies the expression wishes to retain the relationship because of economic or emotional dependence. This is most clearly evidenced in Shawn's and Ruksana's narratives. Shawn's mother does not directly state her Christian conviction that homosexuality is a sin for fear of alienating Shawn and losing the emotional tie (S-03, lines 83-87). In contrast, though Ruksana's mother continuously questions her about the time and money she spends with her partner, she does not have the power to object openly because she is economically dependent on Ruksana.

R-03, lines 38-47

- 38 मुझे लगता है की
40 मेरी माँ थोडा बहोत जानती है,
42 लेकिन कोई *economical power* होता है
43 क्यों की उसका बहोत ख्याल रखती है ।
44 अगर बेटा होता,
45 या उसका उस तरह का *power* होता
46 तो शायद वो बहोत ज्यादा
47 *objection openly* बोल सकती थी ।

Denial can also be manifested through ignoring or refusal to acknowledge the non-explicit expression,

suspicion about the nature of the relationship the woman has on grounds other than sexuality, treating the woman as the "other" (and therefore trivializing her reality) and by refusing to positively respond to the woman's expression. In the domain of work, Shawn articulates people's unwillingness to engage positively and openly with her, which aggravates her isolation in society (S-04, lines 17-21). Similarly, Ruksana's friends' initial denial of her non-explicit expression was rationalized by "othering" her, i.e., the fact that she was a "non-believer" gave her the leeway for actions they considered wrong (R-09, lines 65-68)

Denial and Explicit Expression

Anjana, Shawn, Ruksana and Niloufer all faced denial of their explicit expressions. With Anjana this occurs after she leaves home to live with her partner and then re-establishes contact with her parents. She finds that they are in denial about her life with her partner and the violence they inflicted on her (A-11, line 131). Anjana was dismayed at her mother's continuing emotional blackmail and lack of concern for her well being (A-12, lines 153 - 157). Anjana was also unable to comprehend the loss of her relationship with her sisters and their lack of support for her (A-13, lines 41 -48). Underlying all three stories is the deep grief that Anjana feels, about the ease with which these family relations can be severed, because of the expression of her desire to live with Vrinda.

A-13, lines 32-33

32 *So it's very sad, you know?*

33 *Relations can just break up so easily.*

When Shawn tells her mother she is lesbian, her mother first reacts by denying her expression and then by punishing it with "silent treatment" (S-01, line 92). Through a series of interactions this denial continues to the extent where she evades/ignores Shawn's partner's suggestion that she would be a suitable bride for Shawn (S-25, lines 49-61)

A similar silent hostility and denial was the reaction of Ruksana's partner's daughter's when she found out about their relationship. Initially, she treated Ruksana with coldness and when Ruksana and her partner attempted to talk with her to help her come to terms with their relationship, she denied that there was anything to talk about.

R-05, lines 135-139

135 *लेकिन वो बहुत ignore कर रही थी ।*

136 *तो फिर हमने उसको एक दिन बोला था की*

137 *उन्हे कुछ problem है तो बात करो ।*

138 *उसने बोला की,*

139 *मुझे कुछ नहीं बात करनी है*

Niloufer faced a series of denials in her intimate relationships with women, where her partners denied her

need for emotional intimacy and reduced their relationship to mere instrumental sex (N-06, lines 4-9).

Shawn narrates the consequence of denial of her expression by society, when information that would have helped her self-acceptance process was hard to obtain. It took her a year to find a copy of the gay magazine *Bombay Dost* and then she had to contend with the hostile reaction of the shopkeeper. The effort made her weary and she retreated into isolation (S-11, lines 05-10, 47-49).

6.3.3 *Silence*

In this category, the normative presumption of heterosexuality ensures the absence of knowledge of the realities of lesbian existence, both for the woman, and for the people she interacts with. For the woman, it means an often painful process of discovery and self-acceptance.

Non-Expression

This is the central point of silence about lesbian sexuality. It is encoded in the normative heterosexuality of social institutions, which makes difficult a woman's attempts to articulate to herself her desire for women. The first difficulty is the unavailability of knowledge about lesbian sexuality or relationships, which is vital for the woman to be able to acknowledge the possibility of such realities for her self. Second, even when such knowledge is available and the woman's has articulated her desire for women, there is often still an internal conflict as she struggles with religious prohibitions, social stigma, or gender identity issues. These proscriptions are the source of *social-cultural violence*. Since the location of the struggle is essentially internal (i.e, in the domain of self), there are no direct consequences from any other person. The emotional consequences for her are confusion, fear, anxiety, depression, shame, guilt and isolation.

Anjana recognized that when she initially retreated from Vrinda's interest in her, it might have been because of her own internalisation of heterosexual norms that propelled the rejection:

A-01, lines 63-64

63 *Initially, I was like no.*

64 *But may be I wasn't accepting it myself*

Ruksana too had initially rejected lesbian sexuality as an option for herself. As a young girl, she had initially internalised social values that sex is unclean and something that needs to be controlled. She felt guilty and ashamed of her sexual desire for a man or woman (R-01, lines 26-32). Heterosexual norms were so deeply embedded in her understanding of sexuality that she did not consider about lesbian relations, and later, even when **she encountered** lesbian women, **she** could not consider any option for herself but heterosexual marriage in **order to gain** autonomy from her natal family.

R-02, lines 13,16, 23-24

13 *क्योंकी मुझे पता नहीं है तो कैसे रिश्ते होते हैं?*

16 *लेकिन मैं यह रिश्ते में नहीं जाउगी बाबा*

23 घर से बाहर निकलना है तो एक आदमी का support होना चाहिए

24 जो शादी करके बाहर निकले

Paro did not have difficulty accepting the possibility of relationships between women. However, she did articulate her initial lack of knowledge about the significance of being in a long-term relationship with a woman, which is equal to that of heterosexual marriage.

P-04, lines 88-92

88 *It wasn't something which was very conscious and thought of, you know, "this is the girl I want to spend my life with", "I am a lesbian".*

89 *There was no thought like that at all.*

P-01, lines 34-35, 37

34 *It was like, you know, that was hard life.*

35 *You realize that it's not a piece of cake staying this way,*

37 *It's like you getting married and having a family.*

For Shawn and Mohan the conflict runs deeper, as they come to terms with the contradiction between their desire for women and normative heterosexuality through the modification of their gender identity. Although neither of them expressed shame or guilt about their love for women, both experienced varying degrees of conflict about their gender identity. For Mohan, this meant that she rejected the idea of desire between two women, but constructed a gender identity that was unique, in that she believed she had the 'guts' (hormones and desire) of a man, although she was clear she did not want to have a sex-change operation (M-09, lines 78-86). In Shawn's case the conflict is extended over a period of time, and exacerbated in severity by her rejection of the term "lesbian" (S-10, line 11-73). While referring to the period of 10-12 years when she seriously contemplated sex change to accommodate her desire for women to the heterosexual paradigm, Shawn indicates her sense of complete isolation (S-12, lines 44-47).

The internal conflict process is manifested differently for Niloufer, who contends with the contradiction between her desire for women and her desire to conform to the (heterosexually inscribed) norms of "good mother" and wife. She also struggles with the fundamental conflict of being a devout Muslim and Islam's prohibitions of homosexuality.

N-16, lines 35-43

35 *I know I should not be setting my own rules.*

36 *But still for my heart's sake I am doing it.*

37 *Like 1 rupee main to adha ...50 paisa*

38 *I am doing wrong.*

39 *But I don't feel guilty about it*

42 *Then only I will be able to do it, na?*

43 *That 50%.*

Niloufer continues to carry this burden of internal conflicts about her roles as mother and her religion, both of which centrally strain her existence and contribute to her deteriorating mental and physical health. Shawn faced a potentially similar situation as a Catholic. Unlike Niloufer though, Shawn does not practice her religion, and therefore, does not enter the internal conflict arena vis-a-vis religious proscriptions.

Crucial to the resolution of the internal conflict women may experience between their desire for other women and social proscriptions of this desire, is the location of value systems. Vrinda has no internal conflict about her lesbian identity because she clearly prioritises her personal value system over the normative social system.

V-01, lines 34-52

34 *Yah! Yah! I never had guilt feelings of any kind.*

37 *I feel guilty, only when I am not a very nice person.*

38 *That is my criteria of being good and bad.*

39 *Good-bad meaning what I feel eh...*

40 *for myself, not others.*

51 *Not even when I was a kid.*

52 *I didn't feel anything is wrong with it.*

Suppression of Expression

In this category are the narratives that focus on suppression of expression due to a real or imagined fear of negative consequences. These consequences could be the social stigma or breaking of relationships. Yet, even suppression has its consequences: a sense of isolation, shame and inadequacy is a recurrent theme in all the narratives.

Ruksana exemplifies this fear of expressing her sexual identity due to the possibility of negative social consequences. As a result, she continuously lives with the stress of people coming to know about her orientation.

R-12, lines 27-33

27 *तुम मिल नहीं सकते हो ।*

28 *तुम रह नहीं सकते हो ।*

30 *की ये एक डर है की,*

31 *दुनिया वाले क्या कहेंगे,*

32 *family क्या कहेगी,*

33 *relations क्या कहेंगे ।*

Paro and Niloufer indicate that they cannot talk about their sexual orientation with their friends, or in society. Underlying this is a deep sense of fear that the relations they have will be terminated. Paro indicates that she would have liked to tell her work colleagues, but felt unable to do so (P-11, line 17), Niloufer further indicates that she would be stigmatised in her social circle of friends, acquaintances and neighbours.

N-17, lines 12-14, 23-25

12 *Too scared.*

14 *R: Scared of society only.*

23 *I: What's the worst that you can imagine could happen?*

24 *R: Break relationship with me.*

25 *Not contact with me.*

For Niloufer, in addition to this sense of isolation from earlier friends is also the sense of shame that she has failed to be a good woman, wife and mother.

N-18, lines 40-47

40 *I avoid them.*

42 *R: Because they would know my story.*

43 *That I have left my children.*

44 *Like I am a divorcee,*

46 *I: You feel a sense of shame about that?*

47 *R: Yeah. Because my children are not with me, na?*

The fear is based on the very real loss of relations that they have either experienced personally, or seen others experience. A direct consequence is a sense of isolation and depression.

6.3.4 Tolerance

Tolerance falls within the Circle of expression, since it presumes that the other person knows the woman's sexual identity. This category describes reactions that are neutral in that they are neither negative nor positive. This may be due to the inappropriateness of further reaction or the unwillingness of the person to respond further.

Tolerance and Forced Expression

Shawn's orientation is "outed" by one of her friends to her colleague, though he does not ask her directly. His response is neutral, with no negative or positive consequences for Shawn.

S-4, lines 34-35, 47-49

34 *I: And your... the friend told him, yes?*

35 R: Yeah. And... Then he [friend] told me about it
47 ...even after he knew,
48 it didn't bring about a change in him in any way.
49 So it didn't matter

Tolerance and Non-explicit expression

There are two narratives that fall into this category. Niloufer develops a "crush" on a woman film star and meets her. She is strongly sexually attracted to her, and continues to figure Dimple Kapadia in her fantasies. Underpinning this tolerance of her sexual attraction, there is an understanding that such "crushes" are normal, since the possibility of an actual sexual encounter is virtually non-existent (N-03, lines 62, 64-78). The other narrative is Ruksana's, where she indicates that their families and neighbours implicitly acknowledge the significance of the relationship between her and Shabana, but will not acknowledge it openly (R-08, lines 65 - 68).

65 मानते है, लेकिन, खुलापन से नही है ।

68 Neighbours वालो या family बोले

6.3.5 Acceptance

Actions that support or affirm a woman's expression of sexual identity have been categorized as acceptance. This means not just acknowledgement, but active, positive engagement with the reality of the woman's life. This can be by treating her intimate relationships as equally significant to any heterosexual relationship.

Acceptance and Forced Expression

When Vrinda decides to leave home to live with her partner, her partner's family forcibly prevents it. In the process Vrinda's family comes to know about her orientation. Vrinda's mother, however, accepts her orientation and continues in later narratives to provide support to Vrinda in her grief over the loss of her lover (V-02, lines 131-138)

Acceptance and Non-Explicit Expression

Ruksana continuously negotiates her non-explicit expression with her family and with her neighbourhood. Thus, although her mother initially was silently hostile, she gradually comes to accept Ruksana's close relationship with Shabana, and realises that it is a central supportive relationship for her. She comes to acknowledge Shabana as a part of Ruksana's life. However, no explicit discussion about the nature of the relationship occurs between mother and daughter (R-03, lines 49-60). Again, when Ruksana's sister-in-law comes into her house and sees the intimacy between Shabana and Ruksana, she comments on it smilingly.

R-04, lines 9,10,42

09 "तुम दोनो ऐसे बैठे हो की

10 जैसे *husband, wife* बैठते है ना वैसे बैठते हो "

42 *क्योंकी माँ और भाभी का थोडा मैं समजती हूँ।*

Both Ruksana and Shabana emphasise the importance of Ruksana's existence within Shabana's family, as Shabana's partner (R-07, lines 14-16,23,24,59-61). They are seen as a couple by Shabana's neighbour and friend, even though at no point do they actually explicitly discuss the nature of their relationship with her. This is illustrated when the neighbour invited Ruksana into a "family photo" as Laila's "second mother".

R-08 - lines 38-39

38 उसके *neighbour* ने बोला की

39 अरे उसकी *second* माँ को नही बुला रहे है क्या तुम

Acceptance and Explicit Expression

Anjana, during her period of being imprisoned by her family, finds acceptance and support from social organisations in Mumbai.

A-05, lines 58-62

58 *Then with Anjali I spoke alone once.*

60 *Anjali was very supportive.*

62 *She was just listening, no.*

Shawn's sister accepts her orientation when she finally expresses it explicitly. The significance of this acceptance is that it is matter of fact. Shawn's sister equates it to any other significant heterosexual relationship, even offering her advice on the choice of partner.

S-17, lines 50-58

50 *So when I told her she was like oh! Arrey find someone better.*

52 *I will make a very bad sister-in-law.*

56 *And after that she was never ever...*

57 *I didn't have any barbs or any side comments or anything like that.*

58 *Nothing thrown on my face or make me feel...*

Ruksana's and Shabana's choice is accepted by Laila, Shabana's daughter over a period of continuous open dialogue with her, which increases her understanding (R-06, lines 23, 62-65).

6.4 Narrative Cycles within Domains

Examining the narratives, we found what we called cycles of linked narratives within a domain. These narrative cycles tracked changes that occurred over time in the woman's primary relationships, i.e., with her self, her family and friends, which we document in the following sub-sections . Within all the domains

48 See Annexe 7 for details of placement of each women's narratives within the Framework on Violence.

that involved face-to-face relationships (i.e. family and friends), we found that the woman's different levels of expression were met by responses that changed over time, from punishment to denial, tolerance, and finally, sometimes to acceptance.

What was interesting was that the patterns in a domain were similar, even though the details of the narratives may have differed. When the woman's fear of negative consequences (actual or potential) was high, the Circle of Silence was larger, and the Circle of Expression smaller. When this fear, and the incidence of punitive consequences was low, women's Circle's of Expression expanded within a domain.

6.4.1 *Self*

In this domain, the clustering of narratives has been in the category of non-expression of self. This is the crucial area in which a woman's sexual identity as a woman who loves other women is constructed. The construction of identity for each woman reflects a constant negotiation of the intersections between her self-acknowledgement of desire for women, the actual relationship with a woman, and the social constructs of the "abnormality/ immorality" of such desire and relationships, as well as around the normative social constructs of gender and sexuality.

Two broad paths are discernible in women's transition to acknowledgment and some degree of self-acceptance. The first path was when women resolved the identity issues internally, and then got into a relationship, as was the case with Vrinda, Shawn and Mohan. The second path was when women got into a relationship with another woman and then came to terms with the identity questions through the reality of being in a relationship with another woman (as in the case of Ruksana, Paro, Niloufer, Jaya and Anjana).

Both Shawn and Mohan have sets of identity formation narrative cycles in which we can trace their personal negotiations with social constructs of normative gender and prescriptive sexuality. Fundamental to both was the deep non-acceptance of desire between women, which stemmed from the (violative) normative social construct that you have to be of the male gender to desire a woman. Given this non-acceptance, each then had to find "rationalizations" to accommodate the desire they felt for women - for Mohan it was in adopting a male gender identity, and for Shawn it was in seeking a transsexual identity. In effect, these "rationalizations" embodied the contradictions of denial of *gender*, rather than denial of sexuality (i.e., both are clear about their attraction to women). Through these narratives, we can track their movement from self-denial to self-acceptance.

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Mohan's linked narratives (M-3, M-04, M-09, M-10) had a series of explanations of her desire for women, which rationalized it in terms of the male gender identity she adopted. Her parents had brought her up as a boy (M-10, lines 16-17) and as a result she was comfortable socializing only with boys (M-03, lines 04-

49 See Annexe 7, Grid 3 for placement of Mohan's narratives.

05). More significant was the fact that she had never menstruated (M-03, lines 26-27) which to her was a "physical reason" why she should have been born male (M-03, lines 35-36). She expressed her desire for women as "guts", which for her is equivalent to "gents hormones" (M-10, lines 02-07).

As a consequence of her identification with a male gender identity, she expressed *anger* at the idea of desire between two women (M-09, lines 28-30). The emotion is noteworthy not only because of the force with which she stated it, but also because she could offer no reason for her anger, except that she did not agree with the idea. When probed for the contradiction this posed if her body was female, and her desire ("guts") was for women, she responded that her anger was directed at her body (M-09, Lines 84-86). Despite anger at her body, she emphatically rejected the idea of a sex change, on the grounds that the operation did not guarantee physical safety (M-09, Lines 116-119).

A partial shift in Mohan's levels of self-acceptance occurred in the aftermath of the publicity surrounding her marriage to Vijaya. When she was confronted by the taunts of the police that their marriage was a joke, she reacted in pain at the injustice of a world that would celebrate a heterosexual marriage, but dismiss their marriage undertaken with equally serious commitment (M-15, lines 55-71). She moves into expressing acceptance of love between two women when she counters the police taunt that they were imitating the film *Fire*. Her ironic response was that when people get married, they don't do it by imitating films, and that same-sex love was not for everyone.

M-13, lines 41-45, 63-69

- 41 मैंने बाले पिक्चर देख के कायके लिए करेंगे ?
45 शादी करते लोग तो पिक्चर देख के करते क्या वो? (both laughing)
63 हर कोई ladies -ladies love कर सकते क्या ?
64 नहीं ।
65 अगर करती थी, तो आदमी दुनिया में नहीं रहते थे ।
66 ऐसे ठराविक जो है,
67 जिसको उसके आकर्षण हो सकता है ।
69 ये चीज कर सकती ।

Perhaps too, the public/media discourse around the marriage also gave her a new language "samalingi"⁵⁰ to fit her experience (M-17), and help her move towards acceptance.

Shawn's narrative cycle on identity tracks her trajectory into the "male gender", which started with her acknowledgement of desire for women, but rejection of the lesbian label (S-10, lines 46-47) as an unacceptable self-descriptor. Similar to Mohan, she also attributed a "physical reason" for her difference -an "extra chromosome" (S-16, lines 18-20; S-16, lines 15-19), and had discomfort with her body image

50 Hindi word for homosexual, which is not gender-neutral, since 'ling' refers to the penis.

51 See Annexe 7, Grid 7 for placement of Shawn's narratives.

(S-13, lines 19 - 21, S-18 lines 07-09). She found the transsexual identity more acceptable initially, but gradually realised the physical and emotional implications of sex re-assignment surgery.(S-19). At this point, she also came into contact with other lesbian women (S-12, lines 32-36), which helped her to construct and accept a lesbian identity.

Anjana, Paro and Ruksana's narratives reflect the process of coming to terms with sexual identity through

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a relationship. Ruksana , for instance, grew up in a highly conservative Muslim family, where sex per se was taboo, let alone lesbian sex. She therefore felt her physical intimacies with her sisters as a young girl were "wrong" because she did not have "control" over sex (R-01, lines 26-32). As an adult woman, she refused to acknowledge the possibility of a lesbian relationship because she perceived heterosexual marriage as the only acceptable way to escape her natal home (R-02, lines 13, 16, 23-24). In her first relationship she expressed a sense of wonder at the natural ease of relating with a woman.

6.4.2 Family

Since this is a primary arena for most women, there are more patterns that are evidenced across the grid. Beginning from the point of forced expression we have the linked narratives of Anjana and Paro. Both of them went through traumatically violent incidents with their families as a consequence of their relationships with women being forcibly disclosed; and then moved into a stage when their families cut them off, ignored their existence and/or relationships. For both women, this transition is graphically represented on

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their narrative grids , from the spectrum of forced expression and punishment to voluntary expression and ignoring.

Anjana's narratives begin with her parents attempting to control her, even before they have any suspicions about her relationship with her partner (A-02, lines 136-138). When the parents find out from other family members first that her partner was lesbian and that they were in a relationship, Anjana admits that Vrinda is lesbian, but denies that they are in a relationship (A-04, lines 40-45,60-64). The next series of narratives (A-05 to A- 07) document the intensification of physical and verbal abuse that she underwent during the next six months when her parents incarcerated her in the home, constantly monitored her movements out of the home and her phone calls; and prohibited her interactions not only with Vrinda, but also with her other friends. This took a toll on her health and self-confidence (A-15, lines 7, 65).

The physical intensity of her parents punitive actions only reduced once she had extricated herself from their immediate physical control; but it was at the tremendous cost of seeing her father smile agree with the police inspector when he compared her and Vrinda to terrorists, animals - generally a depraved and despicable species (A-07, lines 86-89; 113-118).

52 See Annexe 7, Grid 6 for placement of Ruksana's narratives.

53 See Annexe 7, Grids 1 and 5 for placement of Anjana's and Paro's narratives respectively.

Even when she escaped, the emotional abuse continued as they put pressure on her by exposing her to the censure of other relatives (A-09, lines 03-04, 36), and by intimidating Seema on the phone (A-10, lines 66-68).

- 46. *that there is a lesbian meeting at Kothrud -*
- 48. *And I want someone to organise it.*
- 49. *He meant... Seema said that they are not at home.*
- 50. *So he said ok, write down this message.*
- 51. *He made Seema write down the message*
- 66. *I don't know what they were trying to tell Seema ki...*
- 67. *B: Some kind of harassment?*
- 68. *Yeah. Some kind of...*

Anjana's mother attempted to emotionally blackmail her about her ill health (A-12, lines 128-51). As Anjana rejected these attempts at emotional control, her family moved into the spectrum of ignoring her (A-13, lines 27 - 34; 40), which continues to be a very painful experience for her.

Paro's narratives followed a similar trajectory. Her mother invades her privacy and discovers that she has had relationships with women (P-02, Lines 13-14,29-32). Again, as with Anjana, the next few narratives (P-04 to 07) describe the escalation of physical and verbal abuse, including the allegation that she was psychiatrically "abnormal" (P-07, lines 06 - 08). The culmination was Paro's discovery that her mother planned to subject her to electro-shock therapy (P-06, lines 22 - 23). Her escape from her mother's control ultimately resulted in her mother cutting her off (P-10, lines 115-116).

Two other sets of linked narratives about relationships with family that move across different sets of categories on the grid are Shawn's interaction with her mother , and Ruksana's interaction's with her partner's daughter Laila.

Shawn's voluntary disclosure of her lesbian identity to her mother resulted in her mother first responding with passive aggression (S-01, Line 92), and then with emotional blackmail (S-01, Lines 98-113). Now, however the status quo is her mother's tolerance or denial of explicit or non-explicit expressions of Shawn's lesbian identity. This denial produced the black comedy of the following interaction between Shawn, her partner and her mother:

S-25, lines 49-64

- 49 *[partner says] "Aunty, don't you want your daughter to get married?"*
- 51 *[my mom says] "I want her to get married",*
- 53 *and then she [mom] goes like "any nice boy?"*

54 See Annexe 7, Grid 7 for placement of Shawn's narratives.

- 56 *And she [partner] goes like, "What about me?" (laugh)*
 57 *I don't know about my mother.*
 58 *Whether she played ignorant*
 59 *or whether she disregarded... (Laughs)*
 60 *[my mom says] "We will find for you also.*
 61 *We will get both of you married." (Laughs).*
 62 *I am like, "Hello...*
 63 *I don't want to..."*
 64 *That conversation right away was left.*

However, unlike in the case of Anjana and Paro where the denial meant complete cut off, Shawn's mother continues to relate to her, and even her partner.

Ruksana and her partner's continued dialogue with her partner's teenage daughter Laila resulted in her ultimate acceptance of their relationship . Initially, when Ruksana and Shabana's relationship was non-explicit and she discovered it, she had rejected the relationship as "un-Islamic" (R-05, lines 36-37,135-139) and punished Ruksana by limiting interaction with her. This produced a lot of tension for Ruksana and Shabana, as Laila rejected their attempts at initiating dialogue. (R-05/2). Their persistent exposure of Laila to the lives of other lesbian women and discussions on sexuality bore fruit in Laila's final acceptance of their relationship.

6.4.3 Friends

In the domain of relationships with friends, the two women who had linked narratives were Ruksana and Mohan.

Mohan's friends moved from denial to acceptance and back to denial. When Mohan first told them that she and Vijaya were to marry, her friends responded with disbelief, and only accepted that Vijaya was prepared to marry Mohan after they cross-questioned her on whether she was sexually happy with Mohan.

M-08, lines 12-13,23-24

- 12 *जैसा, मानने वाले मानते,*
 13 *नहीं मानने वाले नहीं मानते ।*
 23 *मेरे पे विश्वास नहीं आया, तुमको सुख मिलता क्या ? शांती मिलती क्या ?*
 35 *यहा तक पुछा उसको ।*

Subsequently, they accompanied Mohan and Vijaya and were witnesses to the marriage (M-02, lines 88-89,97). However, after the scandal burst, they succumbed to the pressures of their parents to disassociate with Mohan, and not get their reputation tainted by the public shame heaped on Mohan.

55 See *Annexe 7*, Grid 6 for placement of Ruksana's narratives.

M-07, lines 40 -49

40 –जो दोस्त थे

42 किस्सा होने के बाद मे ,

48 की अपनी बदनामी होगी,

49 ऐसा होगा, वैसा होगा

The trajectory of Ruksana's friends, in contrast, ended in acceptance.

R-11, lines 140-159

140 मान्यता जो है

141 वो जो बनी है

157 कम से कम ऐसे तो group है जो

158 हम अकेले तो नहीं है

Initially however, in R-09, lines 44-46), she evades her friends questioning about her own sexual orientation, for fear of their reaction and the consequent loss of their friendship. The reaction of her friends was to emphasize her difference (lines 64-68) from them in that she smokes, drinks and is a "non-believer" in Islam. Later, Ruksana expresses her sexual identity to them non-explicitly by persistently bringing up lesbian issues for discussion (R-10, line 07), and her friends are forced to make explicit value judgements (R-10, lines 40-42) and ignore the issue by walking out of discussions (R-10, lines 48-55). The final narrative R-11 tracks the shifts when her friends have to come to terms with her relationship with her partner. Initially they state dismay at the partner being "corrupted" by Ruksana (R-11, lines 10-12). Ruksana's persistence in the relationship with her partner, and continued struggle to dialogue with her friends despite the intense frustration she felt (R-11, lines 77, 86-87), finally results in their acceptance, which reduces her sense of isolation.

Chapter 7 - Conclusion

To conclude, we will first present summaries of the research findings in each of the three components of the study. We follow this with a discussion of the key themes that emerge through the process of triangulating the evidence from each of the research components. Finally, we will outline some possible future courses of enquiry.

7.1 MHP report summary

7.1.1 *Lesbian Client Profiles*

The client profiles of 70 women represent data on the larger population of lesbian women and are useful in triangulating the key emergent issues with the other two data sets on lesbian women.

There is a significantly low incidence of lesbian clients (especially compared to gay male clients), which could be explained by a combination of factors. First, in general women are less likely to seek mental health services than men. Gender bias as well as the fear of the stigma of being "mentally ill" may dissuade them. They may be further dissuaded by the pervading social stigma attached to homosexuality as a mental illness and their apprehensions about the attitudes of the MHP.

An alarming trend is that 21% of clients were forced to visit the MHP by family members, in order to change their sexual orientation. This is particularly disturbing when considered in conjunction with the fact that *none* of the women wanted to change their sexual orientation.

Self-referred clients typically came for problems of depression, anxiety, addiction, poor scholastic performance, problems in the relationship and grief over break-up, etc. The incidence of depression was predictably high, but no more so than the incidence in the general population of women.

All of the women who wanted sex re-assignment surgery (SRS) were evaluated as not meeting the criteria. This leads to the conjecture that, rather than change their *behaviour* (or suppress/deny their desire for women), lesbian women may be more likely to consider changing their *bodies* in order to meet social norms of compulsory heterosexuality.

There was comparatively less reported physical abuse (perhaps because of the desire of families to "hide the shame" of a lesbian daughter), but high reportage of emotional violence perpetrated by family members. The low level of lesbian women reporting violence could be due to the double bind of silent shame and ostracization experienced by women. That is, if women disclosed their sexual identity, they ran the risk of violent reactions from family and society. If they chose to keep their sexuality a secret, then they were likely to internalise the social stigma in the form of shame, guilt or self-abuse.

However the low reporting of violence could also be due to "normalization" of such violence, and the

MHP's differing perceptions about emotional violence. Some MHPs recognised that lesbians faced social stigma and ostracization, but did not label it "violence". In a situation of silence around violence, communication with, and support of women who are undergoing these experiences is difficult.

7.1.2 MHP Views, Knowledge and Therapeutic Interventions

All the MHPs knew that homosexuality was no longer classified as a mental or sexual disorder. The opinions of 4 MHPs who (implicitly) considered homosexuality to be abnormal reflected the classic Freudian, psychoanalytic perspective of homosexuality being the result of "arrested sexual development" or "dysfunctional family history". They explained the "causes" of homosexuality as due to:

- Dysfunctional relationship with the same gender parent
- Childhood sexual abuse
- Situational homosexuality

A subtle variation was the perception of some MHPs that homosexuality *causes* "maladjusted" or "abnormal" behaviour. This view problematizes homosexuality, rather than question societal non-acceptance of homosexuality as a cause of "adjustment problems" clients may have.

MHP's perception of lesbian clients in terms of "dominant/masculine" and "passive/feminine" partners shows their presumption of heterosexual and gender stereotypes as underlying lesbian relationships

A large majority (18 out of 22) MHPs believed that it was necessary to retain a diagnostic classification of "ego-dystonic" homosexuality. Further, only two of the MHPs had a completely clear understanding of the differences between the ICD10 and DSM4 classifications of "ego-dystonic" homosexuality and sexual orientation.

The terminology "ego-dystonic" homosexuality was not used neutrally. Some of the MHP's views contained embedded social biases, such as equating homosexuality to negative behaviour such as addiction. The four MHPs who were *against* the concept of ego-dystonic homosexuality recognized that an homophobic social environment induces distress or "ego-dystonic" homosexuality. They emphasized the need to help the client towards self-acceptance and building personal coping mechanisms for dealing with the socially induced distress producing factors. For them, the priority was protection of the client from the "harm of social stigma about homosexuality" which, when internalised produces the desire for "self-inflicted harm".

Only 3 MHPs had complete knowledge of the exclusion criteria for the diagnosis of Gender Identity

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Disorder . The others were equally divided between those who had adequate knowledge and those who had no knowledge of the criteria. A disturbing implication of the MHPs' lack of clarity on GID is that lesbian women who consider SRS as a coping option in order to live in a hetero-normative world (rather than

56 See Annexe 5 on the DSM4's Diagnostic Criteria for *Gender Identity Disorder*

because they genuinely have GID) may not receive the support they require to adjust to a lesbian identity. MHP therapeutic interventions addressed the presenting symptoms of anxiety, depression, grief, etc. The primary techniques used were counselling, rational-emotive therapy and psychotherapy. Only four of the MHPs were aware of other resources (lesbian and gay organisations, books or internet resources) for lesbian women.

7.2 Survey report summary

The quantitative survey provided an outline of the types and extent of violence that women face. Two kinds of data was collected: first was information on the women's background, their disclosure of sexual orientation, and their support systems. The second was the incidence and extent of violence: physical, emotional and sexual.

A majority of the respondents were urban, highly educated and employed. The sample represents the women who are in contact with the city-based lesbian social networks, and as such, cannot represent the total population of lesbian women.

Disclosure of sexual identity to friends was predictably the highest frequency, followed by the mothers. Significantly fewer fathers knew about their daughter's sexual orientation. This trend was corroborated by the fact that friends and mothers were a primary source of support for the women who experienced violence, while only one father was a source of support.

Disclosure of sexual identity was linked to incidence of violence. The 11 women who did not experience violence had disclosed their sexual identity to fewer people (on average to 3) than those who had experienced violence (average disclosure to 6 people). However, the design of question structure was inadequate to establish causal linkages between the person to whom disclosure was made, whether the disclosure was forced, and whether violence was a consequence.

The data clearly showed that all the women who had experienced physical and sexual abuse had also experienced emotional abuse. Emotional violence could therefore be considered the "foundational" violence, which for some women extended into physical and/or sexual violence. Most of the women who reported emotional violence experienced more than one form of violence.

There are clear indications that suicidal ideation exists in conjunction with of emotional violence (in the majority of cases), and silence (in one case). The data collected functioned as a measure of the extent of self-inflicted violence. However, it does not differentiate between suicidal ideation and suicide attempts; neither does it question the origin of the ideation, i.e., whether the respondent felt suicidal specifically because of her orientation.

Another major trend the survey underscored was the maximum incidence of violence in the family domain.

The only emotional abuse that was higher outside than within the family was taunts faced in public taunts. Within emotional abuse, there was a concentration of violence, which involved acts of denial, silent hostility and neglect. Directly confrontational emotional violence was less frequent. Acts of emotional violence that involved control over resources, and people outside the family structure (psychiatric treatment, blackmail, extortion) had the lowest frequency of occurrence. Acts of physical violence primarily involved exertion of physical control over resources and avoided open confrontation (deprivation, eviction and imprisonment). Acts of physical battering were relatively fewer. There are potential linkages indicated by these patterns around control of resources and public disclosure, which offers scope for future study. A possible hypothesis is that violence is contained within the family because families are not willing to disclose the woman's sexual identity to the outside world for fear of social stigma and ostracization. To illustrate the point, only 5 women were forced to go for psychiatric treatment, in spite of the fact that 11 faced allegations of abnormality or mental illness. Further exploration could also be on the nature and extent of control over resources post-disclosure.

Sexual violence and battering was mostly present in the context of male partners, which underscores the vulnerability of women within a patriarchal society.

A disturbing trend is the continued violence experienced by 50% of the women who reported abuse. Further, abuse termination for most women depended on their leaving the abusive situation or denial of their sexual identity. This would indicate that severance of relationships with the family or eviction from the home is the woman's primary means of escaping violence. Only three of the women who reported violence indicated that the abuse termination occurred due to acceptance of their sexual orientation.

7.3 Narrative report summary

The narrative data provided information on the nature and patterns of violence faced by lesbian women. The most significant outcome of the narrative analysis was the construction of a framework to understand violence against lesbian women. The two matrices of the framework were the woman's expression of her sexual identity on one axis, set against the consequences on the second axis. The framework enabled us to track the occurrence of violence within different domains, and across time.

Central to the framework was the articulation of the epistemic violence enforced through silence about lesbian existence. Knowledge about lesbian sexuality or relationships is vital for a woman to be able to consider the possibility of such realities for her self. Even when such knowledge is available, and the woman's has articulated her desire for women, there is often still an internal conflict. Since the location of the struggle is internal, consequences of this violence are invisible and "individualized" as her confusion, shame, guilt and isolation.

The internal conflict process is manifested for some women as the contradiction between her desire for women and her desire to conform to the (heterosexually inscribed) norms of "good mother", wife or daughter. Some women who are devout struggle with religious prohibitions of homosexuality. For some women, the internal conflict runs deeper, as they come to terms with the contradiction between their desire for women and normative heterosexuality through the attempted modification of their gender identity.

Punishment represents violence inflicted by others in order to control or change the woman's expression of sexual identity. The forms vary from battering, imprisonment, verbal and emotional abuse, sexual harassment, stigmatisation, losing their homes, jobs, or relationships with family and friends, and attempts to coerce the woman to change her sexual orientation. The consequences vary depending on the intensity of the punishment and the domain of operation.

The domain of punishment is primarily within the immediate family, (though friends and society can also mete out punishment). Within families, punishment tends to extend over a prolonged period, with violent episodes of varying intensities, till the woman is forced to physically leave the home and/or the relationships with family. Besides the severance of important relations and communication, other consequences for the woman are erosion of trust, persistent fear, a sense of failure, shame, guilt, lingering anger and bitterness, isolation and insecurity.

Women often suppress their expression of sexual identity in an attempt to avert or mitigate violent situations (real or feared). Forced to manoeuvre around the possibility of violence, if she fails she may face violence, and if she is successful at suppressing her sexual identity, she may experience grief and shame at being forced to deny her own reality.

In the case of public (often forced) expression of sexual identity, the woman faces intense social pressures of isolation and stigmatisation. The police have played a central role in forcible exposure and in subjecting lesbian women to censure and ridicule, probably due to the criminalization of homosexuality .

Social institutions with explicit prescriptions against homosexuality (i.e., religion, mental health institutions and the law/police) have the power to severely punish explicit expression, for example through 'conversion therapy'. A discernible pattern occurred when the negative prescriptions of one institution were sought to be re-enforced through referral to another institution, for e.g., when the police sought "medical examinations" of lesbian women.

Denial includes silent hostility towards and ignoring of a woman's expression of lesbian identity. It is premised on a negative valence attributed to homosexuality, but is manifested through non-engagement rather than direct, violent action. Continuous denial invalidates the expression of lesbian sexuality and ultimately erases the identity of the woman. Since this denial is in the zone of the "unsaid", often it is

57 Under Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code.

difficult for the woman to negotiate or directly counter.

Denial of a woman's sexual identity is most evident in relationships where the person who denies the expression disapproves of homosexuality but cannot influence the woman, or cannot sever ties with her due to economic or emotional dependence on her.

Tolerance describes neutral reactions. This neutrality may be due to the inappropriateness of further reaction or the unwillingness of the person to respond further. It can be distinguished from acceptance, which describes actions that support or affirm a woman's expression of sexual identity, for instance, by treating her intimate relationships as equally significant to any heterosexual relationship.

Narrative cycles reflect the transitions women face over a period as they present their sexual identity in different domains and negotiate the consequences. The first cycle is in the domain of self, as they confront the dissonance between their desire for women and the hetero-normative construction of desire. For women who first entered relationships with other women, there was often less self-denial. Women who first resolved the identity issues internally sometimes made "rationalizations" that helped them accommodate their desire with the prohibition of homosexuality in religion or other social institutions. For some this meant a sense of continuous guilt; for other women the resolution is through the denial of *gender*, rather than denial of sexuality. For a woman to make the transition from self-denial to self-acceptance, she would need a strong internal value system and/or positive support and acceptance from external sources (individuals, organizations or the media).

The next critical cycle of relating is with the immediate family or close friends. This negotiation is fraught with internal fears of rejection, punishment or severance of the relationship. The woman may initially suppress her expression of sexual identity. Two patterns are discernible at this point. In the first, if the woman's fear is validated in a violent incident, there is breakdown of trust and the woman's fear is augmented. When violent interaction continues over a period of time it results either in the erosion of the woman's self or a break in the relationship. In either case, the persistent emotions of the woman are guilt, shame and a sense of failure.

In the second pattern, the woman may experience family or friend's silent hostility towards and denial of the reality of her lesbian existence. This status quo may continue indefinitely, especially if the family/friends do not want to sever ties with the woman. Or, over time, the pattern may shift into acceptance, as greater exposure increases the understanding of friends and family.

7.4 Emergent issues

An iceberg is an apt metaphor to understand violence as represented by the three data sets on lesbian women. The tip of the iceberg of violence is represented by low violence reported in the lesbian client profiles, with the extent and nature of violence increasingly uncovered below the surface, as represented

in the quantitative survey, and the in-depth interviews. The MHP data set provides a point of reference to examine the mental health consequences of this violence, and consequently the mental health needs of lesbian women. Triangulating the inter-connections between the components of this study, it is possible to identify key issues in understanding the nature of violence against lesbians.

7.4.1 *Silence*

Silence emerged as a central concept in defining violence faced by lesbian women. It represents the invisible bulk of the "iceberg" of violence. The normative presumption of heterosexuality is an epistemic violence that ensures the absence of knowledge of the realities of lesbian existence, both for the woman, and for the people she interacts with.

For the lesbian woman, silence can reflect three different possibilities. First, she may not have acknowledged the possibility of being lesbian to her self. The two women who were identified as "latent lesbians" by two of the MHPs would perhaps be examples of this. Second, women may experience internal conflict as she struggles to reconcile her desire with the social prohibitions on it. They may acknowledge their identity to themselves, but choose to suppress the expression of sexual identity due to fear of violence. All possibilities reflect the socially inscribed absence of choice. In the third possibility, women may choose silence to maintain their privacy. This silence however can only be a meaningful "individual choice" if it is made in a context of freedom from fear of violent consequences.

For the people she interacts with, silence could again reflect three possible types of interaction. The first possibility is their lack of knowledge about lesbian existence/sexuality. In the second, the person may know but tolerates (is silent about) the women's sexuality. This may be because the relationship does not require further engagement on this issue, as reflected in one of the narratives about a work relationship. This form of silence needs to be differentiated from the third possibility, where the person denies or ignores the woman's expression because the person feels that such expression is "wrong". Categorizing these acts of silent hostility as violence unpacks the grey area of silence masquerading as tolerance or acceptance. Both the narrative and the quantitative data clearly established a large terrain for silent hostility, which had severe emotional consequences for the women. In the survey, the maximum incidence of emotional violence in the family was in acts of denial/silent hostility. The damage caused by silence is personal (internal conflicts, loss of self-esteem, and loss of relationships) and therefore invisible. Indeed, the depth of this damage was only apparent through the detailed analysis of the narrative data. There was a strong convergence in all three data sets of suicidal ideation among lesbians; however the research design had not adequately probed the nature and extent of this ideation. That is, what the reasons were, and whether the ideation had lead to suicide attempts.

7.4.2 Expression of Sexual Identity

Predictably, there is a correspondence between disclosure of sexual identity and incidence of explicit violence. However, in the questionnaire design we had not differentiated between forced and voluntary disclosure of sexual identity. The significance of this difference was revealed only after the analysis of narrative data, when we made the connection between forced explicit expression and ongoing violence.

A further conceptualisation that was not apparent in the first two data sets, but emerged in the narrative analysis was non-explicit expression of sexual identity. In this case, the negative consequence for women was primarily emotional violence.

7.4.3 Familial Violence

The arena of maximum violence (of all types) for women was the family. This was clearly established in all three components of the study. In the survey, 77% of the women who experienced violence (30 out of 39) indicated the family as the domain for incidence of violence. This is not surprising, given the central role of the family in Indian society, and the patriarchal familial control exerted on a woman's sexuality, mobility and access to resources. The form of control exerted by the family lies in a continuum between silent and punitive, and depends on the degree of disclosure and the nature of the existing relationship.

When a woman's lesbian identity is explicitly disclosed (forcibly or voluntarily), the family's reaction may be accepting or not. Emotional violence forms the foundation of the family's non-acceptance of the woman's lesbian identity and their attempt to control her. There is a convergence of all three data sets to indicate that the family would keep the fact that she is lesbian a secret from the outside world, due to the associated shame and stigma.

Non-acceptance can extend to more directly physical violence, including beating, imprisonment, and even remedial action such as shock therapy. However when the woman seeks external help to counter this physical violence, the family may retaliate by approaching social institutions such as the police, or mental health professionals. In many cases of explicit violence, the woman was forced to make a choice between her family/home and her partner/orientation. The consequence of such a choice in any case would be a loss for the woman. In many cases her choice of her partner results in eviction from the family home, and loss of the family relationships. This again is corroborated in both the questionnaire and the narrative reports, where the abuse termination occurred when the woman was compelled to leave her home and/or sever relations with her family.

Fear of the loss of family and fear of violent consequences underlay many of the choices that lesbian women made, even in the choice to suppress her identity, or disclose it in non-explicit ways. In the latter case, actively violent episodes may not occur, but the family may engage in silent hostility, which then enforces her silence, and erodes her sense of self.

Thus, this research clearly establishes the family as the critical domain for the enforcement of coercive control over a woman's sexuality. Despite this bleak picture, there are also a few instances where the family has accepted and supported the woman, which was evidenced in both the quantitative and narrative data.

7.4.4 Cycles of Violence

The transitions from violence to ignoring, tolerance or acceptance occur over time, and can be tracked through linked narrative cycles. Within a domain, a woman constantly negotiates the disclosure of her sexuality, and the violence (real or feared) experienced. The consequences of disclosure may start with violence and shift to silent hostility when the woman refuses to submit to the coercion. It is rare for a cycle that begins in violence to end in acceptance. None of the narratives indicated this, and only 3 of the 39 women in the survey who experienced abusive reactions indicated that the termination of abuse was due to acceptance. Cycles may also start with silent hostility or denial and shift to acceptance, and in this process, acceptance can be facilitated by exposure to the reality of lesbian existence, as some of the narratives demonstrate. Also, a couple of MHPs have facilitated acceptance through family counselling to help parents come to terms with their daughter's lesbian identity.

7.4.5 Institutional Violence

The violent consequences of the prohibitions on homosexuality encoded in religious, legal and mental health institutions were clearly established in this study. Regardless of the woman's religiosity, some of the narratives clearly pointed to the use of religious prohibitions by others to justify their intolerant or hostile reactions to a woman's disclosure of lesbian identity.

The narrative data pointed to the possibility that devout women from religious traditions (such as Islam and Christianity) with explicit condemnation of homosexuality might experience greater internal conflict than women who do not practice their religion. A significantly high proportion of the questionnaire respondents (66%) did not practice their religion. Of the 9 women from Judeo-Christian traditions, only 1 practised her religion. However, the survey design did not probe for further to establish if there was a connection between absence of religious practice and internal conflict about homosexuality and religion.

Violence and coercion that began in the family was often sought to be re-enforced through referral to one or several of these institutions, particularly the police or mental health professionals. The role of the police has been more directly coercive, as evidenced in the narrative data of four women. In three of the cases the family was responsible for invoking police assistance to control the woman. In each instance, the police attempted to separate the woman from her partner by subjecting them to public ridicule, threats, taunts, and even by the fabrication of a case under Section 377. It is apparent that although Section 377

is not applicable to lesbian women⁵⁸, as long as such a legal proscription exists, women will continue to be vulnerable to coercive police interventions.

Mental health professionals are aware that homosexuality is no longer considered an abnormality, yet this has not filtered to general awareness. People not only still believe that homosexuality is an abnormality, but hope to "cure" it through therapy. There was a strong convergence of all three data sets on this: In the lesbian client profiles, 21% of the women had been forced by family to visit the MHPs in order to change their sexual orientation. In the survey, 11 women (22% of the sample) were faced with allegations of abnormality, and 5 were forced into psychiatric treatment of abnormality. From the narrative data there is one woman's narrative which recounts her mother's attempt to subject her to shock therapy, while another woman had experienced several months of aversive shock therapy at a mental health institution.

However mental health interventions can, unlike the previous two institutional interventions, also be positive. Several of the MHPs interviewed had counselled their clients through their emotions of confusion, guilt, and shame to greater self-acceptance, and as mentioned, a couple of MHPs even engaged in family counselling.

7.4.6 Ego-dystonic homosexuality

A significant congruence established in this research is between the category of ego-dystonic homosexuality and the grey area of silence. As discussed above, silence maps the arena of internalised conflict for a lesbian woman. Ego-dystonic homosexuality refers to a woman's distress about her homosexual desire/behaviour. Almost all the MHPs believe that such distress in a client is adequate justification to help her change her orientation. This belief is despite first, the absence of any lesbian client who wished to change their sexual orientation and second, the low success rates in inducing long-term change in sexual behaviour of gay men.

Only a couple of MHPs recognized that the distress experienced by some clients was induced by social non-acceptance of homosexuality. In their intervention, they helped their clients build personal coping mechanisms and come to self-acceptance. Here again, the removal of the diagnostic classification of ego-dystonic homosexuality would be essential for interventions from mental health institutions that are more supportive when addressing the internal conflict experienced by lesbian women.

7.4.7 Transgender issues

Gender Identity Disorder (GID) comprises another area of diagnostic classification where the internal conflict of lesbian women plays out with maximal dissonance. All the women in the lesbian client profiles who wanted sex re-assignment surgery (SRS) were evaluated as not meeting the GID criteria. Two sets of narratives offer glimpses of the struggle women endure in order to accommodate their desire for

⁵⁸ Read literally, Section 377 does not apply to lesbian women.

women within the rigid demarcation of normative gender and (hetero) sexual roles. For one woman, the accommodation was through adopting a male gender identity without considering SRS, for the other woman, it was through adopting a transsexual identity and considering SRS. Both accommodations necessitate some degree of self-denial and violence towards their bodies. The MHP lack of clarity on GD exclusion criteria implies that such women will perhaps be less likely to receive the support they need in order to reach self-acceptance of their lesbian identity.

7.4.8 Consequences and Resistance

The consequences of violence for lesbian women apparent in the narrative and quantitative data could be described at three levels: the personal, social and emotional.

Personal -although the incidence of physical battering, incarceration was apparent in both data sets, it was in the narrative data set that it became clear that the emotional consequences of fear, guilt, shame, anxiety and depression were much more significant for the women, and could, in some cases, lead to suicidal ideation.

Social-women faced the loss of relationships with family and friends, public stigma and ridicule, and the censure of social institutions

Economic- eviction from the home, severance of family financial support, loss of job, etc.

However, even women who experienced extremely adverse consequences of physical violence, eviction from family and home, or public shame and censure were persistent in their resistance, and their attempts to seek support and validation. Significantly, none of the women in the study expressed a wish to change their desire for women.

All the women interviewed in depth, as well as a majority of the women who responded to the questionnaire were economically independent. Of the women surveyed who were employed full-time, 50% were self-employed. This may support a co-relation between a woman's economic autonomy and sexual autonomy.

7.5 Future courses of enquiry

The areas of further exploration that can be envisaged would address some of the gaps in the current research design. The women who participated in this study for both the quantitative and narrative components were predominantly urban, middle-upper class women, primarily since it is these women who are in contact with the city-based lesbian social networks. However, the narrative data of three women indicates that women who come from different Socio-cultural backgrounds negotiate their identities differently. Therefore, a possible course of enquiry would be to explore first, whether the violence framework adequately addresses their experiences, and second to understand the possibility of creating language/frameworks that will reflect their realities.

Glossary

Androgynous/androgyny - 1) Being of both genders. 2) Being without gender, gender neutral. 3) Simultaneously exhibiting masculine and feminine characteristics.

Butch - 1) Masculine or macho dress and behavior, regardless of sex or gender identity. 2) A sub-identity of lesbian, gay male, or bisexual, based on masculine or macho dress and behavior (see femme). 3) "butch it up" To exaggerate masculine behaviors usually for others entertainment (see "camp it up").

Come out - 1) To deal with one's own and others reactions to the discovery or disclosure of one's sexual identity or gender identity. 2) To disclose one's own sexual identity or gender identity to another. [I came out to my mother] 3) "come out to oneself - To discover that one's own sexual identity or gender identity is different than previously assumed.

Crossdresser - 1) A transvestite 2) One who, regardless of the motivation, wears the clothes, makeup, etc. assigned by society to the opposite sex (i.e. a transvestite is a crossdresser but a crossdresser is not necessarily a transvestite).

Gay - One who has a significant sexual or romantic attraction primarily to members of the same physical sex, or who identifies as a member of the gay community. Lesbians and bisexuals often do not feel included by this term.

Gender - Those personality characteristics and social roles society normally attributes to one physical sex or the other. The terms 'masculine', and 'feminine' are normally used to describe the genders while 'male' and 'female' are used to describe the physical sexes.

Gender Identity - How one thinks of oneself in terms of one's gender.

Gender Identity Disorder (GID) or Gender Dysphoria - 1) Unhappiness or discomfort experienced by an individual about ones gender role assigned by society based on ones physical sex. Unhappiness or discomfort may be too mild of words for many individuals. Also referred to as gender euphoria when spoken of in the positive manner. 2) May include unhappiness or discomfort (mild and extreme) with one's physical sex as well.

Heterosexism - A particular subset of the oppression of lesbians, gays and bisexuals. The assumption that identifying as heterosexual and having sexual or romantic attractions only to members of the other sex is good and desirable, and that other sexual/gender identities and attractions are bad and unacceptable, and that anyone is straight whose sexual/gender identity is not known, usually coupled with a "blindness" to the existence and concerns of LesBiGays (See homophobia, biphobia). A heterosexist person is one who practices heterosexism.

Homophobia - Originally, an irrational fear and/or hatred of sexual attraction to the same sex. Developed

into a term for all aspects of the oppression of lesbians, gays and bisexuals (See heterosexism, biphobia).

Homosexual - Formal or clinical term for gay, usually meaning gay male, sometimes meaning lesbian and gay.

Internalized homophobia - The internalized oppression of LesBiGays, bisexuals and transgendereds (sexual minorities) by members of the sexual minority. This often includes feeling that sexual minorities are bad at the core; that the entire world is unsafe; that sexual minorities can only trust other members of our own group; that members of sexual minorities are untrustworthy; that for safety sexual minorities must stay in hiding; that for safety sexual minorities must come out everywhere, all the time; that sexual minority love or expression is bad.

Internalized oppression - Negative messages and feelings about oneself, one's group, and how members of the group (including oneself) deserve to be treated, which are taken in as true at some level. Internalized oppression often includes messages which contradict one another, as well as messages which reinforce one another.

Lesbian - A woman who has significant sexual or romantic attractions to the same sex, or who identifies as a member of the lesbian community. Bisexual women often do not feel included by this term. Derogatory slang: dyke, lesbo.

LesBiGay: Colloquial contraction of "lesbian, bisexual, and gay." Often spelled with capital "B" and "G" to prevent misinterpretation as "lesbian and gay." Does not include the transgender community.

Passing (to pass) - To be able to successfully assume the gender role opposite of physical sex when interacting with society.

Sexual orientation - an individual's disposition to experience physical and affectional attraction to members of the same, the other or both sexes. Established early in life, it is the result of a little understood but complex set of genetic, biological and environmental factors.

Sexual identity - the conscious integration of sexual orientation into an individual's self-definition. While we cannot choose our sexual orientation, we can choose to develop a sexual identity that recognizes and accepts that orientation. The development of a positive sexual identity is closely linked to the development of self-esteem. Anti-lesbian/gay discrimination complicates the development of a positive sexual identity for anyone whose sexual orientation is not exclusively heterosexual.

Sexual preference - a term that is sometimes used when referring to the sexual orientation of a person who is lesbian, gay or bisexual. The term is not considered desirable because it implies that being lesbian or gay is a choice that could be rejected or accepted at will.

Sexual Orientation - How one thinks of oneself, in terms of being significantly attracted to members of

the same sex or the other sex. Based on one's internal experience, as opposed to the physical sex of one's actual sexual partners. People whose sex does not match their gender identity may base the definition of their sexual identity on either their sex or their gender, or may think of themselves as having two sexual orientation identities, one based on each. Sexual orientation may also be based on attraction to gender instead of physical sex (should they conflict), but this seems to be less common. (See sexual preference and sexual identity).

Sexual Reassignment Surgery (SRS) - A surgical procedure designed to modify one's primary sexual characteristics (genitalia) from those of one sex to those of another (penis to vagina, or vagina to penis). May also include secondary surgery such as breast implants or removing the Adam's apple.

Straight - Colloquial for heterosexual/non-transgendered. Straight has connotations of "pure", and "honest", and some members of the sexual minority community find distasteful the implication that one who is not straight is "crooked", "impure", or "dishonest." Straight also has connotations of "narrow," "straight-laced" or "conservative," and some heterosexual people find it distasteful.

Transgendered - 1) a catch all for anyone in the gender and sexual minority community. 2) An individual whose gender identity is other than that assigned by society for an individual's physical sex. 3) An individual who chooses to live the life of the opposite sex without SRS. 4) An individual whose gender identity is somewhere between the transsexual identity and the transvestite identity.

Transition - The period of time between when the individual first starts the sex-reassignment procedure and when the individual is living totally as a member of the opposite sex.

Transsexual (TS) - 1) An individual who has gender identity disorder. 2) An individual whose gender identity is that opposite of her/his physical sex. Normally desires modification of the physical body (i.e. SRS) to match that of gender identity.

Transvestite (TV) - 1) Anyone who dresses in the clothes assigned by society to the opposite sex for emotional reasons. 2) Anyone who expresses transgender feelings/actions yet still maintains a partial gender identity that matches physical sex

Queer - 1) Reclaimed derogatory slang for the sexual minority community (e.g. Queer Nation.) Not accepted by all the sexual minority community, especially older members. 2) Sometimes used for an even wider spectrum of marginalized or radicalized groups and individuals.

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Annexe 1

Lesbian Suicides (news clips)

- 1980 Nov-Dec *Gay Scene*. Mallika (20) and Lalitambika (20), both students of pre-degree course of Keralavarma College (Cochin) were in love with each other. When one of them failed their college examination and separation seemed inevitable, they wrote suicide notes and attempted to drown themselves. They were rescued, and their families are reported to have separated them.
Also report of another incident at Gandhigram, Ahmedabad where Jayashree and Jyotsna two childhood friends committed suicide because they could not endure the separation caused by their marriages.
- 1988 Oct 15 *India Today*. Gita Darji and Kishori Shah of Meghraj, Gujarat, two nurses in the local hospital ended their lives in the hospital quarters because they could not bear the separation, which was to be enforced by Gita's brother after her marriage.
- 1993 May 27 *News Today*. "Gay couple stab each other" - report about 18 year old boy and his friend got married in 1991 and were living as "husband and wife" in Trissur. They committed suicide because of the non-recognition of their marriage by society.
- 1995 Jan 14 *Matrubhoomi* (Daily newspaper in Malayalam) Gita (22) and Saija (16) decided to elope and later committed suicide.
- 1998 Jun 28-Jul 11 *Sameeksha* (Malayalam fortnightly). "Same-Sex (female) lovers commit suicide" by K. C. Sebastian. The feature reports 4 incidents between 1995 -1997, listed below. They were from Alleppy and had eloped together. The reporter claims that he had spoken to the relatives and neighbours of the dead girls and has got enough-evidence to conclude that all incidents were lesbian suicides, prompted mostly by the enforced marriage of one of the lovers.
- 1996 Aug 6 *Sameeksha* (Malayalam fortnightly) Two girls from peasant families committed suicide hanging on the island of Vypeen near Cochin
- 1996 Oct 29 *Sameeksha* (Malayalam fortnightly) Two college students killed themselves by jumping in front of a running train near Calicut
- 1996 Dec 31 *Sameeksha* (Malayalam fortnightly) Girl committed suicide by consuming insecticide after attempting to murder her girl friend by slitting her throat. The girl friend survived. The dead girl was a daily wage labourer in a rubber plantation near Kottayam
- 1997 Apr 1 *Sameeksha* (Malayalam fortnightly) Three girls committed suicide by consuming poison, at Pandalam. Two of them were sisters and both of them were in love with the third, who was a distant relative. All of them were from a lower middle class background
- 1998 Sep *Urdu Times* reported the joint suicide of two young college girls Madhuri Patel and Varsha

Jadhav whose parents were opposed to their relationship. Students at Nanavati College, the girls lived in Andheri and Malad respectively. Their bodies were found on the roof of a building in Virar, with two empty bottles of Baygon and their letters to each other, including a note that said that since the world would not let them live together, they were dying together to become one.

1998 Oct 25-31 *Samaya* (Oriya magazine). "Peculiar Marriage, Heinous Revenge". Report of the marriage of Mamata (19) and Monalisa (24) in Hulipur village of Orissa. Letter from a local activist to ABVA in Delhi results in a fact-finding team and a report *For People Like Us* documenting the details of the case. Mamata and Monalisa had been in a relationship for five years. When Monalisa's father got transfer orders, they decided to make a Deed of Agreement for Partnership as well as to Remain Life Partner. This was notarized, legal document affirming their commitment to each other. Barely four days later, however, in despair, they consumed poison. Monalisa died, but Mamata survived. The police made out a case of murder against Mamata, however, the ABVA team found that the case was being squashed due to the political clout of Mamata's brother. The team was not allowed to meet Mamata.

1999 Mar 27 *Matrubhoomi* [Malayalam daily, Trichur Edition] "Young Women Run Over by Train" - the bodies of two young women, Suja (20) and Sindhu (20), described as intimate friends", discovered on a railway track near Manjadi Kalithipadi, near Tiruvalla, along with an empty liquor bottle, a large and half empty bottle of Coca Cola, two steel glasses and a shawl. The girls had worked together in a shrimp factory in Gujarat, and returned to Kerala 8 months earlier when the factory closed down. Earlier in the week, Suja had left her home for Sindhu's family's house in Kottayam. The pair were supposed to be returning to Suja's house, at the insistence of her relatives.

1999 Jun 1 -15 *Sameeksha* (Malayalam fortnightly). "Lesbian Suicides Continue..." by K. C. Sebastian. In March 1999, Bindu (21) and Gita (22) of Cheruvayoor killed themselves by consuming poison. The former was a tailoring teacher and the latter, her student. Another joint suicide (by consuming poison) was of Sudha (20) and Savitha (19) of Malappuram. They were students of a tailoring and beautician course respectively. The article also adds details provided by relatives and neighbours indicating women were lesbian pairs.

1999 Jul 8 *Mathrubhumi* (Malayalam, Trichur edition). "Friends Committed Suicide Together" - The bodies of Suresh (19) and Krishnakumar (17), were recovered in Shoranur from a deserted housing plot and an adjacent railway track respectively. Suresh had been working in a tailoring shop and Krishnakumar in a workshop. Described as "neighbours and inseparable friends since childhood". An empty bottle, which had contained some poisonous material, was recovered from the housing plot with Suresh's body. Police believe the friends consumed poison together and later Krishnakumar had rushed on to the railway track.

- 1999 Nov 18 *Sameeksha* (Malayalam fortnightly). The body of Mini, a postgraduate student in Trichur, was found floating in the reservoir of the Mangalam dam near her house, with a suicide note. She had disappeared five days earlier with another girl from her hostel, with whom she'd been accused of having a lesbian relationship. They reappeared on November 17 at a friend's house in Trichur, apparently having returned from Chennai. Both girls were subsequently returned to their family houses. With two complaints lodged with the police, Mini was supposed to appear at police station the next day. After Mini's body was discovered, the girl friend was described as recovering from the trauma. A Dalit students' group took up the case, initiated steps to constitute an action committee, demanding a judicial inquiry about the circumstances that lead to Mini's death. However, the committee sought to refute the accusation Mini was a lesbian, instead demanding legal action against the student's college principal for making a baseless accusation against a Dalit girl eventually forcing her to commit suicide.
- 2000 Jan 1-15 *Sameeksha* (Malayalam fortnightly). Bindu (21) and Rajni (22), two lower middle class undergraduate students from Cheranellur near Emakulam, committed suicide by jumping into a granite quarry. Their bodies were tied together with a dupatta. A few days before the incident the two girls had tried eloping together. Before killing themselves, both had written to their relatives that they were taking their lives after realizing the impossibility of ever being able to live together.
- 2000 Nov *Lokmat* (Marathi daily, Nagpur edition). Two young women in Gadchiroli district commit joint suicide by jumping into a well together.
- 2001 Feb *Lokmat* (Marathi daily, Nagpur edition). Two young college students of Nagpur commit joint suicide by jumping in front of a train at Gondia.
- 2001 Aug 26 *Matrubhumi* (Malayalam daily) "Girls, who longed to live together, end their lives". Two tribal girls, who also happened to be relatives, ended their lives because of the trauma of not being allowed to live together. The deceased are Ragini (15), daughter Gopalan Cheradimulluvellil of Moolamattom East, and Manju (22), daughter of Gopalan's uncle Kolumban. Their bodies were seen side by side on a rock near an irrigation canal close to Ragini's house on Saturday morning. Manju's body was in a sitting posture while Ragini was lying on the rock. The two had been living together for some time. They had even asked their relatives to get them married to each other. When the relatives objected, they had even approached the local police station with the same request. Police had sent them back after some counselling. Subsequently both had been undergoing psychiatric treatment of Dr.Sudarshan at Bishop Vayalin Hospital .Moolamattom. Locals report that the girls were seen under suspicious circumstances near the Canal on Friday evening. The girls ran away when people spotted them. The police have registered a case. After postmortem at the Taluk Hospital, Thodupuzha, the bodies were handed over to the relatives.

Annexe 2

2.1 Interview Guideline for Mental Health Professionals

1. What is your professional understanding about homosexuality, specifically lesbian sexuality?
2. What is your opinion of the ICD-10 and DSM-4 classifications of homosexuality?
3. In your practice, what has been the nature of the problems described by lesbians?
4. What has been the nature of your counselling/therapeutic interventions?
5. In your experience, what kinds of violence do lesbian women face?
6. What is your view about "ego-dystonic homosexuality"?
7. In cases of "ego-dystonic homosexuality" would/do you counsel behaviour modification therapy/ ECT/ institutionalisation? What are the norms/criteria followed for counselling?
8. What is your view about women who have relations with other women and who want to undertake a female-to-male sex change operation? What are the norms/criteria followed for counselling?
9. What are the resources for lesbian women that you know of?

2.2 Survey Form for Violence against Lesbians

Thank you for taking the time to answer this questionnaire which is part of a study of Violence against lesbians being conducted through the Research Project on Violence against Women at the Tata Institute of Social Sciences.

Please circle the appropriate category, or fill in the boxes as appropriate..

Age:

- Below 18 : 1
- 19-25 : 2
- 26-35 : 3
- 36-45 : 4
- 36-55 : 5
- 56-65 : 6
- over 65 : 7

Religious Background:

- Hindu : 1
- Muslim : 2
- Christian : 3
- Buddhist : 4
- Jain : 5
- Sikh : 6
- Parsi : 7
- Other (specify) : _____

Do you practise your religion now?

- Yes : 1
- No** : 2

Education:

- Upto Matric and HSC : 1
- BA/BSc/Bcom : 2
- MA/MSc/Mcom : 3
- Mphil/Phd : 4

Vocational, Technical or Other Training (specify) _____

Current employment :

Professional	:	1
Government Employee	:	2
Seasonal/Periodic/Part-time employee	:	3
Home maker	:	4
Self-employed	:	5
Other (Specify)_____		

Income per month :

Upto Rs.5,000	:	1
Rs.5001 -Rs.15,000	:	2
Rs.15,001-Rs.25,000	:	3
Above Rs.25,000	:	4

What is your sexual orientation?

Lesbian	:	1
Bisexual	:	2
Other (specify)_____		

What is your current partnership status :

Single	:	1
With Male Partner	:	2
With Female Partner	:	3
Other (please specify)_____		

Marital status :

Never Married		1
Married	:	2
Divorced	:	3
Separated	:	4
Widowed	:	5
Remarried	:	6

Kind of Marriage:

Arranged by parents/relatives	:	1
Self-arranged:	:	2
Duration of Marriage :_____years		

Do you have children?

Yes : 1

No : 2

Are the children

biological : 1

adopted : 2

Please state if the children are male/female, and ages :

With whom do you currently live?

Parental home : 1

Marital home : 2

Living with woman partner : 3

Living with male partner : 4

Living with friends : 5

Living alone (hostel, own home, rental, paying guest) : 6

Other (specify)_____

What have been your long-term relationships with women?

	No. of years together	Lived Together (yes/no)
First relationship		
Second "		

Who are the people you have told or who know about your being lesbian:

No one : 1

Mother : 2

Father : 3

Sister : 4

Brother : 5

Children (son/ daughter - specify) : 6

Extended family (specify) : 7

Friends : 8

Teacher	9
Employer	10
Colleagues at work	11
Employees	12
Doctor	13
Lawyer ,	14
Landlord	15
Neighbours	16
Public	17

Other (please specify).

In the table on the following pages, please tick the violent behaviours you have experienced, state who has been responsible and the duration you experienced these behaviours.

Type of behaviour	Experienced (Yes/No)	From whom (Specify)	Duration/ Frequency (once, occasionally, frequently, over a period of X years etc.)
physical abuse			
attempt to murder			
battering - boxing/hitting/ slapping/ beating (with hands or with object)			
hair pulling			
throttling			
kicking			
pushing			
burning			
cutting			
binding /physical confinement			
depriving of basic necessities (food, shelter, employment, money, medicine, clothes, toilet, etc.)			
desertion/ forcible eviction OTHER PHYSICAL ABUSE (Please specify)			
mental/ emotional abuse			
taunts/put-downs / personally demeaning comments			
swearing and verbally abusing			
frequent quarrels			
threats (to abandon, to imprison, to harm self or others etc.)			
Neglect			
controlling and compelling actions			
extorting money and property			
refusal to pay maintenance			
blackmail			
isolating by restricting socialising with family/friends/neighbours			
allegation of mental illness/ abnormality			
Suspicion			
OTHER MENTAL/EMOTIONAL ABUSE (Please specify)			
sexual abuse			
forcibly showing sexual images			
making sexual threats			
unwanted sexual touching			
unwanted sex			
unwanted sexual language, songs or gestures			
OTHER SEXUAL ABUSE (Please specify)			

2.3 Interview Guidelines for Narrative Data

1. When and how did you first realise that society views homosexuality/ lesbian sexuality as something "bad/unnatural"?
2. How do you view your own sexuality? (probe questions on : moral/immoral, religious beliefs, natural/unnatural)
3. What has been your experience of people's reactions when they have discovered or you have told them about your lesbian relationships? (Family, friends, neighbours, workplace)
4. What kind of violent behaviours have you experienced as a result of disclosure?
5. What consequences has this violence had on you, on your relationship/s?
6. Describe the help you sought in situations of violence.

Annexe 3

Summary of lesbian client histories

	MHP	Client No.	Age	No. of Visits	Voluntary/ Forced	Client History	Therapeutic Intervention
	MHP 0	1	25	2 visits	Voluntary (came with friend)	Muslim woman who came because she wanted to understand why she was only attracted to women. She was afraid of men. She did not think of herself as "abnormal". She was facing pressure from family to get married, and did not know what to do.	You should feel attracted to Gents
	MHP 1	1	18	3 years	Forced (brought by	(request to not quote) Mother brought client because she had got involved with an older married woman who had initially seduced her with sex talk on the phone. Strong bond between them.	Mother also had problems, so worked with the entire family. Client finally persuaded to leave the woman, and now doing some course.
		2	24	1.5 years	Voluntary	(request to not quote) Client a young Christian woman who had developed a relationship with a nun and was very disturbed - wanted to know if they were sinning, if they should stop the relationship, if they should run away. Suicidal ideation by the couple.	Counseled that they should accept their sexuality, nothing wrong in it, should not be rash and run away or commit suicide. Gradually people will accept it.
		.3		2 years	Forced	Parents brought couple.	Family counseling to get the parents to let them study, meet people, get more exposure and decide if it was a phase, or if they really wanted to be in a relationship. If yes, then how the parents could come to terms with it. One set of parents did.
		4	27	1 year	Voluntary	Wanted to get her parents to accept her decision to not marry (because she was in a relationship), focus on her career and live with a friend.	Counseled parents that client was not interested in marriage, she wanted to focus on career and live with a friend.
		5				Young women who were suicidal because one partner's parents were forcing her to marry.	Convince parents that she is not willing to marry.
		6	30s		Voluntary	Wanted a sex-change. Also manifested symptoms of manic depression.	Continuing treatment for psychosis first.

	MHP 3	1	40s	2 visits		(Cannot remember details). Came for other mental illnesses - anxiety, depression.	
	MHP 4	1	30	4 visits	Forced	Brought by parents because she did not want to marry, they wanted to know if she had some abnormality, wanted physical (endocrine) testing. She was in a relationship with a professor, and quite happy.	No intervention as such-called the partner, but they did not come back.
		2	25	3	Forced	Brought by husband because she was "frigid". She disclosed she was lesbian, did not want to change her orientation, but went back to her husband. Husband was aggressive, dominating and violent.	Did not return.
	MHP 5	1	20		Voluntary	Bisexual, hostelite. In a relation with a boy and two girls. Smoking grass. She came because her studies were effected.	Worked on de-addiction issues, and improving academic performance.
		2	24		Forced	Malyalee girl, came with mother. Did not want to get married, did not know how to tell mother. She was uncomfortable about her preference.	Counseled on self-acceptance. Helped her to manage turmoil at home.
		3	40		Voluntary	Professional woman with strong feelings for a heterosexual colleague friend.	Allowed her to express her feelings. Later she was transferred.
		4		6 visits	Forced	"Burkhwali Muslim girl, whose father brought her because she was refusing sex with her husband. After 4-5 sessions, she said, "Aapne Fire picture dekha hai. Mujhe ladikiyon ke saath accha lagta hai. Yeh baat mein kaise bataoon. Hamare khandhan mein, tauba, tauba. Woh to mujhe mareng. Meri pita jaise mummy ko mareng, mujhe bhi mareng."	Told parents, tried to get them to accept it. Parents terminated counselling. 6 months later father tells him that she is pregnant and happy.
		5			Forced	Brought by husband because "the girl is frigid". She was having a relationship with a friend. Afraid to break-up the marriage because of fear of family disapproval.	No clear intervention, but she broke the marriage and is now living with her female partner.
		6			Voluntary	Student at architectural college, seperated from female partner, who was in the US and having a relationship with another woman there. Emotional abuse within the relationship. She was suffering from grief and depression.	Helping her deal with the grief.
	MHP 6	1	30	3 visits	Voluntary	Family found out that she was lesbian and was not accepting. Had thrown her out of the house.	Had two sessions with the family twice, but they did not accept. No follow-up.

		2	25	5 visits	Forced	Husband came to know she was lesbian, because they did not have a good sexual relationship. They had fights and the husband beat her. She was suffering from depression.	Tried to encourage her to improve the sexual relationship with the husband. Ultimately they separated.
		3	30	6 visits	Voluntary	Woman who wanted a sex-change operation. She was asliving, dressing, working as a male, with her partner. Families were not accepting and she would face physical abuse travelling in the gent's compartment or using gent's toilet.	Referred her to a plastic surgeon and counseled on the risks of sex-reassignment surgery.
	MHP 7	1	25	3-4 months	Forced	Brought by her father, because she was refusing to get married. She was suicidal, slashed her wrist. Had a history of dysfunctional family, and sexual abuse by male servant. Was aggressive and a pathological liar. Family came to know that she was lesbian and suppressed the information. Got her married. She could not adjust with her husband and returned back to the parental home.	Client-centred transactional analysis for resolution of childhood factors. She stopped treatment.
	MHP 8	0					
	MHP 9	1	40	6 months	Voluntary	Married woman with 16 year old daughter who was in a relationship with a younger woman. Came because she wanted guidance on whether and how to tell her daughter. The younger partner's family reacted negatively when they found out about the relationship and tried to confine her to the parental home.	Rational emotive therapy - counseled her for anxiety, depression and aggressive tendencies.
		2	late 20s	4-5 years	Voluntary	A school teacher from a conventional North-Indian background, who discovered her sexual orientation late. She was lonely and depressed. She was resisting her parents forcing her to get married. She was attracted to a student, and felt ashamed, guilty because she thought it was abnormal. This student was emotionally blackmailing her and fleecing her monetarily	Rational emotive therapy - counseled her for anxiety, depression, and self-acceptance. Also bibliotherapy - reading material on internet etc. to improve client's understanding of lesbian sexuality. Client more self-accepting, and has stopped getting victimized by the girl.
		3 20s	Early		Voluntary	Questioning her sexuality- had relationships with both, but felt emotionally closer to women. She had a long-term relationship with a woman, and was considering entering a relationship with a man.	
		4	15		Voluntary	Parents brought the daughter for IQ as sessment, because she was performing poorly (90's student getting 70's). Huge parental pressure and	IQ and personality tests conducted. Focus on reducing stress about academics.

						expectations. She had a very close emotional relationship with a class mate.	Counseled parents on need to talk with her about sexuality.
	MHP 10	1	18	3-4 visits	Voluntary	Had come from Rajasthan with her partner. Wanted a sex change, but when interviewed found it was more a case of lesbianism. "I am in love with her, that is why I want to have a sex change"	Psycho therapy - counseled that there was no need for her to change sex.
		2	18	3-4 visits	Voluntary	Woman ran away from home in Punjab village, wanted a sex change, but when interviewed found it was more a case of lesbianism.	Psycho therapy - counseled that there was no need for her to change sex.
		3	22	14 months	Voluntary (referred by friend)	Woman suffering from clinical depression and suicidal ideation. Latent homosexuality - she felt her friend was not giving her the attention she wanted. Family objected to her friendship, and was planning her marriage.	Explored issue of identity with client in psycho therapy - whether she was looking for a label (lesbian) for herself, or really had these sexual desires and fantasies.
		4	24		Voluntary	Attracted to her female teacher. She was a psychologist, but had lost her job because of an inability to get along. She had a history of a lot of anger towards male members of her family. Very violent dreams. Bothered about her attraction to other women.	Treating for obsessions because "not sure whether she is really attracted [to women] or whether it is a part of her sexual obsessions."
		5	Early 20's		Voluntary	Bisexual woman had done a lot of sexual experimentation. Came because she wanted to deal with her drug addiction problem.	De-addiction focus.
	MHP 11	1	20s		Voluntary	Came to deal with alcohol addiction, and the trauma of violence observed in a dysfunctional family when she was a child.	Combination of therapeutic techniques depending on what the client needs.
		2	30s		Voluntary	Woman coming out of a bad marriage, coming to terms with being a single parent and keeping a career. Self-esteem issues and borderline personality disorder.	Combination of therapeutic techniques depending on what the client needs.
		3	20		Voluntary	College student, exploring sexuality.	Combination of therapeutic techniques depending on what the client needs.
	MHP 12	1	37		Voluntary	Married woman with a teenage daughter. She had a relationship with a woman when she was 20, in Delhi. Her family had found out and she had undergone shock treatment for behaviour modification.	Only came for a few visits, no follow-up possible

		2	24		Voluntary	She was in a relationship with an older woman, and parents physically confined her to the home when they found out - subjected her to a lot of mental torture. She stopped eating, was suffering from guilt. But was determined to continue the relationship. It became a police case and finally she got out.	Referred her to another psychologist.
	MHP 14	1	20s		Forced	Brought by parents because of her suicide attempt Her partner had broken off the relationship. "Late adolescent adjustment phase."	"She was admitted into the ward, and within a week had developed attraction to the male ward doctors.
		2	26	2	Forced	Muslim woman, brought by parents because she was resisting marriage. She was involved with her colleague at the beauty parlor where she worked. She was financially independent and supporting the family. She was depressed and irritated - attributing it to the family.	She was not amenable to treatment. Was not even willing to meet a woman psychiatrist.
		3	19	6 months	Brought by parents	Woman from semi-rural background, brought by her parents (not aware of her sexuality). They were concerned about her drop in academic performance due to depression. She was a kabbadi player, involved with one of her team mates.	Treated the depression.
		4	35	6 months	Voluntary	Woman going through a divorce got involved with another woman from her religious group (Satsang).	
	MHP 15	1	30	6 months	Forced	She was in a relationship with her 26 year old neighbour. Both the families brought them.	Counseling and psycho-therapy. They were scientifically normal... they were very reluctant... But part of the job is to increase their motivation... This will depend on the frame of reference of the psychiatrist." Behaviour therapy was successful, and they were getting married.
		2	30		Voluntary	Wanted a sex change, wanted to become a male and marry her partner. She had been referred by plastic surgeon for psychiatric evaluation.	Conducted the evaluation through clinical interview, and met the partner. No other intervention.

MHP 16	1	20	4-5 visits	Forced	Brought by mother. She was from a small town background, and had got involved with a 24 year old married woman whose husband was away. She was depressed, and wanted a sex change operation.	No intervention, as per assessment she would not be a fit candidate for SRS because she was not psychologically stable.
	2				Iranian woman involved in a same-sex relationship and wanted to undergo SRS. .	Also advised not to undergo it because of emotional instability.
MHP 17	1	20	3 months	Forced	Brought by mother who discovered the daughter was lesbian. Daughter was depressed after rejection by partner. Pressure to get married, partner. Pressure to get married.	Treatment for depression.
	2	16	2-3 visits	Forced	Parents brought her after discovering her in a relationship with another girl. Scholastic problems, anger, depression, adolescent adjustment problems.	Girl refused counseling.
	3	30s	3 months	Voluntary	Married woman who was undergoing marital disharmony. She experienced depression and loss of libido after birth of a child. Had pre-marital lesbian relationships.	Anti-depressants and cognitive therapy.
MHP 18	1	22	10-12 visits	Voluntary	Job problems, suffocation in the relationship. She wanted to break off physically and verbally violent relationship.	Anti-depressants and counselling.
	2	45	8 months	Voluntary	Separated from her husband and living with her adopted son. She was involved with a woman, but it was not working out.	Anti-depressants and counselling.
	3	50	3-4 visits	Voluntary	Unmarried woman, with aggressive tendencies, had problems with all relationships with women partners. Client came during Dr.Joshi's internship at NIMHANS.	Discontinued because she did not want to take medication.
MHP 19	1	18	6 months	Voluntary	She was attracted to women and uncomfortable with it. Depression and suicidal ideation.	Aversive therapy conducted. Relaxation and visualization, showing photographs.
	2	18	5 years	Voluntary	Borderline personality disorder- symptoms of paranoia. Drug abuse, explosive relations with everyone. Masculine attire and behaviour. She got into relationships with women who were nurturing. She never wanted a physical relationship, she just wanted to suckle.	Classic Freudian psycho-analytic situation - engaged in counseling.
MHP 20	1	29	2 visits	Voluntary	Woman who wanted SRS, referred for psychiatric assessment by plastic surgeon. She was in a relationship with a 28 year old woman. Living as a man.	Counseled against SRS because the reason seemed to be need for social acceptance of lesbian relationship. Also she had not understood the implications of SRS.

		2	22	6 visits	Voluntary	Newly married woman had not told her husband she was in a relationship with another woman. The partner was dominant and aggressive.	Couple counseling conducted. The woman opted to stay in the marriage because the husband understood.
		3	24		Voluntary	Woman who wanted to get out depression due to an abusive relationship with a woman.	Anti-depressants, counseling and re-location of the client to another place.
	MHP 21	1	35	2 visits	Voluntary	Married woman attracted to her mother-in-law and suffering from guilt feelings! She believed that her body had been possessed by her (male) ex-employer.	Referred her for psychiatric evaluation, but she discontinued treatment.
		2	25	1 visit	Voluntary	Wanted advice on whether she should get married, since she was in a relationship with another woman.	Counseled that if she chose, systematic de-sensitization (showing images of males) could be done, but she has to decide. Client did not return.
	MHP 22	1	26	3 phone calls	Voluntary	Dealing with grief from break up of relationship due to the partner getting married. Wanted to meet other lesbian women.	Phone counseling, invited to Anchal.
		2	21	2 phone calls	Voluntary	Two college students in a relationship who wanted to run away together.	Counseled to complete education, find jobs and then consider living together.
		3	42	3 phone calls	Voluntary	Married woman with two children, unhappy in her marriage because she has always been attracted to women.	
		4	25		Voluntary	Break-up in relationship produced aggression and stalking behaviour in the rejected partner.	Couples counseling for better communication between them.
		5	25	2 phone calls	Voluntary	Bisexual woman, engaged to a man who broke off the marriage when he found out she was involved in a physical relationship with her sister.	Counseled against relationship with sister.
		6	19	2 phone calls	Voluntary	Call from mother who had found out the daughter was in a relationship with her tuition teacher.	Girl didn't need help, mother was more disturbed.
		7	24	1 phone call, &	Voluntary	Break up in relationship with woman partner produced clinical depression.	Phone Counseling. Client refused medication. Also met client, met twice
		8	18	3	Voluntary	College going couple in a relationship, parents were trying to separate them. Verbal abuse and emotional blackmail.	
		3 clients in 20s			Voluntary	Expressed attraction to a woman, and uncertainty how to tell her. Confusion and some guilt feelings.	Phone Counseling.
		3 clients in 20s			Voluntary	Women who wanted SRS. All were in relationships with women, but did not feel they were men trapped in women's bodies.	Phone Counseling on the implications of SRS - which the women were unaware of.

Annexe 4

Tables

Table 1: Religious Background and practice

Religion	Practising Religion			Grand Total
	No	Yes	No response	
Hindu	20	10	1	31
Christian	7	1		8
Jain	2			2
Muslim	1			
Parsi		1		
Sikh		1		
Hindu & Jain		1		
Hindu & Christian	1			
Spiritualist		1		
Humanism			1	
No response	2			2
Grand Total	33	15	2	50

Table 2: Employment and Income

Employment	Income					NA	No response	Grand Total
	No Income	Upto Rs. 5000	Rs. 5000- 15000	Rs. 15000- 25000	Above Rs. 25000			
Professional		2	10	2	2		1	17
Self-Employed		5	9	2				16
Government Employee			2	1	1			4
Social Worker/ Activist	1		1					2
Seasonal/ Periodic/ Part-time Worker		2			1		1	4
Homemaker	1							1
Student						3		3
No response		1	1				1	3
Grand Total	1	11	23	5	4	3	3	50

Table 3: Sexual Orientation and Marital Status

Sexual Orientation	Marital Status				Grand Total
	Never Married	Currently married	Separated	Divorced	
Lesbian	34		3	2	39
Bisexual	3	2		1	6
Undecided	1		1		2
Pansexual	1				1
Queer	1				1
Transgender	1				1
Grand Total	41	2	4	3	50

Table 4: Partnership and living status

Partner Status	Current living status										Grand Total
	Living alone	In Hostel	With friends	With Parents	With woman partner	Partner living With	In Marital Home family	With male partner	With sister	With extended family	
With Female Partner	3			7	19	1				2	32
Single	3	1	2	4			1	1			12
Polygamous	1				1				1		3
With male partner							1	1			2
In between being single and in partnership	1										1
Grand Total	8	1	2	11	20	1	2	2	1	2	50

Table 5: Disclosure of lesbian identity

Person Out to	Total women
Friends	48
Mother	32
Extended Family	29
Colleagues at work	25
Father	20
Sister	18
Employer	18
Brother	16
Psychiatrist / Psychologist	10
Neighbours	10
Teacher	8
Public	7
Doctor	6
Employees	2
Lawyer	2
Landlord	2

Table 6: Types of Violence

Kind of violence	No. of Women
Emotional /Mental	37
Sexual	15
Physical Abuse	12
Suicidal	10

Table 7: Location of Physical Violence

Location of Violence	No. of Women
Family and outside	4
Only family	5
Only outside family	3
Total	12

Table 8: Incidence of Physical Violence

Physical Abuse	Family	Non-family	No. of women
Eviction	6	2	8
Battering	2	4	6
Confinement	3	, 0	3
Deprivation	3	0	3
Other	0	1	1
Total incidence	14	7	21

Table 9: Location of Emotional Violence

	Non-Family		
Family	No	Yes	Grand Total
No	1	5	6
Yes	16	14	30
Grand Total	17	19	36

Table 10: Kinds of Emotional Abuse

Kind of abuse	Incidence
Constellation 1	
Denial of sexual orientation	17
Denial of relationship	17
Invasion of privacy	17
Neglect	15
Silent Hostility	15
Constellation 2	
Taunts	12
Control	11
Allegation of abnormality	11
Distrust	10
Threats	9
Restricting socialising	9
Verbal abuse	8
Psychiatric treatment	5
Blackmail	4
Extortion	3

Table 11: Incidence of Emotional abuse by non-family

Kind of Abuse	Incidence
Taunts	13
Denial of sexual Orientation	6
Silent Hostility	6
Denial of relationship	5
Distrust	3
Control	3
Allegation of abnormality	3
Verbal Abuse	3
Neglect	2
Invasion of Privacy	2
Restricting Socialising	2
Threats	2
Blackmail	1

Table 12: Location of Sexual Violence

Location of Sexual Violence	No. of women
Family and Non-family	2
only family	3
only non-family	4
Male partner	3
Total Number of women	12

Table 13: Incidence of Sexual Violence

Abusive Behaviour	Family	Non-family	Male Partner	Total Incidents
Sexual name calling	2	2	0	4
Unwanted sexual touching	1	3	0	4
Unwanted sexual language	0	3	0	3
Sexual threats	1	1	0	2
Pornographic interest	0	0	2	2
Unwanted sex	0	0	2	2
Sexual images	1	0	0	1
Total incidents	5	9	4	18

Table 14: Abuse Termination

Abuse Terminated	No. of women
Yes	14
Lessened	2
No	15
No response	6
Grand Total	37

Table 15: Sources of support

Person	No. of women
Friends	22
LGBT organisation	9
Mother	7
No one	6
Sister	5
Psychiatrist / Psychologist	4
Support organisation	4
Colleagues	3
Brother	2
Cousin	2
Teacher	2
Partner	2
Friends on the internet	1
Father	1
Employer	1
Extended family	1

Annexe 5

DSM4 Diagnostic Criteria for Gender Identity Disorder⁵⁹

A strong and persistent cross-gender identification (not merely a desire for any perceived cultural advantages of being the other sex)

In children, the disturbance is manifested by four (or more) of the following:

Repeatedly stated desire to be, or insistence that he or she is, the other sex

In boys, preference for cross-dressing or simulating female attire; in girls, insistence on wearing only stereotypical masculine clothing

Strong and persistent preferences for cross-sex roles in make-believe play or persistent fantasies of being the other sex

Intense desire to participate in the stereotypical games and pastimes of the other sex

Strong preference for playmates of the other sex

In adolescents and adults, the disturbance is manifested by symptoms such as a stated desire to be the other sex, frequent passing as the other sex, desire to live or be treated as the other sex, or the conviction that he or she has the typical feelings and reactions of the other sex.

Persistent discomfort with his or her sex or sense of inappropriateness in the gender role of that sex.

In children, the disturbance is manifested by any of the following:

In boys, assertion that the penis or testes are disgusting or will disappear or assertion that it would be better not to have a penis, or aversion towards rough-and-tumble play and rejection of male stereotypical toys, games, and activities;

In girls, rejection of urinating in a sitting position, assertion that she has or will grow a penis, or assertion that she does not want to grow breasts or menstruate, or marked aversion toward normative female clothing.

In adolescent and adults, the disturbance is manifested by symptoms such as preoccupation with getting rid of primary and secondary sex characteristics (e.g. request for hormones, surgery, or other procedures to physically alter sexual characteristics to simulate the other sex) or belief that he or she was born the wrong sex.

The condition is not concurrent with a physical intersex condition.

The disturbance causes clinically significant distress or impairment in social, occupational or other important areas of functioning.

⁵⁹ DSM4, p.537-538.

Code based on current age:

302.6 Gender Identity Disorder in Children

Gender Identity Disorder in Adolescents or Adult

Specify if (or sexually mature individuals):

Sexually Attracted to Males

Sexually Attracted to Females

Sexually Attracted to Both

Sexually Attracted to Neither