

DISCLOSURE OF A SON'S HOMOSEXUALITY:  
A SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIONIST  
PERSPECTIVE

by

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## SUMMARY

This dissertation explores one family's experience of a son's disclosure of homosexuality, through the use of a second-order cybernetic epistemology, and social constructionist theory. Second-order cybernetics enables a description of patterns and themes that recursively connect the family's ideas and behaviour. Social constructionism enables the family's reaction to disclosure to be recursively linked to their fit with wider society. By using semantic and political frames of reference to describe the family's narratives around disclosure, this study indicates that disclosure is a relational metaphor, dependent on the family's locally co-constructed and transgenerational meanings. It also shows that although the family change with disclosure, stability is regained in a way consistent with the family's rules and norms. This study therefore demystifies viewing disclosure in one way only and creates alternative ways of conceptualising it.

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## CHAPTER 1

### THE CONTEXT OF THE NARRATIVES

#### Introduction

The disclosure of a son's homosexuality to his family is an extremely significant event in the homosexual person's life, with great potential for unleashing a crisis in the family. Disclosure has been defined as a dual process of accepting oneself as well as disclosing one's sexual identity to others (Gerstel, Feraios & Herdt, 1989). Through the disclosure, the homosexual person may be attempting to achieve autonomy and individuation from his family as well as self-authenticity. However, in so doing, the family's ideas, rules and organisation may be threatened. In short, the family system may be destabilised by such a revelation. Thus, the impact is great, both for the son and his family. Therefore disclosure involves far more than simply revealing one's homosexuality to others. Its implications are far reaching because the homosexual is part of a family, who have viewed him and each other in one way only. Disclosure forces family members to reorganise, redefine and renegotiate their relationships with each other as well as forcing members to think differently about themselves.

The aim of this dissertation is to describe the patterns, themes and familiially constructed "ecology of ideas" (Bogdan, 1984, p374) in a family who experienced the disclosure of their son/brother's homosexuality and how this "ecology of ideas" and the family's subsequent behaviour re-organised itself to absorb the impact of the disclosure. In turn, it focuses on how this recursively affected the process of disclosure for the son. This will be further described in terms of the family's connection with their wider social context, as this too plays a part in the family's "ecology of ideas" and behaviour around the son's disclosure of homosexuality.

Disclosure is especially important due to its potential for destabilisation. It has been recognised that within any type of organisational system such as a family, stability is maintained by processes of change (Keeney & Ross, 1992). Thus stability/change form a complementarity in which families may constantly change in order to remain the same (Keeney & Ross, 1992). The process of stability/change and the implications for destabilisation within a family system will be examined in terms of the disclosure of homosexual identity within a family. When faced with some type of deviation from their norm, such as a son's disclosure of his homosexuality, family members tend to engage in "corrective action" (Bateson, 1972, p38) to maintain the family's stability due to the threat of change (disclosure). Corrective action usually comes about by family members engaging in changed behaviour. This points to the reciprocal relationship between stability and change, and the implications of this reciprocity in situations in which the system's organisation is threatened with destabilisation (Keeney & Ross, 1992).

This focus therefore offers a different perspective from which to view the process of disclosure for the individual and the family, as opposed to viewing it from a logical positivist epistemology which would focus on either the homosexual or his family, without looking at the impact of disclosure on the system as a whole. The purpose of this description is to offer an alternative way of viewing the family's experience of disclosure, that, on a theoretical level, can develop "grounded theory" (i.e. theory that follows from the findings, instead of initially having a theory and attempting to fit the findings with it) (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) about a family with a homosexual member and on a practical level, offer the therapist alternative ways of thinking about such issues in therapy.

### Previous Research

Previous research on homosexuality will be briefly described and expanded upon in a following chapter. Its difference from the research embodied by the present study will be clearly seen, and therefore provides an understanding of the alternatives offered by the present research.

Research in the field of homosexuality has generally focused on two aspects:

1. The focus on the individual homosexual person. This research was primarily psycho-analytically or psychodynamically orientated, such as Bieber et al's. (1962) studies. Such studies characterised the homosexual person as a mentally ill individual who engaged in sexually deviant/perverted behaviour. As a result of these studies, and other social factors, homosexuality was listed in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (American Psychiatric Association, 1952) as a mental illness. The implications of this were that the homosexual person was focused upon as the site of pathology and that his behaviour was viewed as abnormal or criminal, punishable by law. The popular image of the homosexual person was of a lone individual who staked out night clubs, alleys and other deviant places so as to gain sexual satisfaction. Homosexual behaviour was strongly condemned by religious institutions who viewed it as aberrant, unnatural and an abomination.

This research was conducted in terms of a logical positivist epistemology with a focus on the individual without regarding his wider context. The individual homosexual was seen as a symptom-bearer and blame was focused on this person for his aberrant sexuality. Viewing homosexuality in this way led researchers to look for qualities inherent in the homosexual that resulted in this particular sexual orientation. This was a reductionistic practice in which consideration was not given to factors or contexts external to the person, or to other ways of viewing homosexuality. Instead, the homosexual person suffered the negative effects of being labelled and diagnosed as a deviant and sick individual.

2. The second area of focus expanded the logical positivist assumptions by attempting to look at the cause of homosexuality, that is, the logical positivist principle of linear causality. In this way, the parents of homosexuals became incorporated into the research as the possible causes of their son's homosexuality. Researchers attempted to characterise the parents of homosexuals. Mothers were found to be strong, dominant and controlling whereas fathers

were viewed as being distant and withdrawn, leading sons to identify with their mothers and thus become 'women'. In this way, a causal model was established and a generalisation was created that this was the case for all parents of homosexuals. In this way, true to the epistemological philosophy of logical positivism, a cause was found for homosexuality and broad-based generalisable assertions were established, which were considered to be the truth. Parents were then blamed for their child's sexual orientation, leading to similar feelings of persecution and labelling as their son suffered.

Later, with changing societal trends, the Kinsey research (Kinsey, Pomeroy & Martin, 1948) on homosexuality moved away from its 'pathological' bias to viewing homosexuality as one sexual choice that ranged on a broad continuum of sexual behaviour from exclusive heterosexuality to exclusive homosexuality. At this stage, it became almost fashionable to be homosexual or friendly with homosexual people who were viewed as trendy and liberal-minded.

However, with the advent of AIDS during the past decade, homosexuality again came to be viewed negatively due to its initial prevalence amongst this group, and homosexuals once again faced oppression and discrimination (Dynes, 1990). Again society subscribed to a logical positivist stance of linear causality and thus blamed homosexuals for AIDS, resulting in further labelling and derision.

Owing to the need of logical positivist epistemology to establish a causal factor for homosexuality which could be seen as certain and predictable, research was aimed in the same direction and thus did not focus on other ways of viewing homosexuality and family interactional patterns around it.

Therefore, during this time, no studies of the homosexual person within his family context were carried out. Research was one-dimensional, either focusing on the homosexual or on parents of homosexuals, thereby establishing a dualistic stance and attempting to explain the cause of homosexuality in terms of one objective and certain 'truth' about homosexuals everywhere so as to facilitate diagnosis. The objective reality, according to the logical positivist paradigm, was that certain parental styles caused homosexuality within their child and that this was a mental disorder to be expunged.

This led to an inflexibility in the outlook of society as well as the helping professions. If, for instance, a homosexual person went to a psychotherapist, the therapist would view him as having a mental illness and attempt to change his sexual orientation, subscribing to the broadly held societal view that such behaviour is unacceptable (Markowitz, 1991). This led to a rigidity in therapy in which it can be hypothesized that neutrality was difficult for the therapist because the client was seen as abnormal. The possibility of working in other directions was rarely considered due to this one-dimensional focus.

More recent research on homosexuals and their families (Bilotta, 1987) attempted to adopt an ecosystemic orientation by interviewing the homosexual person about his family. However, the focus was primarily individual as only the homosexual member's descriptions of events

were elicited, and data analysis was carried out quantitatively by means of statistical measures, thus again subscribing to a logical positivist epistemology, in its search for certainty and predictability. Bilotta (1987) recommends that any study which could include the entire family rather than viewing everything from the perspective of the homosexual family member, would provide a more thorough analysis.

At present, no research has focused on patterns of interrelationship among family members after the disclosure of homosexual identity has occurred. Nugent (in Bilotta, 1987) backs this up by commenting on family members' difficulty in discussing homosexuality, due to its complexity and the strong emotional responses evoked by the topic. Morally, it has also been viewed as unacceptable.

A further reason for the lack of research on homosexuals within the context of their family, as well as the broader societal context, is society's negative views of homosexuality. Families are often deeply ashamed and are not open to discussing their homosexual family members with others; often when the homosexual family member "comes out" - the family goes in. This reflects their internalisation of and belief in these societal views. Bilotta (1987) supports this by stating that: "due to a mixture of homophobia and the negative connotation homosexuality carries within society, the families of homosexual people seem resistive to being studied. This is probably why no studies have been undertaken in this area" (p52).

Although some knowledge about homosexuals and their families with regard to the experience of disclosure does exist, as will be shown in a following chapter, these studies have subscribed to a logical positivist epistemology and have therefore been reductionistic in nature, focusing only on the homosexual person or his family, not both together.

### The Present Research

The study in this dissertation was designed to move away from a logical positivist paradigm so that the attempt is no longer to explain the one objective reality of homosexuality as a mental illness 'caused' by certain parental styles, but instead to describe a homosexual person's disclosure to his family as well as their perceptions of the event. This will be considered within the contemporary sociocultural context. Thus, the description that follows serves to punctuate the researcher's experience of the family in such a way as to avoid a causal explanation of homosexuality, or to determine the 'truth' of all families with homosexual members. Rather, the description of the family that will follow is one that may be applicable to this family at the point in time in which they were interviewed and hence not generalisable to all families with a homosexual member. The focus on familial processes around the experience of disclosure aims to open new avenues for the therapist and to complexify what has previously been approached in one way only.

The move away from a logical positivist epistemology is signalled by the use of a cybernetic/ecosystemic epistemology to describe the phenomenon of disclosure within a family. The implications of logical positivist thinking have been illustrated in the previous discussion,

that is, the negative effects of labelling and blaming for the homosexual person and his family. The need to establish causal relations to result in an inadmissible truth about homosexuality shuts off other possibilities for thinking about homosexuality or describing it within the context of the family. Cybernetic/ecosystemic thinking, with its focus on systems and on "patterns that connect" (Bateson, 1979, p16) systems to each other in a recursive manner, offers an alternative way in which to approach the issue of homosexuality within the context of the family, and for therapy. This may yield new understandings around the experience of being homosexual within a family.

The cybernetic/ecosystemic focus enables the individual and the family to be studied simultaneously. Because the individual is so much a part of his family and because disclosure is a significant event affecting all concerned, cybernetic epistemology provides an opportunity to focus on these areas in a fresh light. This is because its epistemological principles differ from the logical positivist ones of linearity, reductionism and dualism as well as a striving for certainty, predictability and truth. Thus, consistent with a cybernetic epistemology, the principles of recursion, double description, context and pattern will be used to create a description of the family's experience of disclosure. In accordance with the cybernetic principle of holism, the family was interviewed together to generate views of whole relationships. Interviewing the family together also creates binocular vision (Bateson, 1979). Instead of views being given from one family member or from family member's separately, that is, monocular vision, extra depth is created by combining the family member's descriptions (Bateson, 1979). This enables patterns and themes that connect family members to be elucidated, which in turn creates an understanding of their behaviour within their wider social context.

The second-order cybernetic principle of self-referentiality in the generation of knowledge will be invoked. Therefore, the active role of the researcher in acquiring information, in describing the family, and in co-creating the narratives of the research is emphasised. This is done by the researcher clearly stating her guiding epistemology, her theoretical framework as well as her values and ideas about the phenomenon of disclosure.

The cybernetic epistemology rejects the possibility of objectivity and one true reality. Instead the researcher takes responsibility for her constructions. It is for the readers of the research as well as the academic community to decide upon the credibility and viability of these constructions (Atkinson & Heath, 1987). Hence, from this epistemological stance, it is unnecessary (even if it were possible) for the researcher to discover the one objective truth about homosexuals and/or the phenomenon of disclosing to the family. Rather, the researcher's responsibility is to describe what she observes and the context in which her views were co-created, with the understanding that this description may not conform to another's perception and certainly will not result in a statement of absolute truth.

Complementary to a second-order cybernetic framework, the researcher adopted the theory of social constructionism as a further lens with which to describe the family within their sociocultural context, thus attempting to present a holistic view. Social constructionism allows one to consider events within a particular sociocultural context, moving away from the logical

positivist belief in generating descriptions that are valid cross-culturally and transgenerationally. The reader is therefore able to understand the context in which the phenomenon of disclosure took place, and consequently the types of behaviours permitted by that context - be it the wider social context or local familial context.

This links social constructionism with cybernetics in their shared view of an interpersonally created reality that does not exist independently of the observer and observing community. Both cybernetics and social constructionism are concerned with the description of social processes and patterns, as opposed to the logical positivist concern with content and substance. Because cybernetics focuses on "patterns that connect" (Bateson, 1979, p16), it requires the existence of more than one entity so as to be able to describe the patterns of connection between phenomena. Likewise, social constructionism's focus on socially created meanings and behaviours calls for description in terms of "more than one", so as to describe patterns of social construction and connectedness. Therefore together, the two allow for a richer, fuller description of the family.

Hence, the present research will attempt to bridge the research gap by describing the family's experience of the disclosure of homosexuality. The need for this has been discussed and will be expanded upon in a later chapter. On a theoretical level, this study will attempt to describe the family's experience in terms of a different epistemological philosophy from a logical positivist one, opening up new avenues of description and ways of conceptualising a phenomenon, possibly leading to the development of "grounded theory" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). On a practical level, it will attempt to complexify thinking about disclosure, thus providing the therapist with alternative ways of exploring and working with individuals/families who have experienced the disclosure of homosexuality.

This will be achieved through the use of naturalistic research procedures, which are congruent with a cybernetic/social constructionist perspective (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The implication of this is that the research be conducted in its natural context, due to social constructionism's emphasis on context in impacting on meaning and behaviour. As opposed to using standardised questionnaires, consistent with the logical positivist principle of reductionism, the researcher herself will be the research instrument, due to her ability to interact with the participants and co-create meaning with them, thereby allowing the participants a say in the research process. As opposed to seeking bits and pieces of information, the attempt is to elicit multiple co-created realities of the family members. This accords with the social constructionist and cybernetic belief that reality is a shared construction. Within such a framework, no *a priori* design for the research existed. Rather, the "design" was an emergent one (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) due to the evolving process of the research. This contrasts with the logical positivist notions of certainty and predictability.

Through interacting with the family members, the researcher elicited their narratives about their experience of the disclosure. Thus, the narrative was a major "data source". The rationale for eliciting narratives, consistent with a cybernetic/social constructionist epistemology, is that narrative is a useful metaphor with which to understand and interpret human action. It has

been argued by social scientists (Gergen & Gergen, 1983; Sarbin, 1986) that people, in explaining, giving meaning to and understanding their lives, tend to do so in the form of a story. Therefore stories/narratives provide a natural way in which people language about and ascribe meaning to their experiences. Bateson (1979) states that all people think in terms of stories and that these stories establish connections between others. To talk in terms of stories, rather than "truth" implies that objectivity is unattainable, as our reality is co-storied in interaction with others.

Thus, because stories/narrative are the natural way of expressing oneself, allowing an easy understanding by others, and because narratives reflect the context and meaning of one's experience, as well as generating patterns that connect, narrative was used as the major research tool.

As the epistemological base of this research was not aimed at discovering the same "truth" about homosexuals and their families the world over, this research was able to consider alternate themes relating to the phenomenon of disclosure. This creates alternative descriptions of a phenomenon that has previously been explained in one way only. The description that results from this study may result in other descriptions of disclosure which, in turn, may open up useful avenues to pursue, both on a research level, and pragmatically in therapy.

As this study appears to be one of the first of its kind, it cannot hope to address all aspects of the phenomenon of disclosure. In addition it is limited by the principle of self-referentiality, and can therefore only describe what the researcher saw in one particular context. Hence, it is purely the first step in viewing the disclosure of homosexuality in a new light, providing a "thick" description about a family with a homosexual member (i.e: a thorough one that provides in-depth detail about the context of the family as well as interactional processes that took place) (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), so as to enable others to view the phenomenon of disclosure in a broader light.

This chapter marks the end of the first narrative. The following chapters will cover the in-depth theoretical narrative; narratives of homosexuality as reflected by social scientific research; the narrative of research within a cybernetic/social constructionist perspective; the family member's narratives, culminating in the researcher's narrative as well as views of a continuing narrative.

## CHAPTER 2

### THE THEORETICAL NARRATIVE

#### Introduction

This chapter explicates the theoretical framework for the study. The use of a cybernetic epistemology as the guiding frame for this study, as well as the choice of social constructionism as the theoretical framework, will be elaborated.

Social constructionism's origins and basic assumptions will be detailed, concluding with the link between social constructionism and cybernetics, thereby rendering them compatible as a framework with which to describe the experience of the family in this study.

#### On Epistemology

It is important to gain a clear idea of what the word epistemology means so as to understand its use in this study.

According to Auerswald (1985), epistemology is defined as "the study or a theory of the nature and grounds of knowledge" (p1). Bateson (in Keeney, 1983) has extended its meaning so that the term refers to the basic premises underlying one's behaviour and thinking.

According to Bateson (in Dell, 1985), it is unavoidable that one has a basic epistemology with which to understand and structure the world and that one be aware of one's epistemology, especially in conducting research and therapy. The importance of being aware of one's own epistemology is that one can be aware of how one comes to perceive and categorise the world as well as being aware that this perception is constructed through interaction with others.

We use our personal perceptions to give meaning and order to the world. Therefore, we are proactive in creating our reality and in so doing, we are able to create our choices relative to the construction of our reality (Stroh Becvar & Becvar, 1993).

Accordingly, Auerswald, following Bateson (in Auerswald 1985), defines epistemology as "a set of imminent rules used in thought by large groups of people to define reality" (p1). This implies that there is no one true reality but rather many different ways of constructing it, depending on one's epistemology. As Bateson (1979) states, "epistemology is always and inevitably personal. The point of the probe is always in the heart of the explorer" (p166). Bateson (1979) therefore states that the Greek advice "know thyself" has a practical aspect to it as all knowledge of the external world is derived from "self

knowledge" (Bateson, 1979, p148). One's experience of the world is also relative to the context in which one observes.

The relevance of this to the present discussion is that the descriptions provided by the researcher arise from her own epistemology, and this should always be kept in mind. Korzybski's (in Bateson, 1979) generalisation that "the map is not the territory" (p122) makes it clear that when one perceives something, that is, the territory, one does not perceive the 'pure' territory, but instead, in the process of perception, a coding or transformation occurs, due to our personal epistemology. What enters the mind is therefore a 'map' of what has been perceived, that is, a transformation, guided by our epistemology. That is why it is important to be aware of one's epistemology and its influence in determining what we see and how we behave. What will be made clear during this chapter is that epistemologies and reality do not reside within the individual only, but are intersubjectively co-created between people sharing a certain context.

Bateson (in Dell, 1985) speaks of many possible epistemologies one may entertain, for example, cybernetic, linear, circular and logical positivist, amongst others. To illustrate; the positivists view their world in terms of a linear, unidirectional epistemology in which A is seen to cause B, rendering the world certain and predictable. This assumes one true reality that can be accurately understood and known, by breaking phenomena into reducible units whose relations become understandable and predictable through fine analysis and measurement.

Contrary to this is a non-linear epistemology which focuses upon ecology, relationship and whole systems as well as on inter-relatedness, complexity and context (Keeney, 1983, p4). Various non-linear epistemologies exist, for example, circular, cybernetic, ecosystemic and ecological (Dell, 1985, p2).

The cybernetic/ecosystemic epistemology of this study is based on a blend of "cybernetics, systems theory and ecology" (Keeney, 1981a, p45). It is important to be aware of the assumptions of this epistemology so as to comprehend how the phenomenon of disclosure is understood and described in the present research.

### On Drawing Distinctions

According to Keeney (1982), the most basic act of epistemology is to draw a distinction. This refers to the act of differentiating something from something else - as Keeney would say, "distinguishing an 'it' from the 'background' that is 'not it' " (p156). The usefulness of drawing distinctions is that one cannot observe (perceive) without doing so or else one's world would be an incoherent, disorganised mass of meaninglessness. The distinctions one draws flow directly from one's epistemology. Both Brown (in Keeney, 1981a) and Varela (1976a) agree that the construction of a reality begins by "drawing a distinction from which descriptions of the universe can be generated" (p48). Whatever descriptions are elucidated are based on the act of categorising the world in certain ways, according

to one's governing epistemology. Thus, this categorisation/drawing of distinctions exposes our choice of "cleavage" (Varela, 1976a, p29) and there are as many of these as there are people to draw them.

The act of drawing distinctions so as to organise and make sense of one's world has been referred to by Bateson (in Keeney, 1982) as "punctuation." The importance of drawing distinctions to arrive at a particular punctuation is that in so doing one makes sense of, and is able to describe one's world and the phenomena one encounters. This refers back to Bateson's (in Dell, 1985) definition of epistemology, "it provides a grammar of reality ... it specifies how the objects and events of the world should be punctuated" (p2). The point to remember is that a certain punctuation derived from a certain epistemology arranges events in a particular way. Both individuals and cultures differ with regard to how they punctuate their experiences. This punctuation derives from one's biological make up, social conditions and cultural tradition (Keeney, 1982).

As Stroh, Becvar and Becvar (1993) state "each of us lives in and creates reality in a slightly different manner, based on our own unique combinations of heredity, explanations, presuppositions... perceptions. Each of us lives and creates a slightly different reality" (p89). According to Varela (1976a), once one is aware that what one sees is due to one's personal punctuations co-created with others, the focus should shift to the process of what one does to draw a distinction and thereby create a reality. In order to do so, the researcher should be aware of her personal punctuations regarding homosexuality and disclosure (which will be detailed in a following chapter) as well as her theoretical epistemology, as each epistemology yields different distinctions.

In accordance with this necessity, the cybernetic epistemology of this study, with particular emphasis on Bateson's ideas, will now be discussed, as this is the epistemology to which the researcher adheres.

### Cybernetic Epistemology.

According to Stroh Becvar and Becvar (1993), cybernetic epistemology is recognised as a major turnabout in the way in which we study and understand the world. As opposed to studying the world in terms of substance, matter and content through quantitative processes, cybernetics is concerned with organisation, pattern and process (Keeney, 1981a, p45).

According to Ashby (in Stroh Becvar & Becvar, 1993), cybernetics does not focus on objects but on "ways of behaving", that is, process. Because of this difference in focus, the major tools with which to study these abstract ideas are those of pattern and form (Keeney 1981a) instead of materiality and substance. Therefore, according to Ashby (in Keeney, 1981a) the cybernetic view attempts to create an alternative way in which to describe our world - this view of the world being a "communicational" one (p46).

For Bateson (1979), the way one perceives this communicational world is in terms of difference. This reflects Keeney's (1982) earlier definition of drawing a distinction - "distinguishing an 'it' from the background that is 'not it' " (p156). The difference between two phenomena creates a distinction. Therefore, at least two objects/phenomena are necessary to perceive a difference. Until something has been differentiated from something else, no information or "news of difference" exists (Bateson, 1979, p81). It is only when the difference between two phenomena can be perceived, that one has information about the relationship between the two. This is because human sense organs can "only receive news of difference" (Bateson, 1979, p81). For instance, if everything is all white, no difference/information is yielded. However, the difference between white and black yields information about the difference and hence the relationship between the two. Furthermore, according to Bateson, these differences must be coded into events across time in order to perceive them. For instance, the story of the son revealing his homosexual identity is differentiated from the background of not revealing his homosexuality and this provides information (news of difference) that becomes an event in time.

Thus, in order to create a description of pattern, relationship and process, consistent with the cybernetic epistemology, one needs at least two objects/phenomena as only one object/phenomenon leads to the logical positivist focus on describing substance and content.

#### On Double Description

One way of creating descriptions of pattern, relationship and process is through what Bateson (1979) terms "double description" (p79). He uses the analogy of two eyes seeing. The perception of one eye refers to monocular vision. When combined with the vision of the other eye, binocular vision occurs which adds an extra dimension to what is perceived. Thus, if one takes what one eye sees to be one description, and combines it with another to generate another description, extra depth is created. According to Bateson, yet further understanding is created, when, in addition to the combination of diverse pieces of information so as to yield a description of pattern and relationship, this description is enriched by a second language of description. This will be illustrated in the chapter containing the researcher's narrative, in which a description of the family members' descriptions/narrative is created to yield a "second language of description" (Bateson, 1979, p84). According to Bateson, therefore, if two descriptions are combined (e.g. the stories' of two family members), a third pattern will be created. Through the description and combination of these different patterns, thick and rich descriptions of relationship are yielded.

Because one can only describe a relationship in terms of interaction between people, relationship is always a product of double description and is not "internal to the single person" (Bateson, 1979, p146).

As this study focuses on the relationship between different people, the cybernetic principle of double description will be invoked to provide rich descriptions of relationship.

### On Cybernetic Complementarities

Due to the cybernetic emphasis on description of relationship versus description of a single entity, cybernetic thinkers object to speaking of things as if they possess a certain characteristic, for example, the wool is soft. This results in believing that one can describe wool in terms of one single characteristic without taking into account that wool gains its properties of softness by its own internal relations, as well as by its context and distinction from objects that are hard, thus illuminating the relational aspect. This accords with a cybernetic epistemology that stresses focusing on both sides of any distinction. Hence, any one-sided distinction may be viewed as "half of a more encompassing pair" (Keeney & Ross, 1992, p33). Within a logical positivist thought mode, distinctions are seen as dividing entities into an either/or duality, for example, the wool is either hard or soft; things are either good or bad. This subscribes to the logical positivist principles of dualism and reductionism, in which the world can be viewed in one way only.

Varela (1976b) has forwarded a cybernetic way of thinking about distinctions. Instead of focusing on one side of the distinction, it is proposed that both sides be considered. Therefore, although they are different, they are seen to be related. A way in which to do this is to view distinctions as "cybernetic complementarities" (Keeney, 1983). In this way, any distinction that is seen as an either/or duality can instead be seen as one side of a broader recursive complementarity. This is preferable to viewing distinctions as "battling opposites" (Keeney & Ross, 1992, p35). Instead, one may talk of their "complementary connection" (Keeney & Ross, 1992, p34). In so doing, the relationship between the two sides becomes self-referential, as one side emerges out of the other and loops back again. Thus, one cannot talk about wool being soft without simultaneously talking about its complementary relationship of hardness. As Keeney and Ross state, "one cannot speak of change without implying stability, autonomy without interdependence, parts without wholes, competition without co-operation" (p34). To focus on only one side of the dualism leads to the logical positivist mode of chopping up larger cycles of interaction. The focus on cybernetic complementarities allows one to see how pairs are connected whilst simultaneously remaining distinct, thereby providing a description of a whole, interactive pattern (Varela, 1976b) which more closely reflects human behaviour.

In viewing the interactive connection between two sides of a distinction, one obtains a "recursive complementarity of self-referential sides" (Keeney & Ross, 1992, p33). The focus on recursion between the two sides emphasises the interactive aspect of the relationship. In order to interact, the two sides must be different, whilst simultaneously their interaction connects them. Therefore, recursive complementarity underscores how different sides of a distinction participate as a complementary connection, whilst remaining distinct from each other.

If cybernetic complementarities interact together to maintain their integrity as an interactional system, then likewise the family can be conceptualised as a system interacting through different, complementary types of behaviour to maintain its stability as a system.

Thus the cybernetic complementarity is that of change/stability. The interaction between cybernetic complementarities is necessary to stabilise the organisation of a system. If the aim is to maintain stability, the family will adopt the complementary behaviour of change to do so. Keeney and Ross (1992) state that viewing recursive complementarity in this way emphasizes each family member's role in stabilising the family system. Keeney and Ross further define cybernetics as the study of a particular recursive complementarity concerned with the interrelation of stability and change, more particularly, how processes of change determine various orders of stability (Keeney, 1983, p71). Thus, stability and change cannot be seen as separate processes, but rather form a recursive cybernetic complementarity. Cybernetics proposes that change cannot exist without an umbrella of stability over it, and recursively, stability will always be underscored by processes of change. Therefore, a family cannot be described as changing without looking at their attempts at stability and vice-versa. Bateson (1972) sums this up succinctly, by stating, "all change can be understood as the effort to maintain some constancy and all constancy as maintained through change" (p381). Thus, thinking in terms of complementarities moves one away from a discussion of content to one of relationship and process.

Keeney (1979) similarly states that ecosystemic epistemology (another non-linear epistemology to be discussed) is concerned with relationships described by metaphors of pattern and form. According to Watts (in Keeney, 1979), we tend to see things versus patterns because our senses are limited in distinguishing complex patterns. Therefore whenever we encounter patterns we commit "the fallacy of misplaced concrete-ness" (p120) and assign fixed characteristics to these patterns, rendering them objects. Therefore Keeney (1979) states that we should move away from defining substance and start to see "patterns of relationship" (p120).

For Bateson (1979), the reason we describe objects in terms of single properties without reflecting at least two interactions in time/patterns of relationship is because of the way in which our language is formed. The way language is used implies that objects have properties instead of being composed of inter-relationships. Language, which is a verbal representation of our experience, reflects our inherent epistemologies - thus if we talk of objects in terms of substance and materiality, we reflect a linear epistemology. Both Bateson and Von Foerster (in Keeney, 1981a), a cybernetic thinker, appeal for cybernetic, systemic reasons to "restructure our linguistic patterning" (p47) so as to talk in terms of complete cybernetic circuits, instead of describing objects in isolation from their broader connectedness.

In describing human relationships, it is especially important not to describe interactions from one perspective only, so that the connectedness of relationship is overshadowed. This explains the reason for the researcher interviewing the family, so as to be able to describe relationship and pattern between people instead of focusing on one side of an interaction - for example, one family member's story.

### On "Patterns that Connect"

As can be seen, the major distinction or punctuation drawn within the cybernetic epistemology is one that focuses on pattern in organising physical and mental processes, as opposed to a logical positivist epistemology which focuses upon material phenomena of substance, without emphasis on interrelationships.

Cybernetics therefore may be defined as part of a general science that studies pattern and organisation (Keeney, 1983). Bateson (1979) views a pattern as a "dance of interacting parts" (p22) so that although one tends to think of patterns as fixed and invariant, they are actually dynamic and are made "fixed" through physical limitations, as well as the limitations imposed through our description of them. Within a cybernetic epistemology, in order to describe an individual or a family, it is necessary to study how they maintain their organisation through patterned, recursive processes of stability and change.

Hence, the second level of description created by the researcher's narrative of the family will focus upon the family's connecting patterns that maintain their organisation. In accordance with a cybernetic epistemology in which, as already stated, one does not fragment interactions or focus on individual units, these patterns will be described in terms of whole cybernetic circuits.

### Recursiveness

Here the cybernetic assumption of "recursiveness" or "reciprocal causality" (Stroh Becvar & Becvar, 1993, p68) enters. Due to the focus on relationship, both cybernetic and systems theory focus on people and events within the context of how they mutually interact and influence each other. From this standpoint, meaning arises from the relationship between individuals. Causality is no longer seen as linear in which A causes B but instead is seen as reciprocal, in which individuals and systems mutually influence each other. The principle of recursion thus points out how individuals or systems connect with each other in a reciprocal manner. There is no starting point or linear direction to this. Rather, this process is circular in which instead of A leading directly to B, A may first circle to D, then loop back to C, and so on. However, in so doing, the output of A's response is included in A's response to D, which is then included in D and A's combined response to C, and so forth. When this process eventually begins to form a redundant pattern, that always loops back to itself, recursion takes place (Keeney, 1983; Penn, 1982). Thus, recursion includes a folding in on itself so that the original information is incorporated as part of the following response, to further evolve it (Keeney, 1983). This is akin to the process of feedback. According to Bateson (in Keeney, 1979) to understand a phenomenon completely, it is necessary to view the phenomenon in terms of all "circuits" (p120) relevant to it. These circuits refer to "the network of complexly intertwined human relationships" (p120). This again provides the rationale for the researcher interviewing

the family together so as to understand the phenomenon of disclosure in the context of the family's complexly intertwined relationships. These relationships are complexly intertwined due to their recursivity.

### Holism and Feedback

Interviewing the family as a group also embodies the cybernetic/systemic principle of holism. Within this perspective, one does not study parts, but wholes, in relationship. In order to do so, it is necessary to recognise that these wholes are circularly organised (ie. through their recursive organisation) and therefore each impact on the other, so that every part interacts with every other part (Varela, 1976a). One cannot isolate any component and study it in isolation without upsetting the wholeness of the system. The level where the complete cybernetic circuit, for example, the family, interacts with itself constitutes a whole cybernetic system (Keeney, 1981a, p49). This is achieved through feedback. According to Wiener (in Keeney, 1983), the basic core of cybernetics is feedback, which has been variously defined as "a method of controlling a system by re-inserting into it the results of its past performance" (p66), or "part of the system's output is reintroduced into the system as information about the output" (Watzlawick, Beavin & Jackson, 1967, p31).

It can be seen that both of these definitions refer to a recursive process in which the person/system's response incorporates a previous response from another that gets reintroduced to allow for further evolution. Therefore, one cannot return to the original starting point, or as Maturana (1978) comments, one cannot interact with the same system twice. Feedback is evolutionary in nature, in which, due to recursive patterns of interaction, the system evolves in response to prior input and this recursive cycle continues indefinitely. In terms of the cybernetic delineation of stability and change, feedback processes are initiated in a family so as to maintain stability. A move away from stability towards change is usually signalled by deviation from some established familial norm (Watzlawick, Weakland & Fisch, 1974). This perception of deviation/difference often mobilises the family to engage in "corrective action" (Bateson, 1972, p38) to return the system to its usual, preferred state. This corrective action may involve the family/ system varying their behaviour to evolve a new state of stability, highlighting the recursive complementarity between the two processes. Feedback demonstrates how this process works. The feedback process between change and stability has resulted in Keeney and Ross (1992) defining it as "a method of stabilizing a system by recycling into it the changes of its past performance" (p37). Thus, a family member's attempts at change may recursively result in the family engaging in corrective action to return the family system to a steady state. This corrective action to reinstate stability may be achieved through processes of change.

### Self-Referentiality

According to Varela (1976a), at this level, the system/family becomes a self-referential one in which anything that takes place within it refers back to itself. Varela (in Keeney, 1981a) thus defines a whole system as "any domain of self-referential, mutual, reciprocal interactions" (p49).

This self-referentiality can be extended to the role of the researcher/observer. The cybernetic view of human behaviour presupposes that objectivity does not exist due to the fact that all distinctions drawn are drawn by an observer, and these arise from his or her implicit epistemology, thus making them relative. This is in direct contrast to a logical positivist viewpoint in which an 'objective' observer discovers scientific principles which have an objective existence independent of the observer.

Thus, within cybernetics, the fact that it is the observer/researcher distinguishing patterns of behaviour, places him directly in that which is observed. Therefore all distinctions drawn by him are self-referential, that is, arising from and referring back to himself. Therefore the world we observe depends upon how we observe it and recursively, what we choose to observe is what we see. As Maturana and Von Glasersfeld (in McNamee & Gergen, 1992) would say, we do not relate to life directly, but to our understanding of it. Furthermore, because the observer perceives the world through the lens of his culture, family and language, these impact on his observations and become self-referential, that is, comment on the observer himself.

The inclusion of the observer in the observed yields a move from first-order to second-order cybernetics. Second-order cybernetics clearly demonstrates that objectivity is non-existent, as objectivity assumes a separation between observer and observed, which has been shown to be impossible. Instead, from the viewpoint of this holistic perspective (Keeney, 1983), cybernetics of cybernetics, or second-order cybernetics places the observer as directly responsible for the features of the observed (Keeney, 1981a). In this way, the researcher's description of the family does not refer to objective, true features of the family, but rather arise from the researcher's own lens. However, the researcher does not arrive at this description on her own. Rather the 'final' description of the family is a co-construction, due to the inevitability of recursion. The researcher impacts and is simultaneously impacted upon by the family, and this impact is integrated into her further constructions. This illustrates the cybernetic principle of evolutionary feedback. Thus, the world we inhabit and create arises through social exchange and social construction (Anderson, Goolishian & Windermant, 1986). Because this reality is socially constructed, everything becomes a co-construction through our interaction with others.

### On Systems

Following from this principle, not only is the researcher's description of the family a self-referential one, as well as a co-constructed one, but additionally, the people the researcher chooses to define as comprising a system are also an arbitrary punctuation,

arising from her co-constructed frame of reference. As Keeney (in Stroh Becvar & Becvar, 1993, p83) states "we should never forget that the cybernetic system we discern is a consequence of the distinctions we happen to draw". However, although the distinctions we draw around a particular person/group of people, so as to define them as an individual or a family may be arbitrary, these distinctions are drawn on the basis of identifying particular sequences or cyclical patterns of interaction amongst them (Keeney, 1984).

This accords with Becvar and Stroh Becvar (1982) who state that one can only punctuate a system when one observes regular and redundant cycles of interaction between people and other phenomena. Furthermore, punctuating a system allows one a clearer, conceptual scheme with which to understand a given pattern of relationship. Of note here is the concept of 'system'. The trend in systemic theory has often been to describe the family as a system. Through years of so doing, the idea of a family as a fixed system has become reified, instead of realising that this punctuation is also an arbitrary one. As an alternative to the reification of the family as a system, Boscolo, Cecchin, Hoffman and Penn (1987) introduce the idea of the "significant system" (p23) which consists of all those who are involved with a particular issue. Thus, the significant system refers to "the network of meanings and relationships" (Boscolo et al., 1987, p184) organised by the issue, as opposed to the system being defined by a particular social structure, such as "family". Anderson and Goolishian (1987) accord with this view by viewing social systems as distinguished by a central concern (often a problem for therapy), and made up by those people who language about such a concern. The idea of a certain group of people languaging around a core concern fits with the concept of an "ecology of ideas" (Bogdan, 1984, p 384). This ecology of ideas refers to the shared ideas and languaging about the concern that enables members to derive meaning about the concern and to develop some form of co-ordinated action around it (Anderson et al., 1986). The ecology of ideas is often evolutionary in nature, due to new ideas and meanings arising, and in feedback fashion, transforming the present ecology of ideas. Thus, the languaging about the issue forms the ecology of ideas that distinguishes the membership of the system.

In this study, the primary system of focus has been arbitrarily defined as mother, son and daughter. However, the significant system actually encompasses anybody who is involved in talking about and being concerned with the disclosure of the son's homosexuality. Therefore the significant system also includes the father, the older brother, the father's new family as well as the people the mother initially spoke to about her son's homosexuality.

Thus, in this study, the researcher, although only having interviewed the mother and her two children views the father and older brother as part of the significant system, as well as considering this system in the context of their wider societal system, as this wider context is recursively connected to their redundant cycles of interaction.

## The Interlink between Ecosystemic Theory and Second-Order Cybernetics

As stated, cybernetic epistemology focuses on patterns of relationship and interconnectedness between parts of a circuit, so that one cannot study a person/phenomenon in isolation. This links cybernetics to an ecosystemic epistemology which is grounded in the ideas of cybernetics, ecology and systems theory (Keeney & Sprenkle, 1982, p3).

According to Stroh Becvar and Becvar (1993), like cybernetics, systems theory also differs from a logical positivist epistemology in its assumptions and descriptions of reality. Specifically, systems theory asks 'what' instead of 'why', as well as focusing on "reciprocal causality, wholistic; subjective (perceptual), freedom of choice/proactive; patterns; here-and-now focus; relational; contextual, relativistic" (Stroh Becvar & Becvar, 1993, p8 & 9).

It can be seen that many of these concepts embody the cybernetic concepts already discussed. This will now be expanded upon.

Perhaps the primary feature of systems theory is its focus on interdependence, so that events are not interpreted in isolation. Thus, a focus on individuals would necessitate viewing them in their relational context (Becvar & Stroh Becvar, 1982). This clearly accords with cybernetics' focus on describing all interactions in terms of their completed circuits, within the context in which they take place.

Through the focus on sequences of interaction within their context, the focus of interest is shifted from a logical positivist emphasis on isolated entities. Thus no longer is the focus an intrapsychic one, but rather an interpersonal one.

Thus ecosystemic epistemology attempts to arrive at a view of the world in which complete patterns or whole ecosystems are focused upon instead of a study of atomistic parts that conceal the connectedness of whole systems. Like Bateson's appeal to change our language styles to reflect this interconnectedness, ecosystemic epistemology too believes that we should always attempt to describe our observations in terms of patterns so as not to talk about isolated entities (Keeney & Sprenkle, 1982). One of the major aims in ecosystemic epistemology therefore is to talk about reified nouns such as anxiety, intelligence, fear, in a form that reflects relationship and process. This relates to the earlier example of talking about something in terms of properties versus interrelationship and stressing only one side of an interaction, for example, man appears to act proud, instead of man is proud in relation to this particular person in this particular context.

Similarly, from this perspective, there is no one true reality that accords with an objectively observable world. Rather, according to Bronowski (in Stroh Becvar & Becvar, 1993) the view of reality espoused is that of a "constantly conjoined universe" (p6), always taking into account the connections between individuals. Due to the focus on interdependence

and interconnectedness, systems theory delineates many types of systems that can be viewed as interconnected, for example, society, neighbourhood and especially the family (Stroh Becvar & Becvar, 1993).

The view of the family as a system involves looking at each family member in relation to every other family member, since they all impact on each other. Not only must the individual be viewed within the context of his or her family but, consistent with an ecosystemic framework, the family must be focused upon within the context of their larger system, that is, within their particular society (Keeney & Sprenkle, 1982). Thus, just as individuals within a family interact and impact on each other, families interact with and impact on other families as well as wider society. This is naturally a recursive relationship. As Becvar and Stroh Becvar (1982) state "just as an individual is studied in the context of his/her family, so the family is studied in the context of its environment" (p6).

To sum up, the ecosystemic perspective recognizes the reciprocal relationship between the individual/family and the environment, and believes that studying this interface is an important aspect of systemic thinking. Furthermore, it believes that the family's existence is inextricably connected to the external environment. In the same manner that family members fit with their family context must the family system fit with its wider environment (Stroh Becvar & Becvar, 1993). The concept of 'fit' is useful in cybernetic thinking. Instead of stating linearly that the family's environment 'causes' it to engage in certain behaviours, or that family members 'cause' each other to behave in certain ways, 'fit' simply states that the behaviours taking place in a system have a general complementarity; they fit together (Dell, 1982). Through this fit, they evolve a coherence (Dell, 1982, p31) which means "a congruent inter-dependence in functioning whereby all the aspects of the system fit together". Coherence arises naturally when individuals spend time together around matters of mutual interest. Thus, coherence is of a co-evolutionary nature in which, through spending time together, individuals co-evolve their behaviours to complement each other or fit together. The types of coherent behaviour developed in a system naturally have interpersonal consequences for that system that will recursively feed back to the individuals in the system. In this way, certain types of ideas and behaviours become co-evolved in a system and eventually lead to a natural coherence in the system. This will be demonstrated in the researcher's narrative. The coherence of the wider society does not 'cause' the coherence of the family and so on. Rather, the members fit together. According to Bateson (in Hoffman, 1981), an awareness of how all the circuits in the system fit and are connected leads one to 'wisdom' (p346).

Thus, all family ecologies can be characterised by the way in which individuals within them fit with their wider family system as well as their larger social and cultural networks, so as to develop coherent ideas and behaviour. This is essentially the crux of the research study: focusing on how the particular family members' ideas and behaviour fit together to maintain their connectedness as a family system, as well as extending this to focus on how their connectedness impacts on their relationship with larger social and cultural networks, and vice versa.

Therefore systems theory, like cybernetics, is anti-reductionistic, and believes that to study the individual or family isolated from their context is meaningless. This accords with Bateson's (1972) belief that without context, words and action have no meaning as we must always look to the larger units for understanding.

Due to the interconnectedness and indeed strong similarity between cybernetic and ecosystemic assumptions, the researcher will follow Keeney (1983) and Stroh Becvar and Becvar's (1993) proposal that the terms are synonymous, and that cybernetic epistemology be adopted as the overriding term for this perspective. Hereafter therefore, the epistemology of this study shall be referred to as a cybernetic one. The use thereof will be reflected both in the way the research endeavour is constructed as well as in the way that the final interactions are described, that is, in terms of the theoretical concepts detailed in this chapter and in terms of patterns that connect. Meaning will be created recursively, self-referentially; in context, and the description will reflect pattern and process.

The following section will discuss a method by which to conceptualise the family in this research as well as to conceptualise the process of disclosure of homosexuality that accords with a cybernetic framework and is therefore useful in describing the family's patterns of behaviour.

#### A Focus on Semantics and Politics

It was earlier stated that a system can only be delineated when regular, redundant patterns of interaction between people are observed (Becvar & Stroh Becvar, 1982) in a particular recursive manner. However, these regular, redundant cycles of interaction must be described in a particular way, so as to fit with the cybernetic definition of a system. Along with Boscolo et al. (1987) and Anderson and Goolishian (1987), cybernetic theory too believes that a system does not have to be determined by a particular social structure, such as a family (Keeney, 1983). For cybernetics, describing a system's behaviour is not as important as viewing behaviour or events as being organised by recursive feedback processes (Keeney, 1983; Keeney & Ross, 1992). Therefore the concern is not with delineating a particular system but with describing patterns of behaviour in a certain way.

According to Keeney (1983), there are two basic rules in describing a cybernetic system. The first specifies that recursive organisation must be described, so that acts of behaviour are viewed as encompassing a larger recursive sequence of behaviour. More importantly, the second rule in describing a cybernetic system is that it must have feedback structure, so that the recursive process involves self-correction (Keeney, 1983). Thus to purely describe a linear flow of events, such as what happened prior to the son's disclosure of homosexuality, the actual disclosure and the after events is not a description of a cybernetic system. However, if these events are described in a recursive manner to reflect processes of feedback, a cybernetic system is discerned. It does not

matter whether the cybernetic system discerned is an individual, a family or a community. These systems arise as a consequence of the distinctions we happen to draw (Keeney, 1983). What is important is that their manner of description reflects a cybernetic epistemology.

Earlier it was stated that cybernetics is concerned with the recursive complementarity of stability/change. In accordance, Keeney and Ross (1992) state that the "recursive complementarity between stability and change specifies a cybernetic system" (p37). Thus, instead of viewing cybernetic systems as fixed social structures, they are seen as patterns of organisation that maintain their stability through processes of change, and change in order to maintain stability (Keeney, 1983; Keeney & Ross, 1992).

The question can be posed: how do patterns of interaction come to be co-ordinated into regular interactional cycles amongst a certain group of people, for example, a family?

The reason for considering this is that the family in this study will be conceptualised as a system, and it is important for the researcher to be able to describe her understanding of the phenomenon of disclosure as part of an interconnected, recursive sequence of interaction that has developed between family members over time.

Bogdan (1984), in considering the family as a "small ecology" (p380) offers a useful way to understand how family members' behaviour comes to be coordinated into regular sequences of interaction. According to him, the family can be conceptualised as an "ecology of ideas" (p376), so that the reason the behaviour of family members becomes organised into regular patterns of interaction is because the behaviour of each individual is in some way "cognitively consistent" (p376) with the behaviour of every other individual in the system, that is, "the ideas of each family member leads him to behave in ways that confirm or support the ideas of every other family member" (p376). Therefore the question of how a family is organised is essentially how the ideas and behaviour of each family member support and sustain the ideas and behaviour of every other member so that the system displays order, pattern or redundancy" (p381), or, as said earlier, how the system fits together to develop coherent behaviour, in which members vary their behaviour so as to maintain its overall stability.

This accords with Strommen's (1989) views in the following chapter about family members' ideas being cognitively consistent with each other due to shared values and norms. Thus, in this family, for instance, it can be hypothesised that their co-constructed ideas around homosexual people informed their behaviour towards homosexual people, which in turn recursively maintained their co-constructed ideas, showing the recursive, feedback link between ideas and behaviour.

The ideas that lead to the family's co-ordinated behaviour are not explicitly stated amongst family members, but rather, according to Stroh Becvar and Becvar (1993) can be construed as unspoken agreements which define the different family relationships. This accords with Langman's (1986) view that all families have "frameworks of meaning"

(p36) through which they see, interpret and evaluate their world so as to be able to simplify and understand it and accordingly, learn how to act in it. These family meanings may include, for instance, the nature of marriage, the meaning of being a parent, of raising a child and having relationships with the external world (Langman, 1986), and in this research, the family's ideas about homosexuality. According to Becvar and Stroh Becvar (1982), these meanings also lay down the way in which family members communicate with each other, the specific nature of their relationships, as well as goal setting and decision making in the family. These implicit ideas create stability and predictability for the family system.

These meanings often arise from the family's values. According to Kluckhohn and Strodtbeck (in Geyer & van der Zouwen, 1986) values can be defined as "shared standards or reference points which define the nature of reality, the desirable modes of conduct and the ends of social action" (p34). Thus, values are socially created through one's experience in a particular culture and give people within that culture an awareness of how to behave as well as what is considered appropriate. According to Langman (1986), in a family system as opposed to the wider cultural context, values are both historical, referring to the cultural traditions and prior experiences of family members, and contemporary, referring to present social realities and everyday experiences. Once specific values are generated within a family, they tend to recur through generations due to the family being socialised into them - their 'fit' with them.

Throughout, the theme that ideas (arising from values, meanings and implicit agreements) lead to certain patterns of behaviour amongst family members, which recursively reinforce these ideas, has been put forward. This explains Bogdan's (1984) conceptualisation of the family as an "ecology of ideas" (p376).

Therefore it can be said that the family of this research behave in ways which are inextricably linked to the son disclosing his homosexual identity. This behaviour arises due to the family's implicit values and ideas - illustrating the recursive feedback link between ideas and behaviour.

Keeney and Ross (1992) have delineated a view of human communication that provides a useful conceptual tool to describe how a family's ideas and behaviour support each other, providing stability and leading to redundant cycles of interaction between family members.

They have outlined two frames of reference that they view as underlying communication. The first is a semantic frame which focuses on the meaning value of communication. The second is a political frame which refers to the patterns of behaviour that take place between people in a sequential and connected process, so that a view of "how human communication is organised in a social context" (Keeney & Ross, 1992, p7) is provided.

If someone is asked to describe a particular sequence of behaviour specifying who

does what to whom and when, a political frame is required. If someone has to explain the meaning of that behavioural sequence, a semantic frame is required. However, semantic and political frames of reference are always interlinked in a recursive manner so that any description of an interactional sequence (political) requires a shift to a semantic frame of reference. A description of how that 'meaning' is acted out requires a shift back to a political frame of reference. From the point of view of a cybernetic epistemology, this is so because the pattern that connects meaning and behaviour is a recursive one (Keeney, 1983) organised in a feedback manner.

Thus, it can be seen that the view of family ideas implicitly supporting each other is a semantic one, whereas how these ideas are linked to redundant patterns of interaction, both within the family and in relation to the wider social context, is a political one. This view of human communication provides a useful conceptual tool when viewing the areas of focus in this research.

To sum up, the focus of this research will be on (a) how the family's meanings and ideas (around homosexuality and family) informed their behaviour around the son's admission of homosexuality, and how this recursively influenced the process of disclosure for the son - thus focusing on the recursive link between meaning and action. This will be considered within the cybernetic framework of change/stability, thus broadening the focus to consider how the family maintained stability in the face of the disclosure, and (b) describing significant recursive patterns and themes that seem to link the family to broader society, which in turn has a recursive effect on their own familial constructions and behaviour around homosexuality.

On another level, the description of these recursive patterns and themes within the family and society is the researcher's imposition of a semantic frame onto a political description (the family's narratives), and thus reflects self-reference. It can be seen that the circular complementarity of these frames makes discussion of one without the other artificial and impossible, as it is the meanings one has around certain areas that connects with their particular behaviours, and this behaviour subsequently feeds back into their meanings. Thus the two are interdependent, leading to the connection with a cybernetic epistemology, whose focus is not purely on sequences of action (political) or on patterns of ideas and meanings (semantic), but instead on the recursive relation between the two.

The conceptualisation of the family as an "ecology of ideas" (Bogdan, 1984, p384) further fits with a cybernetic/ecosystemic epistemology, in which relationships and whole systems are emphasised as well as interconnectedness, complexity and context.

In addition, cybernetic epistemology not only focuses on recursive patterns of behaviour (political) and meanings (semantic), but in so doing includes the observer in the description, as by the very act of interviewing and describing the family, the observer/researcher becomes part of the system, moving to second-order cybernetics.

When the observer/researcher is conceptualised as such, it is necessary to consider how the researcher's way of observing, describing and thereby drawing distinctions creates a particular 'reality', as descriptions reveal properties of the observer/researcher and thus reflect the observer's biases, prejudices and ideas (Keeney 1983; Varela 1976a). In her interactions with the family under discussion, the researcher, through her cybernetic epistemology, will draw distinctions that look for patterns of relationship and recursive interactions. Through her social constructionist lens (to be discussed), the researcher will focus on socially constructed meanings that inform the family's subsequent patterns of behaviour and vice versa. The family may be described in other ways, depending on the observer and his guiding epistemology.

In looking at different ways of understanding how the observer constructs his world so as to describe it, the researcher studied various theories that are congruent with the assumptions of a second-order cybernetic epistemology in their delineation of a constructed world. Specifically, the theory of radical constructivism primarily espoused by Maturana, the theory of social constructivism primarily espoused by Anderson and Goolishian and the theory of social constructionism primarily espoused in the field of psychology by Gergen, were focused upon. It will be seen that these theories have originated from similar starting points, especially with regard to the idea that reality is constructed or perhaps even independently invented by the observer, whilst simultaneously the observer is a participant in his world and cannot divorce himself from this process.

Ravn (in Steier, 1991a) states that constructivism is the epistemological "ism" associated with second-order cybernetics, and that "reality construction" is the central epistemological activity identified by these theories (p96).

The theories of radical and social constructivism will be briefly discussed so as to provide a clear theoretical background that illustrates their correspondence to second-order cybernetics. This will be followed by a comprehensive discussion of social constructionist theory as in association with second-order cybernetics, it forms the basis for this research. Finally, the linkage between social constructionism and second order cybernetics will be discussed so as to clarify their connection.

#### Radical Constructivism with Emphasis on Maturana's Theory of Structure-Determinism

According to Atkinson and Heath (1987), until recently the majority of research in general, and in the field of psychology in particular, has been based on the traditional scientific view that objectivity is possible and highly desirable. Therefore the main aim of the researcher has been to maintain objectivity by keeping his own opinions and biases out of the interpretation of his research. The overriding premise which encompasses all researchers in this mode is the belief that an objective reality exists and that one can only progress in scientific knowledge by attempting to gain as much objective information about the world as possible. Such 'true' knowledge is seen as certain and thus makes prediction possible.

As has been illustrated, the opposite view to this is an epistemology which believes that it is not possible to gain objective views of the world, as what one observes always depends on the point of view of the observer. This logically leads to the idea that sure, predictable knowledge of the world cannot exist if one's observations are coloured by one's processes of perception. Von Glaserfeld (in Steier, 1991a) argues that even if we could discover how our knowledge is derived from experience, there is no way of discovering how our experience might be related to what there is before we experience it, that is, the act of experiencing makes an impact on the experienced phenomenon, the observer changes the observed, and is himself changed.

This is where the seed of constructivist ideas has been sown. According to Von Glaserfeld (in Steier, 1991a) an originator of radical constructivism, constructivism is radical precisely because it departs from the epistemological tradition of a belief in an objective reality and instead gives up the belief that knowledge should be a true reflection of the world as it exists without anyone experiencing it. Radical constructivism's view of the relationship between knowledge and reality places it squarely in another epistemological framework. It espouses a theory of the world in which knowledge does not represent an objective reality but instead is "exclusively an ordering and organisation of a world constituted by our experience" (Von Glaserfeld, 1984, p24). Within a constructivist framework, the view of the world is an "experiential one" (p29), that is made up of others' experiences and cannot claim any truth in the sense of representation of an objective reality. Thus one's experience as well as what one perceives arises due to the ways and means of perceiving and experiencing them.

As Von Glaserfeld (1984) says, "quite generally this means that the world we experience is, and must be, as it is because we have put it together that way" (p30). Knowledge is viewed as something that the organism builds up in the attempt to order the so-called amorphousness of experience. Through the establishment of recurring experiences and relatively reliable relationships between them, the world is rendered more understandable. The possibilities of creating an ordered world are determined and limited by the prior steps taken to construct this world (Von Glaserfeld, 1984). Knowledge now becomes functional as opposed to representational in that how one thinks and constructs one's reality must be adaptive for the person, so that his survival is enhanced. Therefore, this knowledge reflects the fit between the organism and his environment (Hoffman, 1985). According to Von Glaserfeld (in Anderson & Goolishian, 1987) from this point of view, the individual is not conceived as a passive receptor of knowledge, but rather, is seen as an active agent in that what is known is due to the person actively construing it. This construal presupposes that objects do not possess particular properties per se, but only possess properties when an observer experiences and attributes properties to them. The activity that creates knowledge is termed "operating" (Von Glaserfeld, 1984, p31) in that we create and experience our world through the active operation and use of our senses. Thus one cannot discover properties of social phenomena 'out there'. Atkinson and Heath (1987) cite an example of marital satisfaction and communication, and state that one can only construe such phenomena and understand them through

actively experiencing and inter-pretng them, that is, it requires an observer to do so without 'pre' knowledge of properties 'out there'. Therefore to know something does not imply that one has true, corresponding images/representations of reality but instead one has ways and means of behaving and cognising that enable him to reach his goals. This brings us again to the notion of knowledge being functional for the person (Von Glasersfeld, 1991). Thus, according to Von Glasersfeld (in Hoffman, 1990) one does not discover a world but instead 'invents' (p390) it, so that ideas are created as the organism evolves a fit with its environment. This construction of ideas occurs in the person's nervous system (Hoffman, 1990). Constructivists maintain that our world is invented through our experience and construction of it (Von Glasersfeld, 1991; Atkinson & Heath, 1987). Hence, the world itself is a result of the observer's distinctions, and is ultimately a constructed world (Von Glasersfeld, 1991).

Watzlawick (1984) questions the kind of reality created by constructivism, that is, how would the world look to a person who believes that reality is completely the result of his own construction? According to Varela (in Watzlawick, 1984), such a person would be tolerant as they would understand that others can have world views different from their own, instead of believing in one right and wrong. If each person's world is a created one, one would have respect for the realities others have created for themselves.

Such a person would also feel extremely responsible, not only for his own behaviour and goals but also for the type of reality created by his own self-fulfilling prophecies (Watzlawick, 1984). Such a person would feel responsible for himself and his behaviour and would not be able to blame other people or circumstances for his misfortunes but would have to see it as a result of his own reality construction. In turn, this responsibility would lead to complete freedom since if a person is unhappy with the reality he is in, he is free to construct an alternative one. Thus, constructivism does not in and of itself create one certain 'reality'. This is inconsistent with its chief tenet of individually constructed worlds. Instead it demonstrates that there is no objective world and therefore no separation between subject and object. If one does view a separation between observer and observed, this is due to the distinctions they draw.

As Von Glasersfeld (1984) makes clear, radical constructivism cannot be seen as a description of any objective, true reality but instead provides a model of knowing and specifically how we as thinking organisms come to know our world, so that on the basis of our constructions, we experience our world as a fairly stable, predictable one.

The radical constructivist position of Humberto Maturana will now be detailed so as to further provide another lens for looking at the world, as well as highlighting the way in which it differs from social constructivism and social constructionism.

Humberto Maturana, a Chilean biologist, conducted research on the physiology of vision, in particular, on colour perception in animals. Through these experiments, he found that there was no correspondence between the object seen and what the retinal cells perceived, leading him to conclude that the retinal cells activate the brain cells in a

closed interactional loop that occurs completely within the nervous system, without any inputs from outside (Hoffman, 1990). Thus, animals respond according to their nervous system's ability to perceive colour, instead of an external reality imprinting its images on the brain. Therefore for Maturana and his colleague Varela, the crucial factor is that the closed organisation (defined as identity) (in Hoffman, 1990, p385) of an organism is what determines its perception, as opposed to it being impacted on by the outside.

This is a departure from the conventional way of thinking about the processes of perception, and how the nervous system operates. If this is the case, then a living system is actually a circular one in that what takes place does so within the system itself, uninfluenced by the outside world. Logically then, a living system is organisationally closed, in that what is perceived is determined from within the structural limits of the organism, as opposed to being determined by the outer environment (Leyland, 1988). The significance of this is that each living system is therefore autonomous. This gives each living system its own individuality as the nature of its structure determines the behaviour of the system. The system specifies its own behaviour (Dell, 1985). Thus, the living system is a closed one, which, due to its autonomy is dependent on itself for survival. Maturana called this process 'autopoiesis' as auto refers to self and poiesis refers to creation/production (Leyland, 1988, p360). The implication of autopoietic systems is that any changes they undergo are determined by their own organisation and structure. This led Maturana to assume a constructivist position in which what we know is solely constructed by us, as it is purely via our perception that we construe the world.

If the organism's interactions with the environment cannot determine how it will act, it can thus be assumed that living systems do not receive any external information. Maturana concluded that because all living systems are organisationally closed, information per se does not exist (Dell, 1985). Because it is only the system itself that can specify its own behaviour, although it may receive 'information' from different sources, its ultimate response, is determined by its own structure. Again, it is the system that specifies how it will behave, not the 'information' that can influence it's behaviour. The information has no existence or meaning apart from that given to it by the system with which it interacts (Dell, 1985, p6).

Because the transmission of objective information is impossible, so is the phenomenon of what Maturana (in Dell, 1985) calls "instructive interaction" (p8). Instructive interaction refers to our everyday learning whereby, for instance, we are taught something by a teacher and absorb it. If this is so, it presupposes that everyone receives the identical information and therefore should reproduce this identical information in a class test. However, for Maturana, this is impossible as everyone responds differently in a class test. This is because it is not the teaching that produced the response - rather it is the student's structure that determined the response, leading to a variety of test responses. A therapist's set intervention will produce different responses in clients because the client's structure determines their response. By implication, linear causality is impossible. Linear causality

presupposes that A causes B. Thus information in the brain and response on the paper is due to the information that went into the brain. This is instructive interaction. However, if we as organisms determine our own responses, then nothing external causes us to behave and think in certain ways. Thus, linear causality does not exist.

To account for the fact that living systems behave only according to their structure, Maturana (in Dell, 1985) proposed the concept of a "structure - determined system". As Dell says, our knowledge of the world is determined purely by the "structure - determined 'lenses of our bodies' " (p10). The organism's structure determines which other organisms or events in its environment it can interact with and how it will behave in these interactions. Hence, organisms behave only according to their structure, not according to any intrinsic purposes or aims. It is important to remember that while the organism's organisation (identity) is stable, its structure is not. One's structure can be altered through the organism's interactions, but it is still the structure of the organism that determines this - not the interaction per se.

Therefore, as with the impossibility of instructive interaction and linear causality, objective knowledge is also impossible as what one knows is a result of the interaction between our structure-determined bodies and the medium in which we exist. This links up with the cybernetic assumption of the observer in the observed, rendering objectivity impossible.

To account for a system's interaction with its environment, which Maturana termed medium, the concept of 'structural coupling' (Leyland, 1988, p36) was forwarded. Although the organisation of a system and any changes it experiences are determined purely by that system, systems will interact with others in their environment. In fact, it is vital for its survival that a system be coupled to its medium, in order to continue functioning as an autopoietic unity (Kenney, 1989).

Interactions between systems are viewed as mutual perturbations in which each interaction serves as a stimulus for others. However, although interaction may stimulate the system, it will only trigger responses determined by and possible through the system's own structure. Therefore two structure-determined systems are able to interact only because their structures determine that they are capable of perturbing each other, that is, they interact because they are structurally able to (Dell, 1985). Although as humans we may experience changes through interaction with our environment, these changes are determined by the system's own organisation and structure. This form of structure-determinism does not speak of a real world existing "out there" (Dell, 1985). This can be contrasted with Bateson's cybernetic epistemology which speaks of a real world but claims that we can only know it through our processes of perception.

The ability of organisms to interact with others and maintain a congruence with their medium is due to the 'structural plasticity' of the system (Kenny, 1989, p21). Plastic

refers to the system's ability to make continuous changes due to interacting with itself, its environment and other structurally plastic systems. Therefore, although the structure of a system determines its' reaction to a perturbation, this in turn creates structural changes within the system, which alter the future behaviour of the system (Leyland, 1988). It follows that when a structurally plastic system is coupled to its environment it will appear to behave intelligently because its plasticity enables it to change in response to its environment. Structure is not static and can evolve in accordance with interactions in its environment. However, how it evolves is determined by its' structure.

When one living system structurally couples with another, the two become organised into an interactional system. This system, through its interaction with another becomes part of the environment of the other. Due to the plasticity of the systems, they are able to couple, and actually, this is a "necessary consequence of their interactions" (Leyland, 1988, p362). Through this, living systems become organised into complex interactional patterns, and develop consensual domains through language. This implies that in order to survive, they have reached consensus about the co-ordination of their behaviours - what Maturana calls "linguistic behaviour" (Kenny, p20). Kenny (1989) cites an example of this by describing an instance where a human observes his cat scratching the door to be let out. Here human and cat have evolved consensual behaviour. One could attribute meaning to this interactional co-ordination of behaviour by saying that the cat is telling his owner he wants to be let out. However, according to Maturana's theory of structure-determinism, there is no intrinsic meaning in behaviour - all that is happening is that the human and cat are triggering various, recursively-linked structural changes in each other. When this co-ordination of behaviour becomes recursive, so that consensual coordination of behaviour of consensual co-ordination of behaviour takes place, we have the phenomenon of language (Kenny, 1989, p21).

It must be remembered that this type of structural coupling between organisms (such as the description of human and cat) is without any intrinsic purpose. According to Maturana, any interpretation of this interaction in terms of meaning and purpose arises only from an observer describing this structural coupling and through his description ascribing meaning to the interaction. According to Dell (1985), Maturana is insistent on the fact that any description which includes meaning and which is not intended as a metaphor is "intrinsically inadequate and fallacious" (p12).

According to Maturana (in Dell, 1985) the distinctive feature of humans is their ability to engage in language. Language can arise only through our structural coupling with other structurally plastic organisms in our medium and is particular to human beings.

This languaging process is important as anything said in language forms part of the person's environment, and therefore is part of their coupling with others. It is through languaging in the process of structural coupling that it is possible to draw distinctions and therefore create objects.

According to both Maturana (in Dell, 1985) and Von Glasersfeld (1984), objects do not exist until distinctions are drawn through language. Therefore no world/reality exists prior to distinguishing it in language. Thus the perception of an object does not constitute perceiving an objective reality because objects arise only through structural coupling with other organisms in our medium. In addition, the observer cannot make just any observation but only those allowed by his "operation in structural coupling with the medium and furthermore - only those allowed by his structure" (Dell, 1985, p16).

The process of languaging enables one to complexify one's relationship with others. Languaging is seen as a social process versus one that occurs internally. Language is a way in which living systems may exist together collectively (Kenny, 1989).

Because observations derived through language can never be objective and arise through one's structural coupling and structure, all observations are equally valid, because they are determined by the observer's structure together with what that observer's interaction with the medium allows. Hence, all realities created by these observations are valid for each observer. This led Maturana (in Dell, 1985) to propose the concept of a 'multiverse' (p16), as opposed to living in a single universe. In a multiverse, objective, single truths are non-existent. Rather, there are as many truths as there are observers who make distinctions consistent with their structure. The concept of multiverses is important in a cybernetic epistemology in which an observer draws distinctions and thus creates his world. This leads us away from a logical positivist, linear belief which states that one true, objective reality exists, rendering the world the same for everyone.

Radical constructivism, espoused by Von Glasersfeld and Von Foerster, and detailed here through Maturana's theory of structure determinism is a useful way in which to escape the idea of an objectively knowable world and to view living systems as autonomous entities responsible for themselves, as opposed to viewing living systems as entities influenced by forces acting upon them. However, in the researcher's view, this theory leaves much room for criticism.

The fact that it extrapolates from studies of animals (i.e. frogs) to the behaviour of humans, and describes humans in abstract biological terms makes it difficult to identify with.

Similarly Laing (in Falzer, 1986) states that any theory about humans not based on the nature of being human is a "lie and a betrayal of man" (p353). According to Laing, such inhuman theory will ultimately lead to inhuman consequences.

The view of humans being structurally determined, structurally plastic entities that interact with their environment through structural coupling appears inhuman, abstract and incomprehensible, as opposed to everyday views of people with active minds who interact with others socially, thereby adapting to their environment.

Humans are seen as fully autonomous beings who are solely responsible for their behaviour - not because they consciously decide 'this is what they want to do' - but because their structure determines it for them. Therefore they are at the mercy of their predetermined structures. For the researcher, this view is extremely deterministic and is actually akin to a linear, causal model by stating that 'structure-determines', that is, structure causes, leaving no room for interpersonal influence through social interaction. Thus, this view does not seem to differ from a linear causal epistemology.

This theory states that what we know is a function of the interaction between the operation of our structure-determined bodies and the world out there (Dell, 1985). The emphasis on our bodies, as opposed to our minds, implies that our minds go along blindly with our structures and that it is our bodies, on the basis of biological and neurological equipment, that determine our behaviour. As humans however, according to Cushman (1987), we do not have adequate biological systems to guide us (as opposed to animals with instincts) and therefore we depend on knowing our world in a different way. As Sluzki (1992) states, our reality (i.e. what we know) and our description of this arises through social interaction and discourse. This differs from Maturana's conception of consensual domains. Although agreement is arrived at consensually to view reality in a certain way, this is only done for the system's survival, not for systems to exert any recursive influence on each other.

Although the theory states that interaction with others may trigger behavioural changes, it is the organism's structure that decides what changes will take place. As Varela (in Chubb, 1990) says "every system has its own organisation, its coherent identity . . . that fully specifies how the system will behave" (p170). This leaves no space for the possibility of mutual shaping of behaviour that may take place through social interaction. Mutual shaping differs from Maturana's notion of structural coupling in that the former implies recursivity so that individuals/systems grow and develop as a result of their recursive impact on each other. Structural coupling takes place only for the system to survive as an autopoietic unity. The recursive influence of the medium and the system is not necessary for survival, as the system develops individually. Therefore the social construction of ideas, their recursive interrelationship with society and their recursive fit with individual behaviour is ignored. This viewpoint implies that one's individuality is due to one's structure and closed organisation, which excludes the recursive interchange of others, such as peer groups, role models, family values and the like. As Minuchin (1991) states, one cannot forget that the individual or family exists in a social context. Viewing the family as a closed system ignores the fact that individuals and families are embedded in society and that their lives are shaped by the realities of "age, disease, ethnic identity, class, race, gender and economic condition" (Minuchin, 1991, p49). Thus, to envisage the individual/family as a closed system, only perturbed but not recursively influenced by wider social systems and social realities, is inconceivable.

The view of humans as closed structures, determined by their structure and therefore unpredictable to others is one that Tjersland (1990) opposes. According to him, certain events can be predicted with some certainty. If not, one's world would be a chaotic, disorganised one. He cites the example of arranging to meet a friend at a certain time and being fairly sure that such an arrangement can be organised and that it will take place. Therefore, although one's interactions with others can only perturb them, this does not mean that one is perturbing an unknown planet that is completely unpredictable. Rather, for Tjersland, because one's organisation and structure are created within a certain social arena, within a shared cultural language of understanding and within a similar society for both participants, one can expect others to behave with some degree of regularity and predictability. Thus Tjersland, along with Hoffman (1990) states that he favours the social constructionist's, especially Gergen's metaphors of reality, to those of Maturana.

The lack of meaning, purpose, values - in short, mental apparatus and human characteristics results in humans appearing to be robot-like structures, who interact mechanically and systematically only because they can and have no choice but to do so. The researcher finds the lack of human meaning in such behaviour disturbing due to her belief and subsequent subscription to a social constructionist theory that states that meaning is what enriches one's life and to a large extent, recursively shapes behaviour.

Similarly, Hoffman (1991), criticises the theory of structure-determinism for viewing people as being stuck in biological isolation booths, in which ideas are limited to the person's mind only ('skull-bound'). In this view, the construction of ideas takes place in an isolated nervous system. This creates a lonely image of man in which social interaction is carried out only to ensure that the system remains coupled to its medium so as to ensure survival. This differs from seeing the system as open to social influences that enable it to develop different ideas, shared meanings, shared feelings, and thereby become complexified. This theory does therefore not explain how people in a shared context come to agree on or arrive at a consensual view of reality.

Bateson (1972, 1979) viewed man as being recursively influenced by context, as opposed to being an isolated biological unit. He thus proposed the idea of "mind" as not being located within the individual, but rather as being a social phenomenon that takes place through conversation between people, so that 'mind' evolves, due to the recursive development of shared meanings. In order to reconcile the isolated view of man with the social view proposed by Bateson, Varela (in Hoffman, 1985, p386) has proposed the concept of "autonomous systems". An autonomous system is any entity made up of elements that may/may not in themselves be autopoietic, that is, able to produce themselves and thus survive. Thus an autonomous system may be the family, a nation, social districts and so on. However, although one may see these different entities interacting together to form a wider system, thereby including the concept of organism interacting with

environment, the view remains that of autonomous systems, thereby returning to the metaphor of interaction in order to survive, but not recursively influenced by these social processes.

The lack of accounting for context in this theory is also significant. The importance of the individual/system's recursive link with its wider context, in the form of historical and cultural mores, as well as social trends, is not mentioned. This is understandable given the view that humans can only behave according to their structure. According to Cushman (1987), who advocates a social constructionist position, one's sense of reality is inextricably constructed and derived from the cultural framework of one's era as well as the social interactions of everyday life, that is, by one's context, as opposed to Maturana's view of reality being an individual construction.

For Cushman (1987), as humans do not have biological instincts, a shared culture becomes the way they understand their world and learn how to act appropriately in it. If one does not have a cultural frame of reference, one would not know how to behave. In other words, according to Geertz (in Cushman, 1987) one's culture is an "indispensable part of one's very being" (p31). Cushman (1987) states that one's cultural frame of reference is made up of one's values, beliefs and language. These guide us as to how to behave in everyday life, as well as lay out the types of rituals we engage in, for example, weddings, ceremonies, our dress code and importantly, how we understand others. One's sense of identity is not individually constructed but arises due to one's relationship with parents, friends, one's position in one's culture, one's environment and everyday behaviour and experiences. These components comprise our reality and this is unavoidably culturally influenced. Therefore, the non accounting of contextual influence in Maturana's theory is seen as a serious weakness in viewing human behaviour.

Maturana's theory is however useful in some respects, such as the proposal of a non-objective reality, the belief in a constructed world, as well as the belief in the impossibility of instructive interaction which implies linear causality. The concept of multiverses opens up further possibilities instead of being committed to the idea of a single, objective universe in which only one truth presides. The view of humans as autonomous beings is an improvement on the logical positivist view of humans as passive receptors of environmental forces. However, overall the researcher regards the radical constructivist theory of Maturana as being untenable in view of the earlier criticisms.

## Social Constructivism with Emphasis on Anderson and Goolishian's theory of "Meaning-Generating" Systems

An alternative to the radical constructivist position is that of social constructivism, espoused by Anderson and Goolishian (1987). This view fully acknowledges the social influence of human behaviour, as opposed to radical constructivism's emphasis on the individual's skull-bound construction of reality. Social constructivism criticises radical constructivist models for ignoring the personal experiences of the individual and for viewing people as primarily "simple information-processing machines" versus "meaning-generating beings" (Anderson & Goolishian, 1992, p25).

The social constructivist viewpoint arises from the emerging belief in the social sciences that reality is a social construction arising through language. Language in this mode refers to the role it plays in determining meaning and the function it has as a form of social participation (Anderson & Goolishian, 1987). Central to this perspective is the essential role of meanings that are created through social interaction, resulting in this position being a semantic, narrative one (Anderson & Goolishian, 1992). Within this framework, human action does not take place according to individual structure but exists in "a reality of understanding that is created through social construction and dialogue" (Anderson & Goolishian, 1992, p26).

People make sense of their behaviour only through socially constructed realities as these give meaning and coherence to their behaviour. Language is seen as a conveyor of meaning, and as language can only take place in interaction with others, meaning is "interactional, local in nature, and is always changing" (Anderson & Goolishian, 1987, p32). Thus, meaning is created "intersubjectively" (Anderson & Goolishian, 1987, p532) which implies that people reach consensus about the meaning of things.

Going a step further than the radical constructivists, Anderson and Goolishian (1987) too believe that we do not have knowledge of an objective, external world or that reality is static and unchangeable, but instead, that we live according to our interpretations or attributions of meaning. These interpretations are not skull bound but arise through social interaction so that meaning and understanding are socially constructed, and do not exist until individuals engage in communication relevant to the persons interacting at the time. Thus, reality is a social construction and one behaves according to the reality co-constructed recursively in interaction with others. Because reality is socially co-created, there is no one fixed meaning to anything, but rather a "multiverse of meanings" (Anderson & Goolishian, 1987, p532) are created in social interaction that always evolves, and is co-evolutionary in nature. Therefore one is not stuck in a singular view of reality but instead can engage in dialogue that creates different world views.

From this view, people are not seen as structure-determined entities who do not have any purpose or meaning in their lives. Rather, human systems are viewed as "language-generating and simultaneously, meaning-generating systems" (Anderson & Goolishian, 1992,

p27), in which communication and dialogue define social organisation. From such a perspective, social systems are communication networks distinguished in and by language (Anderson & Goolishian, 1987, p532)

The major critique of this viewpoint is its primary emphasis on language without taking account of context. As opposed to a social constructionist framework in which the historical and cultural era as well as prevailing social codes impact on language and behaviour, this perspective does not take these factors into account. The relationship between meaning and action is not clearly elucidated, as opposed to Keeney and Ross's (1992) semantic and political frames of reference in which meaning and behaviour are seen as recursively affecting each other. Rather, from a social constructivist perspective, a view of human behaviour exists in which people engage in language, through this co-create their reality and through this arrive at shared understandings. However, what these meanings open for them and how they impact on their external behaviour is not clearly detailed. It seems as if the major action per se is one of 'being in language'.

However, the move to a view of human behaviour arising from social interaction and meaning being expressed through language, as the result of viewing reality as a social construction, is for the researcher just improvement on the closed "biological booths" (Hoffman, 1990, p3) espoused by Piaget's (in Dell, 1985) view of humanity.

The need to take a broader social and historical context into account, as well as to consider the influence of cultural and historical conventions on meaning and behaviour led the researcher to the theory of social constructionism, a discussion of which will now follow.

### Background of Social Constructionism

Viewing reality as socially co-constructed and placing these constructions in the framework of the mores, norms and behavioural codes prevalent at the time, as well as in day-by-day social interactions (Cushman, 1987), forms the basic premise of social constructionism. According to Hoffman (1991), social constructionist theorists believe that the process of social interaction gives rise to ideas, concepts and memories. This social interaction takes place through language so that "all knowledge evolves in the space between people in the realm of the "common world" (Hoffman, 1991, p.5). Thus, our beliefs about the world are socially created so that how one languages about the world does not reflect a true, objective reality but instead is a product of "communal interchange" (Hoffman, 1990, p3). As can be seen, this social constructionist view accords with the positions of radical constructivism and social constructivism in its delineation of a constructed world.

The *raison d'être* of this theoretical position will now be expanded upon.

Social constructionism arose as a reaction to two prevailing, competing intellectual traditions which embody two contrasting epistemologies and thus ways of viewing the world. These positions can be characterized as the exogenic and endogenic perspectives (Gergen, 1985b,

p269) which correspond roughly with the logical positivist linear epistemology and cybernetic non-linear epistemology, respectively. Thus, positivists, such as Locke, Hume and Mills view what we know about the world to be the objective truth that can be understood in terms of linear causality, whereas subscribers to the endogenic perspective such as Spinoza, Kant and Nietzsche believe that our knowledge of the world is dependent on the thinking and perceiving abilities of the organism, so that what one knows is through one's own creation. Thus reality is individually constructed. Moreover, this view accords with a cybernetic/ecosystemic epistemology in which understanding is gained by focusing on the wholeness of phenomena and the patterns that connect them within their context.

These two perspectives have been represented in psychological theory by behaviourism on the exogenic/positivist side and phenomenology and cognitive psychology on the endogenic side. Behaviourism emphasizes that the successful adaptation of the person to his environment depends on his adequate and accurate knowledge of that environment. With the primary focus on behaviourism, the endogenic perspective did not take root firmly in American psychology until approximately two decades ago in which it appears there was a major turnaround, with the emphasis on the endogenic perspective, represented primarily by cognitive psychology (Gergen, 1985b).

The primary proponent of this position within social psychology was Kurt Lewin, whose fellows and students carried out this tradition by studying social phenomena as opposed to those of physical reality, for example, the social comparison process, motivated perception, emotions as perceived and the like (Gergen, 1985b, p269). All of these, as well as further studies on cognitive processes extended Kurt Lewin's essential premise that "human action is critically dependent on the cognitive processing of information, that is, on the world as cognised rather than the world as it is" (Gergen, 1985b, p269). Thus, the shift to a view that we do not act on an objective world but rather behave in accordance with how we construct our world, is clear.

However, according to Gergen (1985b), although the shift has been towards embracing the endogenic perspective, with the emphasis on cognitive psychology, this shift in perspective is still not dominant in psychology and probably cannot be whilst the exogenic/positivist perspective remains the "metatheoretical basis of the science (psychology) itself" (Gergen, 1985, p269b). What Gergen is saying is that as long as the contemporary view of science remains committed to claiming that it is able to view the world in a totally objective way so as to determine its 'real' nature, and to the extent that the researcher on cognitive processes claims through his methodology that he has done so, the view that it is the world as cognised that we act on, as opposed to the world in itself that we act on, is threatened.

Thus, in attempting to establish objective truth (thereby implicitly subscribing to a logical positivist, exogenic epistemology), the researcher of cognitive processes undermines the significance and validity of the phenomena he attempts to explain. In addition, the exogenic perspective, with its emphasis on establishing regularity of relationships so as to be able to predict outcomes, ignores the meanings individuals attribute to experience, as well as

the manner in which individuals are connected to the dominant meaning systems of their time so as to understand their world (Gergen, 1985a). One has only to look at changes in fashion, contemporary music, views of politics, religion and so on, to gain a clear idea of how behaviour and ideas are influenced by the prevailing meaning structure of the time. Thus the exogenic perspective emphasises the view that human behaviour accords with one objective reality, and consequently undermines the view that one's behaviour and beliefs evolve with changing times. Thus, although it may be useful to study behaviour amongst non-living organisms or animals according to a logical positivist lens, this is not useful for looking at or understanding human behaviour which evolves over time.

Bateson (in Keeney, 1981) makes a significant contribution to our understanding by delineating the worlds of *pleroma* and *creatura*. Whilst it is useful to study forces between objects in the world of *pleroma* which accords with a positivist, linear epistemology, it is far more useful to study human behaviour in the world of *creatura*, where only ideas, not objects, exist. These ideas are created through social interaction, and consequently do not remain static but evolve constantly depending on who one is interacting with, guided always by the larger cultural and social context (Sluzki, 1992). In fact, one of the advantages of social constructionism, as opposed to radical constructivism, according to Hoffman (1990) is that social constructionist theory forwards an evolving set of meanings that arise from interpersonal interaction. These meanings do not arise individually within the person's mind, but arise through the flow of social interaction and narrative between people. This theory bypasses Maturana's theory of cognition as being biologically based, and, instead states that the generation of ideas and concepts is a dynamic process, arising through social interaction. Thus, a theory that considers the impermanence or evolutionary nature of human behaviour would be more meaningful than one that implies that human behaviour is unchanging, ahistoric and acontextual.

However, according to Gergen (1985b), it is unlikely that cognitivism will ever be the primary perspective in psychology. He argues for this by furnishing an account of the history of the philosophy of knowledge which he sees as characterised by pendulum swings through time, between favouring exogenic and endogenic perspectives:

the conflict between Plato's pure form of knowledge versus Aristotle's concern with the role of sensory experience, between the authority granted to experience by Bacon, Locke and Hume versus the rational capacities granted to the mind by Descartes, Spinoza and Kant. (Gergen, 1985b, p270)

He believes that although the endogenic, cognitivist perspective is currently the primary one, once the flaws of cognitivism are shown up in future psychological works, the pendulum will probably swing back to the exogenic perspective. Gergen (1985) already sees problems with cognitivism. For instance, in its extreme form, it appears as solipsism, that is, a world does not exist until we create it. This is illustrated by Von Glasersfeld's (1984) radical constructivist stance in which objects do not exist until an observer languages about them. In essence, this implies that a world does not exist until we distinguish it through language.

A further critique is that cognitivism also appears unable to account for how ideas or concepts originate, or the way in which cognitions impact on behaviour. This is illustrated by the social constructivist stance of Anderson and Goolishian (1987) in which the primary focus is on language to the extent that it appears that all humans do is engage in language, without considering the recursive relationship between language and behaviour.

It is as a reaction to these problems and to the history of the conflict between exogenic (logical positivist) and endogenic (constructivist) epistemologies that social constructionism has emerged.

### The Emergence of Social Constructionism

Over the last quarter of a century, the social sciences have expressed an interest in alternatives to the conventional logical positivist inquiry mode. According to Tiefer (in Witkin, 1990) the new approaches forwarded are endogenic (as stated) and stress the proactivity of persons in constructing their reality within the context of their culture. Contrary to this, logical positivist science is exogenic in nature and looks to the external world to structure reality.

In relation to the growing interest in a new epistemological framework, there has been an increase of attention among psychologists, in a philosophical model termed social constructionism (Rizzo, Corsaro & Bates, 1992). Social constructionism arose from Berger and Luckman's (1966) work "The social construction of reality", as well as from the philosophical and historical writings of Wittgenstein, Kuhn and Habermas (Witkin, 1990). Social constructionism has also existed in the field of social psychology for a long time (as said), especially represented by the work of researchers such as George Kelly with his theory of personal constructs, Kenneth Gergen and Clifford Geertz, all of whom stress the idea that knowledge is a social, as opposed to an objective construction (Hoffman, 1990).

One of social constructionism's major challenges has been to go beyond the traditional polarisation between exogenic and endogenic perspectives to develop a new framework based on an alternative, non-empiricist theory of the functioning and potentials of (psychological) science, as well as to "challenge the position of transcendental superiority claimed by those operating in the traditional scientific mode" (Gergen, 1985a, p5).

At its root is a challenge to the idea of knowledge being a purely mental representation, so that what we know is the result of a solely subjective individual process. This is espoused in radical constructivism and gives rise to problems such as solipsism, previously mentioned. On the other hand, taking a constructionist position also implies challenging the traditional ways in which inquiry is carried out based on the assumption of objectivity, such that the physical and social world is assumed to exist independently of us. Rather, social constructionism acknowledges that what is described in research/inquiry is inextricably linked to the researcher's involvement in describing it and therefore cannot exist "out there", independent of the researcher (Steier, 1991a). This is akin to the cybernetic principle of self-referentiality.

Social constructionism challenges the idea of knowledge as being either a purely individual creation (radical constructivism) or a pure reflection of objective reality (logical positivism). Berger and Luckman (1966) argue that reality is socially constructed through the use of shared and agreed meanings communicated through language, so that our beliefs about the world are "social inventions" (Speed, 1991, p400). Hoffman (1990) supports this in contending that within a social constructionist mode, the development of knowledge is a social phenomenon, such that perception and its' resultant knowledge can only be derived through people in interaction.

Therefore, although we construct our reality and as observers must take responsibility for our experience, this experience is socially and consensually created, as opposed to individually constructed. This is because we live in a world surrounded by others and are very much connected to others in our experience as well as in creating our identities.

Thus, for the social constructionist, the idea of objectively knowable truth is banished. According to Hoffman (1990), the social constructionists place far more emphasis than the radical constructivists on social interpretation and the intersubjective influences of history, language, family and culture, as a framework for understanding the world. This position had wide appeal for the researcher due to her shared belief that knowledge is co-created in interaction with others and that this co-created knowledge fits and evolves with the prevailing socio-cultural era's norms and values. This provides an understanding of changes in attitudes and beliefs over the years, due to the co-evolving nature of knowledge.

From this viewpoint, understanding of the world derives from people in relationship. Thus, social connectedness versus isolated minds should be a significant vantage point from which to study views of reality (Gergen, 1989) as well as what people take to be knowledge. This research therefore focuses on the social connectedness between family members and the particular reality they have created for themselves through their interrelationship with each other as well as with wider society and culture.

To sum up, one's understandings of reality are created through dialogue which creates social constructions and this is therefore the place to study human behaviour. These socially constructed realities provide the meaning and organisation for our experience. This concept relates to the earlier description of the recursive link between meaning and behaviour, as the world we socially construct for ourselves in dialogue with others (i.e. our meanings) delimits the type of behaviour we can carry out in that world, and recursively, how we behave in that world continually confirms our social construction of it.

For instance, in the family under discussion, their ideas around homosexuality informed their language about it. Through their dialogical interchange their ideas became socially constructed (meaning frame) and subsequently recursively informed their behaviour (political frame) toward the son's disclosure of homosexuality, and with regard to wider society.

It can be seen that social constructionism offers an alternative lens with which to view

and understand the world. This perspective, according to Witkin (1990), accords with an ecosystemic/cybernetic one in which humans are not seen as passive receptors of impersonal environmental forces, nor as autonomous agents acting without any limitations, or as Maturana (in Dell, 1985) would say, as structure-determined entities behaving only in accordance with their structures. Instead, the recursive interrelationship among environmental factors such as historical and cultural norms, social relationships and individual purposes is emphasised. Thus the individual's behaviour within his social and cultural context is all important.

For social constructionist theorists, the most important feature underlying human behaviour and interaction is the meaning or communicative purpose of the actors, as well as the focus on the recursive interrelationship between meaning and action.

Social constructionist theorists believe that the assignment of meaning (semantic) to action (political frame), "the sign-meaning relationship" (Rizzo et al., 1992, p10) is not a simple and direct one, but, as said earlier, is constructed and negotiated interpersonally. Therefore the meanings we have about certain issues, such as family, dating, wealth and so on do not arise simply, but are the complex result of social interaction. Like the earlier statement that our beliefs about the world are social inventions, so too are our meanings "observer generated co-constructions" (Penn & Sheinberg 1991, p31), as opposed to reified entities. Furthermore, not only are these meanings socially constructed but they are also automatically influenced by pre-existing "sign-meaning" (Rizzo et al, 1992, p31) cultural norms. It can be seen that the relationship between one's present beliefs and ideas is recursively influenced by previous cultural norms. For instance, our beliefs about homosexuality today are inextricably influenced by pre-existing cultural beliefs of it being an aberration of mankind, a sexual deviation, a mental illness and so on.

To give a formal definition of social constructionism, the term may be separated into two components: constructionism refers to the idea that each individual formulates reality from his specific viewpoint; hence there are as many realities as there are individuals with viewpoints. This accords with the radical constructivist position of Von Foerster, Von Glasersfeld and Maturana. However, the social aspect is paramount, as social traditions and social consensus are closely connected with one's personal perspective, in a recursive manner. These influences are transmitted through symbolic action - language. Thus, "the beliefs that construct realities are not ideas in the minds of people, they are generated in communication processes, so that . . . realities are maintained through social interaction which, in turn, confirm the beliefs that are then socially originated" (Fruggeri, 1992, p43). This again feeds back to the recursive relationship between meaning and behaviour.

Gergen and Davis (in Steier, 1991a) sum constructionism up as follows: "constructionism refers to the movement within the human sciences which sees knowledge as a result of social processes and which points to the linguistic interaction and socially shared character of knowledge" (p143) as well as its embeddedness in a particular cultural history and context.

## Core Assumptions of Social Constructionism

Gergen (in Witkin 1990) has described four basic assumptions of social constructionism, "a metatheory that attempts to elucidate the sociohistorical context and ongoing social dynamics of descriptions, explanations and accountings of reality" (p38).

### Assumption One

Conventional understanding and knowledge of the world is not objective, proved through observation or hypothesis testing. Rather, this understanding is influenced by "linguistic convention, cultural assumptions and historical precedents" (Witkin, 1990, p38).

By viewing knowledge as the result of linguistic, cultural and historical factors as opposed to viewing this as objective truth, social constructionism assumes a critical viewpoint from which to study the world.

Within such a perspective, our understanding of the world refers to our knowledge of it. This knowledge is, however, not objective. Rather, the social epistemology of social constructionism views knowledge as residing in patterns of social relatedness, versus the individual mind (radical constructivism). Therefore what are assumed to be knowledgeable assertions about the world are actually the products of social relatedness.

From such a viewpoint, scientific evidence is not the result of individual discovery but lies in patterns of social relationships. Therefore, shared agreement amongst a group of people such as scientists is necessary to decide whether or not something worthwhile has been discovered.

According to Bohan (1990) and Delia (1977), knowledge and research are limited by the particular paradigm prevalent in the scientific community at the time. This is necessary as all discovery of knowledge must be grounded within a framework of basic assumptions, as concepts can only be meaningful within a particular paradigm or world view (Delia, 1977). One accepts the conceptual frame of reference of a particular paradigm because one believes that it creates a useful way of understanding a range of phenomena. Therefore, within a social constructionist perspective, the shift is to viewing scientific theories as being developed within a particular historical context and agreed upon by the scientific community to be 'true' for that time. Thus, "science and scientific paradigms are social creations" (Delia, 1977, p81). For instance, the Newtonian logical-positivist paradigm has been the dominant one for many years. As a result, most phenomena have been studied in terms of this paradigm - a paradigm of force, push and pull, and concrete entities versus the cybernetic paradigm of form and pattern. This has led to the application of logical positivist methodology in order to interpret and understand social and human phenomena, and relates to White and Epston's (in Speed, 1991) view that the particular meanings we ascribe to behaviour are determined by the "dominating analogies or interpretive frameworks of the time" (p400). The logical positivist framework has been the dominating analogy of our time.

Therefore, for the social constructionist, the most 'sure' way of knowing the world is the

realisation that how we understand the world is through our belief in a particular socially created conceptual scheme, that organises and makes sense of our experience. Thus, the tendency to believe in objective facts and reify these entities through language (what the ecosystemic/cybernetic theorists warn about), for example, "schizophrenia, menopause, altruism" (Gergen, 1985b, p267) is a practice the social constructionists criticise. Instead, constructionism asks that one remain sceptical of commonly accepted categories and understandings that are given their 'reality' through 'objective' observation. By so doing, the possibility of an objective basis to conventional knowledge is disputed. The importance of being open minded in this regard is that the belief in one objective truth and one way of viewing the world can lead to inflexibility, rigidity and consequently, to dangerous social practices. For instance, if, as in during the times of the Holocaust, the view existed today seen as an objective truth that Jews, gypsies, homosexuals and weaklings are inferior, and therefore deserving of punishment, what would the consequences be? The dangers of labelling in mental illness are widely known. Once a person is labelled, he tends to be treated in terms of that label and is progressively socialised into that role, instead of viewing the person's behaviour from another perspective, for example, looking at family context.

Thus, when examined, these 'objective' facts are shown to be highly specified by "culture, history or social context" (Gergen, 1985b, p267). According to Hoffman (1991), social constructionists believe that there are no unchangeable social truths - only stories about the world that we engage in with self and others. Sluzki (1992) points out that these stories make up our social world and may vary with emphasis on different aspects, depending on who we are interacting with at a given time. As our life changes and other events become more meaningful, our stories change accordingly. Furthermore, these stories are firmly embedded within a social framework and a larger sociocultural context. Thus they do not remain fixed and unchangeable, but evolve, in the same way as so-called objective facts do, so that 'truth' always evolves. Witkin (1990) backs this up by citing examples of changes in theories over time where he explains how these theories are culturally and historically determined and serve to perpetuate certain practices. He quotes an example of the widely-held assumption that mental retardation is an irreversible condition, which negates attempts to work with mentally retarded people. He also cites how research and therapy, by their association with scientific ideology may create knowledge and practices that maintain stereotypic beliefs about women and their role in marriage (Witkin, 1990). However today, regarding the first example, mentally retarded people are viewed as having limited potential to learn. Likewise, due to changing societal and economic conditions, many women earn and are often the primary breadwinners in the house, leading to very different conceptualisations of women's role in marriage. These examples illustrate the evolving basis of knowledge, and its recursive impact on subsequent behaviour.

As illustrated, our knowledge of the world is usually learnt via theories. These theories become lenses used by people to understand and categorise themselves and others (Witkin, 1990). Because theory plays a powerful role in contributing towards beliefs and behaviour, the social constructionist perspective does not undermine theory as being secondary to methods but rather views theory as significantly connected with one's perception and behaviour.

Gergen (in Witkin, 1990) describes theory as having an "agentive or generative role" (p41) due to its strong connection with thinking and behaviour. If one studies the recursive relationship between one's theoretical concepts and subsequent behaviour, theory can be seen as a form of action, illustrating the recursive relationship between meaning (i.e. theory) and behaviour (Keeney & Ross, 1992). From such a perspective, theories can no longer be viewed as abstract, neutral formulations disconnected from the 'real' world. Instead, due to its 'agentive' role, theory can be seen as a powerful tool, recursively linked with thought and behaviour. For instance, many years ago, psychological theories of racial differences led one to a stereotype that black people were inferior and that their brains were less developed than those of white people. This gave rise to a system of segregation in which discrimination was practiced against black people. This clearly points to the recursive relationship between theory, thought and behaviour.

Within a social constructionist framework, theory should not be evaluated on the basis of empirical evidence, but instead should be evaluated on the basis of the social and intellectual utility of viewing life in this way (Stroebe & Kruglanski, 1989). Therefore scientific theories are not seen to be useful because of their ability to generate information about the world that can make predictions for the future. Instead, theories obtain their usefulness from their position within the practices of the scientific community (Gergen, 1989). These theories allow members of such a community to co-ordinate their actions with each other. They are able to do this through language. Social constructionism therefore does not view scientific activity to be useless. It acknowledges the significant, useful achievements rendered through science but views the 'language of science' in a different way. Instead of viewing scientific language as a way to represent the real world, the constructionist focuses on the functional use of language in science. According to Gergen and Gergen (in Steier, 1991a) this means that scientific lingo is crucial as it "coordinates the activities of scientific communities around mutually agreed upon problems" (p78). Again, there is a move to viewing knowledge as existing not within one individual, or within abstract descriptions and explanations, but rather, knowledge represented through language is "part of the coordinated activities of individuals which are used to accomplish locally-agreed upon purposes concerning the real and the good" (p74).

Therefore, from a social constructionist perspective, the criteria with which to evaluate scientific theories differ from those of a logical positivist perspective. For the social epistemologist, such theories do not have to be internally consistent in the logical positivist sense. Instead, a theory should be comprehensible to a community of scientists. Theory in the social constructionist perspective does not have to reflect objective facts, as no such facts are deemed to exist. Instead, as long as the community of scientists regard the theory as being consistent with what they view to be 'facts', it is deemed worthwhile, remembering all the time that these facts are only "firmly embedded beliefs" (Stroebe & Kruglanski, 1989, p487). According to Kuhn (in Delia, 1977), scientific progress must be accounted for by "examining the nature of the scientist group, discerning what it values, what it tolerates and what it disdains" (p82). From Kuhn's perspective, this implies that science, like other human enterprises, is grounded within a cultural system that is developed within a historical context. Therefore no objective

logic or standard of evaluation exists beyond that established by the scientific community itself. The scientists' view of what is rational and credible reflects historically created standards of evidence and argument as well as a methodology that differentiates the scientific way of viewing the world from other ways of thinking. Therefore an important aspect of the scientific enterprise is to come to understand how scientists reason to co-create the choices they make within the scientific community. Yet, this is a paradoxical task as one cannot step outside of the logic system created by scientists in evaluating their work, rendering the endeavour a self-referential one.

Hence, from the social constructionist perspective, theories (psychological and otherwise) do not reflect "absolute, transhistorical truth" (Cushman, 1987, p30). Instead, theories are created within a particular era. Although certain theories may be useful when looking at a particular issue, they are not universally applicable to all people and issues across time. These theories must be used on the understanding that they are bound by the cultural frame of reference of their place and time. Furthermore, at another level, the particular prevailing theory is also a cultural artifact and can therefore be studied to understand the particular perspective, values and reality orientation of its era. As Cushman states, "the elaborate psychological theories of this century . . . are themselves part of the historical landscape. These theories are products of the same cultural and social system they are attempting to understand" (p32).

The view of theories being the product of a particular era and representing the value systems of the era is clearly exemplified when examining homosexuality in its historical context.

Homosexuality used to be listed in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (American Psychiatric Association, 1958) as a mental illness reflecting the cultural view of homosexuality as a mental illness to be diagnosed and treated. Legally, in many countries it is still considered a punishable offence. Today, however, it is no longer included in the manual as a form of pathology. Rather it is viewed far more tolerantly by society in which it is often considered to be a sexual preference as opposed to an inherent illness. Thus, social and cultural constructions are seen to play an important role in determining the theories generated in an era, pointing to the recursive relationship between meaning (theory) and action.

With the development of AIDS, attitudes towards homosexuality have become more negative due to the association between the two. This illustrates the social and cultural context of knowledge. As Gergen (in Gergen & Gergen, 1987) states, "various forms of deviance are not essentially empirical in nature, but are created through systems of socially shared labels. The deviant is thus a product of those who label" (p193). It can be hypothesised that in the past, the idea of "coming out of the closet" was hardly entertained, and instead, homosexual people were generally seen as somewhat depraved. Later it became almost fashionable to be friendly with homosexual people, to demonstrate one's open-mindedness and liberalism. Again, it can be hypothesised that currently more people are able to admit to being homosexual and are able to "come out" to their families than was previously possible, due to the evolution

of different views around homosexuality. This emphasises the significance of social changes and how these changes impact upon theories developed about homosexuality, and subsequent languaging about and behaviour towards homosexuals. This once again illustrates the recursive link between meaning and action. Thus from the social constructionist point of view, it has been clearly illustrated that psychological and other knowledge is "historically and culturally situated . . . normatively sustained, and subject to deterioration and decay as social history unfolds" (Gergen, 1985, p271).

It must be understood that the way in which the process of disclosure is described in this study is influenced by prevalent views of homosexuality today determined by the cultural and historical context. The description is also naturally influenced by the researcher's own social context, her epistemology as well as values and ideas around homosexuality. This description is one way of looking at this family and is by no means objective truth. It may fit well for this family in Western society in the mid 1990's, but may not be useful in other times or eras.

As a result, in looking at a theory one should always ask, "for whom is this theory useful and why?" Each theory will support certain social practices whilst threatening others. Hence, a further important question to ask of various theories is the types of practices they support? According to Stroebe and Kruglanski (1989), a major question to ask when adopting a particular theoretical lens is in what way would one's life be enriched or impoverished by so doing. It can then be asked what practices the theory of social constructionism supports? Earlier on this was alluded to in Gergen and Gergen's statement (in Steier, 1991a) that social constructionism supports the "real and the good" (p78). However, that too is murky as it depends upon who agrees what is real and good and why, as no objective 'real and good' exists.

This leads one to the issue of values in constructionism. The fact that knowledge is historically and culturally situated and can be seen as a form of social action means that social scientists should always consider the moral and value implications of their actions. From such a perspective, the value-free, amoral stand of objectivity is not possible. This is particularly poignant in social constructionist research, as the researcher cannot ignore that her value system will impact on her research, on her subjects and that her presence will influence the research situation and the role she plays in constructing the reality of her research participants. (Ravn, 1991a).

Therefore, from a social constructionist standpoint, the activities of researchers are inescapably "value-laden as the basic categories by which the world is understood involve value choices" (Witkin, 1990). Thus, as cited earlier, theories such as blacks being inferior, result in dangerous social practices such as discrimination. These are backed up as scientific 'proof' instead of being viewed as value laden choices.

As a result, various second-order cybernetic writers have offered certain ways of dealing with these research implications. Von Foerster (in Steier, 1991a) advocates acting always so as to increase the number of choices one has. Krippendorff encourages us to give others

the autonomy that we practise in constructing them. Gergen urges that one creates fresh options for social action and Von Glasersfeld beseeches us to consider others (Ravn, 1991).

All of the above point to an awareness of flexibility, diversity and complexity versus the rigidifying practices created through the belief in one objective reality. They all point to the possibility of many choices in action as well as to the consideration of others in so doing. According to Ravn (1991), from a constructionist viewpoint, this amounts to an advocacy of "classical liberal values" (freedom to choose, generating alternatives, granting others autonomy" (Ravn, 1991, p97), as well as having a concern and respect for others.

Liberal values accord well with a constructionist standpoint as the epistemology of constructionism is a liberating one. The implications of thinking along social constructionist lines are that we do not have to be constrained by a belief in one objective reality, but instead that we are responsible for co-creating our reality in association with others, so that the range of choices is wide and alternatives are always possible. Thus, one is free to choose as long as one's choice respects others. However, the range of choices available is always co-constructed. These can be seen as the social practices that social constructionism supports, in accordance with the viewpoint that knowledge and subsequent behaviour is historically and socially situated.

#### Assumption Two

The second core assumption of social constructionism is that the way in which we understand and describe (language about) the world is the result of active social negotiation between persons in relationship.

The role of language as a social process is primary. From this perspective, the perception of objects does not arise from the cognitive processes of an individual observer (as held by radical constructivism), but arises through language which is a social process. According to Gergen and Gergen (in Steier, 1991a) it is through social interaction that language and description of events is generated, maintained or discarded.

This viewpoint enables us to realise that the way in which we describe and understand the so-called objective world is inescapably influenced by the conventions of language and other social processes. According to Gergen and Gergen (in Steier, 1991a), the emphasis is on the collective meanings created by people as together they describe and explain their world through language. The implication of this is that the ability to change the way we understand our world is connected more with the language, culture, history and moral codes used in explanations, than on a 'direct' reading of facts.

Accordingly Sluzki (1992) believes that language is not representational, in that it does not provide a true representation of an objective world. Rather is derived from and expressed through one's descriptions of events, ideas, feelings and experiences. These descriptions are, in turn, generated through social interactions that recursively shape these descriptions - pointing to the recursion between and evolutionary nature of meaning and action.

Delia (1977) also points to the social constructionist emphasis on the "reciprocal and emergent creation of meaning as a joint product of a socially shared code" (p70). It is necessary to emphasise that although all description arises through social interaction, this description is historically and socially situated. Witkin (1990) provides examples of this by pointing out that concepts of self, children and marriage have evolved over different historical periods and across different cultures. Within a particular period or culture, these concepts set a parameter on how it is feasible to language about such topics. Therefore, what we do in interaction with others, in the specific social period, allows certain ideas to be expressed that recursively inform subsequent action, whilst other ideas are not entertained. Hence, it is important to be aware of cultural and historical factors in shaping our use and understanding of such concepts.

It can be deduced that the way in which the family of this study, within their particular social and cultural context languaged about homosexuals and the 'gay' world, was due to their social co-creation of meanings. Their experience and understanding of their world and of their son/brother's disclosure was socially co-created and may have been different in another time/culture.

### Assumption Three

The third assumption of social constructionism is that major forms of understanding prevailing at a given time are not necessarily those that have been tested the most vigorously and found to be 'true', but those that are most socioculturally useful in achieving desired ends.

From the social constructionist perspective, each historical period creates its own specific reality. Corresponding to that reality is the creation of "a whole constellation of culturally syntonic artifacts" (Cushman, 1987, p31) that reflect and to an extent uncover that particular era, so that, in a manner, they are the pointers to understanding that particular historical context.

Thus, constructionism can be said to put forward a "history of cultural assumptions and social expectations" (Cushman, 1987, p32). According to constructionist thought, by understanding and coming to grips with the specific cultural framework of a society, one can understand what individuals within that society view as truth and falsehood, enjoyment and displeasure, lawful and illicit, illusion and reality, and so on, as all of these are open to change, as time and culture changes.

However, as political, economic and social gain are considered significant factors in contributing to the dominance of one form of knowledge over another, social constructionists, in their drawing of distinctions must be aware of what is morally and socially just, raising again the question of the types of practices social constructionism supports, as well as the question of who decides what is morally and socially just.

This leads to Foucault's (in White & Epston, 1990) notions of "power / knowledge" (p21)

and truth. According to Foucault, when one thinks in general of power, one tends to think of its repressive and oppressive nature, for example, those in power such as apartheid proponents oppressing the majority. However, according to him, the predominant experience of power is not a repressive one, but rather, the power individuals experience daily is of a "constitutive" (p19) nature - "that we are subject to power through normalizing 'truths' that shape our lives and relationships" (p19). Truth in this sense does not reflect an objective reality but rather, reflects constructed ideas that are then believed to be truth. These ideas ('truths') are then accepted as the norm around which people shape their lives and behave. Therefore these 'truths' are very powerful. For instance, the 'truth' of one generation, that children should be seen and not heard resulted in adults treating children in a dismissive manner and berating them if they spoke too much. This constructed 'truth' was very powerful and shaped people's attitudes with regard to their view of and behaviour towards children. Such truths were seen as the norm. In the same way, 'truths' of this kind dominated the ideology of whole societies in recursively shaping ideas and behaviour.

The view of power as constitutive of one's life, in that we are all subject to ideas that we take to be objective truth and thus behave accordingly has a powerful influence in maintaining certain behavioural practices. Foucault (in White & Epston, 1990) believes that power and knowledge cannot be separated as a particular form of dominant knowledge is powerful in influencing how we live our lives.

Thus, akin to the social constructionists who query which theories are useful for whom and to what purpose, Foucault (in White & Epston, 1990) also confronts the question of those who promote one form of knowledge over another. In turn, he questions what other knowledge forms could be developed so that the dominant one would be disconfirmed and, in turn, which person/group of persons would be placed in an unfavourable position, as a result of another form of knowledge/power presiding.

For instance, in relation to homosexuality, McIntosh (in Epstein, 1991) states that:

'the homosexual' has come to occupy a specific social role in modern societies, since homosexual *practices* are widespread but socially threatening . . . a special stigmatized category of *individuals*, is created so as to keep the rest of society pure. By this means, a clear cut, publicized and recognizable threshold between permissible and impermissible behaviour is constructed, anyone who begins to approach that threshold is immediately threatened with being considered a fully fledged deviant. (p829)

This is similar to Gergen's (in Gergen & Gergen, 1987) earlier description of the social construction of a deviant person and is illustrative of how a dominant form of knowledge (seen as objective truth versus a socially and culturally constructed idea) is extremely powerful in allowing certain social practices to emerge in achieving desired ends. According to Epstein (1991) the desired ends are that by viewing homosexual behaviour as deviant, the rest of society is provided with a baseline against which to compare their "goodness" or "purity" - this being an implicit moral judgement versus a truth. Because such behaviour is seen

to be 'really' and 'truly' deviant, an important social function is served.

According to Epstein (1991), concepts such as lesbian, homosexual, bisexual and heterosexual are purely social constructions. They may be viewed simply as labels of a category but the powerful impact they have on the way one's 'reality' is perceived and experienced cannot be ignored.

Thus, as earlier stated, for researchers, the importance of considering the moral and value implications of their findings cannot be underestimated. As a researcher, instead of attempting to control or eliminate the effects of one's value position (as in the logical positivist mode), one is encouraged to openly explore the possible value perspectives put forward in their research and the possible moral messages their findings put forward, so as not to consider their interpretations as the only possible truth, but instead to see them as being culturally, historically and socially situated. In so doing, the researcher joins the "cultural dialogue about competing human values" (Gergen, 1982, p45).

Thus, in this research, the researcher will actively state her values and views of homosexuality and disclosure so that her findings may be clearly understood in terms of that perspective. This relates to Bateson's (1979) view that all human endeavours, such as science, art and religion are based on presuppositions, and all behaviour concerned with the activity in question is therefore implicitly guided by these presuppositions. Thus, it is preferable for the scientist/researcher to be consciously aware of and able to state his presuppositions. Furthermore, it is necessary for those evaluating the research as well as for readers of the research to be aware of the presuppositions of the researcher.

This assumption leads one to consider what the dominant knowledge around homosexuality in the 1990s is, and how this contributed towards the process of disclosure and behaviour around homosexuality in the family of this study. (This dominant knowledge will be illustrated in the following chapter).

#### Assumption Four

The fourth core assumption of social constructionism is that what one understands does not reflect an objective reality, but rather that one's understanding is a mode of social action, negotiated with others and intimately connected to one's behaviour. Therefore, according to Gergen (in Witkin, 1990) the way in which we describe and explain the world is significantly linked with our patterns of action. Thus, it is not objective understanding but socially shaped understanding that impacts on how we behave and treat others.

In accordance with this assumption, Delia (1977), states that one of the main aims/purposes of constructionist theory is to produce an understanding of behaviour in terms of "the shared knowledge, the linguistic system, and . . . individual interpretive processes" (p70) prevalent, as the perspective of each person is unavoidably influenced by these processes.

On a broad scale, all of society's major rules result from negotiated understanding and depend upon shared agreement, otherwise they would not be adhered to. This understanding of 'what is' again informs people's ideas and subsequent action. For instance, the socially shared agreement in the past about homosexuality being a mental illness or criminal activity led to certain actions towards homosexuals that were consensually determined by society. Thus descriptions (homosexuals are mentally sick and criminal) and explanations of the world, in themselves, constitute forms of social action, as these descriptions and explanations invite certain possibilities for directing behaviour and constraining other behaviours. This relates to the previous assumption in which Foucault (in White & Epston, 1990) questions how the dominant knowledge that prevails limits other forms of knowledge and consequently other forms of action.

Therefore, description and explanation on a negotiated scale are enmeshed with the whole range of human activities pointing to the complementarity between description and behaviour. If social description and explanation are altered (e.g., nowadays homosexuality is seen as a sexual preference versus a mental illness), certain patterns of action are threatened and others are co-evolved and made possible. (e.g. currently instead of reacting negatively towards homosexual people, one is encouraged to accept them and to get to know more about them).

Hence, to understand human action, it is not enough merely to 'objectively' observe (if that were possible) but one must participate in the contemporary cultural and social system of understanding. Scientists operating in the logical positivist, exogenic mode, through their acts of description, claim to have discovered a 'true' representation of what exists in the world, leading to a view of truths being unchangeable and fixed over time. Therefore, according to Gergen (in McNamee & Gergen, 1982) terminology such as "repression, socioeconomic class" (p2) is seen to be the result of keen observation. In terms of social constructionism, it is seen as lenses of the theorist, the world not actually being so unless seen through that specific lens.

From this point of view, it can be seen how the scientists' lenses together with their particular theoretical context, are very powerful in implying certain forms of action, whilst limiting others. If one considers the history of the professional attitude towards unconventional behaviour, an example is furnished. According to Gergen (in Mc Namee & Gergen, 1992) early in the century, psychologists spoke of "mental illness" - a description implying that these individuals should be treated in a manner somewhat similar to the physically ill. By this act of description, a logic for action is implied that is an active intervention into social life. According to Gergen (in Mc Namee & Gergen, 1992) by incorporating scientific description, society "absorbs a value structure with widespread behavioural implications" (p30). On a macro scale, this is carried out through negotiated understanding. Langman (1986) refers to Foucault and other theorists who have shown how professions and the theories upon which normality, health and needs are based often serve to justify and legitimate particular types of social arrangements and class structures, at the expense of others.

It must be remembered that the way one languages about phenomena and the language terms that are used in theories, descriptions and explanations are essentially historical and cultural products that may change over the course of historical periods. In this sense, language is functional in that it is not viewed as a symbol system to represent the world but is instead a "performance means for coordinating activities" (Steier, 1991b, p5). This shift in how one considers language leads to a view in which language cannot be separated from the context in which it takes place, leading to the acknowledgement of non-objectivity, and recursion between the two.

According to Gergen and Gergen (in Steier, 1991a) from a social constructionist perspective, the goal is to acknowledge the "linguistic implications of preferred positions more fully, and to invite the expression of alternate voices or perspectives into one's activities" (p79), so as not to become rigid in one's beliefs and subsequent behaviour. The present research is one attempt to open up a different dialogue on the process of disclosure of homosexuality and its meanings in a particular family, as opposed to the currently held rigid view, reflected in the following chapter.

On a microscale, social constructionists point out that our ideas and beliefs are not only connected with wide scale historical norms but are also interlinked recursively with our participation in a particular social group. What one perceives, the subsequent meanings one ascribes and ones' consequent behaviour are all connected with one's membership of a social group (Speed, 1991). For instance, in one type of family, open conflict and expression of feelings may be the norm, whereas in another this may be seen as disturbing, and withdrawal versus open conflict may be encouraged.

This relates to Anderson and Goolishian's (1992) formulation of "locally constructed understanding and a local (dialogic) vocabulary" (p33). This refers to the shared meaning and understanding that individual members of a family develop together (as in the above example) via dialogue, rather than a broadly held societal viewpoint. This 'local' understanding enables family members to comprehend immediately and implicitly all references and nuances relating to the family's past and present events.

From this perspective, the question of how a family is organised is essentially "how the ideas and behaviour of every member support and sustain the ideas and behaviour of every other family member, so the system displays order, pattern and redundancy" (Bogdan, 1984, p341). Thus, a family can be conceptualised as a "flexible entity composed of people with shared meanings" (Lax, 1992, p70) and these meanings give the family their shared identity as well as their concept of the type of behaviour and ideas permitted and required within the family.

For instance, when looking at the types of families described in the following chapter, it can be postulated that their particular ideas around homosexuality (that it is a negative experience to have a homosexual child, homosexuality is deviant, abnormal behaviour), recursively informed their subsequent reaction to their child's disclosure (reaction of horror, shame, sadness,

and disappointment). This type of social construction is idiosyncratic, characterised by one's participation in a particular group.

It can be concluded that certain rules and regulations are applied in a family as a result of family decision making and consensus. This is generally not an intentional or conscious process. The deciding factor in these rules and regulations is still a social construction, in a microcosm. This assumption has been found to be useful in considering the family of this study's socially/locally constructed meanings about themselves as a family and their view towards homosexuality as well as how these implicit meanings, values and frame of reference fit with the way they react to their son's disclosure of homosexuality.

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These are four of the major assumptions of social constructionism in which the move is from an "experiential to a social epistemology" (Gergen, 1985). It can be seen that although these four assumptions have been separately outlined, there is a great deal of overlapping and similarity between them, highlighting their recursion and the difficulty of trying to fragment what is essentially holistic.

Cushman (1987) concludes that in taking a constructionist stance to research, one is forced to realise how vulnerable and fragile the constructed basis of human social life is. The mere recognition that our most firmly held beliefs are only constructions versus reality is often a disquieting, threatening one that is not easily tolerated by researchers and others. However, there are benefits to be derived. He concludes:

to grasp the remarkable interrelatedness of a culture, to sense for an instant how the disparate pieces fit into the whole, to understand the innocence, the beauty, and the brave fiction of it all - this is one of the sacred moments." (Cushman 1987, p41)

### Social Constructionism and Second-Order Cybernetics

Although implied throughout, more specific linkages between second-order cybernetics and social constructionism will now be discussed so as to further justify the appropriateness of using social constructionist theory in accordance with a second-order cybernetic epistemology for this research.

Both social constructionism and second order cybernetics are concerned with the process of *how* we know what we do, versus *what* (i.e. the content) we know - (ontology).

In this, the most obvious similarity between the two approaches is their view of a constructed reality. Both state that no objective reality exists. A cybernetic epistemology does so by including the observer in the observed and acknowledging the paramount position of the observer in drawing distinctions and punctuating reality

Cybernetic epistemology believes in the notion of self-reflexivity, that is, that the observer participates in creating what he knows. It views the acquisition of knowledge as a circular process in which multiple realities can be constructed, as long as they are functional (i.e. able to exist) within their particular environment/context. One has to participate in this circular process of co-construction in order to 'know' anything.

Social constructionism too rejects the idea of an objective reality and instead acknowledges the constructed nature of knowledge. Its move is to a social epistemology in that relationships, identities, emotions and the like are seen to be socially constructed through language, and intersubjectively co-constructed between people. Like cybernetics, it recognises the recursive, self-reflexive nature of knowledge in which the observer cannot be separated from the observed. The observer is included in the construction of reality by viewing reality as socially co-constructed, so that much of what one knows is socially negotiated with others. Social constructionism goes a step further than cybernetics by taking into account the wider sociocultural context with its prevalent norms, beliefs, and values, and critically questions its impact on ideas and behaviour.

Social constructionist research stresses a focus on process which shifts attention from what is produced in interaction to the actual process of social production, connected with historical and cultural conventions. This process of social production is reflected by one's languaging and calls attention to the "constructive qualities of everyday activities" (McNamee, 1989, p93).

This links with cybernetics' emphasis on form and pattern, as opposed to material phenomena. Cybernetics' way of patterning events is akin to looking at how the processes of social production are coordinated. Cybernetics' focus on language as an activity which promotes certain distinctions and constructions clearly links it with the social constructionist emphasis on language being a form of action, reflecting certain cultural norms (McNamee, 1989).

The cybernetic/ecosystemic focus on whole interactive systems so as to generate a complete pattern that connects links with social constructionism's "celebration of complexity" (McNamee, 1989, p95). Because social constructionism focuses on the social construction of meanings and behaviours, it is necessary to look at these constructions in terms of whole interactive systems so as to generate rich and complex descriptions of social phenomena.

It can be seen that the overall compatibility between the two render social constructionism an appropriate theory for second-order cybernetic research.

### Conclusion

Taking social constructionism and second-order cybernetics as the framework guiding the researcher's conclusions, it will be shown that the family's co-constructed meanings and actions around the son's disclosure is recursively tied to their co-constructed familial rules and norms, as well as to their relationship with broader society. Taking historical context

into account also reminds one that the distinctions drawn by the researcher are subject to current trends and are based on socially accepted viewpoints, as well as on her own ideas about homosexuality and disclosure.

Due to the subjectivity of experience, and in accordance with the principle of self-referentiality that characterises the processes of knowledge, the analysis that the researcher makes of the family under discussion cannot be considered an objective description, but is in fact a reflection of what her social constructions enable her to see. The researcher accepts responsibility for her conclusions and acknowledges that other readers may not agree with them and are free to construct their own distinctions (after reading the transcripts in the appendix - the 'raw' data). Naturally the researcher's distinctions are not constructed in a vacuum, but through interaction with the family. The researcher's inclusion of an academic community also informs what she sees. As Gergen (1982) says "social description does not essentially reflect the empirical world" but is a reflection of "the observer's conceptual construction of this world" (p294), co-created in interaction with others.

Having accepted a second-order cybernetic epistemology and the theoretical frame of social constructionism as the basis of this research and taking into account the conceptualisation of the family as an "ecology of ideas" (Bodgan, 1984, p384), the following chapter will describe the narrative of homosexuality as reflected in social scientific literature. This will illustrate the prevailing dominant forms of knowledge with regard to homosexuality and disclosure.

## CHAPTER 3

### THE NARRATIVE OF HOMOSEXUALITY AS REFLECTED BY SOCIAL SCIENTIFIC LITERATURE

#### Introduction

Homosexuality has existed throughout recorded history, with varying degrees of cultural acceptance/rejection. As with other prescribed, shrouded topics, homosexuality has been progressively demystified through scientific, psychological and descriptive communications in the twentieth century (Silverstein, 1977).

This chapter will briefly describe the various forms of research on homosexuality from its early emphasis on etiology, through shifting focii, to experiential depictions, including the family's experience of a son disclosing his homosexual identity. More specifically, the chapter will focus upon existing research on the homosexual and his family's experience of his disclosure, as opposed to a discussion of general research on homosexuality and its etiology, as this is not germane to the topic of research or consistent with the epistemology of the study. This chapter will also describe past and prevailing societal attitudes towards homosexuality, as these have a recursive impact on parental reactions, and in fact, deem it necessary for the phenomenon of disclosure to take place.

It must be noted that all of the research cited has been carried out within a logical positivist epistemology and thus the descriptions provided lead to implications and conclusions other than those of a cybernetic epistemology. These implications will be pointed out throughout the chapter.

#### Early Research

The majority of early psychological studies deal with discovering causal factors for the development of homosexuality. Bieber et al. (1962) and his successors epitomised the main stance of this research, which attributed the cause of homosexuality to be a close-binding, over-controlling mother combined with a rejecting, detached father.

Money (in Switzer & Switzer, 1980) forwarded a theory that espoused biological differences between homosexuals and heterosexuals. These differences were presumed to be based on endocrinological or genetic differences. Yet, to date, no conclusive evidence on this exists (Switzer & Switzer, 1980).

According to Turnage and Logan (in Strommen, 1989) homosexuality has also been viewed as a pathological syndrome as well as a set of learned pathological behaviours. These studies were linear in focus, operating from a logical positivist epistemology, without viewing homosexuality within the context of the family or within wider interpersonal and sociocultural contexts.

This had certain implications. The homosexual person was viewed as the sole bearer of the 'problem' and responsible for his negative behaviours, or blame was placed on his parents for 'causing their son's homosexuality'. This research thus subscribed to the logical positivist assumption of dualism, in either focusing on the homosexual person or his parents, without considering both in interaction.

In looking at the etiology of homosexuality, Clark (1987) states that the causes of homosexuality are irrelevant unless one believes that it is preferable to change one's homosexual identity to a heterosexual one. This again subscribes to a notion of homosexuality being bad and heterosexuality being good. For him, there will always be homosexual people of different ages, classes and ethnic backgrounds. Barnett (1975) states that one does not exercise personal choice or free will in becoming homosexual. This would not make sense if one considers the broad societal disapproval homosexuals experience. Thus Barnett is stating that the voluntary choice of a sexual orientation that will result in discrimination and prejudice would not make sense. Just as the heterosexual orientation is never questioned as it is the majority sexual orientation, the same should be so for homosexuals.

Hersch (1991) concurs with Clark (1987) adding that the research findings on the causes of homosexuality are controversial, a fact emphasised by the Kinsey Institute's (1948) discreditation of psychological evidence that homosexuality is due to pathogenic parent-child and family interactions. Other 'causes' of homosexuality such as children being seduced by their elders or being sent to same-sex boarding schools, have also been dismissed (Clark, 1987).

Birke (1981) makes a similar case by stating that researchers are almost exclusively concerned with the origin of homosexuality as opposed to heterosexuality, due to the belief that heterosexuality is normal and is therefore not in need of explanation. She accords with Freud's view (in Murphy, 1983/4) that a theory on the origin of sexual orientation should explain any focusing of the sex drive on a specific object, whether it is on the same or the opposite sex.

According to Sanders (in Hersch, 1991):

we come into this world with a lot of things not determined, but with some parameters laid out, and sexual orientation is probably like that. We are born with some potential range of possibilities and what happens to us is that each individual interaction with our environment determines where we are going to fall on that range. (p41)

Despite this behavioural perspective, Sanders (in Hersch, 1991) highlights that, contrary to popular opinion, people cannot be divided into two mutually exclusive groups: homo- or heterosexual, on the basis of behavioural criteria. Rather, these two labels merely signify two extreme poles on a continuum of sexual behaviour.

Barnett (1975) shares a similar view on causation with Sanders (in Hersch, 1991), but is more specific in stating that "when family or other environmental influences intermesh with certain inherited bodily and mental endowments, the combination will produce one or other

of the various shades and intensities of homosexual orientation" (Barnett, 1975, p49). Both Barnett and Sanders focus on the interaction between external environmental influences and individual endowment. Barnett believes that instead of focusing on etiology, it is best to accept that different types of sexual orientations exist. What is more important is to focus on how society can allow each person to live a fulfilling life without suffering discrimination and hostility due to their sexual orientation; and instead to aim for people to treat each other with respect and understanding.

Furthermore, a focus on etiology accords with a logical positivist epistemology of linear cause-and-effect. If one can decide that it is parents who "cause" their child's homosexuality, blame is laid at the parents' feet. If one decides the fault lies within the homosexual person, this person is victimised. Therefore, etiological considerations may be damaging in their effects.

Scientific approaches to patterns of maladaptive behaviours include attempts to classify types of mental disorders. This is in keeping with the medical model of disease, with its focus on etiology so as to attempt to treat and accurately predict prognosis (Smith, 1988). The most widely used taxonomies of behavioural disorders are the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, published by the American Psychiatric Association and the International Classification of Diseases published by the World Health Organisation. These taxonomies adopt multi-dimensional approaches to categorisation, in keeping with a medical model and overriding logical positivist epistemology. Within this perspective, deviant behaviours may be diagnosed as mental illnesses, as was homosexuality in both DSM I and II (American Psychiatric Association, 1952 & 1968). This subscribes to the logical positivist principle of dualism in which something is either good or bad - thus, in this sense, homosexuality was seen as bad and a mental illness, whereas heterosexuality was considered to be good and normal. The implications of this for impacting on society's attitude towards homosexuals is clear. Recursively, just as the medical profession's categorisation of homosexuality impacts on society's attitudes towards homosexuals, society's attitudes towards homosexuals are reflected by the medical profession's categorisation of homosexuality as a mental illness.

On December 14, 1973, the American Psychiatric Association expunged homosexuality from the official list of mental disorders, provided the homosexuality was not ego-dystonic for the person. In other words, that the person's homosexuality was not disturbing to them. The removal of ego-syntonic homosexuality from the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders came about through pressure from organised gay movements, who insisted that they have a say in the decision of their psychiatric diagnosis (Silverstein, 1977). These movements, such as the Gay Liberation Movement, were aware that despite studies on differences in emotional health between heterosexual and homosexual men, no significant findings had resulted (Dynes, 1990). However, this research had not been taken into account by the psychiatric establishment who viewed all non-reproductive sexual behaviour as abnormal (Silverstein, 1977). By the early 1970's, many psychiatrists had become aware that their theories of 'homosexuality as an abnormality' were often based on social conformity, pointing to the recursion between societal views and its impact on theories generated. Hence, activists in the Gay Liberation Movement, along with many professionals, combined to oppose the psychiatric diagnosis of homosexuality.

As a result of this opposition, the American Psychiatric Association invited a group of homosexual people to motivate why homosexuality should be removed from the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual. In December 1973, the American Psychiatric Association casted a unanimous vote to remove ego-syntonic homosexuality from its list of disorders (Silverstein, 1977). This change clearly challenged the logical positivist notion of one objective truth about homosexuality.

### Later Research

According to Strommen (1989), the removal of homosexuality from the official list of psychopathologies coincided with a shift in research orientation towards an analysis of the nature of the experience of "being homosexual". For instance, studies on homosexual adolescents (Savin-Williams, 1989a), on intimate relationships among homosexuals (Meyer, 1989), on older homosexual people (Friend, 1988) and so forth, were carried out. Consequently, homosexual individuals as opposed to the abstract reified and objectified entity of 'homosexuality' were investigated.

One of the focal points of the study of homosexual individuals is that of disclosure of homosexual identity, in other words, explicitly revealing one's sexual preference to significant others, including family. According to Warren (in Strommen, 1989), although homosexuality refers to certain types of behaviours, the majority of people view homosexuals as a "certain type of being" (p38), whom he defines as being members of a "stigmatized minority that is the subject of severe negative sanctioning in popular social values" (p38). According to Plummer and Dank (in Strommen, 1989), negative views of homosexuality arise from complex social, historical and religious antecedents that have impacted on the development of two "homosexual" phenomena: firstly, the formation of a separate, peripheral, homosexual subculture and secondly, the necessity of having to "come out" or declare one's homosexuality as part of one's identity, in defiance of social norms.

### Research on Social Attitudes towards Homosexuality

This section will examine literature and research on past and prevailing societal attitudes towards homosexuality, so as to provide a context in which to facilitate an understanding of the homosexual and his family's experience, as their experience is recursively intertwined with the current sociocultural context.

According to Hersch (1991) no other distinction, besides race, has the potential for such negative and defamatory connotations as that of alternative sexual identity and practices. In most areas of life, including religion, education, the military and employment, one is expected to have the 'correct' sexual orientation.

In Western society, there are three constructed categories of sexuality: hetero-, homo- and bisexuality. According to Birke (1981), because society sees itself as organised along heterosexual behaviour patterns, it views any deviation from this norm as aberrant.

This categorisation, subscribing to the logical positivist principle of dualism as well as reductionism, can be a destructive process, in which people are taught to believe that they should belong to the first category, and if they belong to another, they should see themselves as flawed.

Thus, a person attracted to someone of the same sex is pressurised into labelling himself as a homosexual, with all its associated stigma. He is defined as flawed because he is not attracted to someone of the opposite sex. According to Clark (1987), society has created a "menu-sort" (p145) which serves as a defence mechanism in dealing with the anxiety-provoking phenomenon of human sexuality.

This is substantiated by research on attitudes and behaviour towards those who are not of a heterosexual orientation. According to Clark (1987), homosexual people were burned at the stake during the Middle Ages because they were seen as a threat to the established social order. This accords with a popular myth of homosexuals being viewed as "a social and moral menace" (Barnett, 1975, p40) to the community. Young people were seen as especially vulnerable to this threat to community well-being, being more easily influenced and naive. This myth was shaped by broad-based societal views towards homosexuality. Society viewed homosexuality as "a terrible, irreversible fate, an abomination written in the flesh and, since the advent of AIDS, often a literal death sentence to men" (Hersch, 1991, p38) as well as being viewed as a crime or a mental illness (Eichberg, 1990; Kiefer Hammersmith, 1987; Silverstein 1977). It is seldom seen as simply an alternative identity or way of life. As a result, research shows that homosexuals suffer a great deal of societal prejudice (George & Behrendt, 1987). As said, the past forms of discrimination involved burning, as well as hanging or imprisonment for sexual acts. Today discrimination may take the form of being fired from one's job, ostracised by one's church, and rejected by family and friends (Silverstein, 1977; Smith, 1988). According to Barnett (1975), the Christian Church views homosexual behaviour as morally wrong as well as being a "flagrant denial of the appointed design for human life" (p81), although some Christian people may feel pity for the situation homosexuals find themselves in, in relation to their church.

Eichberg (1990) finds that although parents differ in certain qualities and practices of child-rearing, certain social practices are almost always endorsed, leading to a particular type of experience for the homosexual child (George & Behrendt 1987). The homosexual child is usually raised by heterosexual parents and is expected to be heterosexual himself. The societal message received by him through his parents is that one should conform and one way of not conforming is to be homosexual (Eichberg, 1990). Consequently, a young boy showing any homosexual leanings, such as being interested in traditionally female activities, wearing 'feminine clothing' or not having a girlfriend by a certain age becomes a cause for concern to his parents. These activities herald "a decisive fall from heterosexual grace" (Hersch, 1991, p39). At school, these children are frequently teased by other children and called names such as sissy, queer, faggot (Eichberg, 1990). This points to how society's construction of homosexuality is reflected and labelled as negative both through parental and other domains of society, leading to a shared ecology of ideas (Bogdan, 1984), prejudicial to homosexuals.

Eichberg (1990) found that the negative socially constructed ecology of ideas (Bogdan, 1984) around homosexuality has had other implications for homosexuals - namely the adoption of a homosexual life-style. Eichberg (1990) explains that the ramifications of this are that a particular 'homosexual' life-style with negative ascriptions has been seen to be an objective reality of homosexual people. However, this lifestyle has arisen, in part, due to society's negative view of homosexuals, illustrating the recursion between the two, in which outright negative societal attitudes against homosexuality necessitated the establishment of a 'homosexual subculture'. Recursively, this subculture made itself very noticeable due to societal negation of it, thereby gaining negative societal ascriptions. Thus it can be seen how societal views had a recursive impact on homosexual behaviour.

Eichberg (1990) furnishes some illustrations of this homosexual life-style that are off-shoots of society's discriminatory attitude towards homosexual practices. For instance, homosexual haunts such as clubs and bars are usually only frequented late at night due to the stigmatisation associated with frequenting such places. Homosexuals are often criticised for the fact that they tend to meet in unsavoury places where they make their sexual contacts. However, this in part arises from the forbidden nature of homosexual contacts, necessitating that they 'go underground'. Eichberg (1990) states that a further psychological consequence of stigmatisation is that society communicates to homosexuals that their behaviour is unacceptable, leading to feelings of personal discomfort and unacceptability.

In addition, Eichberg (1990) states that homosexuals have also been criticised for their promiscuity. Yet the majority of homosexuals want committed relationships (Eichberg, 1990. George & Behrendt, 1987). However, the societal condemnation of homosexuality may have resulted in homosexuals turning against society's standards of monogamy, as a rebuke for their lack of acceptance (Eichberg, 1990; Kiefer Hammersmith 1987), once more illustrating the recursion between a particular societal attitude and the implications of this for homosexual behaviour.

Currently the situation has changed, so that just as society is no longer as overtly condemnatory of homosexuals as it was previously, so recursively homosexuals having found a degree of flexibility in society's norms, have become a more visible part of society. This is reflected in their dress, behaviour and career choices (Herdt, 1989).

Where discrimination still exists, research has found that its forms are more subtle in expression (Clark, 1987), illustrating shifting societal views and their implications. Research indicates that this subtle discrimination is shown, for instance, by the fact that there are hardly any openly homosexual people on television so that no positive homosexual role models exist. Neither are openly homosexual people seen in top executive positions (Clark, 1987; Eichberg, 1990). Churches state that homosexuals are sinners and hence ineligible to become priests, clergymen or policy makers of any kind, although of late, certain churches have changed. Although the situation has changed, Clark (1987) states that it is not easy to be homosexual today, although it is easier than it was two decades ago. He expands on this by explaining that as a homosexual, one endures pain and a struggle at the mercy of discrimination and prejudice, as well as being

under great emotional pressure. The start of the 1990s has shown a greater visibility of and attention towards homosexual issues, illustrating a shift in societal attitudes. This focus allows homosexuals to show who they are to society and further frees them to alter the stereotypical perception of a 'gay life-style', mentioned earlier. As homosexuals become more visible, due to a repeal of negative legislation, a different perspective on homosexuals can emerge. This involves a recursive process in which greater visibility leads to greater understanding of what it is to be homosexual, creating more acceptance and respect. This acceptance will allow for various homosexual role models to emerge. The variety of role models supports the expression of individuality amongst homosexuals, which in turn, provides society with a wider perspective on homosexual people. (Eichberg, 1990). Through current research it is hoped that the negative stereotypes of homosexual people will diminish, bringing about a major shift in society's consensually created ideas.

#### Research on Therapy with Homosexual Clients/Their Families

Today homosexuals attend therapy primarily to come to terms with their homosexual orientation, to integrate into homosexual society, as well as to make the decision of whether to 'come out' or not and to learn how to deal with significant others after so doing, as well as dealing with concerns about AIDS (Cabaj, 1988; George & Behrendt, 1987). These are problems specific to the experience of being homosexual. They may also attend therapy for many of the same reasons heterosexual people do, such as relationship problems, life-skills coping and the like (Silverstein, 1977). This illustrates a shift in the experience of homosexual people commensurate with a shift in social attitudes towards homosexuality.

Previously, however, the prejudice of society extended to the area of homosexual clients in therapy. According to Schippers (in Dynes, 1990) the practice of therapy has often reflected societal views of homosexuality as sinful, criminal or an illness. Consequently, the implicit or explicit aim for therapists working with homosexuals was to 'convert' them to heterosexuality, be it through confrontation, persuasion or exploration of childhood trauma (Markowitz, 1991). This therapy was generally psychodynamically orientated. Homosexuals were often brought in at the behest of parents, anxious to convert their child to the 'correct' sexual orientation (Silverstein, 1977). According to Feldman (in Koertge, 1981), often behavioural techniques such as aversive conditioning were used in which the subject would be shown pictures of men and women and would receive shocks if sexually aroused by male pictures. This type of treatment accorded strongly with the medical model view of homosexuality as an illness to be cured.

According to Schippers (in Dynes, 1990), changing attitudes towards homosexuality and an increased awareness of minority rights and the homosexual's positioning as a minority group in society, have alerted and sensitised many therapists to the experience of their homosexual clients. Research which shows the lack of significant differences between homosexual and heterosexual men in terms of their emotional health (Cabaj, 1988; Dynes, 1990), the fact that it is not only impossible but dangerous to attempt to alter a person's sexual orientation (Dynes, 1990), combined with the knowledge that homosexuals are as heterogenous in personality and behaviour as heterosexuals (Dynes 1990; Herdt 1989), has led many therapists to stop attempting

to change their client's sexual orientation, and believing in an objective image of what it is to be homosexual. Instead, therapists attempt to help their clients deal with the stress imposed on them through their homosexual orientation as well as helping their clients to accept their orientation and develop a fulfilling lifestyle (Cramer & Roach, 1988).

When it comes to the issues of homosexuals in family therapy, Marianne Walters, one of the founders of the women's project in family therapy, states: "Family therapists haven't yet considered what it means that our theory is based on a heterosexual model" (Markowitz 1991, p28). According to Silverstein (1977) family therapy could prove to be useful when parents are too upset to talk calmly to their children about their homosexual orientation. Family therapy is also useful in dealing with the problems experienced by the homosexual son, his parents and/or siblings, in coming to grips with the situation. Kiefer Hammersmith (1987) points out some of the relevant issues for a homosexual person and his family in therapy, for instance: that both homosexual clients and their families have been subject to the negative stereotypes of what it is to be homosexual. Neither homosexuals nor their families have access to positive role models or support groups, so that they are deprived of their benefit. The 'homosexuality' *per se* becomes confused with its consequences, and according to Simon and Gagnon (in Kiefer Hammersmith, 1987) the fact of the person's homosexuality is given exaggerated significance, instead of being seen as one aspect of the person's life.

For Markowitz (1991), homosexual issues are still ignored by most therapists. For her, it may be that many therapists misunderstand issues fundamental to their clients. As a result, research shows that many homosexual clients believe that their heterosexual therapists view their homosexuality as an abnormal and undesirable orientation (Kiefer Hammersmith, 1987; Markowitz, 1991). This may lead the homosexual client to look for another therapist. It is important that therapists examine their inner prejudices about homosexuals so that they do not communicate internalized negative messages without realising it, and further victimise their homosexual clients. Negative assumptions about homosexuals are often due to lack of information or societally created conceptions, so that many people, including therapists remain insensitive to an awareness of their own biases (Cabaj 1988; George & Behrendt, 1987). Kiefer Hammersmith (1987) urges that therapists gain information about homosexuality and the homosexual community, outside of the clinical setting, so as to provide informational education for the homosexual and/or his family, when the former is attempting to work with his inner feelings of being homosexual, or when the latter are faced with disclosure. Thus stress is placed on considering the importance of the wider context, which is a core concern for ecosystemically oriented therapists.

Up until recently, little or no discussion of homosexual issues at conferences or in mainstream literature existed, and those who did participate in homosexual workshops were generally also homosexual (Clark, 1987).

Yet, according to Gerstel et al. (1989), changes in media presentations of homosexual themes and cultural roles in the past few years indicate shifts in societal perceptions, values and norms regarding homosexual people. As a result, homosexual issues have gained far more publicity and acceptance, exemplified by television's coverage of the plight of homosexual people

AIDS, the first South African homosexual film festival to be screened as well as the first open gay march to take place in South Africa (in October 1994). This change is also reflected in research on homosexuality, in which the focus has shifted from previous early studies on etiology to present day issues concerning homosexual people, such as research on AIDS and its impact on many homosexuals' lives (Harowski, 1987; Quadland & Shattls, 1987); the issue of homosexual people as parents (Bozett 1989; Dunne, 1987) as well as children of homosexual fathers (Bigner & Bozett, 1989), amongst others. This allows for new socially constructed ideas around homosexuality to emerge and challenges the stereotypical notion of homosexuals.

These changing societal attitudes have also impacted on the therapy of homosexuals, illustrating the recursion between societal theories and subsequent action. In America, Gay Affirmative Counselling methods have been developed, often by homosexuals themselves (Dynes, 1990). These therapists do not aim to change their client's sexual orientation but instead aim to help the client achieve a positive, satisfying lifestyle within the context of his sexual orientation (Coleman, 1982). Within Europe and America, counselling services exclusively for homosexuals exist. These services also offer the client the opportunity to take part in numerous groups such as "coming-out groups; consciousness-raising groups, groups of people with AIDS-related problems" (Dynes, 1990, p270). All of this points to major changes in society's ideas of and attitude towards homosexuality.

Research thus reflects a shift from the early aim of therapists to change their homosexual client's orientation to one of working together with the client to forge a healthy, constructive lifestyle, as well as to working with the family.

#### Studies on Shifts in Perceptions of Homosexual Culture

It is believed that due to the changes in perceptions of and within homosexual culture, much of the post World War II 'homosexual subculture' and folklore is disappearing, as has happened to the 'free-wheeling sexual cultures of the American homosexual scene (Herdt, 1989, p3). This implies that knowledge and cultural practices of the homosexual world are capable of shifts and thus open to emergent values and meanings. According to Plummer (in Herdt, 1989), the homosexual perspective underwent a "significant discontinuity" (p3) from being regarded solely as a pathological group to being viewed as an oppressed minority. The connotations surrounding the term 'homosexual' have changed from it being seen solely as a sexual culture in the 1960s and 1970s to include current social issues as well as extending its cultural meanings elsewhere in the world. Contemporary studies of homosexual people include untold stories of many young homosexual people across the world, and simultaneously represent narratives of changing views across generations in the homosexual world. Specific stories reflect social changes in wider society (Herdt, 1989). Examples of these studies include Gerstel et al's. (1989) study of a homosexual youth group, Troiden's (1989) work on homosexual identity formation, Feldman's (1989) work on homosexual youth and AIDS, amongst others.

Thus, as opposed to previous research which focused on the negative experience of being homosexual, today's research reflects a focus on the singular experiences of homosexuals

disclosing their identity to their families; of homosexual relationships and of homosexuals raising children. This clearly illustrates major social changes which have taken place. This too points out the difficulty of subscribing to a logical positivist epistemology in which only one true reality is seen to exist across time, so that views on homosexuality remain unchanging.

Thus, social change which challenged oppression has finally placed homosexual issues in their "rightful judicial arena and political field in society" (Herdt, 1989, p13). The accomplishment of this will be briefly described.

### The Gay Liberation Movement

During various periods, many movements have been established to effect social change and to better the rights of minority groups (Dynes, 1990). The fight for Gay Liberation was thus part of a broad-based social struggle of many disenfranchised groups to achieve majority status. Such groups were, for instance, the Woman's Liberation Movement, groups fighting for racial equality, usually Black people, as well as those fighting for political freedom. All of these groups were seen as intimately connected because they were all committed to achieving recognition, acceptance and respect from conventional society (Barnett, 1975).

According to Johansson (in Dynes, 1990), the homosexual movement began as part of a rising challenge to the sexual norms of the 19th century. It aimed to get rid of legal and social sanctions against homosexuality which led to social rejection and financial ruin, should one's homosexual orientation be discovered.

The movement's manifesto listed "women, Black people and other national minorities, the working class, young people and peoples oppressed by imperialism" (Dynes, 1990, p927) as the social minorities that suffered oppression by society. It challenged the socially constructed norm of heterosexuality, in which if one was not heterosexual, one would be subject to the above-mentioned sanctions, as well as to police harassment and acts of aggression from homophobic individuals. It also stated that the Judeo-Christian traditions gave priority to the patriarchal family and relegated homosexuals to the status of second-class citizens. Thus, according to Houser (in Dynes, 1990) the Gay Liberation Front aimed to end these injustices by attempting to challenge the oppressive societal system of which they were a part.

Between 1961 and 1969, the Gay Liberation movement in America evolved from being a small collection of individuals to becoming a nationally organised group with a large membership, who achieved substantial gains. According to Donaldson (in Dynes, 1990), this movement would no longer allow society, in the form of psychiatrists, theologians or any other 'authorities' to speak on their behalf and make decisions concerning them. Instead they stated that they were the experts on themselves and thus the ones to be consulted about matters pertinent to them.

What gave particular impetus to the Gay Liberation movement was the Stonewall rebellion, which took place between the 27-30th June, 1969 (Dynes, 1990). The Stonewall Inn was a bar in Greenwich Village, New York, frequented by homosexuals. It was often raided by police

to expose homosexual activity. On that particular night, homosexuals in the bar decided to fight back against the police. Instead of passively submitting to the raid, they fought back and succeeded in barricading the police in the Inn. This behaviour gained impetus and for three days, homosexuals fought back against the police, challenging the common view of homosexuals as passive and weak. The Gay movement, then relying on the support gained from Stonewall, demanded legislation to protect the rights of homosexuals in all areas in which they had been discriminated against. As a result, the topic of homosexuality, which had always been taboo, gained much media coverage in the papers and on television. According to Donaldson (in Dynes, 1990), the movement's work thus brought about large-scale shifts both legally, as well as in the way homosexuals were perceived and responded to socially.

This empowered members of the homosexual community to fight against homosexual oppression and to reconstruct their social realities in an alternative manner. According to Altman (in Herdt, 1989), there is a belief that due to the subsiding of radical policies against homosexual people, notwithstanding AIDS, homosexuals are more accepted into mainstream western culture. Whereas in the past, transvestism was seen as the essence of homosexual cultural style (Kiefer Hammersmith, 1987), as both stigma and oppression made the narratives of homosexuals inaccessible and invisible, today this concept appears outmoded. The participation of teenagers and adults in homosexual groups can also be seen as indicative of some social change. These varied cultural changes provide a new context in which to examine the stigma, struggle, liberation and disclosure of homosexual people. The advent of AIDS has resulted in new problems and challenges for the Gay Liberation movement. Homosexuals' association with AIDS has created new sources of stigma and discrimination. A greater amount of money to research the causes and treatment of AIDS has to be raised by the movement and its allies. New organisations such as ACTUP (AIDS Coalition To Unleash Power) have been formed to cope with the challenges that AIDS puts forward (Dynes, 1990). Thus today, the movement still works at challenging society's oppression of homosexuals and aims to derive the same acceptance and respect accorded to other minorities (Dynes, 1990).

The description of the Gay Liberation Movement serves to reflect the degree of societal change that took place, both with regard to homosexuality and within the homosexual community itself. This points out the necessity of considering phenomena contextually as opposed to viewing them as unchanging across different contexts. This challenges the logical positivist paradigm of objective realities that hold across time and culture.

### Research on Homosexual Identity Development

The previous sections have described research that reflects the recursion between societal attitudes towards homosexuality and its impact on the homosexual person's experience.

This section will focus on research regarding the homosexual person - specifically his identity development. However, the context in which this takes place is always described as the two are interlinked.

Although wide-scale social change has taken place in regard to societal attitudes towards homosexuality, Herdt (1989) maintains that four basic assumptions exist concerning homosexuality, especially adolescent homosexuality, that impact on the experience of homosexuals in relation to society.

### Assumption One

According to Ponce (in Herdt, 1989), homosexual adolescents are subject to the "assumption of heterosexuality" (p76). The majority of homosexuals have grown up isolated from, yet influenced by, the sexual social institutions, rules and norms of wider society. As a result, the homosexual youth may feel different from others when growing up in such a society. Homosexual youth have the unique experience of having to develop identities, create social networks and learn to handle certain social tasks in an environment in which their parental models have a different sexual orientation from their offspring (Kiefer Hammersmith, 1987; Suppe, 1981). According to Eichberg (1990), often when a person begins to think that they may be homosexual, an accompanying feeling of being invalid as a human may prevail. This may be so strong that the homosexual person may decide to keep this identity secret. This points to the strong influence of societal ideas on the homosexual's sense of self-worth. The idea that one must hide parts of oneself and the fear of being found out can result in having low self-esteem as well as a feeling of being isolated from others (Kiefer Hammersmith, 1987). Thus, Harry (in Herdt, 1989) states that homosexual youth experience a major social vacuum in which they remain isolated and excluded. Primarily because conventional adolescent activities such as heterosexual dating and participation in certain sports, which subsequently leads to adolescent peer bonding, often does not interest homosexual youths, it is difficult for the homosexual person to acknowledge that the social expectations of behaviour that accompany heterosexual identity are not applicable to him. However, pretending to be heterosexual exacts its price in terms of feeling inauthentic and hypocritical as a person and in relationships, as well as the fear of being discovered (McDonald, 1982).

This isolation and experience of difference can lead homosexual youths to desiring a change of their identities and eventually to their disclosure. This process is initiated when the youth begins to suspect that he may be different in sexual orientation (Herdt, 1989) This creates problems as the socialisation that exists for the homosexual youth leads him to participate in a co-created ecology of meanings, values and prescriptions which offer little provision for his way of being in the world. Because homosexual youths are a fringe group, they do not have established social groups that encourage dating, participation in social settings and the like (Suppe, 1981) which results in a lack of anticipatory socialisation. If any anticipatory socialisation does exist, it is usually one that teaches young homosexuals that to take the step in disclosing one's identity is a dangerous one that can result in hurt and ostracism (Suppe, 1981). According to Gerstel et al. (1989), the formation of a personal identity is a complex process in which the individual attempts to accommodate to social roles as well as to interpret social norms through individual experience. The development of a homosexual identity is a dual process in which (a) the homosexual is socialised into traditional society which presumes

heterosexuality and (b) he is socialised into homosexual society which often has different norms from traditional society. Therefore, homosexual cultures are not "simple reverse images" (Gerstel et al., 1989) of traditional heterosexual society, but simultaneously no homosexual culture can construct itself in isolation from wider society. Homosexual youths thus have to create an understanding of themselves and society from two conflicting but synergistic viewpoints. This discrepancy and resultant discomfort between the homosexual's self-cognitions and those of significant others are unavoidable, principally due to the assumption of heterosexuality. It is hoped that a positive experience in disclosing one's homosexual identity will lead to a feeling of self-worth, an integrated identity, less loneliness and instead, support from the homosexual (Dynes, 1990) and heterosexual community.

### Assumption Two

"Because they are not heterosexual, these teenagers are assumed to be inverts, according to our cultural presumption of inversion" (Herdt, 1989, p7).

It is necessary that the homosexual youth works through any inner conflict he experiences due to the reversal of his gender behaviour and self-striving, before he can recognise and manage the stigma and oppression he may experience (Herdt, 1989). The necessity for this arises because of the social stereotype that anything other than a heterosexual orientation is abnormal - thus the term "invert". Freud originated this term to describe the ability of humans to be attracted to objects of the same sex under certain psychical or social conditions (Murphy, 1983/4, p72).

According to Herdt (1989), some of Freud's psychological theories contributed strongly to the idea of homosexuality as an inversion, owing to the lack of clear knowledge about homosexual people at that time. However, Freud was the first to discuss homosexuality without condemnation and questioned traditional medical and religious ideas about homosexuality (Murphy, 1983/4). Nevertheless, ideas of homosexuals as inverts reigned supreme, leading to much of the social stigma against them (Kiefer Hammersmith, 1987). It is therefore felt (Herdt, 1989) that only when homosexuals come to terms with the old negative, invert image, can a change in homosexual awareness take place. This process is facilitated by an awareness that a social world of homosexuals beyond the self exists, which may allow for the lonely, negative image of the invert to diminish. What must be remembered is that this process would not be necessary if different societal views on homosexuality existed. In other words, a generally homophobic environment necessitates the existence of a process of disclosure so as to assert oneself against society's shared ecology of ideas. Thus, social acceptance of homosexuality in terms of viewing it as a natural sexual variation, would render the process of disclosure unnecessary as well as all the emotional problems associated with it. This highlights the recursivity of social and individual processes in which the two mutually impact on each other.

### Assumption Three

"They are then stigmatised as persons whose oppression has real-life consequences for their development and adaptation" (Herdt, 1989).

The homosexual person's experience of the stigma and homophobia surrounding homosexuality can become significant. Illustrations of this stigma include long-held stereotypical perceptions of the homosexual as deviant and delinquent (Herdt, 1989; Kiefer Hammersmith, 1987), as well as medical classification of homosexuality as a pathology. A vast majority of these views regarding homosexuality result from theories that assume that anything less than a heterosexual orientation and the prospect of being a parent is a signal of abnormality. Society has failed to comprehend the adolescent homosexual's experience of oppression and peripherality. Herdt (1989) draws the analogy of society being a house that has left no room for the homosexual to occupy. Contemporary increased social awareness has allowed for the provision of a room for homosexuals - albeit a "rather poorly furnished back room" (Herdt, 1989, p22), catering for such an alternative, which contributes towards a smoother transition to a homosexual identity. According to Plummer (in Herdt, 1989) this alternative social reality, although still stigmatised, allows young homosexuals to 'rewrite' their personal histories within a homosexual framework. Thus, the changing cultural context allows for the emergence of new meanings around being homosexual and the process of disclosure (described earlier). This once more points to the importance of looking at contexts and environments in evolution, as opposed to viewing them as fixed and unchangeable.

Yet, by insisting on the necessity of a transition to a homosexual identity, Herdt continues to subscribe to a logical positivist epistemology with its emphasis on reductionism through categorisation. Categorisation is necessary to order our world, yet resistance to change comes about when one category is assumed to be better than the other, for instance, heterosexuality over homosexuality. The need to make a transition to a homosexual identity (Herdt, 1989) continues to subscribe to the belief that homosexuals are different from mainstream society and must therefore undergo different processes. This may aid in understanding the recursive effect of homosexuals adopting a counter culture, in response to societal condemnation, as they too categorise themselves as different, and, more importantly, as worse off than heterosexuals.

### Assumption Four

"Finally, as homosexuals, they are subject to the assumption of homogeneity - the idea that gays the world over are the same in 'coming out', especially in identity and cultural organisation" (Herdt, 1989, p27).

Irrespective of sexual orientation, an individual's identity evolves through its positioning within a particular cultural and social, as well as personal life history and being part of a particular family (Gergen & Gergen, 1983). Thus, despite being relegated to a classified category such as 'gay', all those belonging in that label are not the same, in view of the influence of the above-mentioned factors. There is a temptation to become a universalist rather than a relativist when

classifying people, as it simplifies our understanding of society. However, given the fact that one's sexual identity is to a large extent a cultural and social construction, the assumption of homogeneity is unfounded (Herdt, 1989).

According to Herdt, these four assumptions have governed thinking with regard to homosexuality and contributed to much of the negative image and experience of homosexuals in society, showing the recursion between society's consensually created ideas and the internalisation of these ideas by homosexuals. As homosexuals fight out against society's ideas, recursively their self-image begins to improve.

#### Disclosure - The Homosexual Person's Experience

The shift from studying the abstract concept of homosexuality to the study of homosexual people included a shift in focus from isolated case histories to include a focus on homosexuals as part of a family (Strommen, 1989). Muller (1987) questioned whether homosexuals were anti-family and concluded that families are anti-homosexual, to the extent that the place where homosexuals often experience the greatest hostility is within their own families. The reason for this may be that the family's negative social perceptions of homosexuals prevents them from forming a solid family unit. This leads to the subjective experience of isolation and alienation from family members on the part of the disclosing homosexual.

Thus, research shows that although it may be believed that homosexuality is a rejection of the family and a threat to the family system, the family is very important for the homosexual person. Homosexual people have a strong desire to be a part of their family. This is deepened by the fact that homosexuals do not have their own families or children to raise. Therefore, their family of origin becomes all the more important (Switzer & Switzer, 1980). Eichberg (1990) agrees with this and also expresses surprise at the belief that homosexuality can destroy families. He goes a step further in stating that family bonds are actually increased when a homosexual person is accepted naturally into his family.

What makes being part of the homosexual minority more difficult is that in the case of other minority groups, one's parents or other family members are usually alike in the way they differ from others (e.g. religion, race) whereas homosexuals are different from their families of origin (Kiefer Hammersmith, 1987). Therefore, the necessary support for their orientation is not available.

Disclosure appears to be a highly significant aspect of homosexuality owing to the attitudes of wider society as well as parental values and the impact these have on the individual. Herdt (1989) states that although the process of disclosure is so significant from a personal and cultural perspective, no other area of research on homosexuality is as badly in need of new models and fresh ideas. This research project will attempt to bridge part of that lacuna.

According to Dank and Lee (in Savin-Williams, 1989a), although there is strong emphasis on the significance of the parent-child relationship in the process of disclosure, theoretical and

empirical research appears to underplay the issue. This is exemplified by Myrick (in Savin-Williams, 1989a) who equates disclosure to one's family with disclosure to one's employer and acquaintances. Cass (in Savin-Williams, 1989a) views parents as part of the same category as peers, church groups and heterosexuals in general. This may be due to previously mentioned assertions that homosexuals are not considered part of the family unit (Muller, 1987; Strommen, 1989) and provides yet further impetus for this research. Gerstel et al. (1989) define disclosure as a dual process of accepting oneself and of disclosing one's sexual identity to others such as family, friends and co-workers. However, disclosure is more than just information about one's sexual identity, as it necessitates attempts to redefine and renegotiate relational, familial as well as self definitions. Thus, the meanings around it have far-reaching implications.

This is epitomised in McDonald's (in Dynes, 1990) description of disclosure:

... coming out involves adopting a non-traditional identity, restructuring one's self-concept, reorganising one's personal sense of history, and altering one's relations with others and with society, ... all of which reflects a complex series of cognitive and affective transformations as well as changes in behaviour. (p253)

Dynes (1990) states that the majority of homosexuals experience a troubled phase on finding that they are homosexually orientated. He attributes this to the negative stigma of being homosexual. Thus, when finding that they are homosexual, homosexuals are motivated to attempt to hide their sexual identity. However, both Switzer and Switzer (1980) and Dynes (1990) agree that maintaining a facade takes its toll on the homosexual person, who lives a half-life in which he is psychologically estranged from his family, anxious that they may find out about his sexual identity and afraid of their reactions. Eichberg (1990) also talks about the compromises to one's functioning if one keeps a part of oneself hidden, such as having to be secret about other aspects of one's life in addition to the homosexuality itself. Eventually a barrier is erected between parent and child in which the child is constantly deceitful and in which his behaviour is an act (Silverstein, 1977). For Eichberg it is preferable to be honest with one's family as it allows the homosexual person to share more of his life with his family and enables family members to know their child as well as giving the child the opportunity to validate his lifestyle. This allows for greater communication between family members as well as greater self-respect for the homosexual person. Eichberg (1990) also believes that even if the consequences of disclosure do result in rejection and being disowned, the experience can still be a liberating one in that the homosexual no longer has to carry out a half-relationship based on half-truths and is free to develop an alternative life-style for himself. The psychological rewards of not having to hide who one is are immense. These involve no longer having to hide one's sexual identity, consequently enabling the person to feel authentic and whole, as well as not having to pretend to be heterosexual and living a double life (George & Behrendt, 1987).

For a homosexual person, the decision to disclose one's sexual identity to others, including significant others, is one of the most significant decisions ever taken. Silverstein (1977) sees this to be a sign of growth within the person and a reflection of a positive feeling of self-worth. As opposed to seeing it as a confession of one's sexual orientation, both Silverstein and Eichberg

(1990) view the process as an act of love.

According to Muller (1987), what often precipitates an adolescent disclosing his homosexuality to his parents is the dual need for parental approval as well as a strong desire to be honest within the context of the parent-child relationship, despite the many risks involved. To quote one young homosexual:

I don't think you can have an honest relationship with your parents, with anyone significant in your life, if they don't know something real and fundamental about your life, and your sexual identity is certainly a very fundamental part of you. (in Muller, 1987, p8)

According to Welch-Griffin, Wirth and Wirth (1986), as homosexual people develop self-pride, they become irritated with having to conceal their sexual identity. They desire to be accepted in the same way as they were when they were young, that is, for their own special qualities. This is an additional reason for homosexual people wanting to disclose their sexual identity to their parents. It is a test of whether they are loved and accepted for who they really are.

According to Savin-Williams (1989), the most difficult decision to make after acknowledging and coming to terms with one's homosexual orientation is to come out to one's parents, thereby risking the destruction of their dreams of generativity via grandchildren and everything else that is contingent upon heterosexuality, such as marriage and importantly, social acceptability and conformity. Because this process is such a difficult one, gay advice literature takes a careful, considered approach to the issue of disclosure to one's parents. It advises that one should carefully consider the benefits and disadvantages of the situation, as parents are in a powerful position to ostracise, reject, isolate and even use violence against their children (Savin-Williams, 1989a).

It is not only the fact that society has viewed homosexuality negatively that makes disclosure such a difficult process. In addition, parental values and expectations, such as children being heterosexual, getting married, providing grandchildren (Switzer & Switzer, 1980) run counter to having a homosexual child.

Silverstein (1977) advises that parents should only be told if the child has a sound relationship with them and has developed a relatively secure and positive view of homosexuality.

The choice of being honest with parents becomes a doubly compounded problem for the homosexual youth. On the one hand, most parents view their children with pride, as extensions and representatives of themselves; yet on the other hand, society has historically condemned homosexuality as a perversion and an abnormality. This combination contributes towards making the disclosure to one's parents, the most significant problem for many homosexuals, and it often becomes the final exit out of the closet (Savin-Williams, 1989, p92).

Welch-Griffin et al. (1986) see it as a great compliment when children choose to tell their parents they are homosexual. In so doing, they are risking a great deal, but because of the

love they have for their parents and their consequent desire to have an honest and respectful relationship with them, they are prepared to run that risk. Children who do disclose to their parents despite their enormous fears, indicate a trusting parent-child relationship. Inwardly, they are telling themselves to trust that even if their parents disapprove, they will continue to love and respect them for their honesty and integrity. For Dynes (1990) disclosure may be seen as a process of "psychoindividuation" (p269) in which homosexuals become self-aware at the expense of their family's norms and regulations. Kiefer Hammersmith (1987) views disclosure as an attempt to establish honesty, gain understanding and hopefully, emotional support.

A brief outline of the process of disclosure will be discussed. This is based on Eichberg's (1990) model.

A personal phase begins with the self-awareness that one is homosexual. This phase involves the psychological process of coming to terms with one's homosexual identity (George & Behrendt, 1987). This may be a painful process in which the individual hides his identity from others and may experience feelings of depression, unworthiness and shame, in part due to society's negative attitudes towards homosexuality.

The private phase involves telling someone else about your homosexual identity. This is usually done with someone who is also homosexual, and may be tested out on a variety of people before telling one's parents. The aim is also to build a support system made up of other homosexuals (George & Behrendt, 1987). Depending on feedback from others, the homosexual will decide to continue or halt the process of revealing his sexual identity. Eventually people most significant to the homosexual person are told. These are usually one's parents. Up until then, the relationship may have become strained (as described earlier). It is usually only when the homosexual feels positive about his sexual identity that he is able to tell his parents.

Once those most important to the homosexual are told, the public phase of the disclosure begins. Within the 'public phase' one's sexuality is part of one's daily life in all domains, professionally, familiarly and intellectually. One's sexual orientation is no longer hidden in any sphere. Eichberg (1990) points out that this process is a cumulative one in which feelings and experiences from different phases may overlap.

Existing literature indicates that homosexual individuals experience a difficult, often painful process of identity development as their sexuality is acknowledged and accepted. Similarly, their families of origin experience this discovery as a negative, disruptive event often followed by long-term distress (Bozzett & Sussman, 1990). While homosexual identity development has traditionally been considered to be distinct from family member's reactions to having a homosexual relative, the elements of both processes are so similar as to suggest a common foundation. According to Strommen (in Bozzett & Sussman, 1990) this foundation is social stigma. Being homosexual, or having a homosexual family member is disruptive because society and its institutions view homosexuality in a powerful and pervasively negative light. Therefore, according to Dalheimer and Feigal (1991, p47), it is heterosexism - society's prejudice against homosexuals

- not a family member's sexuality, that creates real stress when someone discloses. It can be seen that much of the family's reaction is recursively interlinked with society's views and serve to maintain societal views. Thus, the present study aimed at considering the family as part of the shared ecology of ideas (Bogdan, 1984).

It can be seen that the existing literature has described disclosure as an event that occurs in one way only, with unilateral effects. Family organisation, rules and scripts are not considered, nor the recursivity between the child's disclosure and the parents' reaction to it. This will be considered in the present research.

#### Disclosure of Homosexuality - the Family's Point of View

The cultural and social environment of a family often has a recursive influence on family attitudes, norms and values. Therefore, the negative attitude of many family members with regard to homosexuality may be said to be representative of and shaped by general social norms and values. Just as this recursive relationship exists between societal and familial values, parental attitudes have significance for their children as families usually share similar ideas. Consequently, parental response to a child's disclosure of homosexuality is invariably intense and bound to have a profound effect on the child (Muller, 1987), and reciprocally, on the parent. Because families form a connected unit in which the assumption exists that members are similar in terms of shared ideas and values, it is extremely painful for parents to hear that their child has adopted a value system and way of life that is different from their parents. This is exemplified by a son telling his parents that he is homosexual and thus different from them (Switzer & Switzer, 1980). Disclosure might also impact on family members' perceptions of each other, thus possibly changing and threatening the family system in some way. Thus, disclosure of a child's homosexuality to his parents is not only viewed as negative due to society's attitude towards homosexuality, but each family has its own view of themselves as well as values and expectations that may be threatened by disclosure. Thus, the family reality is strongly challenged, and the taken-for-granted belief that family member's share similar ideas and worlds is threatened, placing the family in a predicament. In addition to responding differently to the homosexual person, family members may also respond differently to each other. Both Strommen (1989) and Hersch (1991) believe that the disclosure of a homosexual child is usually perceived and reacted to negatively, resulting in a family crisis. Hersch states that most families do not have a constructive language with which to deal with the situation. Instead all they possess are negative societal as well as personal views of homosexuality. Families are usually shocked, lack skills to deal with the situation and have no support systems to which they can turn, so that when the child comes out, the parents often 'go in'.

Both Switzer and Switzer (1980) and Silverstein (1977) thus see the discovery of homosexuality as a crisis for the family, challenging and threatening the family's consensually created ideas and stability. However, simultaneously this challenge may be seen as an opportunity for the family to change and grow, to which each family member can contribute. Thus the crisis can be viewed as a threat or an opportunity (Silverstein, 1977). Switzer and Switzer (1980) add that the crisis may have the potential for pushing the family to communicate in a manner not

done previously, to reflect on feelings, and to create a new quality of loving relationship with one another. This naturally depends on how the crisis is responded to.

According to Muller (1987), when a son discloses his homosexuality, parents struggle to reconcile three conflicting ideas. Each one exists independently of the other, but "fit together like a set of Chinese boxes" (p121).

The outer box consists of negative societal images of homosexuality. Weinberg and Jones (in Strommen, 1989, p39) substantiate this view by stating that parents apply their negative view of homosexuals to their own child, and in so doing, foster the belief that their child is suddenly someone unknown. This view arises in part from the misconceptions that homosexuals are all child molesters and perverts, and in part from the belief that there is no role for homosexuals within the family (Kiefer Hammersmith, 1987). The feeling of shock, denial and then grief upon being told of a child's homosexuality is an experience common to most parents and has been likened to emotions experienced when a close family member dies (Switzer & Switzer, 1980). In an abstract sense, this is what occurs, because parents' lifelong-held ideas about themselves and their children as well as their hopes and plans for the future are crushed. Research describes how many parents become aware of being associated with a negatively-viewed social group and consequently fear being ostracised for having a homosexual child (Kiefer Hammersmith, 1987). Confusion concerning how to relate to their child and how he will fit in with their everyday life are frequently quoted concerns (Strommen, 1989). Research has also shown that one of the most frightening aspects for parents is that they experience this loss without recourse to traditional support systems, such as church, social groups and the extended family (Kiefer Hammersmith, 1987). This forces parents to confront and deal with the problem unaided, which is often an overwhelming experience as parents have to relinquish many of their entrenched beliefs without any available substitutions (Welch-Griffin et al., 1986). This is often exacerbated by the fact that parents decide not to tell anyone due to shame and embarrassment. Thus at the time when they need support and understanding from others, they are instead alienated and isolated (Eichberg, 1990). As long as parents accept widely held societal views of homosexuality, they are unwilling to identify themselves as parents of homosexual children, often isolating themselves, increasing their loneliness and preventing them from being able to discuss their crisis. It seems difficult for parents to do otherwise considering the co-constructed nature of idea systems.

One parent describes his experience:

We had been victimised on several counts . . . we were hurt by the whispers, smirks, innuendos and jokes that were an acceptable part of our social community. We were hurt by the bigotry that is present in so many of our religious communities. (Welch-Griffin et al, 1987, p120)

Furthermore, Muller (1987) found that the stigma of having a child who is seen as a social misfit resulted in parental feelings of incompetence in their behaviour as men and women. Feelings of failure and shame often become intense as parents confront social attitudes towards

homosexuality, that are now personally directed towards them. They often feel that they are now assigned to a minority group and do not have the defences to cope with society's antagonism. Many parents carefully review their behaviour to see if they have been anything other than socially conforming in case any deviation from this conformity might have led to their child's homosexuality (Switzer & Switzer, 1980). Thus, the foundations upon which parents' daily lives are built become shaky and their guaranteed place of acceptance in the community becomes threatened. Some parents have even stated that their child's homosexuality felt worse than a death due to the accompanying feelings of abhorrence of homosexuality they had to deal with (Switzer & Switzer, 1980). Thus, according to Collins and Zimmerman (in Strommen, 1989) the youth's newly exposed identity alienates him from his family through the process of parents associating their negative conceptions about homosexuals with their own child, thereby disconfirming the latter's role or identity as part of the family, whilst recursively the family feel isolated from society.

According to Muller (1987, p21) the second Chinese box contains the parents' hopes and ambitions for their child prior to him disclosing his homosexuality. As said, these are dreams for heterosexuality, marriage, children, grandchildren and social acceptance (Eichberg, 1990).

The last box contains the belief that parents cause their children to become homosexuals. Each box can conceal the other, but it is the last box, containing parental guilt, that must be opened first in order to better deal with the conflicts contained in the other two. Strommen (1989, p39 & 40) concurs with Muller (1987), in the view that parents' strong feelings of guilt and failure are due to the belief that they have somehow caused their child's homosexuality, and are therefore responsible for his negative identity, thereby creating an emotional and ethical crisis for them. This belief leads them to question what they did 'wrong'. Welch-Griffin et al. (1986) explain that the other reason many parents search for the origin or cause of homosexuality is to try and contain the situation by giving it some order, structure and meaning. These authors also believe that parents search for the cause of homosexuality in the hope of finding a natural biological explanation of homosexuality, so as to normalise and justify the homosexual way of life, thereby reducing their guilt. Feelings of guilt imply that being homosexual is wrong and that someone must be blamed. After blaming themselves, they often blame their child, someone in his past, the child's lover or the other parent (Clark, 1987; Muller, 1987). According to Clark (1987) all parents invariably make mistakes in the upbringing of their children, but irrespective of these, the 'causes' of homosexuality are not certain. Furthermore, Clark states that unless one assumes that homosexual people are bad and unhappy, such causes are irrelevant. To understand parental guilt in context, it is necessary to consider how long the negative view of parents as the 'causes' of homosexuality in their children has existed. As stated earlier, the shift from viewing homosexuality as an innate evil to viewing it as an illness was made by the early nineteenth hundreds (Muller, 1987). Yet, it was only in 1973 that homosexuality was removed from the American Psychiatric Association's list of mental illnesses, and even then, not completely expunged.

If one considers these facts from the perspective that ideological change takes place very slowly, and that approximately 20 year parent-child generation cycles take place, it becomes

clear that most parents of homosexuals have been subjected to the idea that their incorrect upbringing could lead to their child being homosexual (Muller, 1987). For instance, Bieber et al's. (1962) earlier quoted research which stated that homosexuality was due to a strong, controlling mother and a withdrawn, detached father. For many years, this research was purported to be the truth about families with a homosexual member.

Muller (1987) adds that sex roles also have a significant meaning for homosexuals and their parents. This research has shown that if one believes in rigid sex-role stereotyping, one will be more inclined to be homophobic. Muller identified the best single predictor of homophobia as "a belief in the traditional family ideology, i.e: dominant father, submissive mother, obedient children" (p88). Strommen (1989) and Kiefer Hammersmith (1987) also found that family values with regard to traditional sex roles could influence reactions to a child's disclosure. MacDonald and Storms (in Strommen, 1989) added that individuals who believed in rigid, separate roles for the sexes are less likely to accept homosexual people.

Fathers who reeled at any effeminate behaviour in their sons often put more pressure on them to behave as 'men', or withdrew from the relationship. This may differ for mothers. Seen from a sex-role perspective, the mother is usually the one who cares for and nurtures the children. Therefore when seeing conflict or distance between father and son, she is the one most likely to accept responsibility and to attempt a reconciliation between them, frequently empathising with her son, as he remains her child, to be protected. Often a closer relationship develops between mother and son (Muller, 1987).

Certain attitudes have changed since the Kinsey et al. (1948) research on sexuality. In one of the first extensive studies of male homosexuality, (Kinsey et al., 1948) it was found that homosexuality is but one variation of human sexuality which ranges on a continuum from exclusive heterosexuality to exclusive homosexuality. They found that even males who had not had an overt homosexual experience had reacted erotically to other males. Instead of focusing exclusively on the cause of homosexuality, the search has become a broader one to encompass investigations of the roots of all human sexuality. Thus, as parents of homosexual children come to understand that many theories of homosexuality are based on preconceived value judgements and originated within a particular socio-cultural context, they can rise against their guilt. In so doing, they are empowered to open Muller's (1987) innermost Chinese box - the one that contains the guilt which forms a barrier between parent and child, enabling parents to relate to their homosexual child positively rather than through the negative lens of past generations. This is not easily achieved and requires much assistance and hard work from parents.

Devine (in Strommen, 1989, p40) and Welch-Griffin et al. (1986) have identified some of the ways that parents respond immediately after the disclosure and have also have outlined certain phases of parental adjustment and coping. Devine (in Strommen, 1989) proposes that movement through these phases is determined by three aspects of the family system: the "cohesion" (p41), or closeness of family members; the "regulative structures" (p41) or rules that govern family members behaviour; and the "family themes" (p41) or defining values that dictate the family's view of themselves, and their interaction with the larger community.

The first stage, described by Devine (in Strommen, 1989) is "subliminal awareness" (p40) where the youth's homosexual identity is suspected, due to behavioural and communicational patterns. Clark (1987) accords with this view and states that most parents of homosexuals are not completely surprised when their son comes out. One knows one's children well and usually many clues exist.

The second stage is of "impact", where the child discloses his sexual identity often leading to family crisis.

This is followed by a third stage of "adjustment" where parents frequently urge their child to change his sexual orientation or to keep it secret so that the family may still maintain a respectable front. Welch-Griffin et al. (1986) refer to this stage as one of "self-centred concern" (p140) and believe it is the first of three levels of parental understanding. During this phase parents may adopt three types of reactions:

a) Some parents may decide to break contact with their child. This exacts a heavy emotional toll on parents who have to pretend that their child no longer exists and have to live a lie/ life of pretence.

b) Other parents may attempt to change their child, either by taking their child to a psychotherapist, leading the child to religious conversion, or encouraging the youth to have a relationship with a person of the opposite sex. Viewing homosexuality as an illness may be what leads parents to take their son to a psychotherapist : a 'cure' rationale. However, all that therapists are able to do is help families learn to accept their child and deal with the difficulties. The negative view most religions have with regard to homosexuality can lead to families being unnecessarily traumatised. The most religion can do is give support and understanding, but it is unlikely to be able to change sexual orientation (Kiefer Hammersmith, 1987). Encouraging a child to have opposite sex relationships in the hope that a sexual experience will change their sexual identity also creates anguish for the child and the opposite sex partner (Welch-Griffin et al., 1986).

c) Another reaction of parents is to ignore the issue, yet still maintain contact with their child. In such a situation, parents are unable to break their relationship with their child and are simultaneously unable to revise their negative ideas with regard to homosexuality. Not only do they have to revise their ideas about homosexuality, but the specific hopes and expectations that they had for this person as a heterosexual have to be revised. The tendency of parents in this situation is to go back to a point in the family's development when the issues of homophobia and homosexuality did not exist. In such a situation, the experience of the offspring is a disconfirming one, in which they want to explain their feelings and behaviours to their parents, but realise that they cannot broach the subject. Thus, issues regarding homosexuality create a distance between parent and child. A further parental reaction described by Muller (1987) is that of 'blocking it out', by insisting that their children are going through a stage, and that their son's lover is merely a close friend

Parents also commonly experience anger (Switzer & Switzer, 1980). Sometimes this anger is directed at the child, creating severe conflict and placing an enormous burden on the family. Parental anger is frequently an expression of fear and pain. Welch-Griffin et al. (1989) advise parents to express their anger and negative feelings but not to vent them on their child. Airing their feelings may be the first step in the process of confronting the situation and eventually coming to accept it. Working through these experiences in psychotherapy or support group counselling often helps to relieve the stress on families attempting to deal with the crisis alone.

Welch-Griffin et al. (1986) maintain that at this level of adjustment parents are preoccupied with their own grief and are primarily responding to an overwhelming sense of loss and the concomitant need to mourn. Communication with others often becomes minimal, even between spouses, and marital relationships often become strained. This is the first time parents come to grips with the negative societal attitudes previously discussed. They begin to fear for their child and for themselves. Going beyond this level requires enormous effort as parents are emotionally drained, have minimal, inaccurate information and feel isolated from the rest of society. However, what often moves parents beyond this point is the discrepancy between what society thinks of homosexuals and what they perceive in their child. This motivates them to seek helpful information and go beyond society's constructed views because of their commitment to a continued relationship with their child. They then develop their own local "ecology of ideas" (Bogdan, 1984, p384) around homosexuality. On a broad scale, this recursively challenges many societal attitudes and ideas on homosexuality.

The fourth stage parents experience, as defined by Devine (in Strommen, 1989) is one of "resolution", where the family begins to dispel the negative myths surrounding homosexuality. Welch-Griffin et al. (1989) calls this step one of moving towards acceptance, renewing their commitment to their child and accepting reality. At this level, parents begin to confront and rid themselves of their inner prejudices against homosexuals. Instead of being primarily concerned with themselves, they focus on their child, becoming aware of his pain and anguish.

Furthermore, parents realise that their child will not change. The only aspect capable of change is their own attitude. Part of this process involves parents having to become better informed about homosexuality in order to adapt their belief systems so that they are able to resist and question dominantly negative cultural views of homosexuality as well as their own views. This enables them to move towards new levels of understanding (Welch-Griffin et al., 1986).

A role-reversal often takes place with children advising their parents, who then start to develop a new understanding of their child. Once parents resign themselves, sometimes accepting that they have a homosexual child and facing the reality of the situation, their depression and sense of despair tends to lessen. Their child's welfare becomes a priority. They often have times of depression and wish that their child is heterosexual, but are nevertheless primarily concerned with the problems their child faces in society. It is important that parents realise that their child cannot change and that hence, they themselves will have to change. At this stage, parent-child relationships begin to improve and parents find that they are not as socially excluded

as they had feared. Parents in America often demonstrate solidarity with their children by attending homosexual meetings and speaking out for homosexuals everywhere (Borhek, 1983).

The more parents are able to support their offspring, the more able they are to reach the final level of understanding described by Welch-Griffin et al. (1986), in which focus shifts from parents to children, including other homosexuals, and their parents. This level corresponds with the stage that Devine (in Strommen, 1989) calls "integration" (p41) in which new roles for the child and new behaviours for dealing with the child's homosexual identity are created. At this point, the relationship between parent and child starts to become familiar and comfortable.

One of the last and most difficult aspects of the child's sexuality for a parent to accept, is that of overt physical affection between their child and his lover. Homosexual youth can, however, educate their parents by talking to them about the sexual nature of homosexuals. This is one way for parents to become aware that they are not dealing with strangers but with their children whom they have previously loved and often respected. Parents also become aware of the hardship their children have experienced and some begin to speak with pride of their homosexual child. According to Welch-Griffin et al. (1986), the hard work has paid off when parents no longer have questions regarding problems and causes of homosexuality, but begin to realise the problems created by society's continuing and irrational fear of homosexuals, and may even begin to commit themselves to the public challenge of negative viewpoints. At the stage of integration, parents become aware that homosexuality is no longer part of an external lifestyle, but is incorporated into their daily existence. Switzer and Switzer (1980) state that parents who battle on are rewarded with a better quality of relationship with their child and the achievement of what all parents and children want from each other - mutual love, respect, friendship and acceptance.

Thus, it can be seen that at disclosure, the family's existing ecology of ideas is challenged, threatening family organisation. The family has to restructure itself by incorporating new meanings around homosexuality, one of which is that their son is homosexual.

Devine (in Strommen, 1989, p41) points out that the resolution of these stages is a depiction of the ideal. He is careful to note that the family may stick at any of these levels indefinitely, rather than ultimately reaching the last step. The recursivity of this process is clear. It is a co-evolving process where what the homosexual person first experiences in isolation is then experienced on a parallel level by his family, and ultimately by society, in moving towards a different attitude towards homosexuality.

#### Disclosing One's Homosexuality to Siblings

According to Strommen (1989), there has been little discussion of the effects of disclosure on siblings. Jones (in Strommen, 1989) believes that sibling reactions are similar to parental ones in that siblings see the homosexual brother as a stranger and tend to assign negative societal values of homosexuality to their sibling. However, the strong guilt feelings and self-blame that parents experience is not common for siblings. At present however, according to

Jones (in Strommen, 1989), research which considers sibling-parent interactions in relation to the disclosure does not exist, providing further impetus for this investigation.

According to Welch-Griffin et al. (1989), parents usually accept the responsibility of informing other family members. Their research found that parents told their other children soon after the disclosure, as they felt that their children were entitled to be informed, and that their homosexual child needed the love and support of the family. Siblings experience a variety of emotions, particularly fear: fear of being isolated on account of their brother's orientation, or that the homosexuality is transferable to them. Research has shown that while those who were most fearful were unable to offer support to their brothers, others were able to be supportive, particularly if they were the first to know and could act as a facilitator between parent and child. Generally it appears that if siblings had a good relationship prior to the disclosure, this continued, with the converse applying.

Clark (1987) states that often a sibling fears for his homosexual brother, owing to the knowledge of negative societal views regarding homosexuality and possible agreement with these views. Although misinformation may be dispelled by careful explanation, having a homosexual brother often forces siblings to confront their own prejudices and make them more sensitive to society's attitude towards homosexuality as well as to the diverse differences between people. This further emphasises the recursion between society's values and familial values.

#### Disclosing One's Homosexuality to Others

Research (Switzer & Switzer, 1980) shows that to disclose one's child's homosexual identity to people beyond the immediate nuclear family involves much risk-taking. Parents who attempt to conceal their son's homosexuality leave their child feeling misunderstood and unaccepted. Therefore, parents' "coming out" includes supporting their homosexual child directly or indirectly, through word and deed, such as attempting to alter misconceptions by providing information both privately and publicly, at meetings and on television. When a parent is able to tell others that they have a homosexual child, they are implicitly telling others and their offspring that their child is their first priority and that they will remain supportive despite the circumstances (Borhek, 1983).

It is often frightening for parents to take such a stand, given their dependence on society's approval and acceptance. As Welch-Griffin et al. (1986) say:

Taking a stand against society's injunctions is not to be taken lightly. In a sense, society understandably places pressure on us all to accept its rules of right and wrong. Since we enjoy the benefits of society, it expects our allegiance. It offers painful penalties to non-conformers." (p103)

It is clear then that a great deal of courage and conviction is required before parents question society's negative conceptions of homosexuals. Accepting homosexuality facilitates taking such a stand, and unless parents do so, they remain in self-imposed exile (Borhek, 1983). Parents

usually find that speaking out is not as difficult as they anticipated, although it is initially an ordeal that requires courage to overcome. Each time they are able to challenge someone's negative comments regarding homosexuality they are able to confront society's attitudes and free themselves further (Borhek, 1983). Parents daily confront the question of whom and how much to tell, but are generally rewarded by knowing that they are being true to themselves once they have been honest with others. To quote a parent: "It's a tremendous feeling. When you're being yourself, you don't have to account to anybody any more. You're free". (in Welch-Griffin et al., 1986, p104).

### Conclusion

Strommen (1989) states that although descriptions of how families react to their child's revelation of homosexuality are fragmentary and incomplete, it is possible to put forward a broad model that includes family member's reactions. This model contains three specific components:

- (a) the family members values with regard to homosexuality.
- (b) the effect of these values on the relationship between the homosexual family member and other family members
- (c) the conflict resolution mechanisms family members employ.

It is clear that the most important component of this model is the values family members have regarding homosexuality, as it is the implication of these values that determine family members' reactions to disclosure, due to the family's shared ecology of ideas (Bogdan, 1984).

It is found that certain common values pervade entire families from grandparents to parents, to children, as family members are limited by the themes and values that the family identifies itself with. Due to these shared values, initial reactions can be expected to be similar within a family.

Strommen's (1989) model of shared values that determine the family's reaction to disclosure of homosexuality is a useful one, as it is the nature of these values that to a large degree influence family member's responses. It will be shown that this model is a simplified version of the narrative told by the researcher in a following chapter.

This chapter has served to illustrate past and present views on homosexuality within different contexts, primarily the social and family context. The recursion between society, the family and the individual's ideas is clear, due to the social construction of ideas.

It has been shown that the development of ideas within the context of the medical model with its corresponding focus on etiology often led parents to assume responsibility for their child's homosexuality, or resulted in the homosexual being labelled as a person with a mental illness.

However, shifts in this model, reflected by shifts in social attitudes, which are furthermore

reflected through shifts in research foci, have moved to studies of homosexual people's specific experiences, including those of disclosure to the family. As previously stated, the research quoted was conducted within a logical positivist paradigm, so that the effects of disclosure for the family, as well as the homosexual person's experience of disclosure were assumed to be the same for families everywhere, thereby creating generalisations and predictions, irrespective of context, sociocultural era or family dynamics. In addition, this research focused either on the homosexual's experience of disclosure or the family's experience of disclosure, subscribing to logical positivist principles of dualism and reductionism.

The present study intends to be holistic by focusing on the experience of the family and homosexual person in interaction within their social context, so that the whole ecology is considered. Instead of attempting to create generalisations that hold across time and context, it aims to focus on local 'truths' - these being the narrative of one family who experienced the disclosure of their son's homosexuality.

## CHAPTER 4

### THE RESEARCH NARRATIVE

#### Introduction: The Shift from Positivism to Constructionism in Research Endeavours

In order to establish a credible scientific base with its claims of plausibility and legitimacy, in terms of measurable reliability and validity, the social sciences in explaining social phenomena have previously used the logical positivist paradigm of the physical sciences to design their research, choose their methodologies and explain their findings (White and Epston, 1991). The logical positivist paradigm also determined the choice of topics to be investigated. This resulted in non-quantifiable issues not being researched.

The central feature of the logical positivist view of science is a focus on maintaining objectivity, and carrying out measurement procedures to do so, as these maintain an objective distance between the inquirer and objects of inquiry, and therefore enable 'true' reality to be measured. Control, in terms of eliminating confounding variables is stressed and the focus is on the outcome of research. Within this paradigm it is assumed that research cannot be influenced by the researcher's values as there is only one single reality to be reflected. This reality is represented by findings that are broken down into standardised, quantitative units of measurement, thus reflecting reductionistic assumptions about reality. Outcome is seen as absolute, incontrovertible and certain. Thus, the results of findings (i.e. outcomes) are seen to be generalisable, reliable and universal across different contexts and times. If this were not so, scientific inquiry would be viewed as useless (Guba, 1981; Wassenaar, 1987).

However, the core underlying basis of logical positivism (the idea that it is possible to have direct and certain knowledge of the world) has been challenged in the physical sciences by Planck and Einstein (Auerswald, 1985).

A major effect of such a challenge is that a 'new science' paradigm has emerged within this sphere. Consequently it is seen that the traditional methods of research and the single-minded scientific dedication to logical positivist research criteria are incongruous in contributing to the development of knowledge within the 'new science' paradigm, (Moon, Dillon and Sprengle, 1990). Not only has the positivist paradigm been challenged in its application to the physical sciences, but the need to question the appropriateness of using a logical positivist methodology for research in the social sciences has also arisen. This corresponds with the argument put forward in a previous chapter that questions the usefulness of studying people by using a logical positivist paradigm, with its focus on linear forces and concrete entities of materiality and substance, as opposed to focusing on process and pattern between people.

The question is not which paradigm is better in conducting research, as this immediately presupposes a belief in one objective truth. Rather, each paradigm rests on different assumptions (as has been detailed previously), and the paradigm to be selected for research must be the one whose assumptions are best fitted to the phenomenon under study. According to Guba (1981), investigators of social phenomena have become increasingly convinced that the logical positivist paradigm is not useful for studying social phenomena, and that the "new science" or "naturalist" paradigm (Guba, 1981, p77) is one that is best fitted to studying social phenomena.

According to Auerswald (1985), a new epistemology governing thought is apparent in "new science", epitomised in the social sciences by Batesonian thinking. He sees this new thought system as being profoundly different from the logical positivist paradigm and views the two thought systems as incompatible and separate from each other. For him the ecosystemic epistemology is congruent with the new science epistemology. However, Keeney (1985) takes a complementary stance and instead looks at the cybernetic complementarity between the old and the new, in which the old is useful for studying certain phenomena (those in the physical realm) and therefore should not be completely erased.

As stated previously, the epistemology of second-order cybernetics and the theory of social constructionism both accord with the new science paradigm.

Bateson (in Schwartzmann, 1984) also strongly believed that the logical positivist paradigm and its corresponding research methodology was inapplicable to social science phenomena, as the logical positivist paradigm is chiefly concerned with material, inanimate phenomena whereas the social sciences are concerned with phenomena of pattern and form, in animate beings.

Bateson (in Schwartzmann, 1984) expressed this succinctly by stating, "we have this massive addiction to physical metaphors which, as far as I know, are completely inapplicable to the life and epistemology of real organisms living in a real world" (p229).

As a result of these developments, social scientists realised that the use of logical positivist metaphors were just that - metaphors. This allowed them to search elsewhere for appropriate metaphors to describe the social phenomena under scrutiny. Geertz (in White & Epston, 1990, p4) calls this shift the "refiguration of social thought" in which, instead of following the methodology of Newtonian physicists to discover anything relevant, social scientists could further their aims by using a different methodology and subscribing to a different epistemology.

This methodology will be discussed in a later section. However, a few of its underlying assumptions shall be briefly discussed. If a researcher accepts that one cannot be objective with respect to one's study, that one cannot make context-free generalisations, as human behaviour is dependent on its context for its meaning, so that knowledge of human behaviour is necessarily idiographic instead of being generalisable, and that differences are as important as similarities and generalisations, in understanding human behaviour, the naturalistic paradigm

is the one that is most suited to this type of research.

As stated previously, by recognising the active role played by the observer in the process of observation, description or knowledge-making, so that one speaks of an observing system, a turning point is reached in the domain of science generally and in the social sciences, specifically. By taking note instead of the constructive relationship people have with the world (we know our world through our interpretations of it which arise through social interaction), the impetus is generated to release scientific discourse from the mechanistic metaphor with its corresponding emphasis on certainty, acontextuality, logic and ahistorical features. As a result, Ceruti (in Mc Namee & Gergen, 1992) states that knowledge in the constructive paradigm is seen as an "on-going self-referential construction" (p40). By defining knowledge in this manner, a "scientific" paradigm emerges that cannot rely on "objectivity, on one descriptive and accurate language, or on a universal conceptual framework" (p40).

Scarr (1985) recommends that instead of being daunted by the view that science is actually constructed knowledge, as social scientists, we should instead be humbled by the fact that our scientific creations are not the grand, unchangeable truths we imagine them to be. Instead science/constructed knowledge is the result of agreement and consensus amongst a group of researchers who share the same/similar values and ideas which arise from a shared context. This leads us to a knowledge that any one set of so-called established 'facts' are actually just a particular scientist's theoretical lens, and are relevant for a specific context at a specific time. Accordingly, Keeney and Morris, (1985) point to the growing awareness of research being part of a political context that sets out what is considered as legitimate theory and research. This relates closely to social constructionism's questioning of scientific theories and its critical stance towards them.

The constructionist viewpoint holds that although reality, and in accordance, scientific theories are products of a specific time and culture, this does not render them useless or negative. Rather, it is important that these constructions do have a specific theoretical context reflecting social, cultural and historical processes. Scarr (1985) sees this as an advantage in that our claims about truth can be more modest. As she concluded, any theory and its consequent directives for action are of limited usefulness - "limited by the sociocultural time and space in which they occur" (Scarr, 1985, p512). She also questions our need for an unchanging scientific base. As humans we live in a world that is constantly changing and indeterminate. Therefore new theories evolve all the time that become more suitable in describing human behaviour. As a result, a static scientific base is untenable, in a dynamic social world.

If one believes in an exact reality that is expected to be accurately reflected, the ability to be flexible in theory construction and subsequent action is severely limited. This is because the belief in one objective and certain reality limits one to develop theories that are based purely on this one reality and hence, other possible theories that reflect a multi-dimensional reality and therefore different points of view, cannot be created. As was illustrated in the discussion of the core assumptions of social constructionism, theory development and the

types of action it allows is a recursive process - if only certain theories are developed, only certain modes of action are allowed.

The constructionist view is liberating in that one is free to view 'reality' from multiple perspectives, constrained only by one's imagination, values, context and necessarily and unavoidably one's biases. According to Maturana and Varela (in McNamee & Gergen, 1992), the transition to this way of thinking implies that "universal truths or structure give way to a multiverse or plurality of ideas about the world" (p70), leading to multidimensionality and flexibility as opposed to rigidity in thinking, and consequently limited options for action. Practically, therapists will be open to conceptualising and approaching problems in multidimensional ways, allowing clients greater opportunity to explore new ways of thinking and behaving.

This connects with what Sloman (in Antaki, 1981, p219) regards as the central aim of science: "extending man's knowledge and understanding of the universe". In moving in this direction, the emphasis is upon extending our knowledge of possibilities as opposed to creating certainties. What is therefore an actuality for one person becomes a possibility for another, extending the range of choices for future human behaviour and experience.

#### The Interpretative Method

Due to a multiplicity of perspectives put forward by research participants (in this study, the family members) and researcher in interaction, as well as the belief that there is no objective reality to be accurately mirrored, everything said is open to interpretation. This does not imply analytic interpretation, but an interactive process of ascription of meaning to people's actions. The social sciences refer to the interpretative method when studying the ways in which people make sense out of the world (White & Epston, 1990). This method would state that it is through the meaning that individuals attribute to events that their behaviour occurs. Thus, in this research, the meanings socially constructed around themselves, their notions of other family members, as well as around homosexuality, shaped the family members' behaviour towards the son's admission of homosexuality. This view is an imposition of the researcher's semantic (meaning) frame onto the family members' behavioural description (a political frame) (Keeney and Ross, 1992).

Although the researcher provides her own interpretation of the family's experiences, according to Rizzo, Corsaro and Bates (1992), it must be remembered that for the particular family members, their cultural pattern and its subsequent implications for behaviour represent "a unit of coinciding schemes of interpretation and expression", (p105), so that for family members, the ability to sum up and act appropriately within their social milieu is an intuitive occurrence, in which behaviour is habitual and automatic.

For researchers, however, this automatic interpretation of family members' behaviour does not take place. Researchers are in a position where they have to take what they see as natural behaviour between family members and translate this into their own understanding of that behaviour. In such cases, the assumption that the interpretations will accord cannot

be made. On the contrary, researchers regularly have to deal with key differences between their way of interpreting situations and the way the family would interpret the situation. The researcher's interpretation is based on her experience of the family and what appears to be most fitting on the basis of her knowledge of the family's 'culture', her theoretical lens, the larger social mores prevailing, as well as her impressions of "the interactive history among the specific participants" (Rizzo et al, 1992 , p107).

However, to avoid becoming arrogant and believing that the researcher's interpretation of the family's patterns are the 'true' pattern, Bavelas (in Wassenaar, 1987) cautions us to be aware of reifying a pattern into a 'thing' (as in a reified object), which limits the opportunity for co-existing patterns to emerge.

One way of avoiding this pitfall is by recognising that the interpretation of findings (the imposition of a semantic frame onto a political behavioural description) is carried out according to a certain framework - in this case, a social constructionist and cybernetic one. This framework is an analogy used to describe the findings so that "the analogies that we employ determine our examinations of the world, the questions we ask about events the realities we construct . . . the analogies that we use determine the very distinctions that we pull out from the world" (White & Epston, 1990, p5).

In choosing one analogy over others, it is not possible to judge it by means of criteria of correctness or accuracy as this is an analogy and not the truth. Therefore researchers must be aware that their observations are coloured by the analogy they are using - the analogy in this research is social constructionism and second-order cybernetics.

#### Methodological Implications of Social Constructionism - a New Methodology

In conducting research, the new science paradigm moves away from measurement and quantification (reductionist assumptions) as well as attempting to establish objective findings. Perhaps one of the most important implications for research, according to a social constructionist perspective, is that it be conducted in the research participants' natural context. According to Lincoln and Guba (1988) the possibility of multiple realities existing and being interdependent with a particular context and time for their existence, presupposes that the research be conducted within this same "time/context complex" (p103). Rizzo et al. (1992) add to this view by stating that from a social constructionist perspective, researching human behaviour in its natural social ecology maintains the essence of this behaviour as the context in which this behaviour takes place is not interfered with. Therefore, according to Bateson (in Keeney & Morris, 1985), the emphasis in social constructionist research is on studying naturally occurring behaviour, without "disrupting the historical and interactional integrity of the whole setting" (p549).

Furthermore this contextual study should be complemented by an in-depth understanding of the social-ecological conditions in which this behaviour takes place as well as any changes that occur in these conditions over time, as this often necessitates an adjustment in people's

activities (Rizzo et al., 1992). (These evolving, socio-ecological conditions have been detailed in the previous chapter).

A further implication of social constructionist inquiry is a focus on the subjective nature of the research. Instead of attempting to dispense with subjective factors, researchers should instead attempt to address them and the inherent uncertainties that they bring, perhaps using tacit, intuitive knowledge to do so. In fact, the naturalists (those who study behaviour in its natural context) insist on the right to incorporate and use tacit knowledge (Guba & Lincoln, 1988, p103).

Tacit knowledge has been defined by Polanyi, (in Guba, 1981) as the knowledge that contains one's "intuitions, apprehensions or feelings that cannot be stated in the form of language but are somehow "known" (p78). This is distinguished from propositional knowledge that can be translated into language. Lincoln and Guba (1985) believe that just as values intrude and impact on research, so too does tacit knowledge. Therefore such knowledge must explicitly and legitimately be admitted as part of the research process. Many research insights that later become the basis for the development of hypotheses are initially based on tacit knowledge. In fact, it is only the human researcher that can develop tacit knowledge - any other research instrument is propositional in nature and cannot therefore be sensitive to nuances, intuitions and unstated feelings. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), it is imperative that tacit knowledge eventually be converted into propositional knowledge, making it explicit both for the researcher and readers, or else it would have little usefulness.

The use of tacit knowledge does not, however, allow the researcher to work carelessly and purely state what she thinks. Instead, because the researcher is the major research instrument, it is necessary that any biases on her part be made explicit (Moon et al., 1990). This relates to the second-order cybernetic principle of self-referentiality in which the observer is included in the observed. Therefore the observer/researcher's frame of reference must be accounted for.

Not only is subjectivity dealt with by making researcher biases explicit, but furthermore, it involves examining what one has done to create a particular research perspective as well as describing how the researcher's use of a particular theoretical perspective leads to her constructions and interpretations (Keeney & Morris, 1985). According to Spencer-Brown (in Keeney & Morris, 1985), this involves a process of "tracing the original distinctions that we prescribed in order to know the basic forms underlying our experience" (p545).

In this way, readers of research will be able to understand how the researcher came to her descriptions, as the researcher will be exposing the process of how the data was co-created and organised into meaningful distinctions (Atkinson & Heath, 1987). This leads to a core notion of constructionist research - that of reflexivity and self-reflexivity (Steier, 1991b). This implies that if researchers adhere to a constructionist perspective, the principles of constructionism must be applied to their own research. Therefore the research process is, in fact, the act of socially constructing a certain reality (i.e. the reality of the family) with the researcher taking responsibility for her constructions although they have been co-

created with research participants. She must also be aware that these constructions do not reflect an objectively existing reality. Therefore, researchers in the constructionist mode are aware that their descriptions of social systems (e.g. this researcher's description of the family) and the categories and names they apply in order to understand these systems derive from their own models of knowing the world as opposed to reflecting the truth. The focus then is on reflexivity - defined as a "bending back on itself" (Steier, 1991b, p2). What is important is the realisation that although we look to ourselves and our models to understand and describe what we see in research, this 'self' is also socially constructed through the experience of participating in the research and interacting with the research participants. Thus, the researcher's description does not arise from her lens only, but is an intersubjective description, reflecting a reality co-created by herself and the research participants in interaction.

From a constructionist perspective, one may ask how one develops methodologies to carry out research incorporating the notion of reflexivity. This has already been answered in the previous chapter by the use of a second-order cybernetic epistemology, as this epistemology is directly concerned with recursive, circular processes, as well as viewing the researcher as part of, as opposed to separate from, the research process. In such a case, the researcher and any responsibilities that occur as a result of researching are included in the research description. This is being reflexive.

Thus second-order cybernetics as the epistemology underlying this research correlates with a second-order constructionism as the guiding theory of this research, as both take the perspective of the observer into account as well as remembering that the account of the observer/researcher is a socially constructed one. This is so because our research description not only arises from our heads but is co-created through interacting with and listening to the participants stories'. Although the final product may be in the researcher's words, the path to get there was co-constructed by researcher and participants. In this way, the principle of reflexivity and the values of social constructionism are accounted for. Research is therefore a reciprocal process in which not only the researcher's voice is heard, but more importantly, the voices of the participants are included. This is reflected by the inclusion of their stories in the following chapter. In this way, one becomes a social constructionist researcher. In such a paradigm, family members are not viewed as research subjects but as co-researchers.

In the social constructionist paradigm, the researcher does not work with an *a priori* theory in mind, as opposed to the logical positivist paradigm in which one's theory guides one's research. Rather, the notion of grounded theory is incorporated, that is, theory that follows from the contextualised findings, rather than preceding it (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In addition, the social constructionist paradigm incorporates the concept of using theory which is applicable at a specific time for a specific subject- researcher context. This viewpoint enables multiple realities to be posited. An *a priori* theory would not be able to predict the many realities that the researcher will encounter when carrying out the research, or be able to take into account the myriad factors that impact at a local level (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

According to Glaser and Strauss (in Lincoln & Guba, 1985), when looking at the concept

of grounded theory, the terms 'fit' and 'work' are important, as a grounded theory will ultimately "fit the situation being researched, and work when put into use." (1985). This means that the categories the researcher applies to organise her findings must not be forced onto the findings in order to make sense, but instead must be naturally applicable and be able to explain the phenomenon under study.

Thus, the researcher conducted her interviews without any *a priori* theory in mind and only after the process of interviewing was the theory of social constructionism found to fit with the research.

From this perspective, it can be seen that the 'design' of the research is an evolving one, that emerges from the doing of the research itself, as the meaning that arises from the research is greatly determined by the context. Therefore, it is not enough to simply take the researcher's constructions into account, due to the multiple realities forwarded by the participants. The interaction between the researcher and family members, within their particular context, also shapes what is learnt by the researcher. This interaction is not predictable beforehand as the results of a mutual interaction cannot be predicted until they actually occur. All of these features taken together point to the indeterminacy of research in the new science paradigm, so that research becomes an unfolding process, co-evolved between researcher and participants (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). As a result, grounded theory is dependent on an emergent design.

#### Establishing Legitimacy within a Social Constructionist Perspective

Researchers adhering to the logical positivist scientific paradigm tend to view research conducted within the constructionist, ecosystemic framework as untrustworthy on the basis of factors such as lack of randomisation, inadequate control of variables and lack of standardisation, as well as no attempts to test for reliability and validity. Their strongest objection to new paradigm research is the lack of objectivity due to not carrying out the afore-mentioned procedures. However, working within a different paradigm, these criteria and procedures are inapplicable, indeed are inappropriate, unless one subscribes to a logical positivist philosophy. Within a social constructionist, ecosystemic framework, the notion of objectivity is fallacious due to its assumption of a separation between the observer and the observed. As Von Foerster (in Keeney & Morris, 1985) so aptly asked: "How would it be possible to make a description in the first place if the observer was not to have properties that allow him to generate such descriptions?" (p548).

#### Ethicality

As an alternative to the concept of objectivity versus subjectivity, an ethical perspective is proposed in which the link between observer and observed is recognised, so that it is crucial for the researcher to state how her constructions were co-created (Keeney & Morris,

1985; Steier, 1991a). This implies that researchers retrace the distinctions they created in co-constructing a 'reality' from the data, so that the reader may be open to the research process, as well as understanding how the researcher arrived at her conclusions (Atkinson & Heath, 1987). This corresponds with Spencer- Brown's earlier quoted statement of retracing the original distinctions we drew to arrive at our propositions. Through so doing, the researcher takes the notion of reflexivity seriously, as not only is she carrying out research, but she is also subjecting this research to be 'researchable' by others. In this way, the research conclusions are not seen as grand, incontrovertible truths but one way of describing a phenomenon that is useful for us and for our professional community (Steier, 1991a). In this way, the researcher is moved from her privileged position and readers are left to decide on the legitimacy of the researcher's constructions as they test it out for themselves (Atkinson & Heath, 1987). This presupposes that if readers are able to understand how the researcher arrived at her constructions, they can then decide whether these are feasible or not. In this way, ethicality is maintained. The researcher is not attempting to put one truth forward that may propose unethical action (e.g. homosexuals are mentally ill and should be discriminated against), but instead is demonstrating how she came to her conclusions, leaving it open for others to decide on the credibility and feasibility of them.

The type of information the reader is exposed to is important. Some types of data yield more useful information than others. Thus it can be assumed that a reader of research will gain more from having access to the actual research interviews (i.e. the transcripts) as opposed to pieces of data that have been selectively pruned by the researcher. In this way, the reader becomes as much part of the research process as the researcher and participants. In essence, the researcher provides the reader with the transcripts and then, through her theory and description of findings shows the reader how she has come to draw specific distinctions that meaningfully describe patterns or themes that she has observed through listening to the family. Ultimately then it is up to the reader to decide how credible the research descriptions are. The researcher also includes her own presumptions and ideas about homosexuals, as well as providing details about the family's local, contextual and broader societal situation (previous chapter) so that these constructions are placed within context. To reiterate Bateson (1972), nothing has meaning without context. In this way, ethicality is maintained. Atkinson and Heath (1987) go so far as to recommend that the quality of a research report be based upon how comprehensively the researcher gives the reader access to the process of research. Thus, a shift takes place in which it is the readers versus the researcher's responsibility to decide upon the legitimacy of research.

#### Communal Legitimation

The researcher must be reasonable in her constructed findings and illustrate these clearly, as well as provide the best possible evidence to support these constructions. However, it is actually the "consumers of research" (Atkinson, Heath & Chenail, 1991, p163) who establish the trustworthiness of the study by deciding whether they understand the researcher's reasoning that led to her descriptions and establishing whether these are feasible against their perceptions of 'reality'. Thus, the 'legitimation' of the study is dependent upon the

judgement of a "community of observers" (Atkinson and Heath, 1991), rendering this a democratic process, in which all research consumers have equal say. Other criteria can also be applied. For instance, an ethicality criterion would question if the values implied by the researcher's explanations are ethical, a morality criterion would question if the way the researcher constructed the social world of the participants is moral, and a pragmatic criterion would question if the constructions seem to make sense (Atkinson et al., 1991). This relates to the theoretical narrative in which the question of the types of social practices social constructionism supports arose. The answer was, amongst others, one of ethics.

Although this decision making is a highly subjective process, given that meaning arises through social interaction and language, it can be reasonably assumed that through dialogue among research consumers, certain ideas will be supported more than others. Both Hoffman (1991) and Atkinson et al. (1991, p163) argue that "dialogue and consensus is the only process through which some ideas can be said to be more legitimate than others in any scientific sense".

Lavee and Dollahite (1991) also propose the concept of legitimisation through consensual agreement. They state that within a post-positivist perspective, where scientific knowledge is viewed as created instead of being discovered, a consensus criterion for scientific knowledge is necessary. This is because scientists' knowledge arises within a specific sociohistorical context and is consequently limited in its claims to mirror an objective reality. It is necessary that scientific knowledge is not seen as an accurate mirror of reality but instead is seen as agreed upon consensus between members of the scientific community, to be legitimate for the particular time. The relation of this to social constructionist theory is clear.

Reason and Rowan (1981) extend this view by stating that "validity" is improved if one can say "we know" rather than "I know". This once more signifies an intersubjective agreement in which what is "right" is only so for a group of people (the audience of the research and scientific community) who share a similar world view. This presupposes a view of individuals as "interpretive agents" (Williams, Olson & Knapp, 1989, p22) who live within a specific sociocultural context.

Communal legitimisation (Atkinson et al., 1991, p163) does not only imply agreement, but may be characterised by tolerant disagreement. The point to remember is that whatever is resolved is often temporary, open to reconsideration and not necessarily unanimous. From this viewpoint, the adequacy of scientific theories is never definite. The community of scientists, as well as research consumers must always remain open to questioning and re-evaluating the usefulness of the theory.

With both researcher, participants and reader being involved in the research process, Atkinson and Heath (1987) believe that research will lead to a "renewed sense of community" (p15) where it is realised that no one person/group is in a better hierarchical position to determine the legitimacy of findings than others. This relates to Steier's (1991a) call to "deprivilege the research class" (p8).

### Research Participants' Perspectives

A further issue in social constructionist research is that the viewpoints of the participants involved in the research be illustrated, instead of the researcher assuming that she knows what they are attempting to convey and re-interpreting it. If the attempt is to study people who together actively interpret reality in their own terms, their rendition is the primary acceptable source of 'data'. The validity of an individual's experience can only be viewed in terms of the individual's role within the interaction that produced the event recounted. This points to the necessity of recounting each family member's story.

This philosophy assumes that multiple, co-constructed realities exist which are the creation of individuals in interaction. Therefore one way of establishing so-called "trustworthiness" is to show the researcher's ability to represent the multiple constructions of the family members (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The researcher in this study aims to do so by including the separate narratives of the family members (in the following chapter), according to her interviews with them. The correspondence of these stories can be tested by readers against the raw transcripts of the interviews, contained in the appendix.

Therefore, from a social constructionist perspective, the usual focus of research topics such as personality traits and intelligence reflects an atomistic instead of holistic perspective. This ignores the very core of human action which is its communicative function and by so doing, the significance of the study is lost for others (Rizzo et al., 1992).

It can thus be seen that the methodology of social constructionist, naturalistic research differs greatly from logical positivist research which is linear, rational and closed. Instead research in the new science mode is "circular, interactive, hermeneutic, at times extra rational (intuitive, not irrational), open, patterned as well as focusing on criteria of relevance versus methodological rigour" (Lincoln & Guba, 1988, pp.109 - 10).

### Transferability

With regard to the logical positivist notion of generalisability of findings, those conducting research within the ecosystemic, cybernetic paradigm reject the notion of generalisability on the basis that almost all social/behavioural phenomena take place within a specific context and era, so that one cannot develop general assertions that hold across place and time (Guba, 1981). However, although this may be so, this does not mean that some 'generalisations' cannot take place as two contexts may be very similar and one can perhaps generalise from one to the other. Subscribers to the new science paradigm, such as Lincoln and Guba (1985) advance the notion of transferability versus generalisability. They state that the ability to transfer findings depends on local contextual factors such as the similarity between the context in which the initial research was conducted, and the one to which the same findings will be extrapolated. Therefore the study is 'true' only within its specific time and context. Hence if transferability should exist, it is for the researcher seeking to make the transfer,

versus the initial investigator who does not know the areas and contexts in which transferability may be applied, to decide if transferability is possible. If transferability depends upon a match of characteristics between two contexts, the major responsibility for the initial researcher is to provide sufficient descriptive data to allow for such judgements of similarity between contexts. According to Geertz (in Guba, 1981), it is the initial researcher's task to collect "thick, descriptive data" (p86) that will allow for comparison of the context he is researching with other contexts to which transfer may be considered. Thick description has been defined by Lincoln and Guba (1985) as a "thorough description of the context or setting within which the inquiry took place and with which the inquiry was concerned. A thorough description of the transactions or processes observed in that context that are relevant" (p362) to the research focus. Therefore, descriptive data should describe the local situation of the participants including all relevant features, so that it can be clearly understood to allow other researchers to decide on the extent of 'fit' between the initial context and the one they wish to extrapolate to. Therefore, within this paradigm instead of attempting to develop generalisations that hold across time, descriptive and on a different level, interpretative information about a context is provided, and from this working hypotheses that may be tentatively transferred from one context to another are formed. This depends upon the similarity between contexts (Guba, 1981). The researcher will provide thick description by describing the context (previous chapter) and local factors, and including the family's narratives, the interview transcripts, her own description of the family as well as showing how she drew her distinctions (the theoretical narrative).

#### Coherence and Credibility

A further way with which to view such research is by the criterion of coherence (Lincoln & Guba, 1988). Within the logical positivist paradigm, correspondence with the real world is the focus. However, in a world of multiple realities, convergence on one true reality is impossible. The development of a construction that is internally consistent so that all research participants concerned agree that what is put forward by each of them reflects their reality perception of the events at the time, and is credible to all, leads one to the criterion of coherence. It will be seen that this coherence existed in the study and relates to the idea (to be explained) of a narrative audience who either support or doubt the story put forward.

In addition, and closely related to coherence is the concept of credibility (Guba, 1981). In order for the researcher's interpretations to be seen as credible it is necessary that she test these findings with the sources, that is, the research participants. This has been referred to as "member checking" (Guba, 1981, p80). However, one can run into problems with this as what the researcher 'finds' may be very different from the participants' view of reality and may not accord with how they view themselves. As Steier (1991b) states, it is the researcher who specifies the questions that characterise the phenomenon under study and who creates "order" , that is, meaning and understanding from the participants' stories. Thus, participants may agree with how the researcher has put forward their views (their narratives) but disagree with the researcher's interpretation of them. This is connected to the problem in qualitative research that LaRossa, Bennett and Gelles (1981) term "the exposure of a

family to itself." (p310), and is exemplified by the family reading the study about themselves. This area is particularly sensitive due to the investment people have in their families, the fact that the family is often the core of their world, as well as the basis for their self-esteem and confidence. Therefore people are more sensitive to criticism in this area. What can be said about resolving this problem is that it must be remembered that the researcher's description of the family arises from her theoretical lens as well as personal context, and this does not reflect the truth about the family, but one way of describing them. Further decisions about credibility can then be left to the consumers of the research or members of the professional community who can decide upon the credibility of the findings for themselves.

Extending the position of taking into account the multiple realities of research participants is the necessity to take into account the reality of the researcher's narrative. However, an over-focus on this as the truth can result in one becoming one-sided. Becoming one-sided by focusing only on the researcher's viewpoint or only on the research participants' viewpoint, ignores the interaction between the two that gives rise to the various stories elicited, that form the essence of the study, thus creating a double description (Reason & Rowan, 1981). If this focus is ignored, the so-called 'validity' of the research is threatened, as only one perspective is considered.

#### Goals of Naturalistic Research

Within such a perspective not only the methodology but the aims of research differ significantly from the logical positivist perspective. Because the assumption of one truth and one objective reality no longer holds, discovery becomes a significant goal, as what one finds is not the truth but a construction. If there are many constructions extant, the researcher must be open to hearing them and be flexible as new constructions emerge through interaction (Lincoln & Guba, 1988). Bateson (in Keeney & Morris, 1985) agrees with this by stating that one should not close off possibilities, but instead always be open to new ones and aim for "warm ideas" (p549). These are ideas which lead us to stay close to our subject matter and give us new ways of looking at and thinking about our research so that it is hoped we "extend our territory into new avenues of inquiry, and amplify our understanding beyond what we knew before (Bochner, 1981, p76).

According to Keeney and Morris (1985), the main aim of scientific research within the constructionist perspective is not to prove one's observations, but to create new theoretical principles (grounded theory) that may lead to the creation of alternative life experiences or solve specific, local, interpersonal problems.

Lincoln and Guba (1988) believe that this developed theory should then be extended and refined as the inquiry develops, so that verification is not as significant as is theory development.

When the researcher no longer has to unilaterally attempt to establish credibility or trustworthiness, she is given the freedom to throw herself into the singular experience of the

particular research, follow her intuitive knowledge and generate fresh insights that are illustrated in the writing stage of the research. As Keeney (1979) says: "When one can forget theory and technique, abandon purposive knowing and attend to the 'doing of non-doing' one can then (see) in an ecosystemic way" (p127). Once this takes place, the goals of research may no longer be to carry out rigorous methodology so as to establish general, universal laws, but instead to illustrate new experiences that give rise to new ways of conceptualising the social world.

This mode of research allows one to study complex events in context across time (Moon et al., 1990, p364) and aims to search for patterns of naturally occurring behaviour. Thus, the information gathered in the research situation is used to construct a model/description, which enables one to understand the particular phenomenon under study. According to Diesing (in Guba, 1981), this is done by "connecting themes in a network or pattern" (p205). Within this mode, Kaplan (in Guba, 1981) states that objectivity is reinterpreted to mean that the pattern can be fitted in and expanded indefinitely as further knowledge about the phenomenon is accumulated. This conceptualisation of generating a patterned description from the participant's stories fits with Bateson's formulation (quoted previously) of generating patterns that connect, instead of attempting to discover predictable generalisations that hold across time and context. The aim is to create new concepts, hypotheses and theory from the findings that may lead to pattern extension as well as be of use to others in understanding or further refining the area under study (Rizzo et al., 1992).

Reason and Rowan (1981) sum up research within the new paradigm by stating that it is multidimensional, co-operative, qualitative, holistic as well as taking place in natural settings as context plays an important role in the development of meaning. The researcher would like to add that this new form of research is most importantly, interpersonal and intersubjective, in which the social construction of phenomena must always be noted.

In summary, research from a social constructionist perspective which uses qualitative methods focuses on "social context, multiple perspectives, complexity, circular causality, recursion and holism" (Moon et al., 1990, p364).

Further discussion of different ways of establishing 'legitimacy' will arise in the explication of narrative itself. Although the discussion has so far been limited to the alternate use of another paradigm for conducting research congruent with a cybernetic epistemology and social constructionist theory, and how to establish 'reliability' and 'validity' within this paradigm, the discussion will now turn to the use of a particular research method within the new paradigm - that of narrative, which corresponds with the theoretical framework of social constructionism.

## Definition and Characteristics of Narrative

Sartre (in Bruner, 1987) states,

A man is always a teller of stories, he lives surrounded by his own stories and those of other people, he sees everything that happens to him in terms of these stories and he tries to live his life as if he were recounting it". (p21)

From time immemorial, storytelling or narrative via parables, myths, legends and allegories, has been used to teach morality, culture, values, mores and customs. Storytelling has hence played a vital and vigorous role in guiding tellers and listeners in their conduct and thought patterns, as well as providing a vehicle for entertainment (Sarbin, 1986).

According to Landau (1984, p262) the central claim of narratology is that human beings love to tell stories. In attempting to make sense of their lives, individuals arrange their experiences in patterned sequences across time so as to render a coherent picture of themselves and their world. According to Gergen and Gergen (in White & Epston, 1990), ways of understanding past events, present ones, and those that may occur in the future are connected in a linear manner to develop this account, which can be referred to as a story or "self-narrative" (p10). In the process of developing a self-narrative, the person strives to establish logical links among life events, so that instead of viewing one's life as purely one unconnected sequence after another, the person tries to understand events as systematically related. This self-narrative is not a collection of facts, but rather a story that embodies one's conception of self, relationships and life experiences so as to communicate to one's self as well as others about the meaning and purpose of one's life (Goldstein, 1990). Therefore the person's identity is an accumulation and evolution of a life story. Thus, narrative thinking is the invoking of a story form onto experience or events. This may take place instantaneously (i.e. as the experience occurs) or later in reflecting upon the experience or recounting it to self or others (Sarbin, 1986). If one is successful in telling a story about one's experiences, one is furnished with a sense of continuity and meaning in one's life. According to Bruner (1987) the self-told life narrative is ancient and universal. The variations in its telling are as a result of cultural and linguistic changes in historical eras.

In putting forward the narrative as a useful metaphor for explaining and understanding behaviour, social scientists such as Bruner, Gergen and Harre (in Epston, White & Murray, 1992) whose work is orientated to the interpretative method, have proposed that the story or narrative provides the principal structure to explain and organise lived experience. Our experiences are usually "storied" or narrated and through this storying, our meanings ascribed to the experiences are determined.

Furthermore Steier (1991a) argues that just as people make sense and meaning of their lives through storying about them, so too do researchers create their research worlds through storying about them, and, according to Wittgenstein (in Steier, 1991a) they view these narratives as experiences that guide one in viewing some "streams of life" (p164) as worthy of note

whilst leaving others in the shadows.

Thus in this research, the researcher viewed the process of disclosure of homosexuality as the narrative to note, while possibly leaving other aspects of the family's lives in the shadows.

Paget (1982) defines a "narrative" as a method of reporting events that occurred in the past. It has a cast of characters and a sequence of complicating events which are resolved. Also it has a point, a *raison d'être* and a coherent structure. As a story always takes place within a particular context, the uniqueness of any episode is conveyed, but because narratives are also characterised by certain consistent features (e.g., a beginning, middle and end) each narrative is similar to others so that a sense of familiarity is evoked for every reader/listener. It will be evident that the stories or narratives told to the researcher by the various family members include these elements indicating their appropriateness to be considered as narratives.

Gergen and Gergen (1986) consider the most vital feature of a narrative to be its ability to create directionality among a number of events that are otherwise isolated - thus, its ability to generate a pattern that connects.

Certain characteristics of narrative allow it to be so. Firstly the establishment of a goal state (Gergen and Gergen, 1987) or an end point that is of value to the major protagonist in the story. Once a goal state is established (in the present research, the disclosure), the narrator selects and organises events that render the goal state more or less probable, making the narrative coherent. Consequently, although many events may have occurred in a person's life, they are reduced to the ones significant to the particular narrative being told. For instance, in this research, the son viewed his mother's statement of his achievements at drama as unrelated to the narrative being told.

A second feature of narrative is the arrangement of events in chronological order or a linear, temporal sequence so that a sense of directionality is generated. According to Gergen and Gergen (1987), the ideal narrative embodies the ability to link the events preceding the goal state causally. This does not imply that one subscribes to a linear cause-and effect view of causality, but provides the narrative with a sense of coherence and intelligibility. What is included within the range of events is of course dependent on the current historical and social context.

In the family under discussion, the son, his mother and sister, in telling the researcher about the disclosure, structured the narrative in terms of the events leading up to his awareness of being homosexual (events of the past), the events leading up to the admission of homosexuality (explain existence of events in the present) as well as the outcome and consequences thereof (prediction of future).

A further characteristic of narrative which links to its feature of directionality is its delineation

of certain prototypical forms. For instance, if in the rendition of a narrative, progress towards the goal state is accentuated (e.g. progressing towards the goal state of disclosure), the narrative is of a progressive nature. If no change occurs, one may talk of a stability narrative, and if the linking of events moves one away from the desired goal state, a regressive narrative is found (Gergen & Gergen, 1986). In the family of this study, it can be said that a progressive narrative was elicited. A narrative should employ demarcation signs in which the properly formed story has a clear beginning and ending. A further essential feature of a narrative is that the motivations of their actions are explained by the narrators themselves, thereby personalising the accounts, pointing to the principle of self-referentiality.

A narrative which contains these components is considered to be a well-formed, clearly elucidated one and therefore worthy of analysis for social scientific purposes-what Stein and Policastro (in Sarbin, 1986) would call a "structurally complete story" (p112).

The narratives elicited from the family members of the research incorporate all of these elements and are thus suited to analysis. It must be noted that narratives are not however, reified structures that must contain these features. Rather if a narrative is seen as metaphoric of life meaning, it is more easily understandable if it contains certain features. There is, however, no wrong or right.

As one of the primary features of narrative is the temporal ordering of events, it appears that when people narrate their experiences, they often do so in the form of "nested narratives" or "narratives within narratives" (Gergen and Gergen, 1983, p263). Sarbin and Scheibe (1983) provide an example of this by stating that some people view themselves as part of a long cultural history, but nested within this narrative, they may possess an independent account of their development since childhood.

The event of the disclosure as recounted by the family was storied as a simple and cohesive narration. However, the researcher's subsequent delineation of patterns and themes points to a "nested narrative" within the main story. These patterns and themes will be expanded upon in a following chapter.

Greimas (in Bruner, 1987) speaks of narrative as being enacted upon a "dual landscape" (p20) - a landscape of action which refers to the events comprising the story and a "landscape of consciousness" (p20) which refers to the inner world of the participants - their meanings and ideas. This shall be referred to in a following chapter and reiterates again the connection between meaning (semantics) and action (politics).

To conclude, the researcher will be using the narratory principle as an overarching conception to account for the organising and patterning of ecological events within the family. This is because the narrative/story is able to ascribe meaning and coherence to experiences. It is co-constructed through social interaction and is useful for this research as the family members together co-constructed the narrative of the disclosure, as well as events prior to and past it.

## The Language of Narrative Research

Within a logical positivist research framework, the language used is indicative so as to reduce uncertainty as certainty is seen to be vital and consequently, truth absolute. By so doing, it appears as if reality has a substance, a materiality, so that individuals develop a sense of certainty about the world in which they live. According to Bateson (in Auerswald, 1985), this materiality excludes the positivists from studying abstract ideas such as "mind" (p4), as one cannot be certain in such an area, nor is quantification possible. As the emphasis is on consistency and accuracy, possible alternative meanings to words are eliminated by univocal word usage and quantitative descriptions (White & Epston, 1990). These quantitative descriptions necessitate a study of phenomena broken down into separate bits. This is atomistic and reductionistic, as opposed to the narrative mode in which the primary focus is on patterned events (Auerswald, 1985).

In the logical positivist paradigm, the possibility of words having more than one meaning, or being dependent upon the context for their meaning is prohibited, since meanings are assumed to be acontextual and permanent across the passage of time. The beauty of narrative is that it is able to convey the individualised meanings of storytellers. Their repetitive use of certain phrases or words often metaphorically reflects their central meanings, as opposed to eliciting standardised accounts of phenomena.

Within the narrative mode, language used is in the subjunctive mood which triggers the creation of implicit rather than explicit, definite meanings (White & Epston, 1990). This opens up a wide range of possibilities of what may be meant so that each reader/listener can derive his own unique meaning from the story. Use of language in this mode therefore stresses the subjectivity and complexity of experience, broadening the possible realities to be encountered. In this mode, conversation is exploratory and co-evolutionary as opposed to being purposefully motivated (White & Epston, 1990). Because of this complexity, one is able to think richly and multi-dimensionally about options for action instead of phenomena being understood and approached in one way only .

Most importantly, within the narrative mode and congruent with the tenets underlying social constructionism, language has all of these characteristics (stated above) because it is a social activity that takes place between people as they interact and together co-evolve the meaning of the conversation. In this sense, language refers to the role it plays in reflecting meaning and its function as a form of social participation, influenced by the historical and cultural context (Anderson & Goolishian, 1987). Language only assumes meaning in the social arena so that language and meaning is "interactional, is local in nature and always changing" (p532). This challenges the logical positivist conception of the universal validity of language and meaning, as within the narrative mode, language is intersubjective and constantly open to change.

## Legitimation of Narrative

Having discussed the characteristics of narrative, the issue of establishing its legitimacy arises.

In focusing upon the narrative as a major way of conducting research through in-depth interviewing, a way to assess the 'rightness' of such narrative constructions is through their explication in the social arena. As the use of a narrative always implies an audience, if others find one's narrative believable and the events reported possible, the narrative construction is supported. If such renderings are viewed as impossible and dubious, the narrative is rejected. Thus, as said, criteria of 'legitimacy' are established in the social arena as the construction of a narrative is a social act.

As narratives are used to convey information about one's life experiences and meanings, the focus on a 'true' reality becomes less important, and the concern is rather with the implications of these constructions for further action by the teller and the audience (in this research, the audience being family members and researcher as well as research consumers - the 'scientific audience'). In this way narratives are suggestive of options for action and open up possibilities: "In this sense, narrative constructions are more like invitations to a dance than mirrors of reality" (Gergen and Gergen, 1987, p274).

The narrative mode of thought is characterised by stories that are credible due to their life-likeness. This life-likeness is further exemplified by the researcher's interaction with the participants as people with stories to tell versus research subjects. As Heron (in Reason & Rowan, 1981) states "a research process which does not rest on experiential knowledge is not research about persons but hangs in a . . . void" (p242).

Within the narrative mode, the aim is not to focus on similarities among phenomena that can be developed into general abstractions but instead to detail the particularities of the research context that give it its uniqueness. Wassenaar (1987) proposed that it is possible that no study's results will ever be of general significance due to the singularity of the events described. Bavelas (in Wassenaar, 1987) extends this view by commenting that the best researchers can do is to describe specific patterns. (The reader should take into account that description of these patterns are meaning [semantic] frames imposed by the researcher on the family's narratives after her co-evolution of findings with the family). These patterns may be useful to others within similar contexts or situations. Therefore although describing one singular experience, it is hoped that the patterns and theory developed are useful to others. Hence the legitimacy of narrative lies not in establishing reliability or validity, but in creating stories that are meaningful, coherent, credible and useful to others.

## The Link between Social Constructionism and Narrative

According to Burns (in Sarbin & Scheibe, 1983), "the composition of action as plot . . . depends on the consensual and generative relationships of individuals" (p103).

Throughout the discussion of the use of narrative, it has been implied that story telling is carried out in interaction with others and is thus a co-operative enterprise. The following section will detail the connection of narrative with social processes, that is, its appropriateness as a 'data' tool of a social constructionist framework. This is because one of social constructionism's major assumptions is that world-making' (White & Epston, 1990, p11) is a principal function of storying about one's experiences during social interaction.

Bateson (1979) defines a story as a "little knot or complex of that species of connectedness which we call *relevance*" (p22). He argues that stories naturally establish connections between people. Firstly, because some people have similar stories, and secondly, because all people think in terms of stories. He views stories as inextricably linked with context, as one's position within a specific context is recursively connected with what one is able to story about. This is a recursive process, as we shape our reality through our storying within a particular context, and that context, in turn, contributes to the possible content and meaning of our story. Bateson also views stories as linked with meaning, as without a specific context, words and action have no meaning. Thus, according to Bateson (in Stroh Becvar & Becvar, 1993) stories establish connections between parts, (i.e. the pattern that connects), which to him is "at the very root of what it is to be alive" (p23). For Bateson, to speak of stories rather than of 'true' reality means that truth, as defined by logical positivism, is not available to us. Rather, according to Lax (in McNamee & Gergen 1992), so called true scientific knowledge about the world gives way to "narrative knowledge with emphasis upon communal beliefs about how the world works" (p69). This links with social constructionism due to the emphasis on the intersubjective, social creation of beliefs.

According to the idea that reality is storied through interaction with others, our identity and relationship with self and others is defined by how we story about and define ourselves in interaction with others, and recursively their understanding of us.

According to Bateson (in Stroh Becvar & Becvar, 1993) second-order cybernetics is about stories - stories we tell ourselves and that we perform in our lives, and these stories become our meaning in life. "Our stories are the houses, the families, the communities, nations and cosmos in which we live. That is, we dwell in very different places relative to the stories according to which we operate" (Stroh Becvar & Becvar, 1993, p354).

These stories are not however renditions that can take place without constraints or limits, but instead are firmly situated within the political, social and cultural contexts of their time. Due to their dependence upon cultural norms and language usage, they reflect the possibilities for experience within a particular cultural and historical era, relating to social constructionism's emphasis on the sociocultural creation of knowledge.

In addition to the cultural constraints on narrative, narrative construction depends on shared cultural systems of understanding. The very use of language and sounds is dependent on others' understanding it, that is, on its communicative capacity. For instance, a gesture is meaningless unless someone else comprehends what it is intended to convey. Therefore in linking events in one's life, one is dependent upon shared communicative symbols, implying the existence of an audience, rendering it a social act. This again reflects social constructionism's emphasis on co-evolved realities of understanding on a social level.

All of the above points to the strong emphasis on narratives as reflecting a particular sociocultural era. This fits with social constructionism's emphasis on the co-construction of realities being limited by and reflective of the prevailing sociocultural era.

"Narratives as linguistic devices are inherently a product not of individuals but of interacting persons" (Gergen & Gergen, 1984, p184). As Sluzki (1992) would say, each person's story is embedded in an intricate network of narratives that mutually influence each other, so that individuals, families and larger systems all take part in this system of multiple stories. This is another rationale for the researcher having all family members present in the son's rendition of his narrative.

At the outset, individualised accounts typically include other persons - a supporting cast. One's identity in such stories is dependent upon how members of the supporting cast are constructed and recursively how they construct us. As one extends one's story to include those of 'others', often audience members, as in the case of the family under study, one soon becomes aware that humans live in a state of "ontological interdependence" (Gergen and Gergen, 1987, p274) so that each story teller's construction of his or her life is dependent on the constructions of others. Invariably, the notion of social co-construction predominates.

The social interdependency of narrative accounts is clearly evidenced when hearing how people co-construct accounts of their experience. For instance, in this study, the family co-operate to construct a coherent narrative about the experiences of the disclosure, and the consequences thereafter. Thus, the reality that is co-created and co-evolved becomes a "communal product" (Gergen and Gergen, 1984, p184), due to the interdependent creation of narrative accounts.

The incidents included in a particular narrative involve not only the actions of the principal teller (e.g. the homosexual son), but include his interactions with others, so that others' behaviour forms a vital contribution to the linkage of events and content in the narrative. The son is also the supporting actor in the mother and sister's stories in which they become the principal actors. The interdependence of socially constructed narratives again highlights how narratives are primarily a product of social behaviour and therefore involve a reciprocity in the negotiation of meaning. One cannot alone decide on how others felt but must take others' perspectives into account. One's view of the supporting role played by others gains credence due to the cast's acquiescence in this perspective. Thus, narrative is a consensual co-construction. If others disagree with their roles in the narrative, the credibility of the narrative

is questioned. Within the social constructionist framework, the extent to which the family accept the roles ascribed to them in each other's stories is the test of whether or not the 'research results' can be considered credible and reliable. In this family, all saw themselves described accurately in each other's stories, depicted through their individual narratives and contributions to the son's narrative, and his contribution to their stories, thus supporting and lending credibility to this 'main' narrative. If this did not occur, the chief narrator (the son) would have been placed in a precarious position, as would have the others. Therefore a person's success in maintaining his narrative is vitally dependent on negotiated agreement with others about accepting their parts in relation to the author. As Schapp (in Gergen and Gergen, 1984) states, each of us is 'knitted' into others historical constructions as they are knitted into ours.

Relevant to this is Cicourel's (in Sarbin & Scheibe, 1983) concept of "reciprocity of perspectives" (p272), referring to the assumption that each person would have the same experience if they were to change places. Total reciprocity implies unreserved acceptance of the other's narrative, rendering it a socially co-constructed reality. Thus, in a narrative, all are both main and supporting actors in which stories are interconnected and intersubjectively co-evolved. These stories create a double description.

This view of narrative stresses the dialogical social process of narrative construction rather than the monologue which is centred upon a single person's intrapsychic processes and does not include the perspectives of others in contributing to one's life.

To sum up, a narrative is a social construction limited by and reflecting the prevalent socio-cultural mores. This explains the researcher's choice of narrative as the methodological tool, congruent with a social constructionist theoretical framework.

The following section focuses on the design and application of narrative methodology in the research.

#### Narrative as an Appropriate Methodology for the Research

As the link between social constructionism and narrative has been explicated, the argument for using narrative as an appropriate methodology for social constructionist research, will be expanded upon.

The use of narrative as the research process for social constructionism is a logical one since social constructionism studies people in everyday life within their social context and sociocultural era. The natural way for so doing, as said, is by listening to people story about themselves and their experiences, as this constitutes their reality. This reality, made up of their narratives, is a socially constructed one, as stories are intersubjectively co-evolved, evidenced by the family members' narratives.

Mitchell (1981) defines a narrative as having a specific syntactic shape that is characterised

by a "situation-transformation-situation" (p85) as well as a content that encourages the imposition of human feelings and values. This is because, as has already been made abundantly clear, no particular rendering may be independent of the teller, so that it is safe to assume that each rendition of a story is constructed with certain purposes in mind. This relates to the selective process of narrative in which one only brings into one's account events that fit with the prevalent evolving story that we and others share about us. Thus, in the research under study, the main protagonist, the son, brought in certain aspects he considered relevant to the process of disclosure since the researcher had informed the family that this was where her interest lay. Hence the narrative by family members, especially the son, was constructed accordingly, once again pointing to the social construction of stories.

As said, a main purpose of social scientific research is to describe and provide a theoretical understanding of social processes that include complex relationships over time. Narrative constructions fulfil this by organising the unfolding of events into story form to provide an understanding of complex events across time. However, people tend to tell stories in a linear manner in which they connect events as causal of each other. This gives stories their coherence as every story has a beginning, an ending and events in between that make up the passage of time. However, the fact that events can be connected across time does not establish a causative relationship between them (Auerswald, 1985). Rather, the constructionist view of causality holds that what occurs in a situational context comes about through interaction, so that each person shapes and is shaped by others in many complex ways. Therefore one cannot aim at an understanding of A causing B but can only aim to understand complex patterns of human behaviour (Lincoln & Guba, 1988) and the ways in which A and B are inter-connected within a specific context at a specific time. Within a cybernetic, social constructionist framework, it is for the researcher to read into these linear stories, patterns, interrelations and recursion of these patterns. This is achieved by asking questions that add depth and complexity to the research participants' narratives, enabling the co-construction of recursive patterns and themes.

According to Robinson and Hawpe (in Sarbin, 1986), the success of storying is because stories are the natural way in which individuals reflect upon their experiences. This provides a rationale for using narrative in accordance with the theoretical framework of social constructionism as both study people in natural life. Because humans are social creatures who interact with others regularly, they need ways of understanding each other's behaviour. To do so necessitates analysing action within its social context as context is strongly interlinked with meaning and behaviour. The categories and associations which make up narratives are the result of the analysis of social conduct. Thus narratives provide the solution to understanding behaviour through creating intelligible order in human conduct.

As Bateson (in Colapinto, 1979) said, "there is no such thing as a 'neutral' or 'uncontaminated' grasping of 'reality' but rather a patterned approach to it after a set of categories that regulate both our perceptions of and our action on reality" (p428). As opposed to viewing these categories as universal truths as in the logical positivist epistemology, Bateson (1979) noted their cultural conditioning, which links with social constructionism's emphasis on context and

local and wider social conditions. This is suitable for narrative constructions which are elicited within a particular "time/context complex" (Lincoln & Guba, 1988, p103).

Thus, the narrative gives the reader a clear idea of the person's life context as well as the socially co-constructed meanings allowed within that context. The elicitation of narratives by the various family members allows the researcher, together with the family, to co-evolve a story of disclosure that is dependent on all participants for its meaning and evolution. The concepts of co-evolution and social construction that are vital for the development of narrative fit clearly with a social constructionist framework.

Narratives also create full accounts of an experience as opposed to chopping information up into bits and pieces. This further accords with the social constructionist mode where the aim is to understand human experience holistically, without breaking it up into cause-effect sequences, as the logical positivists do.

The principal of self-referentiality, crucial to second-order cybernetic thought, is invoked by the use of narrative. This is because the creation of a story is dependent upon the narrator, rendering it a personalised account. The story includes the emotions, aims, desires and values of the creator. Within the social constructionist mode, these are all contributed to by others' participation in the story, rendering it to be a socially constructed process.

Thus, within the narrative mode, the stories and therefore the personal experience of the participants form the essence of the research as they embody the lived experience of the participants and enable an understanding of their contextual behaviour (White & Epston, 1990). This links with social constructionism's emphasis on context.

Within the narrative mode, the person is viewed as being a primary participant in his world and as being proactive (versus passive) in deriving different meanings from his storying of experience. People are viewed as interacting together in their storying and this is what shapes their lives and relationships, as opposed to viewing the person's world as shaped by mechanical forces.

Extending the second-order cybernetic principle of observer within the observed, thus leading to self-referentiality within the narrative mode, the interaction between the observer and observed is included in the researcher's narrative so that the position of the observer/researcher becomes that of a "privileged author" (White & Epston, 1990, p80) in the construction of the story. Likewise in this research, the researcher may be considered the privileged author in the story of the family.

Within such a framework, control is not purely in the hands of the researcher, but instead the research takes on a "negotiated or collaborative form" (Lincoln and Guba, 1988, p99). Furthermore, Torbert (in Lincoln & Guba, 1988) suggests that such collaborative inquiry should not only focus on the research participants' responses but should also include the researcher's own activities so that they are open to observation. This has been detailed through the

discussion of the establishment of legitimacy via ethicality in social constructionist research.

This alternative paradigm states that at least three levels of relationship occur between the researcher and participants of the study - the level of reaction takes account of the response of the research participant. This level is admitted by logical positivists. The level of disturbance acknowledges the impact of the researcher on the participants so that the researcher in establishing a relationship with participants is able to focus on certain areas of inquiry whilst precluding others. The level of interaction acknowledges that the focus of inquiry and people involved with it may impact on the researcher as much as he or she impacts on them (Lincoln & Guba, 1988), which points to the principle of recursion.

This links with the earlier discussion of establishing reflexivity in research. According to Ruby (in Guba, 1981) the researcher must "intentionally reveal to his/her audience the underlying epistemological assumptions which cause him/her to formulate a set of questions in a particular way, and finally to present his/her findings in a particular way (p87). Reinharz (in Guba, 1981) agrees that research reports usually only include discussion of the problem and method but not of the inquirer and the process of co-constructed meanings. The question of reflexivity is addressed in this research by the researcher stating her epistemological theoretical framework in a previous chapter, so that the focus of inquiry and the manner in which the findings are constructed can be clearly understood in terms of her epistemological framework. Furthermore, the family's transcripts are included to establish a reflexive circle back to them, so that the eventual narrative co-construction (contained in the researcher's narrative) is clearly understood.

As the role of the researcher is included and the contribution of the researcher is not viewed as scientific truth, the role of values in such research must be considered. Within the social constructionist framework, it is accepted that the research is influenced not only by the researchers' values but also by the values of the inquiry paradigm as well as the social and cultural norms of the researcher and research participants. These norms may be different from each other - as was the case in this research study.

The researcher of this study aligns herself with the social constructionist approach and agrees with Lincoln & Guba (1988) who state . . . .

If one defines reality as multiple . . . ; if one believes that there is an interaction between the inquirer and the respondents of such a nature that it literally creates the findings of the inquiry . . . if one believes that understandings can be developed only with respect to particular temporal and contextual conditions, and then only by appreciating the pattern of complex interactions that exist . . . ; and if one believes that values inevitably influence the outcome of an inquiry . . . (p99)

then this analogy is the preferable one.

The fit of this mode of thinking with narrative in its explication of socially constructed

narratives that reflect different realities, dependent on the story makers and the particular context in which they live, deems narrative to be an appropriate methodology for social constructionist research.

## The Research Process

### The Sample

One family was interviewed for the research. This family was recruited by the placement of an advertisement in a daily newspaper, requesting the participation of families in which one of the members is homosexual. The fact that only one family responded is further testimony to prevailing cultural standards, which although less stringent than in previous years, may still view homosexuality in a negative way. Therefore the current viewpoint accords with the researcher's own hypothesis that a child in the family admitting his homosexuality is viewed, both socially and familiarly as negative, and therefore not accessible to research.

Contact between the researcher and family was made by a letter written by the daughter in which she described her family's background and welcomed the opportunity to participate in the research. The researcher made telephonic contact and arranged a meeting with the family comprising mother, daughter and son (homosexual). The father did not form part of the family interview as the parents are divorced. Thus family members that were interviewed were the mother, Barbara (approximately 45 years old), the daughter, Tanya (25 years old) and the son, Kevin (24 years old). Also present at the interviews was the son's boyfriend, Paul (25 years old) although he did not contribute much to the interview content.

These are not the real names of the participants. Their names have been changed to maintain confidentiality.

The initial interview took place at Kevin and Paul's home in a bohemian type Johannesburg suburb. The couple have been living there for approximately a year. The interview took place there as it suited the family members to meet there and it was close to the researcher's home. The second interview took place at the mother's home in a middle-class Johannesburg suburb. Kevin requested this and said that this would be convenient for everyone that evening.

As the study involved one unique family, the findings cannot be extrapolated to all families with a homosexual son. To do so would be subscribing to a logical positivist assumption of one truth and one objective reality. It is hoped that the descriptions will be useful in illustrating the experiences of a family who experienced the disclosure of a member and in so doing, open up possibilities for others in a similar situation. These descriptions may also lead to the development of grounded theory, that is, theory that results from conducting research without any *a priori*, theoretical assumptions in mind.

The motivation for having the family participate was congruent with an ecosystemic/cybernetic

epistemology that focuses upon whole systems and complete cybernetic circuits, for as Bateson (in Keeney, 1981) would recommend, one does not chop up interactions which comprise whole systems. Furthermore as a story is a social construction, it is important that the whole family participate in creating it. Bruner (1987), in viewing the family as a miniature culture, sees the advantage of having all the family members participate in the research, as an opportunity to explore how stories are made to mesh with each other through their implicit "ecology of ideas" (Bogdan, 1984, p384). According to Bateson (1979) descriptions from many perspectives allow one to arrive at a systemic view of human relationships and interactions. When people interact, each participant has a specific perspective of his or her interactions. If these perspectives are combined, a view of the complete system will be generated. For Bateson, by combining these different perspectives one is able to envisage patterns which connect .

#### Source and Format of 'Data'

In-depth interviewing was used so as to collect data. Interviews were conducted with all members present. The rationale and use of in-depth interviewing will be discussed in a following section. The interviews were audio-taped and then transcribed.

#### Procedure

Interviews were scheduled by the researcher and daughter. Before the interviews began participants read and agreed to the stipulations of a consent form in which it was stated that they agreed to participate in research in which their identities would be kept confidential. Therefore their names and any details pertaining to their identities have been changed.

#### Methodology of the Interview

According to Brenner (in Brenner, Brown & Canter, 1985), the term "interviewing" means literally to develop a view of something between (inter) people (Brenner, 1985).

Traditionally, Cannel and Kahn (in Robson, 1991) have defined an interview as a conversation "initiated by the interviewer for the specific purpose of obtaining research-relevant information and focused by him on content specified by research objectives of systematic description, prediction or explanation" (p229).

This definition corresponds with a logical positivist epistemology with its' emphasis on prediction and explanation. Mishler (1986a) contends that a new way of viewing the in-depth interview is necessary - one that is congruent with the epistemological shift towards viewing human behaviour as socially connected.

In Mishler's (1986a) view, an interview is a form of discourse that is shaped by the asking and answering of questions. Furthermore, the interview is a collaborative exercise in which participants and interviewer together co-evolve the conversation.

As opposed to the logical positivist paradigm, in which emphasis is placed on standardising interviews by means of questionnaires, so that all respondents are exposed to the same 'stimulus' in an effort to generalise findings, Mishler (1986a) views this as evincing a disregard for the participants "social and personal contexts of meaning" (p96). Reducing respondents' replies to quantified bits of information reflected through their responses to questionnaires, results in a depersonalisation of the research experience.

Interviewing as a research practise that gets in touch with research participants, was advocated as far back as 1942, when Allport stated that if one wanted to find out about people's activities, the best way to do so was to ask them themselves (Brenner et al., 1985). Harre and Secord (in Brenner et al., 1985) further argued that it is research participants themselves who are expert at discussing their experiences. This approach views research participants as the central actors of their own stories, akin to the assumptions of narrative, and sees the interview as having the potential to provide rich, illustrative material.

The actual face-to-face contact between the researcher and participants allows direct communication so that "the subtleties of the mutual understandings between the two parties can be harnessed" (Brenner et al., 1983, p3).

Thus, through interviews, the worlds of those being studied are opened, so that these worlds are understood with greater clarity (Ely, 1991). The researcher of this study found the interview invaluable in opening up understandings of the participants' worlds.

Massarick (in Reason & Rowan, 1981), has described the in-depth interview as characterised by an intensive process on the part of the interviewer to thoroughly explore the views and dynamics of the participants, whilst remaining aware of self-reference and co-construction. Within such a context, the relationship between researcher and participants is important. Initially, an interview is a forced interaction between strangers. The aim of the researcher is to conduct the interview in ways that motivate the respondents to participate fully as well as to nurture and support them in this experience. The aim is that both researcher and participants find the experience mutually beneficial (Williamson, Karp, Dalphin & Gray, 1982).

The researcher of this study attempted to put the participants at ease by engaging in casual conversation with them before going on to explain the aims of her research and what she wished to accomplish, so as to provide a structure for the family. Her manner was relaxed and informal, so as to encourage open, trusting communication.

Initially respondents often have fears and reservations about the intentions or objectives of the interview, and may therefore both consciously and unconsciously continually make decisions about how much to reveal. It is hoped that once the interview is progressing smoothly, the participants will see that it is the interviewer's aim to explore and understand as opposed to exploit and abuse (Williamson et al., 1982). The researcher found that once the family members were involved in the interview, they began to speak freely and to enjoy

talking about their unique experience.

According to Massarik (in Reason & Rowan, 1981), a further means of establishing rapport and trust between interviewer and participants is if participants are able to ask questions of the interviewer. These may involve why the researcher chose the topic in question, as well as gaining clarification on certain points. It is harmless for the researcher to respond as well as for the researcher to reveal facts about herself. This creates a two-way interaction, instead of a one-way flow (Williamson et al, 1982), and is in fact, characteristic of research in a social constructionist mode. In this research, family members asked the researcher why she had chosen the particular topic as well as asking her about herself.

According to Massarik (in Reason & Rowan, 1981), within such a context, the relationship between researcher and participants can be described as one of "peers" (p205), both working equally towards the goals of the research. It is hoped that through the interviewer's interest in the participants' responses, that the participants, feeling valued, respond in suitable depth (Reason and Rowan, 1981). In order for this to take place, "field entry" (Rizzo et al., 1992, p104) is important.

Field entry refers to how the researcher 'joins' with family members always being aware that she impacts on the research setting in a particular way. The aim is to be viewed as a member of the group and to gain a perspective from the inside. This enables the researcher to get a clear feel of what the research participants' experience is like and to understand the rationale for their behaviour. The researcher's field entry has been noted in this chapter and will be further noted in the following chapter.

Once the relationship between researcher and participants is established, and the interview process is under way. Brenner et al. (1985) outline certain basic rules which should be followed by the researcher. These involve questioning in a non-directive manner so that no 'right' or 'wrong' answer is suggested; taking care that the narratives elicited are adequate, that is, "complete linguistically comprehensible, free of internal inconsistencies" (p159) as well as acting as a facilitator in terms of being non-judgemental and supportive. Through this, it is hoped that the participants are motivated to participate fully in the interview process.

If any direction is provided, Bertaux (in Brenner et al., 1985) suggests that this incorporates the researcher looking for patterns of similar episodes at different points in time and searching for participant's value judgements and emotional involvement in the topic under discussion. In a sense, this is what this particular study involved. Looking for patterns of similar episodes refers to the search for patterns that connect in a recursive manner. The search for the participants' value judgements and emotional involvement refers to the participant's political and semantic frames of reference.

Williamson et al. (1982) caution that the researcher must always be cognisant of whether the objectives of the study are being met by the participant's responses.

According to Brenner et al. (1985) one of the most important values of the interview lies in the fact that both researcher and participant are able to explore the meaning of the questions and answers put forward, due to the direct nature of the contact. There is an implicit or explicit sharing and/or negotiation of understanding in the interview situation. Thus, in the social constructionist mode, questions and answers are thought of as co-evolving and as part of a circular process between participants and interviewer as together they attempt to understand one another's meanings.

Paget (in Mishler, 1986a) states that the distinctive feature of in-depth interviewing is that the answers given constantly inform the evolving conversation. Although the formulation of a tentative guide for conducting the interviews which includes general topics or specific questions to be answered, is necessary in order to guide the conversation, the principle of evolutionary feedback is important. In the research conducted, the researcher had a broad frame of questions to be asked, such as when Kevin first knew he was homosexual, the experience of self-discovery, and his eventual disclosure to his family and their experience of it. However within the actual context the researcher used the respondents' feedback as a springboard for further exploration. The questions were not standardised or predetermined by an interview questionnaire but evolved during the course of the interview through the recursive feedback loops established in conversation.

Thus, instead of asking a specific type of question, the researcher tracked where necessary to elicit further information and used clarification questions when confused. Exploratory questions were asked so as to complexify understanding and meaning. The ecosystemic principle of circularity was applied by eliciting each family member's perception of an event described. This enabled full descriptions and the establishment of relational links between family members. If another family member who was not present was mentioned, the researcher attempted to obtain their reaction to the event in question, being aware that each form part of the significant system, thus extending the circularity beyond the members present. Most of the time family members spoke to each other about the experience as they were aware of the story line the researcher was interested in. When it was deemed necessary, the researcher would ask questions to guide the conversation back on track. However, for the most part, a conversation would naturally evolve and the researcher's questions would be in response to the conversation, that is, of a feedback nature. Feedback upon feedback was established by asking other family members what they thought about what another was saying, so as to create feedback loops. Questions were open ended and orientated towards discovery, with the researcher assuming a stance of curiosity. Certain questions were asked in line with her tacit knowledge so as to convert this knowledge to propositional knowledge.

The researcher of this study also identifies with Paget's (1982) notion of the interviewer always being implicated in the construction of the phenomena under analysis. This therefore includes the observer in the observations. This relates to the context of the study. Although the interviewer and participants both live within a specific sociocultural context, the actual interview itself is also a specific context. This links with the assumption made by social

constructionism, that understandings and viewpoints are related to social and cultural contexts and come about through social interaction. Thus according to Brenner (in Brenner et al., 1985), the narratives elicited through the interviewing process are the "joint product of the questions as perceived by participants and the social situational circumstances within which the questions were put to them" (p150). Therefore, the narratives elicited are not only embedded within a certain sociocultural context but are also embedded within the context of the interview situation.

Amongst the various reasons put forward for using the in-depth interview in research is the assumption that people are able to remark on their experiences and feelings and in fact do so in everyday conversation. The interview aims to elicit the everyday activity of talk (Brenner et al, 1985). This relates to the rationale for using narrative as the major research 'data' as the 'talk' of everyday conversation is often constituted of narratives.

The responses produced by family members were in the form of narratives/stories about the events leading up to and including the disclosure. One of the general assumptions of narrative analysis is that the telling of stories is one of the important ways in which individuals construct and express meaning (Mishler, 1986b). These meanings are not explicitly stated but rather implied through the participants' description of their behaviour. It is later in the discussion of the interviews that the researcher imposes her idea of their meanings (semantic frames).

According to Gee (in Mishler, 1986b) one of the primary ways in which people make sense of their experience is by casting it in narrative form. As telling stories is so common in everyday activity, it is just as usual for respondents in the interview to answer questions by using narratives. By eliciting the narratives around the family's experience, their perceptions of the same event were called forth. By virtue of the spontaneity of the storied responses, the essence of the phenomenon under discussion is retained. In this way, "the complexity, opaqueness and mystery" (Paget, 1982, p88) of human experience is illuminated.

The researcher found that narrative created the type of information necessary to understand the process of the family. Just as people in general, as well as the family members attach meaning to their life events through stories, and give their lives a sense of coherence through stories, the researcher was able to attach meaning and coherence from a meta-perspective, to their stories. This enabled her to yield her co-constructed story. Thus, the narrative gives a semantic frame to patterns of behaviour.

Therefore the researcher's rationale for using in-depth interviewing as a research tool is that it yields storied responses. These responses are appropriate as it is through storying in a social context that one's 'world making' and implicit meanings that lead to behaviour are created. This inquiry was carried out in the family's natural setting as all meaning occurs contextually. Likewise the readers of this study will understand the content in terms of the cultural and social mores in operation at the time of writing.

### Interpretation of Findings

According to Epston et al. (1992) we cannot know another person's experience of the world. One can attempt to interpret another's experience by imposing a semantic frame on it, but actual knowledge of it is impossible.

Therefore within the study the researcher will attempt to present the family members' different stories as they were told to her as best as possible, being aware that this may not reflect completely their experience of it. She will not, however, attempt to interpret what they may have meant by their stories so as not to detract from the essence of them or to create interpretations that may not reflect their meanings.

The researcher will, however, tell her narrative about her experience of listening to their stories - being fully aware that they are her interpretations, although they were co-constructed through her interaction with the family.

She will attempt to group together themes from the participants' stories that seem isomorphic so as to generate a pattern that connects. This will be done by taking the multiple family perspectives into account and searching for significant recurring patterns among family members' narratives. Through this, she will suggest her own theory that attempts to understand what she encountered. This is akin to the process of discovering "grounded theory" (Lincoln and Guba, 1988, p107).

This will be reflected in the researcher's narrative about their narratives - but firstly their stories will be presented so that readers can decide upon the feasibility of the research findings.

## CHAPTER 5

### NARRATIVES OF DISCLOSURE OF HOMOSEXUALITY WITHIN A FAMILY

#### The Context of the Research

The initial interview took place at Kevin and Paul's home in an off-beat Johannesburg suburb. Their flat was tastefully decorated in neutral tones with well-chosen accessories.

The researcher arrived equipped with an audio-recorder and video-camera. However, the son, Kevin, was reluctant to be video-taped and preferred only to be audio-taped.

The researcher had not yet met Kevin as the sole contact up to that point had been with his sister, Tanya. Before Tanya and their mother, Barbara, arrived, the researcher spoke to Kevin and his boyfriend, Paul. The atmosphere was comfortable and conversation was relatively easy. It focused on their respective occupations as well as previous schooling, rather than focusing on the research topic. Shortly thereafter Tanya and Barbara arrived. Both were friendly and appeared enthusiastic about the interview.

Before the interview 'proper' began, a consent form was shown to the family in which it was stated that they agreed to participate in the research in which their anonymity was guaranteed. On the same consent form, the researcher also pledged to conduct the research in a confidential manner so that the audio tapes would be played to her supervisor and external examiner only, if requested.

The researcher then explained her theoretical approach as well as the necessity of seeing the whole family so as to gain multiple levels of description.

The family member's separate narratives will now be discussed.

The researcher would like to note that in detailing Barbara, Kevin and Tanya's narratives, it was difficult to separate them which points to the co-constructed nature of narratives as well as the role of each family member in the supporting cast of the other. The connectedness between their stories is reflective of their connected behaviour.

#### Barbara's Narrative.

The researcher gained the impression that the mother, Barbara, has a relaxed attitude towards life. She appeared friendly, outgoing and unconcerned about others' value-judgements. She seemed to be very involved with her children as well as proud of them.

Barbara describes herself as coming from a repressive family of origin in which talks of sexuality never occurred and where her parents even had separate bedrooms. "My parents didn't even share a bed - the one slept upstairs, the other downstairs. That was their arrangement, nothing was discussed and everything was taboo."

Her siblings seemed to be like her parents in following a strict religious Christian background. This influenced the way they reared their children.

Kevin, the son, describes his aunt as being "a devout Christian, who thinks 'dammit' is a swear word."

In contrast, Barbara's husband is of the Jewish faith. She converted to Reform Judaism and later to Orthodox Judaism in order that her children be fully accepted as Jews. The marriage brought many changes to her, not only religious, but also a more open attitude towards sexuality, and other general topics, all of which influenced her in the upbringing of their children. "He (her husband) was always very open and he taught me to be like that".

She preferred this attitude, which seemed, to the researcher's understanding, to be an openness in communication, in which feelings, be they anger or happiness, were expressed. No issues were taboo, so that discussion on sexuality in all its forms was possible.

The daughter, Tanya, describes it as follows: "You could talk to them about anything. Nothing was ever taboo. Nothing."

This openness also seemed to be carried out in a non-judgemental attitude towards people, so that people were not judged negatively, for example, homosexuals being seen as "dirty or disgusting". However, the children were still taught the difference between right and wrong.

Barbara's attitude towards child-rearing also seemed to be fairly *laissez-faire*, in which the children learnt to be independent and not to rely on their mother to do everything for them. This was illustrated by her attitude towards their homework, in that she never checked up on them to see if they had done it, but instead believed that this was their responsibility.

Kevin, the son, described it as follows: "We always had to be very independent. It was 'you must do what you want to do - just be yourself.'"

Barbara's idea was that if you do come up against a wall or "bump your head", that is the way you learn. However, she still took a pride in her children and their accomplishments. For instance, during the course of the interview and out of context, she told the researcher how Kevin received his colours for drama and how "nice" it was.

To continue with the theme of family openness, Barbara described how her eldest son,

Michael, from the age of 12, would be completely frank with her and tell her about his sexual experiences in detail, so that she would "walk around with her hair standing on end". The philosophy to life was to try everything. "If you didn't enjoy it, you could always leave it". This *laissez-faire*, open attitude fitted with Barbara's similar life philosophy, that is, "everybody in their own fashion, if that's what makes them happy, do it."

The theme of closeness between family members as well as being open with each other, was often expressed in statements such as, "We are open with each other, we scream, we shout, we laugh together," "We don't mince words with each other."

In relation to being open about homosexuality, Kevin related that Barbara's first friendship with a homosexual person was with Lawrence, who worked at their local supermarket. He and Barbara became very friendly to the extent that he had his birthday party at their home where many homosexual people, both woman and men, were present.

Barbara also used to frequent gay clubs and bars with Lawrence and tell her children about her night's experiences. For her, homosexual people were enjoyable company. It was open knowledge in their home that two lesbians, Catherine and Sandra, were lovers, but that the one was also a prostitute. At this stage of her life, Barbara and her husband had separated.

When talking of Kevin's birth, she says that she had initially wanted a daughter, but that when Kevin was placed in her arms, she knew immediately that he was special and different. She also stated that she did not know just how different he was going to be!

She recounted a number of incidents in Kevin's youth such as one at the age of four, when he dressed up in veils and scarves, went to a wedding, and stole the limelight from the bride; how he showed an interest in Barbie dolls and wanted to help the maid with the cleaning and washing. She had found this behaviour "cute" and had wanted to buy him a doll, in accordance with her philosophy of "everybody in their own fashion". However, her husband had protested.

At that stage, Barbara had evinced some concern over Kevin's behaviour and had spoken to a friend about it. Her friend's opinion was that Kevin was identifying with his mother instead of his father and advised that Kevin spend more time with his father, playing sports and engaging in more masculine-type activities. She reflected on whether that would have made a difference to his sexuality.

She also recalled one of Kevin's nursery school teachers telling her that Kevin was trying to be a girl for her as he had overheard her expressing her wish for a girl.

At this point, she questioned how homosexuals come about and said, "I sometimes sit and wonder if it had anything to do with the pregnancy or the hormones or what. No never blame. I wouldn't swop him for anything. I always want to know why, but I don't

think there'll ever be an answer."

In the ensuing years, Kevin was described by Barbara as being a "nice, soft, caring person". At that stage, the thought that he might be homosexual had not occurred to her. It was only a few years later that she noticed a possible tendency and mentioned to her husband that Kevin might be homosexual. However, soon afterwards he started dating "a nice Jewish girl" and Barbara thought she was mistaken.

During his matric year, Kevin, Barbara and Tanya went on holiday to Greece, which they said was known as the "gay playground of Europe." Kevin was very much aware of this fact. At this stage Barbara and her husband were divorced, and the nuclear family consisted of Barbara, Kevin and Tanya, as the elder brother Michael had since left home to do his army service and then to live in another part of the country.

After the holiday, family life continued as usual. However, after Kevin matriculated, conflict occurred between himself and his mother as he was befriending others and going out. She used to shout at him that family is more important than friends and that sooner or later his friends would drop him. She also objected to him treating their home like a boarding house.

In a further move to re-establish the earlier closeness of their relationship, Barbara again went on holiday with Kevin to Greece. She stated that she was overtly unaware of Kevin's possible homosexuality. "I had my blinkers on. Mother was on holiday." But somewhere, the idea that Kevin could be homosexual was present, as on the flight home from Greece, Barbara teamed up with three homosexuals and asked, "if hypothetically, a mother knew her son was gay, what should she do?" Barbara describes herself as being evasive in the way that she asked this question. She saw this as being unusual for her as she perceives herself as a straightforward person.

One of the homosexuals on the aeroplane then asked Barbara if she was referring to Kevin and confirmed that he was indeed "one of them". Yet Barbara "put it away" again, as she was having fun on the aeroplane.

When they returned from Greece, the subject was not raised, but Kevin and Barbara started having problems again as Kevin was going through a personal dilemma of when and how to tell his mother about his homosexuality. At one point, Barbara asked Kevin, "Where's the nice guy I used to know". Kevin responded by hinting at his homosexuality. Barbara ignored the hint. "I just got such a fright. I ran and I stayed at scrabble as long as I could." Her coping strategy was to ignore the event for as long as possible. "I thought, "I'll leave it till tomorrow".

When she returned home that night from scrabble and Kevin finally told her he was homosexual, she reacted with nonchalance. Her daughter Tanya described her mother's coping mechanism as remaining calm in the heat of the moment and collapsing afterwards. Tanya

illustrated this by citing an incident where she and her mother were stuck in a lift and her mother remained calm throughout.

Thus, during her actual conversation with Kevin, Barbara was very composed, to the extent that Kevin said: "I was very freaked out 'cause I thought to myself, I thought she would be upset, or 'It's O.K. my darling' or whatever, and she was so nonchalant about the whole thing. She just carried on and she was actually very hard. I thought this was very out of character."

Barbara again described it as shutting the knowledge away. However, the next day she went to her ex-husband (Kevin's father) and collapsed: "Your son is gay. He's come out of the closet. He's admitted he's gay. I'm in a state. He's going to die of AIDS."

Her main concern was that he might contract AIDS. Her mothering role then seemed to change from *laissez-faire* to overtly protective and concerned. (The researcher's imposition of a semantic frame onto a political description): "All I saw was AIDS in neon lights. All I saw was AIDS. My son is going to die of AIDS. I didn't care that he liked men. I didn't care what society thought. I only thought about AIDS."

The fact that she was unconcerned with what society thought was further reflected in statements such as: "I never ever gave a damn about what people think. I tell everyone, 'I've got a gay son and I love him'. They just sort of look at me and I giggle".

She became unsure of her maternal role in relation to Kevin's disclosure and turned to her homosexual friend Lawrence for advice: "and then I said . . . "Lawrence, baby, my son has leapt out of the closet and you're going to have to be his fairy godmother, because I don't know where to start . . ."

The move to a more involved, concerned, mothering attitude was further reflected in her insistence that her son find a Jewish boyfriend.

As Kevin described it: "First she phoned the Gay Community Centre and found out that they were having sundowner drinks on a Friday night and she arranged for me to go. .. then she found out that there was a gay Jewish group, because she said I must find a nice Jewish boyfriend."

This concern was further illustrated by the fact that when Kevin was depressed, it was she who phoned the crisis centre for him to obtain counselling. She also described an incident in which she was listening to a radio show and somebody phoned in to complain about homosexuals: "I sat on the phone for 20 minutes and eventually I just hung up because I didn't get through, because I was... I said to the guy. 'I'm shaking, I have a gay son and I object to what this person has to say'. Now my son is gay and don't say things like that!"

In addition to assuming a more protective attitude towards her son, she also contemplated the reasons for and experiences of homosexuals: "I don't think I realised that they (homosexuals) have to go through all this turmoil to come out . . . I never thought, 'what did Lawrence tell his parents when he came out of the closet? I never thought about anybody else."

Barbara continued by recounting that after the actual disclosure Kevin would bring strange men home and her concern that he find a permanent partner. Although this was a difficult period for both, Kevin says: "Even though it was a rough patch, she just took everything in her stride. She just pretended that everything was just fine".

When asking about the rough patch, in keeping with what the researcher saw as Barbara's positive, optimistic personality, she did not remember many of the details: "I can't remember. We argued, we fought, we screamed, we shouted, we loved each other. We cried, we laughed . . . you know".

Instead she focused on the "fun" aspect of the events of that period: "At one stage, he was getting too much on the queen side. I said, 'No, this is too much. Next thing, he'll be borrowing my clothes!' But you know, we had a sense of humour with it."

Although Barbara describes that part of their lives as being rough it appeared that it was so because Kevin found the experience difficult. If it had been easier for him, it might not have been so difficult for the family. She talks of a period in which Kevin was seeing a therapist and would come home and regale the family with what the therapist had said about them, as well as his desire for his family to go for therapy: "I always wanted my mother to go for therapy. At one stage, I said, 'Everybody must go to therapy...' and that didn't work at all."

Barbara counters: "Well, that was every week when he came back, and . . . 'Suzette (therapist) said this about you' and 'Suzette said that about you . . .' I was definitely not going to therapy. I was married to a psychologist who analysed every damn . . . if I scratched my ear, he'd have something to say about it, you know, so I really wasn't in the mood for that."

However, although she refused to go to a therapist, she remained supportive of her son in this venture: "I was helpless. I didn't know what to do. I was glad he could go and talk to a stranger every week, even though she denigrated me and his sister and everything else."

She had encouraged him to find a boyfriend, especially one of the Jewish faith, so as to bring some stability into his life. Yet when she first met Paul, in a shopping centre with Kevin, her initial reaction was that he stay away from such a "queen". However, later she welcomed Paul into her home, where he spent many weekends.

For her, the major trauma of the period was not so much Kevin's admission of homosexuality as was his extended departure to study overseas: "The trauma was him going away and

losing another child" (the older brother Michael had left home many years previously), "and going so far away and not being able to do things for him or help him or support him or anything."

Thus, the major difficulty she experienced was the threat of limited access to him, initially as a result of their quarrels, and later as a result of him going abroad.

When Kevin returned from his overseas studies, he arranged to move in with his boyfriend, Paul. His mother was very accepting of it and helped them to set up their new home together.

Kevin says: "I'd moved out. I thought it was going to be the biggest drama on earth, but she handled it so beautifully. There was not a drama in the world. She didn't stop shopping. Everyday, she brought home a new appliance, or a new spatula or whatever . . ."

Throughout the impression gained of Barbara is that she is able to handle situations with *sang froid*.

Barbara's principal complaint is that she is unlikely to have grandchildren in the near future, if at all: "My gripe is that I'm never going to have any grandchildren at this stage, because my eldest son, they are not keen on having children. These two (Kevin and Paul), I don't know if they want . . . if they'd be allowed to adopt . . . this one (Tanya) doesn't want to have any in the near future, so I don't know if I'm ever going to be a granny. That's my heartache."

However in accordance with her personal philosophy of *laissez-faire* and not interfering in the lives of her children, she said she has accepted it: ". . . can't change it. It's not my life. It's theirs. But it affects mine . . . we can't live their lives for them."

When asking Barbara how she sees her family, she replies that she has a beautiful family with three great children who are now adults.

In terms of their present stage of family development, she believes they have reached "a compatible stage all round."

When questioned about her perspective on having a homosexual family member, she responded that it was a growth opportunity for everyone in which she herself has developed new qualities: "I've got much more tolerance. I was never great on tolerance. I'm sure I got much more tolerant and more accepting."

Through Barbara's narrative, it can be seen that she developed a very different 'ecology of ideas' in terms of life philosophy and childrearing, from that of her own family of origin. This was developed with her husband but extended by her into an attitude of openness towards most life issues. Thus her children learnt that they could speak openly on anything without condemnation, as well as engage in different, unconventional behaviour, which was

often encouraged and supported. Furthermore, from her, her children learnt that socialising with homosexual people was the norm, thereby opening a new vista in their lives, in which they both felt welcomed and at ease.

The recursion between her ideas of openness and acceptance, and her subsequent behaviour is clear. This recursive relationship continued throughout the family, in their co-construction of open ideas and subsequent behaviours.

### Kevin's Narrative

Kevin is a tall, well-spoken young man who appears quite serious and intelligent in thinking about his life and the events that make up his narrative of homosexuality. Although his life events were not recounted in chronological order, the researcher will attempt to present them as such.

Kevin reported that from a very young age he knew he was homosexual. Throughout the narrative, he said he had always known what he wanted. According to him, it was a "feeling". He said he had always been an unconventional child and described it as follows: "I used to dress up in the doll's corner at nursery school. I used to play with my sister's Barbie dolls. I wanted to be a dancer..."

He recalls having a female friend over to play when he was about eight or nine years old and feeling bored playing the usual childhood games such as "doctor-doctor". At school he had hated playing sport and used to skip those classes. The "difference" extended to primary school where he says, "I never had any male friends. I was always friendly with the girls. I hung around with the girls and even then at a very young age, I was teased and called names, because I was different. People knew I was different." Thus he fitted with the description his mother had given him when she first held him in her arms - that he was different. This difference resulted in him having a difficult time at school due to the mockery of others: "I was called names. I was punched around and I just took it."

He also recalls the independence granted to him by his parents and in particular his mother, in which he was free to act out his feminine inclinations without reservation.

His initial exposure to homosexuals occurred when his mother befriended Lawrence, who subsequently celebrated his birthday, along with other homosexual people, at Kevin's parents' home. (At this stage his parents were separated). He describes his mother going out to gay clubs and bars and coming home and telling him about the drag queens, the various "gay legends" and of her night's experiences. At that time he was about twelve-years old and recalls "being in his element". "I thought, 'oh wow, these people actually exist in the world!' "

Therefore he was already aware of his sexual identity. He describes how he felt in the changing rooms at school during physical education classes: "It was an absolute trauma

because first of all I used to hate changing in front of the boys, second of all I was dying to see them all naked 'cos I thought, 'well this is what I want.' I knew when we were doing PT and they were playing rugby that I was looking at their legs to see if they had nice legs or whatever."

Although he was mocked and beaten, he endured this treatment because he knew inwardly that he was indeed homosexual and thus in some strange way he felt the mockery was appropriate. He felt that perhaps he deserved it, although logically he knew this was irrational: "I was just scared. I was just really, really scared. I just didn't want anybody to know. I thought . . . 'Keep it to yourself'. And I always thought 'One day I'll be able to . . . I'll go overseas and be myself.'"

Thus, although his family were open towards homosexuality in general, Kevin still felt the pressure of being different at school, as well as thinking that he would have to go overseas in order to be himself, despite his family's outward acceptance of homosexuality.

During this period of mockery, he approached his elder brother, described as a "man's man" to teach him how to fight.

His brother also used to tease him, for instance, "Oh, you're such a queen. Stop with the hair . . ." This did not offend Kevin as he saw it as part of his brother's personality and not maliciously intended. Yet when his brother was called up to go to the army, Kevin was delighted to see him go.

He recounted his initial homosexual experiences. He was in Standard 7 and approximately 14 years of age. His sister was in Standard 5, still at primary school. She had a male friend named Brett whom she fancied. One day he came over to visit. As Kevin had been at the same primary school as this boy, he was aware that he had also been teased and was probably also homosexual. That night, Brett slept over at their house, and Kevin approached him. The two had sex.

His other sexual encounters during his high school years were with a school friend who "didn't fit into the normal rugby playing high-school, who did drama . . ." He had an intermittent sexual relationship with this boy and was "together" about it, although the other boy was not. In both cases, Kevin was the one who initiated the sexual encounters.

When asking Kevin about what had led to his disclosure, he stated that it was a long story, but the initial exposure had been to his mother's homosexual friends. In his final year of school, he, his mother and sister went to Greece. There he encountered homosexual people who used to walk around arm in arm and behaved as if "it was the most natural thing in the whole world." This was liberating and exciting to him.

The year after he finished school, Kevin went to university and for the first time started having arguments with his mother. As Kevin put it, he was completely 'losgat' - going out

all night, treating his home, according to his mother, like a boarding-house. This accords with his mother's description of the experience.

Consequently, he moved into his father's home for a short while. Soon thereafter, he and his mother again went to Greece and met up with two women and a man who were fellow travellers. Kevin suspected that the man might be homosexual and thought, "Well, now's the chance". He did not specify whether it was the chance to have a relationship with this man or whether it was a chance to tell his mother about his homosexuality. While in Greece, he was very open with his mother about going to gay places, such as the gay nude beach, discotheques and the like. His mother initially came with him, but decided she did not enjoy the nude gay beach and went instead to the hotel pool. He was frank with his mother about the fact that he was going with Clive (the man he had met) to the gay beach, but at this stage had not thought of telling his mother about his homosexuality. In fact, he had not even spoken to Clive about it. However, that day at the beach, he and Clive conversed about being homosexual and Clive admitted that he was homosexual. Kevin remembers feeling "a bit freaked-out", then also admitted to Clive that he was homosexual. He recounted this experience as being very difficult and in fact traumatic; something he still puzzles over today as he knew that he was homosexual and had had his high school sexual experiences. As he says: "It was very emotional. I felt emotional. It was just like, well . . . I don't know. I can't explain that sense of finality, that it was final, or this is what you really are. It was just . . . very difficult to say. I can't tell you why."

He did not get physically involved with Clive or anyone else on that holiday - a fact which disappointed him.

On the return flight home to South Africa, events leading up to his eventual disclosure to his family took place. As he describes it, in the airport at Athens, his mother befriended three homosexual men who were on the same flight. She sat with them on the plane, got drunk with them, and as Kevin said, was "unruly". Kevin sat apart from them at the back of the aeroplane. During the flight, one of these men came up to Kevin and told him that his mother was wonderful and that she "loves moffies". He also informed Kevin that his mother had her suspicions about him and that he was stupid to withhold the fact of his homosexuality from his mother, as she was so open to homosexual people. Barbara's conversation with the homosexual men on the plane was recounted in her story.

Kevin says: "It actually took somebody to make me aware that it was really just fine to tell her, that there was no problem." Although rationally he knew his mother would be "fine" about his homosexuality, emotionally he was still terrified. He had this "deep, dark secret" that he had been guarding for so long. "It took him to actually say to me . . . or to physically make me aware, 'she's cool, just tell her.' Anyway, I was jubilant. I was absolutely ecstatic." He still did not say anything as he was waiting for the right moment.

They returned from Greece and as he had not yet seen his father since his return, a few nights later he and his sister went there for dinner. Both Kevin and Tanya describe

their father as being an intimidating and powerful person who was not a very participatory father. Thus, the implicit understanding was that to stand up to such a person would be a somewhat terrifying encounter. That night, Kevin, for the first time confronted his father: "It's the strangest thing in the whole world. That's the first time I ever, ever confronted my father about anything, and I gave him absolute hell."

The argument arose when he defended his sister against his father but it turned into a general confrontation. Kevin gained the strength to stand up to his father from the knowledge that it would be alright to tell his mother about his homosexuality (due to his liberating conversation with the man on the aeroplane): "Anyway, it was the first time . . . I stepped of that 'plane and I don't know what it was . . . I had the guts, I was really upset about . . . I was crying, but I screamed at my father and told him exactly how I felt about him for the first time in my life."

This further freed him to admit his homosexuality to his mother. He was then "absolutely dying, waiting for the opportunity to tell my mother . . . because I'd had the affirmation from this guy on the plane and I'm now looking for the right time".

At that stage, his relationship with his mother again became problematic due to Kevin's need for independence. One night he decided to broach the subject. His mother was on the way out to play scrabble and just as she was about to leave, she asked "What's wrong? You've been in such a state lately?" Barbara adds in "Where's the nice guy I used to know?" Kevin remembers that he became upset and told her he was experiencing difficulties: "I'm just having a very difficult time at the moment, lots of things happening and I can't decide if I want to sleep . . . I don't know. I went into a whole big thing, and I said I can't even decide if I want to sleep with boys or girls. That's what I said." His mother's response was to leave for scrabble and say she would see him the next day.

However, for Kevin, the groundwork had been laid and he was not going to wait for the next day to continue. Thus, he stayed up until she returned, pretending to be asleep. When he heard her running her bath water and climbing into the bath, he seized the opportunity to talk to her. He immediately said, "Mom, there's something I've got to tell you. I'm gay." This was a very emotional moment for him and he remembers crying. In contrast to how he thought his mother would react, that is, either being consoling or upset, she seemed to be rational and controlled. She felt that people who were close to and loved him were entitled to know, but Kevin was adamant that nobody, including his father and sister should know. Kevin was still angry with his father from their argument and would only accede to Tanya being told. He did not want to do the telling and was happy for his mother to do it for him. At the end of their discussion, his mother's decision was: "Everyone must know. You can't keep it a secret." Kevin was not very happy about this. This illustrates the shift in her behaviour from being *laissez-faire* to becoming very involved and directive.

The following day his clearest memory was of going into his mother's bathroom and his sister walking out. She had been crying. The immediate assumption was that Barbara

had just told her. Tanya's reaction was to hug her brother and tell him it did not matter - she would always love him.

Kevin: "And that was all she ever said to me and that was it. There was no drama."

Kevin then relates the experience of his mother going to tell his father about Kevin's disclosure. Barbara's description of her visit to Kevin's father was recounted in her story. When she came home from the visit, Kevin said he was on "tenterhooks" about his father's response and was told that his father wanted to see him. He was invited there for breakfast the following Saturday morning. "Well, I'd never had that sort of invitation first of all, never from my father and second of all, I thought, 'There's no way I can deal with this. I can't deal with it. I can't go. I was terrified. Absolutely terrified."

He recounts questioning his mother about his father's response and her being evasive.

The Saturday morning arrived and he went to his father, where they had breakfast and spoke of trivial matters, not pertaining to the major issue. After breakfast, his father suggested going through to his office, which to Kevin, was like "the gas chamber. This is where things get discussed." Tanya agreed with this description.

However, Kevin was very surprised and pleased at his father's response, which was: "I've got absolute and utter respect for you and I'm proud that you've taken responsibility and that you are going to start living your life and that you are going to be your own person. It will never worry me and I'll always love and support you."

Kevin recalls being dumb-founded. His father did say that he was concerned about AIDS as well as discrimination in his chosen career. However, he concluded by telling Kevin that he would always love him and embraced him " . . . which finished me right off, because that is not my father at all. He finds it very difficult to display emotion and that sort of thing and that finished me."

His father asked Kevin to tell his stepmother, but mentioned that she had always suspected that Kevin was homosexual. Kevin therefore felt it unnecessary to tell her as each time he had to go through the experience of telling someone, he found it extremely upsetting. This led to a rift in his relationship with his stepmother, which had been very close.

He found that the most difficult person to tell was his best friend (a girl) from high school. Yet her response was that she had always known, a response which irritated Kevin as, at times, he liked the fact that people were surprised.

Although he was worried about telling other people and tried to keep it selective, he found that this did not work and that it was an "all-or-nothing" situation. This accorded with his mother's view of "everyone having to know."

From then onwards, his mother was insistent that he find "a nice Jewish boyfriend." Kevin went through an experimental stage of meeting different people and trying out his new identity. He would bring different people home and was, according to his mother "running around like a chicken with his head chopped off".

For Kevin, the process of being outwardly homosexual was uncomfortable: "I was actually freaked out . . . I didn't think I actually really coped with this whole thing being out in the open. I ran around. I was looking for somebody. I think what I wanted to do was find a boyfriend, to actually reiterate the point that I was gay and I wasn't just messing around. That this was really serious and this is me . . ."

Thus, although his homosexual identity was already integrated, the experience of being openly homosexual was not, and was different from how Kevin had envisaged it. He tried to get involved in a relationship and became involved with someone who subsequently threw him out. At that point, Kevin became very depressed. "I said to my mom one night, 'tonight I was driving and I wanted to keep driving the car until I hit a wall'."

His mother contacted a crisis centre for him to get help. He began therapy as well as seeing a psychiatrist who put him on medication to stabilise him. According to his mother, he did not really accept what he wanted to be. For him, there was never an identity crisis about being homosexual - the difficulty was adjusting to a new role in a society which had previously viewed him as heterosexual: "I think it was very difficult to establish a new sort of eco-system. To find my niche, to establish friends, to get a little support group together."

Although his family was supportive and open to communicating about the situation, they could not provide the experiences he was seeking. His main problem seemed to be loneliness. He recalls wishing that someone in his family was also homosexual so that he could have somebody with whom to identify and relate: "It was like a whole awakening type of thing and so I was desperately looking for friends. I was exploring and . . . I don't know. It was all a big mess . . . I think I was very lonely."

He recalled the desperation he felt. He went to visit his elder brother and remembered feeling suicidal.

When asked by the researcher whether he regretted "coming-out", he replied that he never regretted it, but experienced "a really bad time". He recalled having many disappointments along the way such as being stood up for dates, seeing a psychiatrist, and being on medication.

After one of his early relationships broke up, he began to starve himself, then start a process of eating and starving. He saw it as a way of punishing himself as he was angry and hated himself: "I wasn't comfortable anywhere at all . . . I was agitated".

His mother remembered discussing Kevin's unhappiness with his father as well as the fact that he seemed unable to come to terms with his situation. Kevin recalled the experience

of bringing men home as being very strained. He was unsure of his mother's reaction as outwardly she would appear blasé, but afterwards scream at him, usually about the use of sexual precautions. Her main concern at that stage was that he find a permanent relationship as she found that when Kevin's short-term relationships ended, he would become very agitated and depressed. Here he and his mother's descriptions differed as she described the period as being filled with fun, although it is hypothesised that she must have felt some strain, although she negates this.

Family fights arose as a result of Kevin's revelations of what his therapist had said about the family. His mother remembers how she hated that period as she and Kevin had always shared a close relationship. In retrospect, she realised that she had not been aware of the extent of his inner turmoil. She recalled him going out with friends frequently, leading to confrontations where she repeatedly pointed out that family are more important than friends. His mother also viewed his gallivanting as a sign that he was too scared to be alone. Kevin agreed with this assessment: "That's exactly what I was doing. It was such a big thing to come to terms with and to live with that . . . that's exactly what I was doing. I didn't want a spare minute of time to think and be by myself."

Although his father had been very supportive, Kevin still thought that he was a disappointment to him, especially as compared to his older brother who was described as "a big macho type - bringing the girls home and playing rugby."

Kevin remembers wanting to take his family to gay places. The motivation being, "just to say, 'this is my world. Come and have a look, you know. There are other things on the other side of the fence'."

The other motivation was to prove that he was serious about being homosexual and it was not merely a phase, although deep-down he was aware that his family did take him seriously: "Besides my personal and emotional insecurity, a very big need in my life was to show them that I meant business and that this was the way things would be. I really wanted to prove to them - although, why did I have to do that? It was like an instinct."

His family accepted his homosexuality, and as Kevin says, "really tried to make it easy". In retrospect, he saw himself as being the one who was "tense". "I think in a way, I was testing them as well. They must just accept whatever I do because if they are going to accept, they must accept me a 100%, not 85% or 60%. Then I think that all the phases that I went through, whatever . . . I was testing. I was feeling the waters to say "well, how far can I go - how much will you accept before you actually put your foot down and say 'uh-uh, this is too much for me!'"

He found in so doing that he could go as far as he needed to and it was acceptable to his family.

Shortly before he met Paul, his current boyfriend, he began to settle down. The fact that his relationship with Paul was a secure one as well as the fact that it was Paul's first homosexual relationship was reassuring to Kevin. He described being very much in love with Paul, but was initially nervous to tell him that he was in therapy and on medication for fear that Paul would think that he was unstable. However, soon after meeting Paul, he went off the medication but remained in therapy. Being weaned from the medication was very difficult and he found that he would have terrible mood swings and would scream and shout at Paul. Paul, however, stood by him.

His family were very accepting of Paul, to the extent that Kevin recalls: "I still remember when we used to go away - my father would book a room for - we used to laugh about it - for my stepmother and himself, my mother and sister, myself and my boyfriend, and that's just the way it was. We were always included in everything and it was accepted."

In describing his extended family's reactions, Kevin realises how fortunate he was. He was reluctant to tell his mother's side of the family, as they are devout Christians, but, when describing his mother's sister and family, said: "I thought it was quite something for her, because I thought 'wow, these people must really love me. That's all it must be, is pure love that they can accept.' It must have been terribly difficult for them to understand, to the extent that even when I was overseas, my aunt went to fetch Paul from the midnight flight, gave him my cousin's car. I mean, my boyfriend and these people. It was something. I'm sure, probably to this day, it's something they don't understand. But they accept."

Soon after becoming involved with Paul, Kevin went to study overseas. It was difficult for him to leave his mother as well as his newly found relationship: "It was actually traumatic and that's where I went through my whole personal crisis and change, because I had to stand on my own two feet for the first time in my life, and do things for myself and just cope, 'cause I had no other choice."

His mother and he accord on the situation being a traumatic one. Barbara's trauma revolved around her child leaving and her inability to help or support him in any way and recursively, Kevin's trauma was having to stand on his own two feet for the first time, without his mother's help.

When he was overseas, he had a second "coming-out", when Paul came on a visit and had to be introduced to his fellow students. Although it was easier than the initial disclosure, it was still difficult and an event that Kevin regretted afterwards, as he felt it was unnecessary.

When he returned from being overseas for three years, he decided to move in with Paul. He was worried about his mother's reaction and had already, on visits home, started "mentally preparing her" so as to "cut the apron strings". However, his mother was very supportive and helped the two set up home. Kevin found himself more content than before he had left for overseas.

### Reflecting on Relationships

In retrospect, Kevin feels his father respected him for owning up to and taking responsibility for his lifestyle. His father has, however, conveyed the attitude that life is beset with problems and "being different" makes it even more problematic. Over the years, his relationship with his father has vastly improved: "I've changed a lot. Therapy, I think, has helped quite a bit, and my father has done things for me that I don't think many fathers would do for their sons. He has gone to the edge of the earth when his back was breaking, and I think that showed me that he loves me that much, that he would do anything and that was very, very important."

Although he did not see he and his father as ever being very close because his father's personality is undemonstrative, and he has a new wife and two young children, Kevin is secure in his father's love and concern.

With regard to his mother, having weathered the initial crises, he found that they are now closer than ever before.

When talking about his elder brother, he said that their relationship is definitely better than when he was younger, although his brother lives far away. When he went to the army, Kevin recalled being delighted as his brother always used to tease and mock him. Kevin's relationship with his brother is more tranquil than it was in their youth as the teasing and mocking made him uncomfortable, as well as giving him the feeling that he could never fit in with his brother's heterosexual lifestyle.

When asked about his perception of his family, Kevin replied: "I think we just coast, you know, unless there's a bump in the road, then . . . I think we are quite lazy in terms of working and things, in that when I say coast, you just go with the flow. If something crops up in terms of a crisis or if somebody's having a bad time, then we'll deal with it."

When talking about the overall perception of the "coming out" process, as it impinged on the whole family, Kevin replied that as he sees it, it was an "eye opener" for everybody around him. This led to a greater awareness of issues that before they had probably never thought about or concerned themselves with, such as AIDS and its related stigma, the stereotypes surrounding homosexual people, and the discrimination against them. It has been a learning experience for the whole family and an introduction to a different reality of which they had only previously been vaguely aware.

He feels his personality did not undergo any changes. However, before "coming out", there was always a "deep dark side" of which only he was aware. His fantasy about what it would be like to be openly homosexual was, at that stage, very sacred and something he was terrified anybody else would discover.

His major regret about the whole process was that he did not "come out" earlier, although he was only 18 at the time of the disclosure. He wished that he had stood up for himself at school and said, "Bugger you, that's the way I am and I'm going to be just what I want to be".

He felt that it should have been a more natural process and that homosexuality should be accepted, as opposed to having to 'come out' and make an explicit statement. This would involve a "whole society re-think", but would have been "utopia" for him. This indicates the depth of pain disclosure had brought about.

When asked about the most difficult part of being homosexual, he stated that he is still fearful of people's reactions, and that people may use his sexuality against him. This stems from the persecution he experienced at school and still plays a part in his life today, both in his relationship with Paul, and at work. This also points to the recursivity between he and his father's ideas in which both feel that society is condemnatory and that being openly homosexual can be dangerous.

He described how he is still "closed" about his sexuality in public places - an issue about which he and Paul argue. He feels self-conscious and reflected on times when he would not allow Paul to hold his hand in public for fear of being beaten.

Nowadays, he is more relaxed about it and jokingly told the researcher how, in the middle of five lanes of traffic, Paul will reach over and kiss him and his resultant embarrassment.

At his work, in which he holds a responsible position, he has only told two people about his homosexuality; one because she already assumed it, and the other because she pressurised him into admitting it. His employer does not know and Kevin does not like Paul to visit him often at work. His reservations are based on his fear that the public knowledge of his homosexuality could be used against him. Although people have told him he is "silly", and that as long as he does the job, it does not matter what his sexual preferences are, he still remains reticent. He feels that people can draw their own conclusions and that it is unnecessary to tell them explicitly. His sister agreed with him in this respect and cited the fact that they were the only family to respond to the researcher's advertisement, as further evidence of society's continuing closed attitude towards homosexuals. Thus, Tanya, Kevin and their father concur in this regard.

When asked about his present happiness, Kevin replied that there is still so much to go through. However, at the moment he is at a fairly comfortable stage and is busy planning an overseas vacation with his mother and Paul.

#### Tanya's Narrative

Tanya is 22 years old and works for her father, "running the show", according to Kevin.

She is due to get married at the end of the year to somebody of the Christian faith, which demonstrates that she has followed the same route as her mother and eldest brother in marrying someone of a different religion.

It was she who first contacted the researcher by responding to her advertisement, and with whom the researcher made the initial appointment.

She is well spoken and has definite points of view about life. The description of her life seemed to be vaguely divided into "pre Kevin coming out", and "post Kevin coming out", in which her own sense of identity appeared to have undergone a change, pointing to the strong connectedness of family members.

When talking about their childhood, Tanya too reflected on her parents openness' in discussing everything freely, and described her experience of it: "It was wonderful. Among so many young people, we were the exception to the rule. There are so many people that have their little lives where their parents don't discuss anything with them, but we knew about everything, from drugs to sex...everything"

Coupled with the openness to what were seen as taboo subjects in other households, Tanya also learnt from her father to be uncondemnatory of others: "I would say most of the time my father was a non-judgemental person. It wasn't like gays were dirty and disgusting, or be racist and hate blacks. He's never given us those values, so where gayness came into it, it wasn't anything we were scared of and disgusted by."

Along with these values was a stress on the children being very independent from an early age. This corresponded well with their mother's *laissez-faire* attitude. Tanya learnt, "You must do what you want to do - just be yourself".

Therefore their mother did not help them with school projects or sign their homework books to verify that they had done their work. This accorded with Kevin's description of his childhood years. When talking about their father's involvement with them as children, Tanya's tone grew slightly disapproving, as she recalled that he was not a very participatory father, generally in the background, undemonstrative towards them, and seemingly uninterested in her and Kevin's daily life. This fitted with Kevin's description of his father.

With regard to her school days, she could identify with the persecution her brother experienced due to his being different, as she notes that she had also been discriminated against all her life. She remarks that she was teased because she was overweight. Thus, both she and Kevin underwent similar experiences, albeit for different reasons.

When questioned about her thoughts concerning her brother at a young age, her only perceptions at that stage were that she and Kevin had been very close and used to do everything together, especially as the age gap between them is only three years, whereas

there is a nine year gap between them and their older brother. She recalled: "We had such fun times. We really laughed. We did everything together from a young age, like we used to go to Durban every year and stay in a holiday flat and at night the two of us would trot off..."

Thus, she never noticed any 'difference' in her brother and only perceived the closeness between them. A further factor in later years that also contributed to not viewing her brother as different was that Kevin did not have male friends and neither did she, so that there was no one with whom to compare her brother, except for her older brother who had already left home.

Like her brother, she was also exposed to homosexual people from a young age and was very used to them. She also went to Greece with her mother and brother and saw homosexual people interacting openly.

When being told by her mother about her brother's homosexuality, her major concern was how society would react (possibly she was sensitive to societal reactions due to the persecution she suffered as a result of being overweight). Thus, she shared similar fears to those of her father.

When asked again if she had had any previous ideas about her brother being homosexual, she replied: "As I said, that was always just the way he was. You know, we being young when we met gay people, we all thought there were those sorts of people. What was different about them? They were actually quite fun."

In fact, Kevin's homosexuality opened up a whole new world for Tanya that she would never have known. For instance, during the phase when Kevin encouraged his family to visit gay places with him, she often accompanied him and enjoyed it. She also found the people he used to bring home in the early days amusing: "It was quite novel him bringing boys home", especially when the one borrowed her white shoes. She said, "The more camped up the better, we just loved it".

When asked what she loved about it, she replied that it was the disparity from heterosexual people. What appealed to her was that these homosexuals had made a decision about how they were going to be and were not interested in what others thought about them: "They seemed to have not as many inhibitions as straight people do, and they'd just carry on having a good time and laugh and whatever".

It appeared to the researcher that due to Tanya's sensitivity to other's reactions, this seemed like a wistful longing on her part, that is, the attitude of the homosexual people she encountered seemed to convey a lack of inhibition or concern about the opinion of others.

When asked her opinion about Kevin not telling his employer about his homosexuality, she strongly agreed with Kevin that he should not do so, as she believed it would make

a difference to how the employer would view and treat him. The fact that they were the only family to respond to the researcher's advertisement, is for her, enough evidence of society's attitude towards homosexual people. Thus she, her father and Kevin participate in the same ecology of ideas in this regard.

When describing her brother at an early age, she recalled, along with her mother, that he was soft and sensitive, "never one of those hard sort of macho, revolting, usual men types." Her attitude to conventional heterosexual men was conveyed in strong terms. However, when talking about her oldest brother, she showed much warmth, and described him as a person with "a lot of soul and a lot of heart . . . who is easy to talk to."

During the period when Kevin and his mother were involved in frequent arguments, she described herself as the arbitrator, who was always in the middle, passing messages from one to the other: "Tell Mommy I say this . . ." or "Tell Kevin, I say that . . . I won't speak to him."

Besides this role, she said that she did not feature much at that stage: "It was between the two of them and I didn't participate much. Nobody wanted me."

When talking about the disappointment that Kevin might be to his father, Tanya reflected that she had been disappointing her father for thirteen years. According to her, her eldest brother Michael is the child who has the best relationship with their father.

Her close childhood relationship with Kevin also changed over the years, and she stated that as they got older, they drifted apart: "You see he was growing up and I was, you know, I was, I didn't have much of a life and was just trying to hold onto him to provide one for me and he wasn't interested." This was difficult for her.

When discussing her father's reaction to her mother's revelation of Kevin's homosexuality, Tanya added: "Of course Dad handled it fine. You told him as if he lived here and participated."

It appeared as if Tanya is resentful of her father and angry with him. When Kevin spoke positively about his father, Tanya pulled a face.

When talking about homosexual people in general, as well as about certain aspects of their lives, Tanya expressed very strong views, in particular about homosexual men who get married, have children and only later admit to their homosexuality: "That is something about gays that I find disgusting. They go through their whole life being married to a woman, have children . . . they've lied to themselves for so long and they do this for so many years, and this man, for all you know, has been going and getting something on the side and risking and passing on diseases and the wife never knows. I think that's one thing about the gay aspect that I don't like."

When talking about Kevin's perceptions of changes in his family members when he re-

turned from overseas, he noted that the most marked change was in Tanya: "My sister got a fiancé and got engaged and she started working . . . and she went through a helluva change. She was the most timid, quiet, little wilting rose."

It appeared as if this was a shared perception of Kevin and Barbara, as Barbara backed it up by adding: "She couldn't go into a shop to buy ice-cream. I had to do it. I used to call her violet. You know 'shrinking violet.' Thus, her mother also perceived the changes in Tanya: "She now can do everything". She gave an example of Tanya's change by referring to the initiative she had displayed in responding to the researcher's advertisement. Thus Kevin and Barbara's views of Tanya accord.

When asking Tanya about her perception of her family, she replied that she thinks her family are "great" as well as "lucky". She also said they have one of everything in the family, such as "a man's man . . .". The rest is implied.

Her mother reminded her that her family also includes her extended family, in the form of her stepmother and step-siblings. It is here that Tanya noted a great change in her relationship with her stepmother. Her mother attributes the change to Tanya's growth as a person. Thus it seems that not only did Kevin 'come out' in being his own person, but a similar process took place for Tanya. Tanya perceived it as initially viewing her stepmother as the person who took her father away from the family. As a result, many arguments occurred between Tanya, her father and stepmother. Later, when she wanted to pursue a relationship with her, after realising that she was not a "wicked stepmother", she believed that because of the previous years, her stepmother would not want anything to do with her. This immobilised Tanya. The major change occurred when Tanya decided to include her stepmother in her wedding plans, especially as Kevin had told her that their stepmother felt excluded. Since that time, the two have become very close.

She has also developed a closer relationship with her mother, in which the two are actively involved in solving Tanya's weight problem. In the identical phrase, they both attribute Tanya's problem as being due to "twelve years of neglect."

When talking about how her brother's homosexuality has affected her life, she replied that previously, she had "just cruised along in life", whereas now her senses are more finely honed and she is more aware of issues that she probably would have been unaware of before: "Now if I see these letters they write to the magazines about how gays are dirty, disgusting, my back gets up. People mustn't tell me that. People are people. What they do in the bedroom is nobody's concern. People just don't grasp that idea and I don't know why."

Thus, her brother being homosexual, combined with her strong loyalties to her family that were expressed during the interview, have made her more aware of general societal attitudes towards homosexual people; attitudes she believes are negative and discriminatory.

## Conclusion

It can be seen from the various family stories that each version supports that of the other, linking it with the concept of a supporting cast in a narrative who either back up or reject the story told.

The social connectedness of their ideas, and its subsequent recursive impact on their behaviour is illustrated by Barbara's open parental style and its recursive impact on the children's independence as well as openness. Her acceptance of homosexuality, as illustrated by her behaviour also recursively interlinked with her children's feelings about and behaviour towards homosexual people. Interconnectedness in ideas was also shown by Kevin, Tanya and the father's shared perceptions of society as being negative and discriminatory towards homosexuals.

Thus, their narratives, in addition to sharing a commonality in the versions rendered, provide a clear picture of the recursion between their co-constructed ideas and subsequent behaviours.

These narratives have been a first level of description, invoking the principle of double description by presenting each family member's narrative. The combination of these results in binocular vision as opposed to monocular vision, which would focus on one member's narrative.

The following chapter will move to a second level of description through the researcher's narrative. This narrative attempts to go beyond the pure narration of the family members' experiences to the level of nested narrative, in which the patterns and themes that connect family members within the context of their fit with society will be described.

## CHAPTER 6

### THE RESEARCHER'S NARRATIVE

#### Introduction

This chapter sets out to describe the researcher's narrative of the family. According to Bateson (1979), greater understanding is created when, in addition to combining diverse pieces of information, which was done in the previous chapter through the family's narratives, this description is enriched by a "second language of description" (Bateson, 1979, p84), in this case, the researcher's narrative.

Naturally, this narrative is an intersubjective one, reflecting a reality co-created by the researcher and research participants, in interaction. This is so due to the principle of recursion, which takes account of the reciprocal impact of the researcher on the participants and vice versa.

The researcher intends to answer the two broad research questions through the delineation of themes that emerged from her interaction with the family. In so doing, the question of how the family's co-constructed meanings and ideas around homosexuality and family informed their behaviour around the son's disclosure, and recursively, how this impacted on the process of disclosure for the son, will be answered. Attention will also be given to recurring and recursive patterns linking family members with wider society, as this recursively shapes the family's own constructions.

The themes will be discussed in terms of the theoretical constructs of a second-order cybernetic epistemology especially those of recursion and cybernetic complementarities, and social constructionist theory, as well as using the conceptual tool of semantics and politics (Keeney & Ross, 1992) to illustrate the recursive link between the family's ideas and behaviour. In this way, the researcher aims to generate a pattern that connects, and by so doing, suggest her own theory (grounded theory) that attempts to understand what she encountered through her interaction with the family.

Although the researcher had certain assumptions about a homosexual person disclosing his homosexuality to his family, in accordance with the notion of grounded theory, which specifies first gathering information before fitting it to a theoretical frame (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), she conducted the family interviews before fitting her discussion to a theoretical framework.

Thus, the researcher, through the imposition of semantic (meaning) frames onto the family's patterns of behaviour (political frame) is taking the family's narratives and organising them into patterns that connect with the two major foci of the research, so as to give meaning

and coherence to the family's account. This does not imply the one objective truth of the family or the only way in which to describe them, but is a viable 'truth' for this specific time and context, as it would be in therapy, between the therapist and family.

According to the constructionist approach (Fruggeri, 1992), themes and patterns that a researcher may identify in family member's narratives are not 'true' features of that person/family per se, but are the researcher's distinctions that emerged through her interaction with the family, and are thus intersubjectively created. Bateson (in Reason & Hawkins, 1988), would add that these distinctions are arbitrary punctuations, and although being necessary and useful, have no objective existence, independent of the observer/researcher, in her interaction with the family, drawing them. These distinctions, or in this case, the recursive patterns identified, will be described in terms of a social constructionist lens and second-order cybernetic epistemology. Thus, the focus shall be on the family's socially constructed meanings of the world as these recursively connect with their subsequent patterns of behaviour. The assumption is made that these socially constructed meanings arise through social and familial interaction.

Within such a framework, reality is socially constructed within a particular cultural and historical context through the co-creation of shared and agreed meanings. The family's co-construction of these shared meanings provide general rules for their behaviour and for organising their experience. Thus knowledge is co-created in interaction with others and this co-created knowledge fits and evolves with the prevailing socio-cultural era's norms and values (Gergen, 1985).

Essentially, what follows is a description of how the family co-create and maintain their reality and recursively confirm it through their behaviour.

#### Self-Referentiality of the Researcher's Narrative

In accordance with a second-order cybernetic framework, which includes the observer within the observed, thereby invoking the principle of self-referentiality (Keeney, 1983; Varela, 1976a), and in accordance with a social constructionist framework which notes the social constructedness of phenomena and asks one to note who made the constructions and for what purpose (Gergen, 1985), it is necessary for the researcher to state her position within society, as well as to make her biases explicit, by acknowledging her premises and pre-suppositions about a homosexual person disclosing his homosexuality to his family, as all these factors impact on the constructions made in her discussion of patterns and themes within the family. Through this process, the researcher exposes her method of organising the information, enabling other readers to decide upon the legitimacy of her constructions (Atkinson et al., 1991). It is also necessary to state the researcher's values, as well as social and cultural norms. Through this, the researcher is being reflexive (Steier, 1991b) by including herself in the research and taking responsibility for her constructions.

The researcher is an English speaking female from a white middle-to-upper class background. She is of the Jewish faith and this may be one of the reasons for her easy connectedness

with the family. Before meeting the family, her ideas about someone disclosing his homosexuality, substantiated by her readings (Strommen, 1989) was that it would be a negative process for the family, with which they would have difficulty coping. This could precipitate a crisis within the family. This would be intensified in religious families, as homosexuality is usually condemned by religious institutions. The researcher also believed that the act of disclosing one's homosexuality to one's family constitutes an attempt by the homosexual person to define himself differently from his family in a rebellious way, and complementarily to achieve autonomy. Autonomy in this respect refers to the person's emancipation from his family, as well as forming a connectedness with wider society, through friends, love relationships, work colleagues, and the like. This view is supported by Dynes (1990), who too sees disclosure as a process of "psychoindividuation".

The researcher does not harbour any views on homosexuality-as-abnormality. Rather, she is interested in the familial context of homosexuality, as is illustrated by the focus of this research.

The researcher's experience of this family was a refreshing one that led her to think differently about disclosure. Previously, as said, she viewed disclosure from two primary perspectives - the one being an attempt at "psychoindividuation" (Dynes, 1990) by the son, and the other being a crisis for the family. Her interaction with the family enabled other meanings around disclosure of homosexuality to be explored, enabling the researcher to move from having a few set ideas to generate a "multiverse of meanings" (Anderson & Goolishian, 1987, p.552) around disclosure of homosexuality within a family. These other meanings are described through the delineation of the various themes in this chapter. This points to the social construction of realities in which, through her interaction with the family, the researcher was able to co-construct a different reality from her previous one, in terms of her view of a homosexual disclosing his identity to his family, as well as adding to her existing ideas.

This new, socially co-constructed reality led the researcher to consider the importance of the role of social and historical context in shaping reactions to and perceptions of various events, in this case, a homosexual's admission of his sexual identity. It was this realisation that led the researcher to the frame of social constructionism. This illustrates the evolutionary nature of new paradigm research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

The researcher's general aim was to elicit the family members' narration of their experience. From these stories, their social constructions around homosexuality could be learnt; the researcher's assumption being that ideas and meanings are social constructions that are played out in patterns of behaviour (Gergen, 1989), pointing to the recursivity between the two.

The use of narrative as the research tool enabled the researcher to participate in the co-construction of the family stories, as well as to generate patterns that connect family members with each other and with wider society. Through the narratives of the family members, a description is also provided of the current sociocultural climate, as well as rendering an

understanding of social processes that involve complex relationships over time.

### Nested Narratives

The concept of nested narratives (Gergen & Gergen, 1983) is pertinent in the story of this family, as there appear to be two different stories told to the researcher. One is the story of a son disclosing his homosexual identity, and his family's response to it. It is in this story that the concept of a family as an ecology of ideas who socially co-construct their meanings, which then recursively inform their subsequent behaviour, is illustrated.

On another level, a second story is not told directly, but the researcher has picked upon a nested narrative, in which homosexuality can be seen as a metaphor for autonomy/interdependence which links family members to each other and wider society. In this instance, autonomy does not refer to the same kinds of meanings the researcher has around autonomy, but, has evolved a local meaning within the family of this study. Here autonomy refers to family members expressing their individuality in a way that runs counter to traditional societal norms, so that autonomy from society is created, whilst complementarily, autonomy from family members is not tolerated. This is almost the opposite of the researcher's definition of autonomy, which she sees as a close linking with society, through the expression of one's individuality and emancipation from the family. It is this family narrative that clearly elucidates recurring and recursive patterns and themes between family members that connect them to each other and describe their interrelationship with society.

It will be seen that certain patterns run through each theme as a result of the interconnectedness of family patterns, both on a political and semantic level. These patterns form the basis of the grounded theory to be formulated, resulting in a description of the family which may provide another perspective from which to view disclosure of homosexuality within a family.

### The Familial Themes

#### Co-Construction of Openness

The first theme that emerges from the family's description is the co-constructed definition of themselves as being an open family. On a political level, this was achieved by the parents engaging in open conversation with their children about a wide range of issues, including those that are often taboo to children, such as sexuality. This openness, co-constructed between husband and wife, and subsequently with children, was complementary to the manner in which Barbara had been raised in her family of origin, in which privacy and secrecy was the rule, especially regarding sexuality. This was illustrated on a political level by her parents sleeping in separate parts of the house. Thus, as opposed to similar meanings and behaviours being passed down through generations so that present meanings are influenced by pre-existing "sign meanings" (Rizzo et al., 1992, p31), Barbara broke from her family of origin's locally constructed ideas and behaviour, and, together with her husband, co-evolved a different

set of ideas. These recursively impacted on their childrearing behaviours and on their children's development. Thus, through feedback from her husband, Barbara co-evolved a family reality of openness in communication.

The eldest son, Michael, was the first to experience the translation of these ideas (semantics) about childrearing and family life into behaviour (politics). Together, the three co-evolved a parental relationship that allowed for complete openness and freedom. Michael's ability to talk about his sexual exploits, drug experimentation and wild experiences are all reflective of the type of reality they had co-evolved. Thus, the family's idea of themselves (semantics) impacted recursively on their behaviour (politics). Tanya described this openness as being different from other families in which parents are not as open with their children. In so doing, a further definition (semantics) was co-constructed by the family - that of being different from other families.

Thus, on a semantic level, the co-constructed view of the family as an open one creates an ecology of ideas between family members in which children and adults relate on the same hierarchical level, through the open discussion of 'adult' topics (politics). Simultaneously, a complementarity is formed between this and Barbara's upbringing. As a complementarity to this pattern of familial openness, privacy and secrecy is not given much place. Hence the pattern that connects family members at this stage, leading to coherent patterns of interaction (Dell, 1982) amongst family members, due to the recursion between ideas and behaviour, is one of openness with each other.

#### Co-Construction of Difference

As previously stated, Tanya described her family as being different, on the basis of being raised differently from others (politics). Thus, their upbringing formed a complementarity to conventional child-rearing practices.

Difference is also evidenced in Barbara's differentiation from her own family of origin, by marrying out of the faith and then converting to another religion. This formed a complementarity to her own family of origin, who stuck strongly to their Christian faith, both in their religious values as well as in the upbringing of their children.

When Kevin was born, Barbara immediately labelled him as special and different. Kevin, during the interview said of his family, "We've always been different". This difference refers to seeing themselves as different from conventional society.

Thus, difference is a further definition co-constructed by family members about themselves. The locally agreed-upon meaning of this difference is that the family behave differently from conventional society, illustrated by the parental attitude towards child rearing, their creation of a non-hierarchical boundary between parents and children, as well as Barbara's difference from her own family. Thus, their local (Anderson & Goolishian, 1987) definition of difference refers to any behaviour that is different from conventional societal norms, as understood

by the family. Hence, on a semantic level, the pattern that connects family member's to each other is their definition of themselves as different. Recursively on a political level, this is confirmed by their involvement in behaviour that can be described as unconventional. For instance, taking sociohistorical context into account, in the 1960's (which was the period in which the children were born), being open and forthright with one's children and openly discussing any range of issues was uncommon. Thus, a recursion existed between the familial themes of openness and difference/unconventionality.

In addition to being open with children, a further ecology of ideas was created amongst family members by the father teaching his children to be non-judgemental of others. Barbara linked with this ecology of ideas around non-judgementality and further extended them, as will be described in a following theme.

Thus, in looking at the recursion between the family's socially co-constructed ideas around being different (semantics), confirmed on a political level by unconventional child rearing practices and the impact of this on their fit (Dell, 1982) with society, it can be said that the family's meanings around being different (semantic) may have recursively set them apart from conventional society. Thus, the complementarity to their behaviour of difference was of conventionality, epitomised by society's norms and expectations. Recursively, this may have had the impact of uniting family members and connecting them to each other (politics). This illustrates the recursive fit that evolved between them and wider society.

#### Co-Construction of Autonomy/Individuality

Together with her husband's ideas around being open and non-judgemental, Barbara further evolved, in co-construction with her family, a credo of "everyone in their own fashion. Do what you want. Just be yourself." This can be viewed as a statement of individuality, in which, together, the family co-evolved a shared ecology of ideas around being independent and exhibiting individuality (semantics). This notion of individuality indicates a belief in behaving as you choose, but taking responsibility for this behaviour. This can be seen as forming a complementarity to Barbara's own upbringing, in which subscription to societal norms appeared to be paramount, and where expressions of individuality and independence conformed to societal expectations.

Thus, the family's (and, especially Barbara's) motto of, "Do what you want, just be yourself", can be seen as a gesture of autonomy from conformity. The complementarity between independence and individuality, which contrasts with Barbara's own upbringing, is illustrated by Tanya and Kevin, being left to do their homework independently, as well as at an early age, to wander freely on holiday together. This independent behaviour fitted recursively with the parent's *laissez faire* parenting style, enabling the family to develop a coherent fit of behaviours (Dell, 1982) which provided stability for all. Again, the family's co-evolved definition of independence and individuality runs counter to societal norms, so that individuality is often expressed through rebellious behaviour, for instance, children are usually closely monitored at an early stage. This fits further with their locally constructed definition of themselves as

different from society.

On a semantic level, the recursion between the emphasis on children being independent and being allowed and expected to express their individuality (albeit in unconventional ways) again forms a complementarity with society's constructed norms for children. Politically, this may have further served to isolate them from wider society. Complementarily, this isolation necessitated a closeness between each other, pointing to the recursion between semantics and politics.

Thus, a further pattern connecting family members is, on a semantic level, the idea of being different to others (society), and demonstrating this difference through the expression of individuality in terms of the family motto, that is, being true to who you are, as well as being autonomous from society. This has the effect of uniting family members with each other (politics) by establishing an intersubjective agreement (Anderson & Goolishian, 1987) about the meaning of autonomy (semantics), which is taken to mean independence, and unconventionality in terms of society's norms. Recursively, this promotes a fit between family members as these different ideas may alienate them from wider society. Hence the family occupies a peripheral position from conventional society due to their familially constructed ecology of ideas. This ecology of ideas and the family's subsequent behaviour informed their later behaviour towards Kevin's disclosure of homosexuality.

#### Rebellion as Identity

It can be asked why the family chose to co-evolve a definition of themselves as different from society, and complementary to this, establish their own individuality and independence.

In looking at Barbara's upbringing, which has been described as very strict and formal, and her later behaviour with her children, which formed a complementarity to this upbringing, it can be said that although she had been raised in a strict Christian, traditional manner, she created a complementarity to this by going against her family's co-evolved norms (semantics). This was done by converting to another religion and marrying a man from another faith (politics). Through so doing, she may have defied her families' norms as well as split from their familially co-constructed range of appropriate behaviour.

This statement of breaking away from her parents' conventionality and traditions recursively led to her assertion of her own individuality and autonomy in a way that was different from her family of origin (semantics). This was extended further to being different from conventional society, epitomised by her parents' behaviour, norms and familially developed ecology of ideas. Thus, if her view of behaving according to societal expectations and norms was to be restrained and proper in her conduct, conveyed through her parents' ecology of ideas and behaviour, it can be perceived that in marrying out of the faith and further evolving her husband's philosophy of openness and non-judgementality, she may have gone against her familially constructed reality of appropriate behaviour. She may have therefore felt that in order to be autonomous and her own person, she had to defy society's conventional norms,

seen and conveyed through her parents' behaviour.

In adopting the reality views of her husband versus those of her family, her process of achieving autonomy was co-developed in interaction with her husband, as opposed to being carried out independently. Thus, Barbara's definition of establishing one's own identity, as a recursion with her upbringing, evolved to mean that in order to maintain one's individuality/identity, one has to rebel against societal norms, thereby creating an oppositional identity.

This later evolved to include the children in this ecology of ideas (semantics), so that all family members behaved differently (politics) from conventional society at different stages. Kevin's being homosexual conforms to the co-constructed familial idea of expressing individuality in a way that is oppositional to conventional society. The father expresses individuality through his openness in child rearing, and later in closeness with both his ex-wife and present family. Tanya's individuality is expressed through being supportive of Kevin's homosexuality by going to gay bars with him, and later, by becoming engaged to someone outside of the Jewish faith. The older son, Michael expresses individuality through drug and sex experimentation, as well as by marrying out of the faith. The theme of inter-marriage recurs with Barbara, Tanya and Micheal, highlighting interconnectedness of family behaviour.

Thus, all family members contribute to the locally developed ecology of ideas of expressing their identities and individuality through unconventionality/rebellion from societal norms. Recursively this fosters enmeshment and closeness between each other.

#### Kevin's Socialisation and Family 'Fit'

When Kevin was born, his older brother was seven years old and, according to Tanya and Kevin had evolved a close relationship with his father, whilst simultaneously maintaining the familiarly co-constructed norm of openness and unconventionality by telling both of his parents, and later, his younger brother and sister, of his sexual exploits, and drug experimentation. Thus, the familial ecology of ideas was confirmed and supported by family members' behaviour (politics).

Barbara, after having Micheal, wished for a daughter. When Kevin was born, Barbara labelled him as different and special (semantics) and possibly, through this definition behaved differently towards him (politics). This illustrates the recursion between ideas and behaviour (semantics and politics). Early on Kevin evinced different behaviour from typical gender behaviour, and according to his nursery school teacher, did so to be the daughter he knew his mother wished for. Thus, on a semantic level, Kevin and Barbara co-evolved a definition of Kevin as being different. On a political level, Kevin fitted with this definition of difference by being interested in conventionally feminine activities. Thus, a fit evolved between Barbara's desires and Kevin's behaviour, in which it appeared that a close alliance was forged between them. Together they co-created a reality of 'mother and daughter' (semantics) and co-evolved behaviour (politics) to fit that role.

On another level, by behaving like a girl and eventually becoming homosexual, it can be postulated that Kevin fitted with the family's script of being different from conventional society in order to be true to himself as well as to be autonomous. Thus, the ecology of ideas created was that this family is different from conventional society and can recursively only maintain their autonomy by behaving differently from conventional society.

Kevin's socialisation can thus be seen as forming a complementarity from conventional male socialisation, in which, as understood by one of Barbara's friends, he was identifying with his mother, more than with his father. Recursively the father's response to Barbara and Kevin's close alliance was to forge a closer alliance with his older son.

Thus on a political level, Kevin and Barbara were close through the recursion between Barbara's support of Kevin's unconventional behaviour, and Kevin being able to express his individuality in an unconventional way. Recursively, the husband and Michael formed a closer alliance.

On a semantic level, Barbara and Kevin participated in a co-created ecology of ideas in which Kevin had been defined as different (semantics), which recursively fitted with the family's definition of themselves as different. This further promoted the idea of difference being seen to mean unconventionality.

However, with regard to Kevin's socialisation, Barbara and her husband's ideas had not co-evolved in the same direction. For the father, although difference also meant unconventionality in terms of nontraditional child rearing attitudes, this definition did not extend to unconventionality in gender behaviour. Thus, the co-evolved intersubjective agreement (Anderson & Goolishian, 1987) of difference (semantics) had evolved in another direction. Recursively, on a political level, this evolved definition of difference, in which intersubjective agreement no longer existed between Barbara and her husband, served to promote closeness between Kevin and Barbara, and recursively closeness between father and Michael.

Thus, semantically, the parents' meanings around openness and unconventionality had evolved in different directions, creating subgroups within the family (politics), between Barbara and Kevin; and the father and Micheal, respectively. Tanya, being very young, occupied a peripheral position, although having a closer bond with Kevin. This pattern of peripherality continued up until Kevin's disclosure, owing to the complementary pattern of alliances described. At this stage, the ecology of ideas which would later inform the family and Kevin's experience of disclosure, is becoming clear.

#### Ecology of Ideas around Society

Together the family co-evolved a clear idea of society. As has been stated, they defined themselves as different from society (semantics) and in line with that definition, behaved differently (politics). Recursively this set them apart from society, complementarily serving to interconnect them with each other (politics).

In addition, not only was society viewed as being different, but especially between father, Kevin and Tanya, society was co-constructed as being dangerous and discriminatory (semantics). Barbara, although also being in a peripheral position from society, both through her religion (formerly Christian, now Jewish, but not really practising it), as well as her unconventionality in child rearing, was unconcerned about society's views of her. Yet together the four had co-evolved an intersubjective agreement (Anderson & Goolishian, 1987) that they are different from society (semantics).

Kevin and Tanya both experienced discrimination at school - Kevin for behaving in a feminine manner and Tanya for being overweight. Thus both received feedback from society that fitted with and confirmed their parents', especially their father's, view of society. Hence politically, the experience of discrimination for the children further confirmed the familial co-constructed ecology of ideas around society (semantics). This served to interlink the family and establish interdependence amongst each other; complementarily ensuring further isolation from society.

Thus, stability was maintained in the family by each member subscribing to the belief that in order to achieve individuality one must be different from society (semantics), recursively engage in different behaviour (especially in later years) to confirm this (politics), which complementarily further estranges them from society. Thus, a further pattern connecting family members is their view of themselves as different (semantic) from society. Complementary to this, society is viewed as being punitive. This recursively unites them (politics), and further isolates them (politics) from society.

#### Enmeshment/Disengagement

A theme arising from this is the family's intense enmeshment with each other, and complementarily, their disengagement from wider society.

When the parents divorced and the elder son Michael left home, the primary nuclear family became Barbara, Kevin and Tanya, with the close bond remaining between Kevin and Barbara. This was again around an unconventional theme of Kevin exhibiting feminine behaviour and Barbara supporting it, in accordance with the motto of, "Do what you want. Just be yourself." Thus, the central familial ecology of ideas is maintained through familial behaviour (politics).

To further illustrate the theme of enmeshment, the children were each others' social life, creating a closeness between them (politics) as they did not have many friends outside the family. Recursively, their enmeshment with each other isolated them yet further from society, in the form of school friends. Enmeshment was further necessitated by the core family continuing to engage in unconventional behaviour (e.g. friendship with homosexual people, the children being open to this, attending homosexual parties), which did not fit with societal norms, thus necessitating closeness between them. At this point, autonomy in terms of the earlier co-constructed familial motto of "everyone in their own fashion - just be yourself",

further evolved in response to the feedback of the situation.

The demands of the nuclear family (i.e. Barbara, Tanya and Kevin) had changed with the parents' divorce. Recursively this meant that although autonomy from society was encouraged, autonomy from each other was discouraged, as their disengagement from society exacerbated by the divorce, complementarily necessitated that they remain close to each other. Thus, in order to promote stability in the face of change (the divorce), family members evolved their meanings around autonomy, and recursively their behaviour to create new patterns of interaction which would promote further family stability

Thus, the pattern connecting Barbara, Tanya and Kevin at the stage of the divorce was one of enmeshment (politics). On a semantic level, the definition of autonomy had evolved to mean autonomy from society but not from each other. In order to accommodate to the changes brought about by the divorce, family stability was ensured through Barbara, Kevin and Tanya moving closer together, with the central alliance remaining between Barbara and Kevin.

Both the crisis of divorce, and the disclosure of homosexuality were dealt with in isomorphic ways, by the family becoming more enmeshed with each other than previously (politics). Thus, in the face of change, stability is recreated through greater enmeshment among family members, and recursively, greater isolation from society. This becomes their overall connecting pattern.

#### Access to a Different Reality

A further theme that emerges is of access to a different reality for Barbara, Kevin and Tanya, realised through Barbara's friendship with homosexuals. After the divorce, as said, the family's peripheral position from society further increased. In order to address this peripherality, in accordance with their co-constructed definition of being different (semantics), the family, through Barbara, became friendly with a unconventional/different subculture (politics). This introduced the family to an alternative reality; in keeping with the family norm of difference and unconventionality. Through this, the family was exposed to the homosexual subculture. This can be understood as Barbara engaging in changed behaviour as an attempt to maintain family stability in terms of the co-evolved ecology of ideas of interdependence and unconventionality within the family and autonomy from society. This can also be understood as an attempt to create a place of acceptance for them. However, the place of acceptance was a subculture that too saw itself as different from conventional society. The effects of this may have been to further estrange the family from society (politics), and recursively bond them closer together.

Furthermore, as Barbara befriended the very type of people Kevin would one day become, an implicit message (semantic) is conveyed to Kevin that homosexuality is acceptable. Barbara's early definition of Kevin as different and his later unconventional gender behaviour may have already created an implicit ecology of ideas of Kevin's difference being that he was homosexual.

Kevin already knew inwardly at that stage that he was homosexual. For Tanya, who was also disengaged from society, friendship with homosexuals created a place of acceptance for her. Tanya's experience of heterosexual men had been primarily limited to her father, due to her peripheral position at school. She did not feel accepted by her father and thus, being friendly with homosexual men was comfortable for her. Thus, on another level, their friendship with homosexuals was functional for them, together as well as separately, and fitted the co-created ecology of ideas. In addition, the move towards a fringe culture impacted on their ecology of ideas (semantics) about homosexuality, which recursively informed their reactions (politics) to Kevin's disclosure.

### Changes in Patterns of Relationships

Within the core family, the relationship between Kevin and Barbara had always been very close, whereas Tanya, although being included in all activities was not as involved as Kevin and Barbara were with each other. However, as a whole, the three were close to and dependent on each other, and complementarily isolated from wider society. Relationships began to undergo a change when the familial co-constructed rule of interdependence (semantics) with each other and autonomy from society was threatened by Kevin finishing school, going to university, making new friends and going out all the time (politics). This fits with his stage of development as a teenager finishing school and wanting to establish his own independent links with the world. His behaviour can thus be seen as an attempt by Kevin at autonomy, in terms of connecting with society on a conventional level. This therefore posed a threat to the co-established stability of family rules around autonomy, and to the natural coherence (Dell, 1982) which had evolved between the three over time. Therefore, corrective action (Bateson, 1972) in response to this feedback of change and deviation from familial norms (Watzlawick et al., 1974) took place, reflected by Barbara telling Kevin that family are more important than friends, and that sooner or later his friends would drop him, as this recreates the co-constructed reality of familial interdependence and autonomy from society. In a family where closeness and interconnectedness is so highly stressed and provides stability and security from society, recursively differentiation and moving away cannot be tolerated. Thus, Kevin's attempts at conventional autonomy were perceived as a destabilising force by the family

In feedback to this change, Barbara evolved from a *laissez-faire* parenting style to becoming more involved in Kevin's life - a further attempt at engaging in corrective action (Bateson, 1972), to return the system to its steady state. Corrective action (Bateson, 1972) was also reflected by Kevin and Barbara going to Greece a second time, to further maintain their closeness and interconnectedness.

This may aid in understanding why Barbara did not see the signs of Kevin being homosexual, especially on that holiday. Possibly at that point, the definition of her son being homosexual

may have implied that he could leave the interdependence of the family and display individuality and autonomy by moving into another subculture. Recursively, this would result in Barbara and Tanya being left on their own, thereby challenging familial locally developed rules.

At that point, the relationship between Kevin and Tanya, which had been close when young, had evolved to a stage in which the two were not as close, as Kevin was moving further away from the family towards society. Again, the politics were of Tanya occupying a somewhat peripheral position in the family, recursively tied to Kevin and Barbara's closeness. Yet simultaneously Kevin was moving towards conventional society (politics), threatening the co-constructed reality of closeness and interdependence (politics) of the family on the whole.

In summary, Kevin's conventional bid at autonomy recursively resulted in corrective action (Bateson, 1972) to restabilise and maintain the family's norms, in the threat of change (recursion between processes of change and stability). Thus, his bid at conventional autonomy was not successful.

### Emancipation

The politics of autonomy as fit within the family, and inverse fit with society were still paramount. Therefore, the co-created reality of the family is that the place to be yourself and express individuality is within the family (semantics). This extreme closeness, although on one level promoting autonomy from wider society, complementarily does not leave much space for autonomy, differentiation and emancipation from each other. In a large sense, the family co-constructed a reality in which they were each others' security, acceptance and social world. Thus, they had co-ordinated their actions (Kenny, 1989) to develop coherent behaviour (politics) which fitted with the construction of family closeness and togetherness (semantics). This was necessary as their fit (Dell, 1982) with society was of an unconventional nature.

Therefore emancipation/individuation in terms of family members engaging in independent, individual behaviour from each other, did not fit with the family's co-evolved ecology of ideas. However, the second holiday to Greece, which aimed to reunite Barbara and Kevin (politics) was recursively the trigger in him disclosing his homosexuality (an independent action). This could have challenged family stability and rules with the threat of Kevin joining another subculture.

At this point it appeared as if familially constructed ideas around autonomy evolved even further. For Barbara, it continued to include the idea of autonomy as interdependence with the family and autonomy from society, whereas for Kevin, it had evolved to mean being true to his (homosexual) identity. Thus the co-evolved intersubjective agreement (Anderson & Goolishian, 1987) had changed.

As stated previously, in response to feedback from her own upbringing, Barbara felt that to achieve emancipation, one had to do so by rebelling against convention (semantics), and

thus engaging in behaviour which was defined as different from conventional society (politics), whilst also breaking bonds with her own family. Therefore Kevin's attempts at autonomy may have been interpreted as him attempting to break all bonds with the family. Thus, in the face of Kevin's autonomous behaviour which seemed to represent moves towards conventional society and away from the family, as opposed to developing an identity that is counter to conventional society in accordance with familial norms, corrective action (Bateson, 1972) was carried out. Although Kevin's meanings around being autonomous had evolved to incorporate being true to who he was (i.e. [Dynes' 1990] concept of psychoindividuation), it did not mean that he wished to leave the family or break with their co-constructed rules, as together with his sister, he was just as estranged from society as a result of being homosexual. In this way he continued to subscribe to his mother's definition of individuality, that is, being unconventional, illustrating the fit between family members. It seems that having tried conventional ways of emancipation in terms of making friends at university, and failing at this, in the face of corrective action by the family, he then tried to emancipate through unconventional ways - homosexuality and disclosure.

For Kevin, the knowledge that he could disclose his homosexuality, which he attributed to the homosexual man on the aeroplane confirming for him his mother's acceptance of it, liberated him to stand up to his father for the first time, as well as being able to tell his mother about his homosexuality. Thus, this knowledge was for him a message of autonomy and emancipation in terms of being true to his own identity - "psychoindividuation" (Dynes, 1990). Standing up to his father and telling his mother about his homosexuality are both independent, assertive actions, in which he is being true to himself whilst simultaneously remaining in the family and subscribing to their definition of individuality. Yet, on a political level, his true emancipation and independence came about when he went to study overseas and disclosed his homosexuality a second time, as he had to stand on his own without any support from his family. Prior to this, his attempts at autonomy and independence were recursively met with counter manoeuvres at connectedness by his family, to retain the familial status quo of enmeshment.

Thus, at this stage, co-constructed familial meanings around autonomy had evolved, so that Kevin's constructions around autonomy differed from his mothers (semantics), illustrated politically by arguing between them as well as his mother's attempts to remain close and interconnected with him. Therefore, in the face of what she perceived as a threat to the familial status quo, Barbara initiated feedback processes to maintain stability of familial meanings.

Kevin's definition of autonomy had evolved to include being oneself whilst still remaining part of the family. Barbara understood this process differently, so that any moves on his part that appeared as if he was leaving the family posed a threat to her, as her constructions still included autonomy as independence from society. Thus Barbara's not noticing Kevin's homosexuality may be seen as her not viewing her son as leaving home. In this family, leaving home, as the elder brother and father had already done, although still maintaining familial connectedness through carrying out the familial norm of unconventionality, could not be tolerated, due to the family's recursive inverse fit with society. This is confirmed by Barbara's

refusal to go to the airport when Kevin went overseas (ignoring change), as well as her descriptions of not having a role to play in his life when he went away. If disclosure is viewed as leaving home to join with another subculture, this recursively impacts on both Barbara and Tanya, due to the enmeshment and interreliance on each other, as well as leaving being a contravention of familial rules around autonomy.

Thus on one level, the family's constructions around emancipation/autonomy differed, but on another level, this was only possible due to the initial co-constructed belief that they all shared and which for them was their most central truth: 'be yourself, but only if you are different from mainstream conventionality'. This helps to understand the different types of messages Kevin received in response to his disclosure, as well as his family's reaction to it.

#### Different Semantic Levels of Message

The question can be raised as to why Kevin was so reluctant to be open about his homosexuality, when his family had always displayed such acceptance of it. It is on this level that the theme of contradictory and incongruous semantic messages arises.

On an overt level, Barbara and Tanya had always shown acceptance of and friendship towards homosexual people. Yet, on another level Kevin only realised he could disclose his homosexuality when a stranger confirmed it for him. It can therefore be postulated that two contradictory semantic levels of message were forwarded by Barbara. On one level, Kevin might have read that it is alright to be homosexual, but not for a family member. On an overt level, this could be for a number of reasons. For instance, Barbara's worries about AIDS, as well as her awareness of the stigma homosexuals experience in society, which recursively had been confirmed for Kevin through his school experiences of discrimination. Barbara may also have felt guilty that she had something to do with Kevin being homosexual, thus subscribing to common societal beliefs around the etiology of homosexuality, evidenced in the interview by Kevin saying that his first exposure to homosexuals had been through his mother, to which she replied that she had not gone out of her way to do this. She also questioned whether pregnancy had anything to do with Kevin being homosexual. Thus, on one semantic level, Barbara may have been aware of societal attitudes towards homosexuals which she now worried about in relation to her son, as well as fear of AIDS, whilst on another level she accepted the subculture of homosexuality as an appropriate connection with wider society, due to the family's unconventionality.

On another semantic level, the family's shared constructions around homosexuality had always been accepting of it. On this level, Kevin knew his family would be accepting of his sexuality, and support him. Yet complementarily, homosexuality as a metaphor of emancipation and differentiation from the family would not be accepted. Kevin's homosexuality could result in him abandoning the co-constructed familial pattern of enmeshment, by leaving the family and moving towards the homosexual subculture. The family needed interdependence due to their recursive fit with society. It is on this level that Barbara chose not to notice Kevin's

homosexuality, or when he finally did tell her, to be nonchalant about it. Acknowledgement of Kevin as different from the family may have posed a threat in loosening the close bond between them, resulting in Tanya and Barbara being estranged without Kevin, although Kevin did not show signs of wanting to leave. This may also explain the trauma Kevin experienced after his disclosure. Although his being homosexual was already integrated, the actual act of living as openly homosexual was extremely difficult for him. On one level, this may have been the adjustment to a new way of life, whereas on another level, this may have been due to the mixed messages he was receiving that were confusing to him.

Thus, if homosexuality is envisaged as a metaphor of autonomy, that is, differentiating and growing away from the family, this could be problematic due to the family's need for close interconnectedness. Therefore autonomy is only tolerated in the form of autonomy and differentiation from wider society. Recursively this connects family members to each other, pointing to the complementarity between autonomy and enmeshment. It can be hypothesised that these contradictory semantic levels of message were conveyed to Kevin, recursively resulting in a context in which Kevin held back from admitting his homosexuality.

These messages continued to be conveyed during the period after the disclosure, for instance, by Barbara being casual when Kevin brought men home, but screaming about it afterwards. Recursively, this may have resulted in Kevin's turmoil after disclosing his homosexuality.

#### Changes in Parenting Styles: Dealing with Destabilisation

A further theme that arises is that both Barbara and her husband evolved different parenting styles from their previous ones (politics) in the face of Kevin's disclosure (change in semantics about Kevin). This can be seen as a response to the threat of destabilisation, represented by the disclosure

Regarding Barbara, Kevin proposed a change to the family's stability by telling her about his homosexuality. This could have been interpreted as Kevin leaving the family. In response to this feedback of change and possible destabilisation, Barbara engaged in corrective action (Bateson, 1972) to preserve the familial status quo. This was done by her evolving her *laissez-faire* parenting style to becoming more involved, directive and prescriptive in her relationship with Kevin. Thus, her behaviour changed (politics) to stabilise the familial pattern of interdependence and connectedness. The prescriptive parenting style was carried out by her being the one to tell her ex-husband about their son being homosexual; insisting that he find a Jewish boyfriend and attempting to find out about homosexual meeting places for him. Thus she took control of his process of disclosure, so that his second stab at autonomy in terms of "psychoindividuation" (Dynes, 1990) was quashed. Recursively Kevin welcomed this, due to his need for family closeness as well as wanting someone to structure the unfamiliar situation for him. This is also because his semantic construction of autonomy was different from hers. He was not attempting to leave the family, as opposed to attempting to live out his own identity. Thus, their ecology of ideas around emancipation differed. Although disclosure may have been interpreted as destabilisation in terms of Kevin leaving the family,

on another level disclosure can also be understood as corrective action (Bateson, 1972) by Kevin to maintain family stability. This is because Kevin's homosexuality can also be understood as a message of him not leaving the family one day for a family of his own, but remaining within his family, thereby recreating enmeshment. This points to the cybernetic complementarity between stability and change (Keeney & Ross, 1992).

It can be seen that in response to the threat of change, the family engages in corrective action. For instance, Barbara changes her behaviour to become prescriptive. This illustrates the cybernetic view of stability/change, in which attempts at change are met with corrective action by changed behaviour to recreate stability, thereby evolving the system to a new state (Keeney & Ross, 1992). Recursively, Kevin acts to maintain this connectedness by happily sanctioning his mother's increased involvement, as well as possibly offering disclosure as a signal of stability, as it maintains family enmeshment.

Barbara's evolution from *laissez-faire* to directive parenting (politics) was complemented by her ex-husband's previous stance of minimal involvement to one of involvement with and respect for Kevin. Thus, instead of being a message of destabilisation, as understood by Barbara, disclosure was in fact a message of restabilisation which promoted further enmeshment (family norm) between family members, by drawing the father back into the family.

Although a major change had been proposed to the system by Kevin's disclosure, the overall pattern connecting family members did not change. This is isomorphic to the manner in which the destabilising impact of the divorce was dealt with, that is, it created greater enmeshment between Kevin, Barbara and Tanya. Through this enmeshment, the family was restabilised. Similarly, after the disclosure, Barbara, Kevin and to a greater extent, Tanya, were as involved and interconnected as previously. Furthermore, Barbara's ex-husband became more involved with his son from his stance of minimal involvement, thus further maintaining the familial co-construction of interdependence and closeness.

Thus, it can be seen that in response to the disclosure of homosexuality, both parents evolved different parenting styles (change) which acted to maintain the familial ecology of ideas around family interdependence and enmeshment.

#### Patterns of Connection

Thus, after the disclosure, Kevin, Barbara and Tanya became more involved with each other. Tanya became more central in the family through the re-establishment of closeness with Kevin by accompanying him to gay places. Thus the core of the family evolved a natural coherence (Dell, 1982), in which Barbara and Tanya actively participated in Kevin's new reality. On one level, this new reality upset Barbara (semantic level of non-acceptance of Kevin as homosexual), but simultaneously, on another level, in having his friends over at her house, she and Tanya's continued involvement with him was ensured.

Thus, the pattern (politics) of enmeshment amongst family members continued, through

Barbara and Tanya's involvement in Kevin's gay pursuits (politics). Recursively, Kevin welcomed this as he wanted his family involved with him, maintaining the co-constructed familial rule of closeness and interdependence (semantics). This closeness was further maintained when Kevin and Paul moved in together. Again, Barbara evolved her behaviour in the face of change and further deviation from familial norms (Watzlawick et al, 1974), that is, Kevin moving out, by becoming actively involved in helping Kevin and Paul set up their home. Recursively they welcomed this, thereby contributing to the maintenance of familial patterns of enmeshment. Thus, all family members maintain the pattern of enmeshment.

Whenever met with change, the family vary their behaviour further, so as to stabilise the system in terms of the ecology of ideas around interconnectedness amongst family members, and autonomy from society. Therefore, the pattern continuing to connect the family is of closeness and interdependence, as well as unconventionality, which recursively maintains their isolation from society.

#### Disclosure: Sueing for a Redefinition of Relationships and Identities

As said previously, disclosure of homosexuality is not purely about informing one's family of a changed sexual identity, but also proposes a change in relationships between the homosexual person and members of his family, as well as between family members. It also points out shifting alliances within the family.

Family meanings and self-definitions, as well as definitions of family members' relationships with each other (semantics), and previous alliances become open to change. Tanya and Kevin had co-created an alliance during their childhood in which each were the social life of the other. As Kevin got older, this alliance/closeness with his sister changed. When Kevin disclosed his homosexuality, Tanya's self-definition as sister to a heterosexual brother evolved to being a sister to a homosexual brother. This semantic shift recursively opened up space for her to move closer to her brother, by sharing with, encouraging and enjoying his gay world (politics). Thus, the pattern changed to Tanya occupying a more central role in Kevin's life. This also happened in her relationship with Barbara when she played the role of arbitrator between her and Kevin during their arguments. This possibly secured a closer bond for her with both Kevin and her mother. Thus, Kevin's homosexuality increased Tanya's interconnectedness with both her mother and brother, leading to a renegotiation of both relationships. The shift in semantics (the disclosure) for Tanya recursively resulted in a shift on a political level in her intra-familial relationships. These shifts are linked with the familial co-constructed ideas around enmeshment. Barbara and Tanya continued to co-create their bond when Kevin went overseas. The subsequent focus on Tanya and recursive closeness with Barbara is evidenced in Barbara and Tanya's identical description of Tanya's weight problem being due to 12 years of neglect. The statement of neglect can also be seen as referring to Tanya's position in the family up until that time. Thus Tanya evolved from being peripheral in the family, to forming a closer bond with Kevin and Barbara. It can be postulated that with Kevin being overseas (politics of distance), it was necessary for both Tanya and Barbara to maintain the co-constructed familial theme of interdependence and enmeshment (politics

of closeness) with each other.

For Kevin and Barbara, as has been said, a close bond had been co-created from an early age, maintained by Barbara's support of Kevin's feminine type behaviour, and recursively, by Kevin being able to express his individuality without sanction. Closeness with his mother was maintained through the years. This may have been due to the father having moved out of the family, complementarily resulting in increased closeness between Kevin and Barbara. This overall fit (Dell, 1982) between Kevin, Barbara and Tanya was recursively further maintained by their distance from society, as well as their distance from their father who was initially closer to his older son, was involved in establishing his career, and was then divorced from Barbara. Later on Kevin and Barbara drifted apart as a result of Kevin's moves towards conventional society, seen as moving towards autonomy on a conventional level. Complementarily however, their arguing preserved intense involvement with each other. Thus, despite the fact that on one level politics of distance were taking place by Kevin going out all the time; simultaneously and complementarily, politics of closeness remained intact by their arguing with each other, thereby attempting to stabilise this change. For Barbara, Kevin's disclosure of homosexuality resulted in a shift from being a mother of a heterosexual son to being a mother of a homosexual one (semantics). Recursively, this affected her knowledge of how to deal with Kevin (politics), thus renegotiating her relationship with him. She turned outside of the family to her friend Lawrence for help, and later, when Kevin was going through a traumatic phase, she suggested he see a therapist for help. Both of these actions challenged the family rule of interdependence within the family, by drawing in help from outside the family (politics). Yet, simultaneously and complementarily, family closeness was maintained by having Kevin's friends over at her home, going with him to homosexual places, although not enjoying it as she had prior to Kevin's disclosure, and involving her ex-husband, by asking him to recommend a therapist. Thus on one level, Barbara's prior, certain knowledge of how to deal with Kevin had evolved, due to the shift in semantics to him being homosexual. This recursively resulted in her having to deal differently with him (politics), but politically, she retained closeness and enmeshment in the ways described above, as well as developing greater closeness with Tanya, thus further maintaining familially co-constructed rules.

Both politically and semantically, in terms of the co-constructed familial norm of interdependence, the family pattern remained unchanged. In fact, with the shifts in alliances and subsystems, greater involvement and closeness with each other came about. To the end, the co-evolved familial norm of interdependence remained (stability), being achieved through various corrective actions (Bateson, 1972), such as Barbara's evolution from *laissez-faire* to directive parenting, Tanya and Barbara's encouragement of Kevin's gay pursuits and recursively, Kevin keeping his family involved with him. Thus all three worked to maintain the co-evolved familial norm. Essentially the family moved even closer together. This closeness is recursively maintained through the family's shared ecology of ideas of society as different from them, which complementarily serves to unite them

For Kevin, the move to autonomy in terms of being true to his own identity, and differentiation in terms of a homosexual identity, resulted in a closer tie being forged with his father, who

respected and admired him for taking responsibility for his life and being his own person. Thus, the father's previous ideas of non-judgementality (semantics) had a recursive impact on how he dealt with his sons' homosexuality (politics). From a relationship of minimal participation by the father, as well as distance from Kevin, a position of respect and increased closeness evolved in response to the feedback (Keeney, 1983) of Kevin's disclosure of homosexuality. Thus, in this relationship, homosexuality was a metaphor allowing father and son to connect differently. However, his father also promoted the idea of wider society being harsh and punitive, by warning Kevin about the hardships of life generally, the difficulties he would encounter as a homosexual specifically, as well as the fact that he believed Kevin would experience discrimination in the workplace. This construction is further supported by both Kevin and Tanya, in which Kevin still tries to keep his homosexuality as secret as possible and is not open about it at work, as well as Tanya's agreement with this, backed up by her argument that they were the only family to respond to the researcher's advertisement. Tanya sees this as continuing evidence of society's negative attitudes towards homosexuality. Thus, the three's co-constructed ecology of ideas of society as harsh (semantics) recursively serves to unite them further (politics), and complementarily disengages them from society. In turn, this confirms their shared ecology of ideas. Furthermore, Kevin's subscription to the ecology of ideas around society (semantics), can be seen as further drawing him closer to his family (politics). Again, disclosure can be viewed as re-establishing stability through further interconnectedness of family members, that is, the father is drawn further into the family politics of enmeshment and Tanya occupies a more central role in her family.

Kevin's admission of his homosexuality was a turmoil for him as his homosexual identity had been constructed in the context of double messages. Although he and his mother had always co-evolved the script of 'mother-daughter', they had not co-evolved a script of mother and homosexual son. Thus, his social and family circle's storying about him had to change from heterosexual to incorporate a new narrative of homosexual. As this narrative was indeed new and was received with double messages, it took a while for it to become a consensual co-construction (Anderson & Goolishian, 1987), relating to Kevin's difficulty and turmoil in living as a homosexual and as an autonomous person, different from his family. Thus, one of his major struggles was not to leave the family, but to establish his own identity, independent of the family. For Barbara, his disclosure was not news of homosexuality but of independence from home and her. Perhaps for the father and Tanya too, homosexuality was a metaphor for leaving the bonds of the family, thus enabling an understanding of their closer moves towards Kevin to keep him within the family.

The emphasis on going to gay places and finding a boyfriend in order to emphasise that he was homosexual seemed to be a search for consensual validation from all. The fact that he said that although his family was supportive, they did not know what he was going through, and therefore he wished another family member was homosexual supports the familial construction of family interconnectedness, where interaction with others is limited to the family. This is reflected by the fact that Kevin wished a family member to be homosexual, as opposed to finding a friend or someone else he could relate to. This points to his maintenance of family rules. Thus, although disclosure on one level threatened to destabilise the family

with its threat of change; complementarily on another level, disclosure continued to maintain the familial pattern of enmeshment. Therefore, although disclosure could be understood as change, it could simultaneously be understood as maintenance of stability. Although certain relationships were renegotiated, the overall pattern connecting family members remained the same.

This fit with each other to the exclusion of others is well illustrated by the fact that presently, when going on holiday, all parts of the significant system (Boscolo et al., 1987), excluding the older brother who lives elsewhere, go together. The father books a room for himself and his wife, his ex-wife and Tanya, and one for Kevin and Paul. This clearly highlights the evolution of the different alliances/subgroupings, as well as the uniting theme of closeness and interdependence. Further evidence of this is the fact that both Tanya and Barbara work for the father. Thus, the original family is reconstituted through moves to counter the possible destabilising effect of disclosure.

In addition to evolving self and relationship definitions in the face of disclosure (semantics), recursively a difference stance towards the issue of homosexuality (politics) was adopted by Barbara and Tanya. This was because homosexuality no longer concerned others, but now concerned a member of their family. Thus, as a fit (Dell, 1982) with Barbara's more prescriptive, involved parenting style, both she and Tanya co-evolved a more protective attitude (semantics) towards homosexuals. This is illustrated by Barbara phoning up a radio station to defend a caller's attack on homosexuals, and Tanya becoming upset when reading negative letters to magazines about homosexuals (politics). Thus, their further co-evolved ideas formed a recursion with their co-evolved behaviour.

On a semantic level, each person is confronted with an evolved definition of themselves in relation to Kevin and each other. Politically, this has a recursive effect on their behaviour, in which they turn to others for support (Barbara) thus challenging family rules, or become more involved in the family (Tanya), thus subscribing to family rules. For Kevin, the semantic difference of being homosexual within the familial context of double messages, recursively impacted on him experiencing a difficult period. By initially running around all the time, he created distance from the family (politics) whilst simultaneously and complementarily he remained within the family by attempting to include his family in his new world. Thus, in the face of apparent change, Kevin and Barbara although both turning outside of the family for help, (Kevin to Paul, Barbara to Lawrence) engage in corrective action (Bateson, 1972) to ensure their continued involvement with each other. This pattern extends to both the father and Tanya's further involvement in the familial politics of enmeshment.

Hence, the family's response to the disclosure was to increase closeness between family members (politics) through shifts in alliance that maintained the overall stability of the family system. Kevin's final moves towards Paul did not have the effect of reducing familial involvement, but maintained it, drawing a further person into familial patterns. Again, all family members co-evolve coherent patterns of interaction (Dell, 1982) to maintain the family fit of closeness and interdependence. Thus, in the face of change (destabilisation), the family re-organises

itself to maintain the cybernetic complementarity of stability. This is achieved by maintaining the connecting pattern of enmeshment to an even greater extent than previously, with all members contributing to the maintenance of this pattern, and a further member, Paul, participating in it.

#### Different Constructions of the Period of Disclosure

A further theme that emerges is of a different ecology of ideas existing around the period of Kevin's disclosure. Kevin described this period as an extremely difficult one in which he was trying to come to terms with his new identity. As a complementarity to this, Barbara and Tanya described this period as a fun one which opened up new realities for them. When asked how they coped with the period, Barbara described it glibly : "We shouted, we laughed, we cried together". The use of 'we' reflects interconnected patterns of coping, versus separate independent ones, highlighting the familial semantics and politics of interdependence. Thus, disclosure as a stabilisation of familial norms worked.

In terms of the familially co-constructed ecology of ideas around interdependence, and autonomy as part of the family and separate from society (semantics), it may have been necessary for Barbara and Tanya to overlook any problems experienced by Kevin, as problems could result in a split from the family's co-constructed norm of closeness and togetherness. That a few times during the interview, Barbara said, "we are so open with each other" and "I'm so good at picking up vibes, but Kevin hid it so well", again points to the double messages of the situation. Although family members are open with each other, it is only around certain issues - those that keep them close and involved with each other. Issues that may threaten closeness and lead to autonomy are not heard or discussed. Furthermore, the fact that Barbara may have been good at picking up vibes, but did not do so in Kevin's case, although having her suspicions through the years, illustrates the double semantic message of "I am open to homosexuals, but not in my son, as that represents autonomy by him possibly leaving". Thus, picking it up may have threatened the familial co-constructed reality of interdependence and been an acknowledgement that indeed Kevin was different from family members, and could belong elsewhere.

Thus, on a semantic level, the familial co-construction of closeness remained strong. Recursively, on a political level this had the effect of Barbara and Tanya overlooking the fact that Kevin went through trauma, as recursively this continues to keep him within the family. In addition, acknowledgement of Kevin having a different experience from Tanya and Barbara, in which he engaged in politics of distance by being friendly with others outside of the family and looking outside of the family for help, could not be openly acknowledged by Barbara and Tanya as essentially this formed the crisis for the family. Complementarily this was also problematic for Kevin, as on one level, he wanted to remain within the family, but was simultaneously attempting to explore another subculture. At the same time he attempted to include his family in his new pursuits, to maintain the family norm of interconnectedness with and autonomy from society, in the face of the double messages he was receiving.

Thus, despite other possible changes to the system being proposed by Kevin experiencing trauma on his own, the cybernetic complementarity of stability was maintained (Keeney & Ross, 1992), by Barbara and Tanya's glossing over of the difficulties of that time, to preserve the status quo. However, this difference in perception did lead to family arguments, such as when Kevin returned from therapy sessions and denigrated his family.

This all forms part of the process of how the family's co-constructed ecology of ideas impacted on the disclosure for Kevin. That homosexuality as an expression of individuality is unconventional in terms of societal norms, and that the family's reaction is unconventional in terms of societal norms, served to further isolate the family from conventional society and recursively keep them interconnected thereby maintaining the stability of enmeshment.

#### Disclosure as a Metaphor for all

Each member of the family can be seen as "coming out", in terms of developing their identity, whilst complementarily maintaining familial interconnectedness.

This is seen in Barbara's establishment of a different ecology of ideas from her own family of origin, her unconventionality in child rearing, her support of Kevin's unconventional behaviour as well as her friendship with an unconventional subculture (politics).

Kevin's actual disclosure of homosexuality was his way of being true to his identity - thus "coming out".

Tanya's "coming out" took place when Kevin went overseas. The bond between Kevin and Barbara, although still being intense, could not be as strongly maintained with him away. Thus recursively, a bond that had been initiated between Barbara and Tanya was continued.

Thus, it can be deduced that Kevin's "coming out" also allowed Tanya to come out, pointing to the interconnectedness of family behaviour. This may be for a number of reasons. Firstly, as Tanya herself had said, in the past, she had relied on Kevin to provide a life for her, again pointing to the strong familial dependence on each other, maintaining the construction of family interdependence in social areas. When Kevin went overseas she had to provide a life for herself. Therefore she started interacting with wider society, leading to her meeting her boyfriend, who subsequently became her fiancé. Thus Kevin's distance, and therefore his inability to provide a social life for her, recursively resulted in her making a life for herself, as well as being actively involved with her mother, for instance, around her weight problem (politics).

Thus, all family members "came out" in different ways: Barbara through converting to another faith and adopting different child-rearing practices, to befriending homosexual people, as well as recreating the pattern of enmeshment, including her ex-husband; Kevin through disclosure of his homosexuality; Tanya through establishing her own identity; Michael in behaving

unconventionally as well as marrying out of the faith and the father in divorcing his wife, but retaining close familial contact.

Thus, Kevin's disclosure had a recursive impact on all family members, in that all "came out" in one way or another whilst complementarily maintaining their familial co-created ecology of ideas and patterns of behaviour around enmeshment.

It can be seen that all of these ways of "coming out" are unconventional in terms of traditional societal norms, keeping the family closely interlinked with each other and recursively, distanced from society. Thus the overall familial pattern connecting family members remains one of interdependence and enmeshment

#### Conclusion: Grounded Theory

The researcher's narrative aimed to describe the family's co-constructed ecology of ideas, and how this ecology of ideas (semantics) and the family's subsequent behaviour (politics) organised itself to absorb the impact of disclosure, and recursively, how this impacted on the process of disclosure for the son.

This description aimed to include significant recursive patterns and themes that link the family with broader society as this has a recursive effect on their familial constructions and behaviour generally, and around homosexuality, specifically. This has been done through the researcher's delineation of certain themes and patterns that arose in co-construction with the family. These themes have been described using the conceptual tool of semantics and politics (Keeney & Ross, 1992) as well as the theoretical constructs delineated in the theoretical narrative. Many of the same patterns are repeated throughout the themes due to their recurring nature, as well as being the core of the family's ecology of ideas and subsequent behaviour.

In accordance with the concept of grounded theory, as Glaser and Strauss, (in Lincoln & Guba, 1985) have previously stated, the terms "fit" and "work" (p205) are important, in that the grounded theory must fit the situation being researched, and work when put into use. This implies that the categories, in this case, the themes used to organise the findings must not be forced onto the findings in order to make sense, but must be naturally applicable and be able to understand the phenomena under study. The researcher found that the themes she delineated through her interaction with the family emerged naturally from the family's narratives and fitted well with the family's descriptions. In addition, they enabled the researcher to understand the phenomenon of disclosure in this family and how it impacted on the family in the context of their fit (Dell, 1982) with society.

In addition to the family's narratives in the previous chapter, the transcripts of the interviews are included in the appendix so that readers can decide whether the researcher's grounded theory (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) makes sense. In this way, the reader becomes part of the research process and can decide on the credibility of the grounded theory for himself (Atkinson & Heath, 1987) and on its applicability to other contexts.

From a social constructionist point of view, it must be remembered that theories do not reflect absolute truth, but are created within a particular era and context. They are thus bound by the cultural frame of reference of their place and time and are useful for that place and time (Gergen, 1985). The grounded theory put forward conforms to this description.

Therefore, one can speculate how the process of disclosure would have unfolded if social attitudes had been different, or if the family had been more conventional in their ecology of ideas and behaviour. This points to the recursive fit between the family and society and the necessity of considering the wider sociocultural context.

The grounded theory which has been developed through the themes of the chapter will now be summarised.

It can be said that the family co-evolved an ecology of ideas of themselves as different from conventional society (semantics) and expressed this through socially unconventional behaviour (politics). This difference isolated them from society which had been co-constructed as being harsh and punitive (semantics). This recursively linked them with each other (politics), creating a family norm of interdependence and enmeshment (politics). As a complement to this, autonomy from the family was not tolerated as this would pose a threat to the stability of the family, due to its recursive inverse fit with society. Individuality in the form of autonomy could only be expressed in a way that ran counter to conventional norms. Any attempts at change from this familial norm resulted in corrective action (Bateson, 1972) to return the system to its stable state of interdependence. Thus, in terms of the cybernetic complementarity of stability/change (Keeney & Ross, 1992), stability is represented by interdependence, whereas change is represented by independence and autonomy from each other.

The disclosure with its threat of instability in the form of Kevin possibly leaving the family, resulted in the family engaging in corrective action (Bateson, 1972) to maintain its stability of interdependence. Although family members achieved autonomy in terms of acting out their individual identities, these identities often followed the family norm of unconventionality. This complementarily maintained their overall interdependence, and recursively their isolation from society.

At the point at which the interviews ended, the family's interdependence had further evolved with Tanya being more included and closer to her mother and brother than previously, as well as to her step-mother. Kevin and his father were also closer than before.

Thus, in the face of disclosure, patterns and ecology of ideas did not change but only intensified, serving to further unite the family and complementarily, continuing to estrange them from society, due to their adoption of unconventional behaviour.

## CHAPTER 7

### A CONTINUING NARRATIVE

#### Introduction

This study aimed to describe the recursive interrelationship between a family's locally co-constructed meanings and ideas (Anderson & Goolishian, 1987), specifically those pertaining to homosexuality and family, and the family's reaction to the disclosure of homosexuality by one member. Furthermore, through the themes detailed in the previous chapter, this description also aimed to reflect the relational context of the family, thereby providing a description of the context which informed the disclosure and the family's ways of dealing with it.

The family's patterns and socially constructed ideas were also viewed in terms of their interconnection with broader society. Thus, the link and recursion between three levels of an arbitrarily defined system was focused upon: the homosexual son, the family, and society, with regard to the issue of disclosure of homosexuality .

#### Overview of the Research Process

The research process was initiated by the researcher posing certain questions about the process of disclosure of homosexuality within a family. These included wondering how different family members responded to the disclosure of a family member's homosexuality, as well as entertaining general ideas about the meaning of disclosure for the homosexual person - such as homosexuality constituting a rebellion against parental and societal norms, as well as a process of individuation, the achievement of self-authenticity and the gaining of autonomy in terms of leaving the family. In stating these ideas, as well as her epistemology and guiding theory in previous chapters, the researcher invoked the second-order cybernetic principle of self-referentiality (Varela, 1976a), so that readers became aware of the premises underlying her description (Keeney & Morris, 1985) generated in co-construction with the family. It also illustrates a principle of naturalistic research, in other words, that value-free research is impossible (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

In accordance with naturalistic research procedures, with its corresponding principle of emergent and evolving design (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), the researcher, through her coupling (Leyland, 1988) with the family, co-created further ideas about possible meanings around disclosure, which moved her away from her initial set of ideas and assumptions regarding disclosure. Thus, the research was indeed evolutionary (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) in nature, as well as conforming to the principles of new paradigm research (Auerswald, 1985) in which the researcher first immersed herself in the context (Keeney, 1979; Lincoln & Guba, 1985) so as to co-create fresh understandings, before fitting these co-created ideas to a theoretical frame. This

accords with the evolving nature of new paradigm research in which research is carried out, followed by the application of a theoretical frame (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

However, the guiding epistemology of second-order cybernetics was already present, providing the rationale for the researcher interviewing the family in context, attempting to search for patterns that connect, and focusing on complexity and holism.

In addition, interviewing the family together accords with the cybernetic principle of double descriptions (Keeney, 1983) in which the researcher was able to hear several different stories which could be connected, by viewing them in the context of the other stories, allowing a unitary story to emerge. This yielded richer description and understanding of the family's experience of disclosure, than if only the homosexual person's story was told.

The use of narrative in order to elicit these descriptions allowed the researcher access to clear understandings of the family members' experiences, as well as enabling family members to express what the events of the disclosure meant for them. This accords with Bateson's (1979) view of a story being a "little knot of relevance" (p22), which, in addition to enabling others to understand the significance of the event for the person, also allows for greater freedom of expression, as opposed to eliciting reduced, isolated pieces of information attained through standardised questionnaires or other quantitative measures.

In addition, the use of narrative enabled the researcher as the primary research instrument (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) to co-evolve the conversation with the family members in a natural manner. In so doing, the researcher was able to actively experience the family, and develop both intuitively and through her theoretical lenses that guided her punctuations, an idea of their interactional patterns, giving life to the research process. This also enabled her to describe complex patterns of interaction that had co-evolved between family members over time. These could only be elicited through a focus on the family as a group, as opposed to isolated members, thus embodying the cybernetic principle of holism.

#### Overview of the Theoretical Usefulness of the Study

##### The Use of Social Constructionism

As previously stated, it was only after interviewing the family that the researcher came to the theory of social constructionism and found it to be a suitable fit with which to understand the family's experience of disclosure. This theory allowed the researcher to consider the family's socially constructed meanings and ideas (semantics) and the recursion thereof with their patterns of behaviour (politics), within context. This provided a different point of departure from logical positivist research on disclosure of homosexuality.

By enabling a focus on the familial context of ideas and behaviour (semantics and politics), as well as their further recursion with the wider social context, understanding the family's reaction to disclosure was greatly illuminated, thereby complexifying meanings and ideas

around the experience of disclosure in this family. Thus, a "multiverse of meanings" (Anderson & Goolishian, 1987, p532) was generated, as opposed to viewing disclosure from the perspective of having one singular meaning applicable to all contexts. Social constructionism's focus on sociocultural context and era and its recursive contribution to the family's experience of disclosure, highlighted the importance of considering this wider context as it impacts significantly on the family's locally developed ideas and behaviour in general, and in relation to homosexuality and disclosure, in particular. The researcher therefore went beyond a behavioural description of the parents' or son's experience of disclosure, to a focus on co-created meanings developed within the family, and in addition, expanded the focus to consider the recursion of wider society with the family's ideas and behaviour. This lends greater understanding to the particular way in which a family may react to the disclosure of their son's homosexuality.

A consideration of context also reminded the researcher to remain humble in her co-constructed description of the family, as this description is only applicable for a specific "time/context complex" (Lincoln & Guba, 1988, p103), and cannot therefore be regarded as the discovery of a certain truth, generalisable across time and context. Rather, the applicability of the description for a specific time enables historical, social and cultural processes to be reflected, yielding a "thick description" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p362) of the phenomenon. The focus on social context had the additional advantage of enabling the researcher, together with the research participants, to co-create a description that drew from many levels of system, creating greater understanding of reaction to disclosure, as opposed to remaining on the level of creating acontextual, general descriptions. In addition, social constructionism's emphasis on context, co-creation and complexity corresponded well with the principles of second-order cybernetics, lending greater depth and complexity to the description of the family.

#### The Use of a Second-Order Cybernetic Epistemology

The researcher's use of a second order cybernetic epistemology allowed for a description of the family's experience of disclosure to emerge that differed from a logical positivist one. As already stated, previous descriptions in a logical positivist thought mode tended to be linear in nature, focusing either on unidirectional causes of homosexuality or on developing a standard typology of family reaction to disclosure. Experiential accounts from the son or the parents did not look further into the relational or sociocultural context of the phenomenon, or attempt to focus on familial sequences of behaviour and ecology of ideas that made disclosure possible, nor were the implications of this examined for the family as a whole.

The use of the cybernetic principles of recursion, evolutionary feedback, context, holism and complementarity with an explicit focus on the complementarity of change/stability enabled the researcher to consider the family's reaction in terms of the recursive link between their ecology of ideas and patterns of behaviour. Second-order cybernetics does not view ideas and behaviour as separate, unrelated phenomena, but instead considers the recursive impact they have on each other, and that this recursion is vital in understanding how family scripts and rules are maintained and confirmed, and recursively, how family behaviour patterns are

sustained and supported. More specifically, this allows one to understand the family's reaction to disclosure in terms of the recursive link between their established ecology of ideas and patterns of behaviour. In this way, the family's reaction to disclosure was not viewed as one isolated segment of their behaviour, unrelated to previous behaviour, but was seen to have a recursion with prior and present family scripts, as well as with the current sociocultural context.

The use of semantic and political frames of reference (Keeney & Ross, 1992) further enabled the researcher to clarify this recursive link between the family's co-constructed ecology of ideas (semantic) and behaviour (politics) as well as allowing her to move to another level of description in terms of the concept of double description, such that her narrative of the family is a semantic description of the description of their behaviour (political).

Thus, through the use of a second-order cybernetic epistemology and a social constructionist theory, the researcher was able to provide a contextualised understanding of the family's reaction to disclosure, alerting one to the possibility of generating multiple descriptions of a phenomenon, instead of attempting to establish the one objective truth about it, consistent with a logical positivist epistemology.

#### Establishment of Legitimacy

Attempts to establish legitimacy in this study were carried out by subjecting the research to be 'researchable' by others. This was accomplished by giving readers of the research access to the actual research interviews (in appendix), so that readers can decide on the credibility of the researcher's distinctions by reading the interviews as well as already having been exposed to the researcher's framework for organising these distinctions (second-order cybernetics and social constructionism). This accords with Atkinson and Heath's (1987) suggestion that the readers of the study be given full access to the process of the research, so that ethicality is maintained. Thus, it is the "consumers of research" (Atkinson et al., 1991) who establish credibility by seeing if they understand the researcher's reasoning, and deciding whether it is feasible against their perceptions of 'reality'.

According to Geertz (in Guba, 1981), the onus of the researcher is to provide "thick, descriptive data" (p84) so that readers have a thorough understanding of the context in which the research was carried out as well as having a thorough description of the interactional processes deemed to be relevant in that context. Thick description was provided in this study by describing the wider sociocultural context (third chapter), as well as including the family's narratives and interview transcripts.

A further way in which trustworthiness was established accorded with Lincoln and Guba's (1985) suggestion that the researcher represent the multiple constructions of the family members. This was done by the researcher presenting the separate stories of the family members (fifth chapter) and readers being able to check whether these correspond with the transcripts provided in the appendix.

Coherence was established (Lincoln & Guba, 1988) through the research participants' agreement with each others' narrative of the disclosure. Thus, the description was internally consistent. This is linked to the concept of a narrative audience in which the narrative construction is supported if others present find the narrative believable and the events reported possible. This was shown through the provision of the family members' stories and transcripts, in which family members present were all in agreement as to their descriptions of the events surrounding the disclosure. Once more, this indicates the establishment of legitimacy within the social arena, as opposed to the researcher attempting to establish legitimacy through traditional logical positivist measures.

The focus on both the researcher's narrative and that of family members' takes into account the multiple realities of research participants, instead of focusing only on the researcher or the family members' narratives. According to Reason and Rowan (1981), bias ignores the interactive aspect of the research that gives rise to double descriptions and the co-creation of meanings. 'Validity' is threatened by over-emphasis on one aspect. The researcher, by presenting both her own and the family members' narratives and creating distinctions in interaction with the family, hoped to provide a balanced overview.

Earlier Bavelas (in Wassenaar, 1987) stated that the emphasis of the new science paradigm is to describe specific patterns which may be useful to others within similar contexts or situations. In this way, legitimacy of the narrative does not depend on establishing reliability or validity but in creating narratives that are meaningful, coherent, credible and useful to others. It is hoped that the research has done so through the development of grounded theory so that other meanings around disclosure are generated, thereby creating options for action that may be useful to others.

#### Disclosure - an Alternative View

As has been noted, traditionally, disclosure of a son's homosexuality to his family has been studied from two primary perspectives; that of parental reaction to disclosure, leading to a delineation of the typical stages experienced by parents, and the effect on the son of parental reactions.

Little attention has been given to interactional patterns, to the specific meanings which disclosure has in a particular family or the relational impact of the disclosure on the different family relationships. Rather, the typical parental reactions have been assumed to be generally universal, and in accordance with society's prevalent views of homosexuality, the reaction is usually assumed to be a negative one in which parents frequently feel that their child's homosexuality is equivalent to losing their child, either on a metaphoric level as they are now presented with someone they feel they do not know, or in fact literally, through the possibility of AIDS.

The reason for the timing of the son's disclosure, in the context of established familial interactional patterns and rules, as well as the effect of this on the family's co-evolved ideas

and behaviours, had not been addressed. This is primarily as a result of subscribing to the universalist assumption of homosexuality being one type of crisis from the parents' point of view, without any other meanings around it being possible, as well as the universal acceptance that disclosure is simply a communication regarding sexual preference.

It is hoped that this study has illustrated that although disclosure of homosexuality did create a crisis in the family, this crisis was not like the one typically described (third chapter), but was instead unique, due to the recursive relationship between the family's locally developed meanings and ideas around homosexuality and family, and the recursion of this with their patterns of behaviour. This illustrates the value of a contextualised description which addresses the uniqueness of experience. As a result, it is hoped that this research has illuminated new options with which to consider the disclosure of homosexuality within a family, the possibilities of which will now be described.

1. As previously stated, disclosure not only concerns informing one's family of a changed sexual identity, but, in fact, in the face of this "news of difference" (Keeney, 1983, p.153), relationships between all family members have to be renegotiated. Thus, in accordance with ecosystemic theory, disclosure not only affects the son or the parents, but impacts upon all members of the significant system (Anderson & Goolishian, 1987; Boscolo et al., 1987) so that all are forced to reconsider their role and behaviour in relation to each other. Thus disclosure has enormous impact at all levels of the system in which family members are forced not only to think differently about the homosexual member, but are also confronted with new ways of thinking about themselves, which may recursively impact on their behaviour towards each other. The change therefore not only affects the homosexual family member but all members of the family.

2. Instead of focusing purely on the disclosure of homosexuality within the family, a crucial contribution was made by applying social constructionist theory, which extended the focus beyond the family to its fit within the wider social context. It was shown that the family's fit (Dell, 1982) with this wider level of system had an important recursive impact on their reaction to disclosure, so that in considering the family within society, further complexity and understanding of the family's ideas and behaviour was generated. Hence, disclosure as an event also draws its meaning and impact from the sociocultural context in which it is embedded, and consideration of this context provides a further lens with which to understand the family's experience.

3. The theory of social constructionism, as well as Anderson and Goolishian's (1987, 1988) social constructivism contributions enabled the researcher to consider the importance of locally co-constructed meanings within a family. It emerged that disclosure, as stated previously, not only conveyed information about sexual preference, but that it has metaphorical meaning specific to the family under discussion. Due to the family's co-constructed local rules around enmeshment, complementarily disclosure became a metaphor for leaving home, emancipation, differentiation and autonomy. This simultaneously and recursively resulted in corrective action (Bateson, 1972) to keep family members enmeshed, in accordance with prior locally co-

constructed rules of interdependence. Therefore, it can be seen that families develop local meanings which have a recursive impact on their reactions to events. On this basis, broad-based, generalisable assertions about family reaction to disclosure cannot be made. Rather, it is necessary to consider each family's locally developed meanings so as to understand their specific reaction to disclosure, as well as its metaphoric value.

4. In addition, these meanings do not only emerge through the family's co-constructed ecology of ideas, but, due to the interconnectedness of family behaviour, they also emerge through a transgenerational connection of ideas and behaviour, such as, in this family, from Barbara's upbringing. Barbara learnt that to become emancipated and establish her own identity, she had to act counter to the norms of her family of origin, thereby flouting conventional societal norms, as well. Therefore, in order to be autonomous, she had to be different from traditional society. This impacted recursively on her own family, who in co-construction with her developed the theme of departing from conventional norms to establish one's identity. Recursively, this difference necessitated that the family remain enmeshed with each other (development of a co-constructed familial rule), owing to their peripheral position in society. This illustrates how familial locally developed meanings have a recursion with previous family scripts from other generations, so that further understanding of the family's present ideas and behaviour is created through exploration of transgenerational themes, thereby complexifying the research description.

5. Disclosure of homosexuality illuminated the cybernetic complementarity between stability/change (Keeney & Ross, 1992), thus providing a different lens through which to understand the family's adaptation to the threat of change posed by the disclosure. All families have certain parameters within which they maintain their stability. The possibility of change, represented by some deviation from familial norms, such as disclosure (Watzlawick et al., 1974), recursively results in family members engaging in corrective action through changed behaviour to return the system to its state of familial stability. This points to the complementarity between stability and change and indicates a further focus in considering families who experience the disclosure of a son's homosexuality. Thus, the family's reaction to disclosure may be conceptualised in terms of attempting to return the system to a steady state. Due to the recursivity and interconnectedness of family behaviour, this type of reaction is again not necessarily an isolated segment of their behaviour, but can be seen as isomorphic to other ways in which the family have attempted to maintain stability in the face of change. For instance, in this family, the initial destabilising threat to the family was posed by the parents' divorce (news of change). This potential crisis was stabilised through Tanya, and especially Barbara and Kevin moving closer together and further evolving, in response to the feedback (Keeney, 1983) of the divorce, their ecology of ideas around interdependence and enmeshment.

A further point of possible destabilisation was initiated by Kevin moving away from the family after leaving school and joining conventional society. This change from the familial co-constructed rule of closeness thus represented a deviation from an established familial norm (Watzlawick et al., 1974), which recursively resulted in corrective action (Bateson, 1972) by family members, to return the system to a steady state of functioning. Destabilisation

again confronted the family by the news of Kevin's disclosure. Change was posed to the family once more, and in accordance with the ecology of ideas around enmeshment, and complementarily, from the nuclear family's point of view, disclosure being perceived as a metaphor for leaving home, further corrective action (Bateson, 1972) was carried out by all family members to return the system to its usual, preferred state. Thus, this corrective action involved family members varying their behaviour to evolve a new stage of stability. This included Barbara's evolution from *laissez-faire* to directive parenting; Tanya's support of Kevin's homosexual pursuits, the father's re-involvement with Kevin and Barbara on a more personal level, as well as Kevin's insistence on having his family involved in his homosexual world. This can be seen as his attempt to re-stabilise the family, by maintaining the pattern of enmeshment in the face of change (disclosure).

Ultimately, the ecology of ideas around homosexuality evolved to protect the ecology of meanings in the family (unconventionality from society), as well as to recursively maintain the politics of "We stick together". By being homosexual, Kevin was still different from conventional society, and recursively therefore, still depended on his family as much as previously. Thus, all members of the significant system (Boscolo et al., 1987) contribute to the recursion between stability and change. In this case family stability was challenged by the disclosure, which complementarily was restored by including Kevin's homosexuality within their co-constructed definition of togetherness. It appears therefore that when confronted with messages of change beyond the parameters of fluctuation tolerable to the family, corrective action takes place, which restabilises the family and evolves the system to a new state of stability in which familial patterns of enmeshment and interdependence are further entrenched than previously. The manner in which the family responded to all of the potential break-ups is isomorphic in terms of re-extending the pattern of enmeshment. Thus, it may be that families have a set way of dealing with possible destabilisation that maintains their locally-developed ecology of ideas and permits overall familial stability. This would be a useful area to explore in looking at other families who experience disclosure of homosexuality.

6. The use of narrative, specifically the concept of nested narratives (Gergen & Gergen, 1983), illustrates the recursion between two levels of narrative. The first narrative refers to the family's direct narration of their experience of disclosure during the interviews. It is in this narrative that the view of a family as an ecology of ideas who socially co-construct their meanings which form a recursion with their subsequent behaviour, is illustrated. Recursively, the nested narrative which is the researcher's narrative of the family, highlights the different meanings homosexuality and disclosure have come to occupy within the family, and how these meanings (for instance, the complementarity of autonomy/interdependence) have a recursive interrelationship between family members and with society. Thus, the recursion between the two levels of narrative lends further depth and richness to the description.

This research has attempted to generate "warm ideas" (Keeney & Morris, 1985, p549) in that it attempts to stay close to the subject matter and develop new ways of thinking about the topic of disclosure, whilst simultaneously extending the territory into new avenues

of inquiry and amplifying our understanding beyond what we knew before (Bochner, 1981, p76).

### Implications For Therapy

If one views homosexuality as 'caused' by something, in terms of parents 'causing' their child to be homosexual through certain parenting styles, or if disclosure is always viewed as a crisis implying aberrant sexuality, this limits options for therapy in considering alternatives to alleviate the crisis. It also encourages a focus on either the homosexual person or the family, subscribing to a logical positivist epistemology and consequently, one set way of viewing the phenomenon of disclosure. As has been shown, the earlier descriptions of the development of homosexual identity (Herdt, 1989) as well as the stages parents experience in coming to terms with their child's disclosure (Switzer & Switzer, 1980) are not universal and would not, for instance, be useful for a therapist dealing with disclosure in the family described in this research.

The advantage of taking a cybernetic, social constructionist approach for therapy is that a complex description of a relational context is generated, which creates further possibilities with which to work in therapy. The creation of different and individualised ways of conceptualising the phenomenon of disclosure prevents the therapist from focusing purely on the 'symptom bearer', which creates a context of blame, or focusing on the fault of the parents, thereby creating a context of shame for family members. In addition, if the therapist sees the homosexual person alone, and only hears his story of disclosure, meanings and ideas around the family's reaction will be elicited from one person only, thereby excluding the family's co-evolved ecology of ideas around homosexuality. Through seeing the family together, an understanding of the family's relational issues and locally evolved belief systems comes about that enables the therapist and family to understand the particular way in which they are dealing with the disclosure. For instance, in the family under research, homosexuality was seen as a metaphor of autonomy/interdependence/togetherness as well as individuation, providing a different area of focus for the therapist, as opposed to focusing purely on the crisis in terms of aberrant sexuality. Through complexifying these meanings, the therapist may provide the family with a wider area to explore, as opposed to remaining limited to the 'tragedy' of the event as the only possible meaning.

In addition, homosexuality and disclosure can be seen as a metaphor for relational changes being proposed within the family. The therapist and family can work together with the challenges being issued to each family member in terms of these relational changes, as well as self-concept changes. In this way, flexibility is created so that wider options for therapeutic action are provided. The shift towards developing different meanings around the disclosure allows the therapist to co-evolve new meanings with the family, so that rigid meanings become more fluid and alternative ways of viewing disclosure (semantics) become possible. Recursively this may open up possibilities for family members to relate differently and deal differently (politics) with the disclosure.

Thus, family and therapist try to relate in a manner that "co-evolves the therapist-family ecology" (Penn, 1982, p 269). Penn believes that the therapist can trigger the family to move from its present form of stability that may be keeping it fixed on the 'problem' of disclosure, without being able to move on. However, it is the family itself, with its innate knowledge of its ecology of rules and norms, that works out its next pattern of organisation so as to fit with its own organisational demands (Dell, 1985; Penn, 1982). The family, therefore, has its own way of solving its crisis, and the therapist's major role is to provide the perturbation which enables them to do so. This was illustrated by the family under discussion choosing to incorporate homosexuality and disclosure as a further message of togetherness and enmeshment, as opposed to continuing to view it as a message of leaving home and the development of autonomy from the family. In this way, homosexuality became incorporated into the family's pre-existing local ecology of ideas (semantics) and patterns of behaviour (politics) around enmeshment, thereby maintaining familial stability in a new way.

The importance of taking a holistic view, to include not only the family/significant system (Boscolo et al., 1987) which refers to anyone concerned with talking about the disclosure, but to consider its recursion with the wider context, and the impact of this at a local, familial level is evident. As can be seen, a social constructionist perspective for therapy allows the therapist to be aware of the recursion between social context and the family's meanings and ideas around homosexuality and disclosure, and how this recursion impacts on the family's behaviour patterns in the face of disclosure.

The above considerations points to the usefulness of adopting a cybernetic, social constructionist lens in therapy, as it enables meanings around homosexuality and disclosure to be complexified, as well as different avenues to be explored and dealt with, instead of viewing the event as a crisis with one possible meaning and its accompanying negative effects of labelling and blame. Thus, therapists and clients can be open to conceptualising and approaching problems in a multi-dimensional way, allowing more opportunity to explore constructive ways of thinking, behaving and dealing with disclosure.

#### Limitations and Recommendations

One of the major limitations of the study is the absence of more detailed information about the significant system. For instance, Barbara's parents' reaction to her conversion to another religious faith, their reaction to the disclosure of Kevin's homosexuality as well as general information about the family's relationship with them over the years, was never explored. This would have enabled the researcher to provide a richer description of the family's interconnected ecology of ideas and behaviours, as well as to establish whether these particular relationships did or did not fit with the researcher's description of the family.

To provide yet further "thick description" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) and fuller understanding, it would have been of use to know about the father's upbringing, the reasons for Barbara and her husband's divorce as well as to have heard the father and elder brother's stories directly, as opposed to hearing about them. This accords with the narrative view in which

Wittgenstein (in Steier, 1991a) states that some aspects of the person's life are chosen as the focus, while others are left in the shadows. The researcher, in focusing primarily upon the story of disclosure, left these other aspects in the shadows.

As this research accords with new paradigm research and epistemology, in which the research is of an evolving nature (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), the researcher was not initially aware of the significance of this information. It was only after reading through the transcripts and discovering the theoretical framework of social constructionism that the significance of knowing this other information was made clear.

Perhaps the greatest limitation of the study was the lack of "member checking" (Guba, 1981, p.80) which refers to the researcher testing her understandings of the family with the family members, to establish whether or not they accorded with the researcher's narrative. This was not done due to the problem in research of exposing a family to itself (LaRossa et al., 1981). Members often have a great investment in their family as it frequently forms the core of their world, and are therefore more sensitive to anything that may be regarded as criticism in this area. Although the family would have agreed with how the researcher put forward their views through their narratives, they may not have agreed with the researcher's interpretation of them. This issue can be resolved by remembering that the researcher's description of the family arises from her theoretical lens, as well as personal context, and therefore does not reflect the 'truth' of the family, but simply one way of describing them.

The researcher could also have interviewed more than one family, although only one family responded to the request to participate, fitting again with broad-based societal views of homosexuality and its recursive impact on the family. Although the aim of this research is not to attempt to establish universal generalisations, but is instead aimed at generating fresh descriptions and alternatives in looking at a family in which disclosure of homosexuality has taken place, perhaps it would have been of use to study a family who dealt with a member's disclosure differently and to look at this family's recursive fit with society and their relational and meaning structures. This would have enabled yet further descriptions and alternatives to be generated.

One is then led to question whether a conventional family would have been open to being interviewed, or if they would have been "resistive" as described by Bilotta (1987). All of this points to a need to focus upon other families' locally developed meanings around homosexuality and disclosure, as well as their interrelational context and fit with society. One would also need to include as much of the significant system as possible, so as to identify relational, adaptational and behavioural patterns that emerge in connection with disclosure. Thus, a recommendation for further study would be the research of conventional families' reactions to disclosure. The exploration of these aspects within a social constructionist perspective further enables a focus on the family's locally developed meanings and their recursion with current sociocultural norms. Researchers could also attempt to follow up on the grounded theory (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) developed in this study, to establish whether the recursive fit between the family and society also holds for other families who describe themselves

as different from conventional society.

These suggestions are aimed at opening this area of study to new ideas and ways of thinking, instead of being rigid and subscribing to one model and one belief system about disclosure.

### Conclusion

This study has aimed at demystifying the nature of disclosure in order to challenge its reification as a crisis solely in terms of aberrant sexuality, without other meanings being ascribed to it.

The present research has attempted to create a different dialogue on the process of disclosure of homosexuality within a family, and the meanings around it. The use of a second-order cybernetic epistemology and social constructionist theory proved invaluable in so doing. Yet it must be remembered, in line with the principle of self-referentiality, that the research conclusions derived from the use of these theories as well as through interaction with the family, are but one way of describing a phenomenon at a specific time and context, that is useful for us and our professional community (Steier, 1991a). This viewpoint accords with the aims of new paradigm research.

It is hoped that this research forms part of a continuing narrative of homosexual people within the context of their families and society and that it will stimulate others to think differently about disclosure, so that further narratives about it may be yielded.

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THESIS TRANSCRIPT INTERVIEWS

First Interview

Members at the interview were mother, Barbara, daughter Tanya, homosexual son Kevin and Kevin's boyfriend Paul.

This family is a very colourful one, especially when looking at the mother. Her son is more serious, as is the daughter. The parents were divorced ten years ago, in 1983, but they remain good friends. The father is re-married with two young children and his ex-wife and present wife get on well. There is another older son who lives elsewhere. The homosexual son is 24 years old, his sister 22 years old and the oldest brother is 31 years old.

The initial interview was focused on the families' views of homosexuality before the actual 'disclosure', as well as the experience of disclosure and how each member experienced it.

Researcher: Why do you think you were the only family to respond to the advert?

Barbara: Like I told you, we are very open . . . we are a very open family, we let it all hang out.

Researcher: What do you mean in terms of open?

Barbara: We are open with each other. We scream, we shout, we laugh together. We do it all.

Researcher: What is it about your upbringing - the way you raised your children that brought about the openness - your ideas, your values?

Barbara: Not my upbringing, the man I was married to.

Researcher: Oh ok, how did he contribute?

Barbara: He was always very open and he taught me to be like that.

Researcher: Weren't you like that before?

Barbara: Oh no.

Researcher: And in terms of openness, was homosexuality or talk about sexuality discussed in your home?

- Tanya: All the time. You could talk to them about anything. Nothing was ever taboo, nothing.
- Researcher: How was that for you?
- Tanya: It was wonderful. Among so many young people, we were the exception to the rule. There are so many people that have their little lives where their parents don't discuss anything with them, but we knew about everything, from drugs to sex, everything.
- Researcher: When did your parents first start discussing this with you?
- Tanya: Well, I can't remember. It's just always been around. It wasn't like "tell us about sex . . ." it's always been there, something we always discussed openly. Anything goes, you know, dirty jokes around the dinner table.
- Barbara: I was at the other extreme. I grew up in a family where nothing was ever discussed. My parents didn't even share a bed - the one slept upstairs, the one downstairs. That was their arrangement. Nothing was discussed, everything was taboo. So it was after a couple of years of living with their father I learnt to be open about things.
- Researcher: Did you prefer that or was it strange?
- Barbara: Absolutely (as in preferred it)
- Kevin: I don't know, we were always around adults a lot as children. I remember being around adults, my parent's friends and I don't know, things were just always there. In terms of gay people and that sort of thing, the first contact my mother had was with a gay grocer. She used to shop at the local supermarket and that's how she met him and there was everything from his birthday party at our house with gay people running around, and I must have been around 12 or 13, and I was in my element. I thought, "oh wow, these people actually exist in the world", and she was going out to gay clubs and gay bars with him and that was years ago, that was 10, 11, 12 years ago and she used to come back and talk about it and talk about drag queens - Granny Lee and all these legends, that are so big in the gay community today. So I don't know, it was just always . . . I mean, I still remember my cousins on the other side of the family, they were completely shocked because they had been brought up in a religious type of environment and my sister and I were at age 8 and 9 looking at Playboy, you know, and laughing about it. They were teenagers and absolutely besides themselves at these precocious children looking at these sorts of things.
- Barbara: We don't know if it was right or wrong, but that's the way we chose.
- Kevin: That's the way it was.
- Tanya: Also I would say most of the time my father was a non-judgemental person. It wasn't like gays were dirty and disgusting, or be racist and hate Blacks.

He's never given us those values so where gayness came into it, it wasn't anything we were scared of and disgusted by. We weren't instilled with those closed sort of things that people instill in their children at 5, like now you an Afrikaner and you must hate the Blacks. We were never told "this is wrong and this is right".

Barbara objects

Tanya: No, not like those are people you must have nothing to do with. I mean, of course wrong and right are wrong and right, but not, "don't socialise with those sort of people, there's something wrong with them".

Kevin: We always had to be very independent. It was, "you must do what you want to do" - just be yourself.

Barbara: And if you bump your head that's the only way you'll learn.

Kevin: That's the way you learn. Ja, that's how it was. I still remember, it all sticks in my mind. When I was in primary school and the teacher says you have to get your parents to sign your homework books, I had to beg my mother to do that, because she thought if you don't do your homework, it's your problem. If you don't study for exams, it's your problem. She never once stood over me and said "you better study" - it was always "you must do what you have to do". You know what's expected of you and that's what you must do. (Tanya making agreement noises in the background). I think maybe once or twice when I was writing matric she was a bit concerned but there was never any pressure, we were never pushed into anything and that's how it was.

Tanya: It was like come home from school and do your own thing, make your own lunch and everything - you lived your own life. We don't know mothers who helped with school projects, we had to do school projects, go down to the library and you must do your project.

Kevin: Sometimes if we were really desperate, I remember she once took me off to the Orange Board or something 'cos I had to do a citrus project, but normally it was just do your own thing.

Researcher: Tell me something, you said earlier then your mom was friendly with the grocer and you had gay parties at your house and you thought, there really are these people in existence, did you already start identifying with gay people at that stage and think 'oh thank goodness . . .'?

Kevin: I knew from a very young age, very young.

Researcher: How did you know?

Kevin: I just knew what I wanted. I knew what I felt. It was a feeling. I had a friend, a girl friend, we were young, we messed around, played doctor-doctor and whatever you did when you were that age.

- Barbara: You were eight.
- Kevin: I must have been about 8 or 9 and I thought, "No, this is boring". I don't know. It was just something I remember from a very young age. I was always a different child. I used to dress up in the doll's corner at nursery school, I used to play with my sister's Barbie dolls, I wanted a Barbie doll, I wanted to be a dancer . . . all those things.
- Barbara: I took him to a wedding once, and he dressed in veils and stole the limelight from the bride.
- Kevin: Ja, I was four.
- Barbara: Went into the church, all dressed up.
- Kevin: I don't know, I was always different.
- Researcher: Did you perceive the difference? (to mother)
- Barbara: The day he was born I looked at him and knew that this child was different, but I didn't think he was going to be this different . . . but I knew. I looked at this and thought, "this is special and different". I didn't know how special or how different he was going to be. (Laughter).
- Researcher: And then he started showing a difference in preferring Barbie dolls . . .
- Barbara: When he was a child . . .
- Kevin: Everyone thought I was cute.
- Barbara: Everyone thought he was cute and I said to his father, "Let's get him a doll", him being so open-minded and all . . .
- Kevin: My father did put his foot down.
- Barbara: He used to put on the maid's apron and help her clean, do the washing and at that stage, he'd already done his psychology (the husband) and I went to see a friend and I said, "Look, you know, my son is wanting to do girls things, he want to clean, he wants to bake, play with dolls," and he said "his father is so busy carving out his career, he's identifying with you. His father must take him to rugby, must play cricket with him, father must do this and father must do that . . . "I don't know whether that would have . . ."
- Researcher: You say your ex-husband did it?
- Barbara: Right
- Tanya: He was not a very participating father.
- Barbara: He was busy getting on with his career.
- Tanya: He was there in the background, day to day, but as far as physical affection

and interest in your day to day life, like going to school plays, he was never there.

Kevin: He didn't have time.

Barbara: I'm not blaming him, but whether that had any influence on you.

Kevin: I don't know.

Barbara: I honestly don't know.

Kevin: You know the one thing I remember, I said to my mother once, "I want to dance . ." my sister was going to dancing. I used to sit there and watch her dance and say "I'm dying to dance". I think he put his foot down at that. I think he put his foot down at the Barbie doll, but I still did it anyway, but I never played sport, I hated playing sport, I used to bunk PT. Even at primary school, I never had any male friends, I was always friendly with the girls. I hung around the girls and even then at a very young age I was teased and called names because I was different. People knew I was different.

Researcher: Did the difference bother you at all?

Kevin: Ja, it was very hard, it was very, very hard. I had a tough time. High school as well. I had a hard time. I never told my mom . . .

Barbara: Never, and he told me everything.

Tanya: I could understand. I've also been discriminated against all my life. I also had teasing because of my weight.

Barbara: I never really thought anything of it. It's just the way he is. He's a nice, soft, caring person. Homosexuality never entered my mind at all until a few years later.

Researcher: Tanya, how was it for you at that stage? Did you perceive your brother as being different, or what were your perceptions of him?

Tanya: Well the two of us were very close. We used to do everything together. There's only three years between us. We had such fun times, we really laughed. We did everything together from a young age, like we used to go to Durban every year and stay in a holiday flat and at night the two of us would trot off to . . .

Barbara: Yes, they used to go off for hours . . .

Tanya: Travel up and down in the lifts.

Kevin: You see, that's how independent we were.

Tanya: We were just always very close, and with me, I never would have noticed any difference. That's just how he was.

- Barbara: That's how he was.
- Kevin: (To Barbara) Do people ever say anything to you? Did you friends ever say I was different or anything like that . . . I don't know.
- Barbara: I don't remember. We just accepted him how he was.
- Researcher: And what actually led to the 'coming-out' as such? Was there an 'event'?
- Kevin: Ja, there was. It's a long story. Well, of course, there was this exposure to my mom and her friends.
- Barbara: I didn't go out of my way . . .
- Kevin: Not at all
- Barbara: To be friends with Lawrence.
- Kevin: No, I know
- Barbara: It's just one of those things that happened and I was really fond of him.
- Kevin: She was mad about him.
- Researcher: Were you still married at that stage?
- Barbara: Yes.
- Kevin: You were separated. I don't think you were divorced yet because I still remember his birthday party was at the Lyndhurst house.
- Tanya: No it wasn't.
- Kevin: Yes it was. But then my step-mother, who wasn't my step-mother at that stage was on the scene and Cathy and Sandra were around - they were two lesbians. My step-mother's friends. It's a whole, big happy family. My mother and step-mother get on and it's like a whole. . .
- Researcher: A really unusual family!
- Kevin: Very different, Ja. We were always different.
- Barbara: What was really unusual about this lesbian who I was very fond of, she was a super person, is that she was a prostitute. She slept with men for money and had a gay girlfriend.
- Kevin: We all knew about it. Even as children, we just knew. She was gay and she was a prostitute. I mean we never discussed it, but we knew. That was Cathy and Sandra. That was their story. Ok, at that stage I must have been 13 or

14, but that was it.

Researcher: And then the actual process of you . . .

Kevin: Oh, Ok. I don't know, I just thought, I knew exactly how I felt. I mean in the change rooms at school it was an absolute trauma because first of all I used to hate changing in front of the boys, second of all I was dying to see them all naked because I thought, 'well, this is what I want'. I knew when we were doing PT and they were playing rugby that I was looking at their legs to see if they had nice legs and whatever, but nobody . . . I never, ever said a word to anybody about it. I just kept it . . . I used to walk around, I was called names, I was punched around and I just took it, because I thought, really deep down inside 'that's what I am' and maybe I deserved it. I didn't deserve it, but that's the way life used to go on.

Researcher: Was that because society said it's bad . . . ?

Kevin: I was just scared, I was just really, really scared. I just didn't want anybody to know. I thought to myself, 'keep it to yourself' and I always thought 'one day I'll be able to . . .' I always was going to study overseas, I thought I'll go overseas and I'll be myself. It was never like a 'coming out', but that's how I used to think.

Researcher: So you never wanted to be straight, you wanted to be what you were, but not show it?

Kevin: Ja, there was never any confusion inside of me. It was always in one direction. I was lucky with that 'cos a lot of people don't have it that easy. I never fought it. However, it was pushed very deep down and I knew what I liked. I didn't really have girlfriends. . .

Barbara: At some stage, I can't remember what year at school, I picked up . . . he never said a word to me . . . I don't know what . . . I said to his father one day, just in passing, 'you know there's a good chance that Kevin is going to turn out gay' and he said 'well then, we'll just support him.' And then he started dating a nice Jewish girl and I thought, 'how wrong can you ever have been?'

Kevin: I didn't date her, we were just very close and she was in love with me and we used to go out and the whole story, but I knew, I knew and I really didn't like it because I knew that I wasn't being fair.

Researcher: What do you mean by fair . . . you mean going out with a girl?

Kevin: Because we were just very close. Everyone thought we were an item, but we weren't . . .

Barbara: I also thought you were an item and I thought, 'Ugh, we picked up all the wrong vibes.'

Researcher: What did you think, Tanya? (to sister)

- Tanya: I don't know. That didn't feature much in my life. Not that I can remember thinking he was gay in any case.
- Kevin: I think it's quite hard to . . . you know when you with somebody every day and they behave in a certain way, I don't know. It's difficult to see that they were different.
- Tanya: Also because you didn't have any male friends, I didn't really have and we weren't really exposed much to strange men around to see how they reacted anyway, except Lawrence, who was, you know, as natural as could be, but . . . except my older brother.
- Kevin: My brother was very . . . he played rugby.
- Tanya: A man's man
- Kevin: Ja, and he messed around and the girls were all after him, but then he wasn't around. He left home.
- Tanya: Ja, he left at 18, he went into the army and we never saw him again.
- Kevin: Ja, he went to Cape Town and that was that.
- Researcher: So, where is he now?
- Kevin/Tanya: In Cape Town.
- Barbara: We didn't see him, he never moved back home.
- Tanya: Ja, he moved out when he went into the army.
- Kevin: I was twelve then.
- Researcher: So did he ever pick up anything . . . ?
- Barbara: He used to tease him stupid but never about anything like that.
- Kevin/Tanya: No, no never.
- Tanya: It was just his way. Him and my father; they love to mock and tease. They love it.
- Kevin: He drove me mad.
- Tanya: Make fun of everything.
- Kevin: He drove me mad but I think once I went to him and I said to him, because he went to Highlands (a boy's school) and in those days Highlands was rough . . . Italians and Portuguese, and I said to him, "You must teach me how to

fight" and he said "Why?" and I said, "Because no, I just want to learn 'cos some guys give me a hard time" and that's I think the most that I ever said to him. So even him, he just used to come and go for the holidays or whatever, so we saw him only occasionally.

- Tanya: He just did very much his own thing and we didn't really see much of him around. Also because he's much older than us. He's nine years older than me. He's much older than the two of us, that's why the two of us are so close, we did everything together and he was sort of in the background. Not really prominent, but he went with girls. . .
- Barbara: It was Bruce who set the whole thing off.
- Kevin: Ja, it was Bruce. I'll get to that. (To Mom). When did we go to that party at Cathy's place? The time when I dressed you up in that tarty outfit?
- Tanya: With the fringed bows . . .
- Kevin: Ja (laughter), that was it. Ja, we went off to this lesbian party with all these numbers.
- Researcher: How old were you then?
- Kevin: I don't know, I wasn't driving.
- Barbara: You might have been then.
- Kevin: I was 15. Ja, and I told her she has to wear a slinky outfit.
- Researcher: Did you go with your parents to this party?
- Kevin: Ja, I went with my mother.
- Barbara: Just me. I didn't know it was a lesbian party.
- Kevin: And off we went.
- Researcher: Were you divorced already at that stage?
- Kevin: Maybe, could have been.
- Barbara: I was divorced in '83
- Kevin: Ja, that could have been. Anyway, so even then, you know, we were just, I don't know. Ja, I was exposed to it and I was happy about it. But nothing was ever said. Then I remember once in matric, I drove . . . I'd heard my mother mention some gay club years ago and I was trying . . . I drove, I thought, "maybe I should just go find it" and I couldn't find it and I thought, "No, forget this".

- Barbara: What, the Dungeon?
- Kevin: No, it wasn't the Dungeon. I can't remember. I don't know where it was, but that was that. Then I left school, I went to 'varsity. I met a whole new bunch of people and then in the July of my first year of 'varsity . . . oh, no, we went to Greece for the first time when I was in matric, in '86.
- Barbara: Was it?
- Kevin: Ja. It was before my matric prelims. Everyone else was studying and I was lying on the beach in Greece. Ja, the three of us went.
- Barbara: mmmm
- Kevin: And I still remember the first night we were in Mykonos, the gay playground of Europe at that stage, the three of us were walking out of a shop, as we walked out these two guys were walking past arm in arm and my mother said "Oops, look at that" and we all nearly fell off the pavement. It was like the first time we'd seen anything like that. Of course, the island was full of it.
- Researcher: But wait. You'd been exposed to it all your life?
- Tanya/Barbara: But not so openly.
- Kevin: Not so openly. Not in the street. It was like . . .
- Tanya: You just prancing around the streets. . .
- Kevin: Like it was the most natural thing in the whole world.
- Barbara: Ja, nobody cared.
- Kevin: Nobody cared and it was like, "oh, this is wonderful", you know. So we went off to Greece and I saw what was going on there and I saw all these Greek gods, and all these magnificent men just being completely open and women and etc, etc, and I thought, this was just wonderful. However *nothing* happened at all. That was in matric. Then I went to 'varsity and my sister went to Europe in the April with a school tour . . .
- Tanya: I went in Std. 9.
- Kevin: And the tour bus went off to Greece for the second time and while . . .
- Researcher: (To Barbara) You were separated at that stage?
- Kevin: Yes, divorced long ago, it was '87 that we went to Greece.
- Barbara: Yes, and we went in '83.

- Kevin: In '83. But she still works for my Dad to this day, and my mom and I had problems in the first three months of varsity because I was . . . I had the time of my life. I moved out, but that was just because she couldn't deal with the whole . . . I was completely 'losgat', I never used to come home, and I . . .
- Tanya: "Cos you just treated it like a boarding house"
- Kevin: So she said to me "it's not a boarding house, and I must behave myself". Anyway so I thought "I'm not going to put up with this", so I moved away to my dad's place for a little while and then . . . it wasn't long, it wasn't even a month.
- Tanya: You didn't last very long there.
- Barbara: It wasn't really different there, was it?
- Kevin: Ja, so then I moved home and the two of us (Kevin & Barbara) went off to Greece, and we met . . . there were two girls and a guy travelling together and we met up with them and they happened to be going to the same island we were going to and I thought to myself, I don't know, that he was maybe gay and I don't think you and I (to mom) even discussed it. Anyway I thought to myself "Well, now's the chance", so one day I said to my mother, I even told her, I was completely open . . .
- Barbara: I never . . . it was like I had blinkers on . . . and we went to the gay beach, went to the disco's . . . when I think of it now . . . with blinkers.
- Kevin: Nothing. Like an ostrich with her head in the sand.
- Researcher: What do you think stopped you from perceiving anything?
- Barbara: I don't know. I just switched off. I just didn't register. I mean. . .
- Kevin: You didn't want to register maybe. I don't know.
- Barbara: I don't know. I just thought he was doing his thing as usual. We went to the nude beach, you know. I didn't like it, he went without me . . .
- Kevin: I thought, "we mustn't let mother suspect anything", so I said "let's go off to the gay nude beach", which we did. We went there. You (to mom) said didn't really like it . . .
- Barbara: Next time I went to . . .
- Kevin: She went to the hotel pool, and I said "Clive (man he met in Greece) and I are going off to the gay beach".
- Researcher: At that stage, did you have any idea of telling your mom?

- Kevin: I hadn't even . . . no, hang on, this is just . . . I hadn't even spoken to Clive about it, nothing. It was just like we were going off . . . hurray-casual.
- Researcher: Had you ever spoken to anyone about it?
- Kevin: Umm, No. At high school once I befriended somebody who . . . Oh, I forgot. I must tell her (the researcher) about the whole . . . I must just tell you that I had a scene with a guy at high school . . .
- Tanya: Mr X down the road.
- Kevin: Doesn't matter what his name is. Ok, this is a very big thing. When my . . . (laughter in background) Ok, first it was Brett . . .
- Tanya: Am I supposed to tell the story? You know it better than I do.
- Kevin: You can tell the story . . . Let me paint the picture. What happened was, when I was in Std. 7 and my sister was in Std. 5, there was a guy that she sort of fancied. His name was Brett and she was madly in love with him. He was a year older, he was 14.
- Tanya: Wow, he was still in Std. 5.
- Barbara: He wasn't very clever, was he?
- Kevin: What happened was, I went to a friend of mine's barmitzvah, and when I came home, it was a Saturday and my sister and Brett were frolicking in the pool. Now I saw them and because I went to the same primary school as Brett, I knew that he at times had also been teased and called names . . . that's what I thought. Anyway he slept over at the house that night.
- Barbara: In the spare room, I hope.
- Kevin: In the spare room.
- Tanya: He was in the spare room, I was in my room.
- Kevin: I must have been 15 at the time. Anyway, the two of us had sex that night in the lounge.
- Tanya: 'Cos you came knocking at his door.  
I want to know the truth  
First, he came knocking on your door.  
You can just tell me.
- Kevin: I must admit, I was the first one to make the first move.
- Tanya: Aah, he told me that when I was 16, so many years after.
- Kevin: Anyway so I was very switched on physically at that stage and I knew exactly

what I was supposed to do and you know . . . and he as well. Anyway so that was that. I felt very guilty about it because it was supposed to be my sister's boyfriend and here I am, you know, fiddling with him. Anyway, (to sister) I don't know when you found out about it.

Tanya: What . . . found out! You told me, in the back of the car one night.

Kevin: It was quite a long time afterwards.

Tanya: I'm sure when I was about 16 or so. You said, 'by the way . . .'. You told me.

Kevin: Ok, so I asked her (sister), "how does she feel about that?", I'm sure I asked her . . .

Researcher: I can imagine.

Tanya: When he told me it was very, 'by the way'.

Kevin: 'Cos you never saw him after that.

Tanya: No, it wasn't as . . . I mean we were in Std. 5. What sort of a relationship do you have in Std. 5? If he'd done it at like 20, you know . . .

Kevin: It would have been different.

Tanya: Stab you in the head with a scissors.

Kevin: (Laughs) Anyway, so that was that. Then I was friendly with three guys at school who also didn't fit into the normal rugby playing high school, who did drama etc, etc. The two of them, to this day I still think are in the closet and neither one of them will admit it and the third one has finally come out of the closet, but it so happens that I had a scene with him on and off throughout high school He then left and went to King David (a school) and I used to see him very, very occasionally. But it was purely sexual. He felt . . . I was together about it. He hated it. He used to get aggressive afterwards etc, etc. and once again I was the one who approached him and who made the first move. So my first sexual experience was at 14.

Tanya: Thanks to Tanya.

Researcher: Your very own sister!

Barbara: Tell how well he did on stage. He got his colours for drama. . . .

Kevin: Well that doesn't make any difference to the whole saga.

Barbara: It was nice, it was very . . . .

Kevin: It was an achievement.

- Barbara: Yes
- Kevin: Ja, I agree with that. So mmmm
- Researcher: Now, back to Greece.
- Kevin: Ok, so back to Greece. So I was physically in tune with that whole side of things and I felt fine about it. I just wasn't happy about this guy who used to get really uptight about it and feel guilty and remorse and whatever you feel after you shouldn't be doing something. Anyway so, I didn't see him very often, maybe once a year or twice a year. Anyway, so I went to Greece, so the two of us went onto the gay beach and we were sitting there and I don't know how it came about but we started talking about being gay, and Clive admitted to me, for the first time really that he was gay . . .
- Researcher: How did you feel having somebody else admitting it?
- Kevin: I was a bit freaked out. I just, I probably remember that. All I remember is that it was very, very difficult for me to actually say, "Well, I'm gay too."
- Researcher: What do you think made it so difficult for you?
- Kevin: That's the strange thing and I still question it today, is that I always knew what I wanted. I'd had sexual experiences and in my mind I knew that I was gay, but to actually say it to somebody in words, for the first time, was very traumatic, I found it very, very difficult.
- Researcher: In what way was it traumatic?
- Kevin: I don't know. It was very emotional. I felt emotional. It was just like, well I don't know. I can't even say that it was a sense of finality, that it was final, or this is what you really are. It was just . . . it was very difficult to say. I can't tell you why.
- Researcher: So did you say it then?
- Kevin: I did say it and I found it quite traumatic. I don't think I cried, but I felt very emotional. I felt quite upset about it. Anyway, then we started talking and looking around, and I said, "Ok, well tonight we are going to the disco" and it was from then on, "here I am, on this island with all these beautiful men, 'let's go and score'". Of course, nothing happened. I was terribly disappointed. I took his number, they went off to another island, my mom and I went off to another island. . .
- Researcher: Had you said anything to your mom?
- Kevin: Not a word, not a word.
- Barbara: I had my blinkers on. Mother was on holiday.

- Kevin: Standing at the airport in Athens, she latched onto three other gay guys who were standing in front of us, who happened to be on the plane coming back with us. She sat with the two of them, got totally drunk and unruly, had an absolute ball with these three gay guys and I was sitting in the back of the plane. Clive happened to be on the plane as well. Of course, the first thing we happened to say to each other was "Hello, did anything happen?" "No, no, not with me". He also had been in the closet for a long, long time and had come out later and was also quite happy with himself. Nothing had happened. And I was sitting and the movie was on, one of the gay guys came up and sat down next to me, and, it was the guy with the black moustache, I can't remember his name. OK, but never mind. We get to the crux of the matter. He came and he sat down, he'd had a bit too much to drink, and he said to me, "your mother is such a card, she's absolutely wonderful". So I said, "I know, she's mad". So he said to me, "she's a bit worried about you. She's got her suspicions". Obviously you (to mom) had said something to him.
- Barbara: I'll tell you exactly what I said. I remember exactly what I said.
- Kevin: Ok, and he said, "what's the problem? Look how wonderful she is, just be open with her. You know, she loves moffies. He was being funny. She loves moffies. She's having a whale of a time with us. You know, what's your problem? Don't be so silly!" and it actually took him, for somebody, to make me aware that it was really just fine to tell her, that there was no problem, because at that stage I was still terrified even though I knew my family was completely open and that they would support me. Rationally I knew that, but emotionally I still felt absolutely terrified and of course I had this deep, dark secret that nobody could see and it took him . . . he was the one responsible . . . it took him to actually say to me . . . or to physically make me aware, "She's cool, just tell her." Anyway, I was jubilant, I was absolutely ecstatic and I thought, "uh, hooray, hooray". Anyway he went off and that was that. Anyway (to mom) so tell what you said to him.
- Barbara: I don't know what it was . . . I think something must have clicked somewhere subconsciously, because now we were on the plane and maybe I was thinking . . .
- Kevin: Or maybe you had a bit too much to drink.
- Barbara: Or maybe I had too much to drink which opened up all the subconscious and I said, "Now, can I ask you guys or girls something hypothetical . . . what would a mother do if she thought her son was gay". Maybe I was too scared to ask or say, but I was humming and haaing which is very unusual for me.
- Kevin: Very. Normally you so straight-forward.
- Barbara: And the one with the black moustache says, "If you talking about that madam that minced on the plane behind you, he's definitely gay".
- Researcher: Talking about you? (to son)

- Kevin: About me, yes.
- Researcher: Did they make the association then that it was your son?
- Barbara: Yes
- Kevin: No, they knew it was me.
- Barbara: If you talking about that madam that minced on the plane with you, he is definitely one of us.
- Kevin: Is that what he said?
- Researcher: How did you feel then? (to mom)
- Barbara: Well, you know we were having the biggest party . . .
- Kevin: And you spent two days in bed afterwards.
- Barbara: I spent two days in bed afterwards. I was violently ill. It was all just part of the . . . you know . . .
- Kevin: Whole thing. Anyway so that was that.
- Barbara: I put it away again
- Kevin: Ja
- Researcher: Did any kind of strife occur?
- Barbara: I put it away again.
- Kevin: Right, Ok. I then came . . the day we came home, my mother was ill, so my sister and I went to my father for dinner, because he hadn't seen us, or whatever, and that night, it's the strangest thing in the whole world. That's the first time I ever, ever confronted my father about anything and I gave him absolute hell.
- Researcher: You mean just about general issues?
- Kevin: He had upset my sister . . .
- Tanya: Which dinner was this - it happened so often?
- Kevin: This was the night I screamed at him about that I would rather live in a dustbin and have a father, than have all of this (indicating material objects).
- Tanya: Was this when we were in the funny nook in their kitchen?

- Kevin: Yes, when Ilana phoned. And you said the wrong thing and he had an attack about it.
- Tanya: I can't remember what I said.
- Kevin: Anyway, it was the first time . . . I stepped off the plane and I don't know what it was . . . I had the guts, I was really upset about . . . I was crying, but I screamed at my father and told him exactly how I felt about him for the first time in my life.
- Tanya: Because the two of us had always been very scared of him.
- Kevin: Ja, I don't know if that had anything to do with this whole awakening.
- Researcher: Maybe in preparation for the final outcome?
- Kevin: I don't know, but it was the first time that I have actually ever said to him . . .
- Barbara: Did he get a big fright?
- Kevin: He got the fright of his life. He didn't know what to do. My father's a very . . .
- Barbara: Very volatile person
- Kevin: Very powerful person  
Ja, but he's terribly powerful
- Tanya: He's very intimidating and you scared 'cos he'll always get you - he'll always knows how to get you with his words.
- Barbara: But then it's finished. It's forgotten in two minutes.
- Tanya: Yes, but you still get upset afterwards.
- Barbara: Once he's said what he's had to say
- Tanya: Then he gets stressed . . .
- Barbara: And you are obliged to forget about it immediately.
- Researcher: And if you don't, there's something wrong with you?
- Kevin: And he's full of remorse afterwards.
- Tanya: He's sorry, but you still remember afterwards.
- Kevin: Anyway, so that was that. Anyway he told me afterwards that he completely respects me having stood up to him. I basically told him that he was a c-u-n-t, I said to him, 'You're the biggest c-u-n-t on two legs' and that was that,

but anyway, and then of course, I was now dying, I was absolutely dying, waiting for the opportunity to tell my mother . . .

Researcher: Tell your mother that you confronted him?

Kevin: No, about, . . . about, sorry . . . about that I'm gay and that whole thing. Because I'd had the affirmation from this guy on the plane and I'm now looking for the right time. Well, I don't know . . . things . . . we started having hassles again . . .

Researcher: What were they about?

Kevin: Me going out and doing all sorts of things. Not going to gay places, just jolling and doing all sorts of things and we started having a few problems and I just remember, it was a Monday night, she was going off to scrabble, she plays scrabble on Monday nights . . .

Researcher: Where was Tanya?

Kevin: I don't know.

Tanya: When did you tell me? Was it the same day?

Kevin: No, wait, wait. No, it was the next day.

Tanya: I can't remember when it was . . .

Kevin: Ok. Well, the Monday night, I had been thinking in my mind, 'How am I going to get onto the subject and how I'm going to broach the subject?' and then it just . . . I don't know. She said to me, she was just about to go out, "What's wrong with you? You've been in such a state lately!"

Barbara: "Where's the nice person . . . Where's the nice guy I used to know?"

Kevin: Oh, I forget. "Where's the nice guy you used to know?' So I think I got upset. I got upset and I said to her, 'I'm just having a difficult time at the moment, lots of things happening and I can't decide if I want to sleep . . . I don't know, I went into a whole big thing, and I said "I can't even decide if I want to sleep with boys or girls. "That's what I said.

Barbara: I ran away.

Kevin: And she said, "Ok, I'm going off to scrabble now and I'll see you tomorrow."

Researcher: How did that happen? (to Barbara)

Barbara: I just got such a fright, I ran and I stayed at scrabble as late as I could.

Kevin: Till one o'clock in the morning.

- Barbara: Till one o'clock in the morning, he was waiting for me to come home.
- Researcher: What were your thoughts during this period?
- Barbara: I thought, 'I'll leave it till tomorrow.'
- Researcher: Did you think to yourself, 'Ok, now its confirmed, now . . .'
- Barbara: No, I just got such a fright, kicked it away again, and I ran away 'till as late as possible, and this little sod was waiting for me when I got home.
- Researcher: Were you petrified to come home?
- Kevin: And I thought: 'Where is this blady bitch, she's not coming home!' and I was lying in bed thinking, 'I can't sleep, now I've set the groundwork. I've said what I wanted to say and she's not coming home!' Anyway . . .
- Researcher: Did you think she was angry with you?
- Kevin: No, I just thought, "Why isn't she coming home?" You know. I was just anxious.
- Barbara: I was avoiding the issue.
- Kevin: Anyway, so I waited, and waited and waited and she finally came home, and I waited and pretended to be sleeping, and I always used to talk to her when she was in the bath, always, always, always. That was the place where we used to talk, when she was in the bath. So I heard the bath water running and I heard her get into the bath and I thought: 'Ok, Now I'm going in'. So there she was sitting and I walked in and she said, "Are you still up?" or something like this and then I can't remember, we just started talking, and I said to her, "Mom, there's something I've got to tell you" and she said "What?" and I got upset and started crying and I said, "I'm gay" and she continued bathing . . . I still remember, and I was freaked out, because I thought to myself, I though she would be upset, or "it's ok, my darling" or whatever, and she was so nonchalant about the whole thing. She just carried on and she was actually very hard which was completely - I thought, 'this is completely out of character'. I thought she would get emotional 'cos I was very emotional.
- ..
- Tanya: That's exactly how you were when we got stuck in the lift . . . The other day we got stuck in the lift and she doesn't react on the spot. She takes a while, she'll pretend . . . she'll not show anything . . .
- Barbara: The next day I went to his father and I just collapsed.
- Researcher: So it's like a kind of control kind of defence, just to carry on doing your thing? What were you thinking, 'Gee, this is it.'?
- Barbara: I don't remember. I think I just shut it away.

- Researcher: So did you just carry on and not say a word?
- Kevin: No, she did, she did. She didn't really console me, but she said "It's fine" and this, that and the other, and then I said to her, "I don't want to tell anybody else. I only want to tell you. I don't want anybody else to know." And she said . . . we started having not an argument, but she said, "No, it's fair, people love you, they're entitled to know" so the first thing I said was "You can tell Tanya, but you are not telling my father!"
- Researcher: How do you think your dad would have reacted?
- Kevin: Well, that was it. At that stage, this was after the confrontation, things were very shaky. I was angry with him. There was a lot of anger towards him and I thought, 'Bugger it! I don't care about him and he doesn't need to know.' So my mother said, "No" and she said "It's only right". So I said, "Well, it's quite difficult for me" So she said "Don't worry I'll tell Tanya."
- Researcher: Did you think it was wrong of your mom to take the lead in telling?
- Kevin: No. I wanted her to 'cos I found it very difficult to communicate with my father.
- Barbara: Always
- Kevin: I always, ja, and even now . . . it's got better, it's got much better. So she said "No, ok" I don't think you really said you would tell him. In fact you said, "Everyone must know. You can't keep it a secret." That's what she said to me. So I wasn't really happy about that. Anyway, the next day I woke up and she was in the bath again . . .
- Researcher; How did you feel the next day after telling her?
- Tanya: She baths twice a day, in the morning and the night . . .
- Kevin: I don't know. I don't really remember. All I remember then was I was going into my mother's bathroom and my sister was coming out and she had tears in her eyes and she had been crying. Obviously my mother had just told her and she put her arms around me and she gave me a big hug and she said to me, "It doesn't matter. I'll always love you", that type of thing and then I started . . . and that was all she ever said to me and that was it. There was no drama.
- Tanya: The only reason I think I was upset was because I was worried about how society would see him.
- Barbara: I wasn't worried. All I saw was AIDS in neon lights, all I saw was AIDS. My son is going to die of AIDS.
- Researcher: That was like 'Gay equals AIDS'?
- Barbara: That's it. I didn't care that he liked men. I didn't care what society thought. I didn't care what his father thought. I only thought about AIDS.

- Researcher: Have you reconciled yourself to . . . ?
- Barbara: Absolutely
- Researcher: How did that happen?
- Barbara: Well, he hasn't got it!
- General laughter.
- Kevin: Ja, so that was fine. It was just fine. I think she (Tanya) even said to me she was a bit worried about how people would react.
- Barbara: I don't give a damn, I never ever gave a damn about what people think. I tell everyone, "I've got a gay son and I love him". They just sort of look at me, and I giggle and ja. I was in the office the other day, and I don't know what I said, and I said something about my gay son . . .
- Tanya: Her gay son!
- Barbara: And that was it.
- Tanya: I never told him! (person they were talking about)
- Barbara: I don't care if you never told him. I told him.
- Researcher: Tanya, how was it for you when your mom told you?
- Tanya: I can't really remember. I remember saying to him that it was ok and that I was worried about how people would react but it was never anything that disgusted me. He was just . . .
- Researcher: Did you have ideas about him being gay before?
- Tanya: Not that I can remember. As I said, that was always just the way he was. You know we being young when we met gay people, we always thought there were those sort of people. What was different about them? They were actually quite fun.
- Barbara: They are fun.
- Tanya: As I said before, if he wasn't gay, I would never have known this side of the world. I also went to their clubs.
- Barbara: We went to see this play, 'The Homosexual'. Did you see it?
- Researcher: No, I was away. I was so upset to miss it.
- Barbara: Ah, it was wonderful and we had like a discussion afterwards.

- Researcher: With the actors?
- Barbara: And with the audience who stayed behind.
- Kevin: It would be quite interesting for you to speak to them.
- Researcher: I tried to, but they all live in Cape Town.
- Barbara &  
Kevin: Ja
- Researcher: 'Cos I got back and my mom said this show was on and I've got to go and see it and it was already off at that stage, so I phoned up and they all live in Cape Town.
- Kevin: It was marvellous
- Tanya: Are we allowed to ask you a question?
- Researcher: Ja
- Tanya: How did you decide to do this as your sort of theme?
- Researcher: Ok, In our actual group, there are 6 of us at Unisa doing our masters. One of the guys is gay, he gets involved in gay activist things. And he sometimes used to sit and talk to me and say, "My mother this and my mother that" and it kind of fascinated me, "How did this process happen?" and he's very open about being gay but he never really went into details about it, but it started to fascinate me, "What must it be like?" and I think with our research it had to be like something that holds our interest and be meaningful in some way because otherwise we could get bored with it, and I started, in my mind thinking of how society thinks of gays generally and reading literature on it. How it's often so stigmatising and parents often 'go in' when gays come out, and I started thinking of it, almost in terms of it being a rebellion in a way of society and maybe sometimes parents see it that way and in terms of where my growth was, I was also going through a stage of kind of individuating from my family.
- Barbara: What's that book?
- Kevin: I don't know, Ma.
- Barbara: By Francis Kendle. Have you heard of her?
- Researcher: No.
- Barbara: She wrote a book called "The Sex Factor" (something or other) on the 702 talk show and she talks about chromosomes, etc, etc, and I can't really remember the details, but she got onto homosexuals, but sort of if the pregnant women produces this of this of the testosterone, it can possibly affect the hormones of the child, so maybe when I was carrying him, I was convinced

that he was going to be a girl. He was going to be Samantha and when the nurse told me I had a son, 'cos I had ceasars, I cried and when I saw this thing I thought 'Oh Lord' and his nursery school teacher said to me, "You know Kevin is trying to be a girl for you because he overheard you telling someone you wanted a girl" I don't know, I don't know.

Researcher: So do you think you implicitly did something?

Barbara: I don't know.

Kevin: I don't remember that.

Barbara: Who knows how homosexuals are made?

Researcher: I don't know.

Barbara: There's no answer

Tanya: I also think if you have to find out why homosexuals are homosexuals, then we must find out why we are straight. We're just born that way.

Kevin: It's just a waste of energy. It's just the way it is and that's it. I could never blame anything. You know people say . . . to me.

Barbara: . . . Do you ever feel guilty?

Kevin: No, I don't. I would never blame my mother because she wanted a daughter, I would never blame my father for not being around. It's just the way I am and that's it. You know, what's the point in blaming?

Researcher: Did you ever blame yourself?

Barbara: I sometimes sit and wonder if it had anything to do with the pregnancy or the chromosomes or what. No, never blame. I wouldn't swop him for anything. I always want to know why, but I don't think there'll ever be an answer.

Kevin: I think it's very difficult.

Researcher: Early studies years ago said it was an over-controlling mother and a weak father. . .

Barbara: Oh no, they had a very strong father, but maybe I was his mother and father but I don't know.

Kevin: Ja, Ja, you did and you did a good job, you did a very good job. You had to.

Researcher: How was it when your father found out?

Kevin: Ok, so we getting to this. So what happened was . . so that was my sister.

Then my mother went off to work 'cos it was a Tuesday and she came back and she . . .

Barbara: I just collapsed at his desk.

Researcher: At Kevin's desk?

Kevin: No, at my father's desk.

Barbara: He was totally calm and he said, "Well, we'll all just have to love and support him"; and I was having hysterics.

Researcher: What were you having hysterics about? What was going through your mind?

Barbara: I don't know. I was saying this blady AIDS and this and that . .

Tanya: My father doesn't deal on an emotional level - he doesn't deal in emotions.

Kevin: Only in facts.

Tanya: Only in facts.

Barbara: Only wants the facts.

Tanya: You mustn't go sit there and blab at him . . . he's not interested.

Barbara: "Your son is gay, he's come out the closet, he's admitted he's gay. I'm in a state, he's going to die of Aids . . ."

Tanya: And of course he said, "you being neurotic and he's not going to get AIDS". I can imagine what he said.

Barbara: No, he handled it. He was very calm.

Kevin: Let me tell you what happened. She comes home and I'm on tenterhooks and I said "So?" and she said "Your father wants to see you." I thought here we go. She said "He wants you to come for breakfast on Saturday morning." Well, I'd never had that sort of invitation first of all, never from my father and second of all I thought, 'there's no way I can deal with this. I can't deal with it. I can't go!' I was terrified, Absolutely terrified!

Researcher: Did you think he'd reject you? What were you thinking?

Kevin: I just thought . . I don't know. I just thought 'I can't deal with this whole trauma'. Anyway so I was in a state from the Tuesday to the Saturday and I think I even asked her, "Was he cross?" My mother said no and I said "What does he want to talk to me about?" and she said, "No he just wants to speak to you." She was quite evasive. "No, he just wants to see you." So I was quite nervous. Anyway I went and we sat and had breakfast and then he said, "come let's go through to my office".

- Researcher: So you hadn't had a conversation about it?
- Kevin: Nothing. We spoke about very petty things.
- Researcher: Were you sitting there . . .
- Kevin: And then the usual, "Let's go through to my office" which was the usual place . . .
- Barbara: Like the death knell.
- Kevin: Ja, like the gas chamber. This is where things get discussed.
- Tanya: This is where you get the summons and you worry for three days what it's about. You do something menial and then you get taken through to the office.
- Barbara: You make out as if he's such an ogre.
- Kevin: No, he isn't. I'm just saying how it was. How my perception of it was. Anyway so I sat down in the usual chair. He sat at his desk and he just spoke and I just sat there and he said, I can't remember what he said in his exact words, but he said to me umm, he obviously said to me "Your mother told me. I've got absolute and utter respect for you and I'm proud of you, that you've taken responsibility and that you going to start living your life and that you going to be your own person and it will never worry me and I'll always love and support you" and I just sat there.
- Researcher: Were you shocked?
- Kevin: I just sat there looking at this man, thinking: 'Wow, You know this is just something else'; and there were just a few things he was worried about. He was worried about AIDS and he's worried about society and being discriminated against, especially in my career. He would hate for people to ever discriminate against me and to hold me back in the kind of career I was going into etc, etc. And then he stood up and I stood up and he said, "I'll always love you" and he gave me a hug, which finished me right off, because that is not my father at all. He finds it very difficult to display emotion and that sort of thing and that finished me. I thought, 'Wow, this is great'. Then he said to me "You must tell your step-mother" and my step-mother and I used to be like this (demonstrating closeness), hey, we used to be so close?
- Researcher: What changed?
- Kevin: I don't know. But I just. I don't know . . . but he said to me "Karen always knew" this, that and the other, so I thought it wasn't actually necessary for me to sit down and say to her 'I'm gay', 'cos every time I told somebody I found it very, very emotional. I got very upset, so I never said anything to her. It was like an unspoken rule, I think she was quite upset about it and

we became quite distant for a long time after that.

Researcher: Upset because you didn't go . . . ?

Kevin: I didn't actually sit down. You know I'd been through all the motions . . .

Barbara: You left her out!

Kevin: Once again!

Tanya: You left her out! (emphatic)

Kevin: So that was basically that. Then it was to tell my friends. My two close friends from 'varsity. I had to tell them.

Barbara: And the girl you dated.

Kevin: Ja, the girl from matric. I told her the day she fell off the bus and broke her leg.

Barbara: (echoing) broke her leg.

Kevin: I told her that night.

Researcher: Did she fall before or after?

Kevin: She fell before and I told her that day. But that was just because I couldn't handle it anymore.

Researcher: Once you'd told, did you just want to get it over with and tell everyone?

Kevin: Uh, no, I found . . .

Barbara: He didn't even tell my sisters or my family. He didn't think they'd understand.

Kevin: Ja, I was very worried about that sort of thing. I tried to keep it very selective but it just couldn't work. You know it's an all-or-nothing type thing, but it was difficult. I found that my best friend from high school was the most difficult person to tell. I told her last. I called her and sat her down and she just said, "Oh, is that all?" type of thing. You know . . . (laughter) "I've known for years" type of thing, which used to piss me off, because at times I used to like it that people were surprised.

Tanya: Was she one of those sisters?

Kevin: Ja

Tanya: Oh, such a response from her!

Kevin: And then of course the girl that I told, and then after that was all sorts of things. Discovering, going places and gay people and going out and gay clubs.

- Tanya: And I used to go with you . . .
- Barbara: And then I went to Lawrence, the gay grocer . . .
- Kevin: Oh, that's right.
- Barbara: And then I said, "Lawrence baby, my son has leapt out of the closet and you're going to have to be his fairy godmother because I don't know where to start" and Lawrence just immediately leapt into the front.
- Kevin: That's right.
- Researcher: What did he do?
- Barbara: What he did, I don't know.
- Kevin: He introduced me to a few people, I don't know. I can't really remember. Right, then my mother said I have to find a Jewish boyfriend.
- Barbara: I did not say that to you.
- Kevin: Ja, Ja. She said "there's a Jewish group, Yachat, a gay Jewish group . . ."
- Barbara: Oh G-d!, the gay Jewish group!
- Kevin: The Jewish group and she gave me the number, and she said "Here, phone them up . . ." oh, no, first you phoned the gay community centre . . .
- Barbara: I don't know. I did all kinds of things.
- Kevin: First, she phoned the gay community centre and found out that they were having sundowner drinks on a Friday night and she arranged for me to go, so off I went and it was absolutely awful. Then she found out that there was a gay Jewish group 'cos she said I must find a nice Jewish boyfriend, and I went to that and it was also awful and then I just met all sorts of people.
- Barbara: That is exactly why I was trying to get you into a nice Jewish group, with all those sorts of people . . .
- Tanya: Oh yes, oh yes, they were all sorts of people
- Barbara: Ah, did he bring all sorts of people home!
- All laugh
- Barbara: Ah, what he used to bring. Ah, I couldn't take it.
- Tanya: The one who borrowed my white shoes.

- Kevin: (Laughing.) She dealt with it very well. She dealt with it.
- Barbara: We went through a pretty rough patch
- Tanya laughing
- Kevin: But she dealt with it . . . I mean my mother deals . . . you know.
- Barbara: I deal
- Kevin: Even though it was a rough patch, she just takes everything in her stride. She just pretended that everything was just fine.
- Barbara: I was very polite to everybody and screamed at him afterwards.
- Researcher: What did you scream about?
- Barbara: I don't know. I've forgotten (talking softly, can't make out; remember it had to do with laughing about the people Kevin had at home). I don't know how long after that it was when we were in Rosebank one day, and we were in the CNA and we were coming out and I was walking in front and I heard this voice say, 'Hello, howzit' (emphasis on kugel accent) and I didn't look around and kept walking and we eventually got to the car and I turned to him (Kevin) and said, I didn't even look around, "If you ever get involved with a Glenhazel queen like that, I will kill you" and guess who it was?
- Tanya: And here sits the Glenhazel queen. (Laughter - pointing to Paul)
- Tanya: Hogging the conversation for a change.
- Barbara: I didn't even see him.
- Kevin: There was a whole lot of things that happened before then. That was basically the story.
- Researcher: Ja
- Kevin: That was the whole coming out . . .
- Researcher: The coming out process.
- Barbara: Running around like a chicken with his head chopped off.
- Kevin: Ja, I was freaked out. I was actually freaked out. Ja, I didn't think I actually really coped with this whole thing being out in the open. I ran around, I was looking for somebody. I think what I wanted to do was to find a boyfriend to actually reiterate the point that I was gay and I wasn't just messing around. That this was really serious and that this is me . . .
- Researcher: Did you think that? That they may think . . . ?

Kevin: I don't know, possibly. Possibly that's why I was so desperate to find . . . I don't know and also because I was quite screwed up about the whole thing.

Researcher: Screwed up?

Kevin: Not about being gay but this whole sort of openness and . . . it was quite, it was quite something. It was different to the way I had fantasized about. I had always thought I was really together, which I was, quietly together, and now that it was all over the open, I just wasn't together about the whole thing, which was really strange. That's why I ran around trying to find somebody and I got involved with somebody who threw me out and I found out that he'd been sleeping with everyone in town and I got into a very bad depression, and I said to my mom one night, I said to her, "Tonight I was driving and I wanted to keep driving the car 'till I hit a wall" and that's when she said, "You had better take yourself to the nearest crisis centre"

Barbara: He phoned the Crisis Centre

Kevin: No, you did, you did and I took myself off there.

Barbara: Ja

Kevin: And they recommended a therapist and I saw her. I was in therapy for ages. I still am but with a different therapist . . . that's just because . . .

Barbara: Therapy addict.

Kevin: I love it. I can't go without my weekly session but that just because there are lots of things I want to work on.

Researcher: Mm

Kevin: I went through a rough stage. I was seeing psychiatrists. At one stage I was on stabilizers. When I met Paul, I was on medication.

Tanya: Also at another stage. You weren't a well boy.

Kevin: Ja, I went through a bad time, a really bad time.

Researcher: Was it all the adjustment to coming out?

Kevin: Mm, I don't know.

Barbara: I don't think he accepted what he really wanted to be.

Kevin: Ja, but it's very weird because, I always . . . there was never a fight within myself, there was never "this is wrong . . . push it away" or "this is wrong - feel guilty" or "this is wrong, I must try and get a girlfriend or I must try . . ." that never, ever came into it. However, once it was out in the open, it

was just different.

Researcher: Where there different demands of relationships on you?

Kevin: I don't know. I think it was very difficult to establish a new sort of ecosystem. To find my niche, to establish friends, to get a little support group together, which is what I needed because my family, as wonderful as they were, and as open as they were couldn't give me the things that I wanted to find out about which gave . . . it was like a whole awakening type of thing, and so, I was desperately looking for friends, I was desperately looking for a lover, I was exploring and . . . I don't know, it was all a big mess. I was let down most of the time with people. Nobody wanted to start a relationship. I just wanted a commitment from somebody that .. they were only interested in one-night stands or whatever, and I think I was lonely.

Barbara: Mmm

Kevin: I was very, very lonely

Barbara: You'd come out of your safe place you see.

Kevin: Ja

Barbara: You'd come out of your safe place.

Kevin: And I was desperate. I was absolutely desperate. I still remember I went to Cape Town . . . I don't know who told Michael (elder brother). You must have told Michael about me. I don't know. I went to Cape Town. I stayed with my brother. I told him that I was depressed, I was on medication. I was suicidal that holiday. I still remember. I never ever did anything, but I felt very desperate, I felt very alone.

Researcher: Did you regret coming out at all at that stage?

Kevin: Mm, I don't think I ever regretted it, I just remember going through a really bad time, lots of different things going on. I didn't really understand what was going on. I was looking for something. I still remember my father said to me. "You never going to find anybody with the vibes you putting out. You've got this black cloud over your head. How do you ever expect to fix somebody up . . ."

Tanya: And who did you see on the beach that time in Cape Town?

Kevin: Brett. That also happened when . . .

Barbara: You didn't even go back for reminiscences?

Kevin: Oh, I tried to have a date with him but he didn't pitch up. He stood me up.

Barbara: Oh.

- Kevin: There were lots of disappointments along the way, really a lot of them and I was in therapy (Barbara talking in background), I was seeing a psychiatrist, and then I met Paul.
- Researcher: And did that make everything right?
- Kevin: Ja, he came at the right time. He really came at the right time, but it was very difficult to tell him I was on medication. I found it very difficult. I was scared, I thought he was going to think I'm unstable. You know the stigma attached to psychiatric medication. I was also quite scared to tell him I was in therapy.
- Researcher: Did you think that was a stigma as well?
- Kevin: Ja, and then I stopped the medication, stopped it, soon after I met Paul, I stopped it and I still continued with the therapy.
- Tanya: And then you and Paul ran around undercover . . .
- Barbara: I don't think Paul was terribly sure about himself either.
- Tanya: Dyeing his hair
- Kevin: Ja, Paul, his whole coming out story and his whole drama as well. That he was also in a state.
- Researcher: (To Paul) Did you also go to therapy?
- Paul: I started going to therapy but it didn't help. But I mean I wasn't thrown into the whole thing, but it just happened and I mean . . . I always knew . . . but it just kind of happened and I was just snowballed, you know. It just happened.
- Researcher: Were your parents as accommodating as Kevin's?
- Paul: I didn't tell them at first, it took quite a while, but I mean, my father doesn't really figure . . . so I mean, to this day I've never told him. We don't communicate at all and my mom, we were arguing one night and she stormed off into the bathroom, I was in a rage and screaming . . .
- Tanya: In the bathroom again!
- Paul, And she locked the bathroom door and I just screamed through the bathroom door "I'm gay, and that's the way I am and you've got to take it or leave it, you know" and that's it. And she wouldn't come out the bathroom the whole night!
- Everyone laughing.
- Barbara: What was she doing in the bathroom?
- Paul: I don't know.

- Kevin: It was hysterical, but he screamed at her through the bathroom door .
- Paul: And I think I was out then . . .
- Researcher: Were you in a state?
- Kevin: Ja.
- Paul: Ja, I was in quite a state.
- Researcher: Were you two already involved?
- Kevin: No, no, no, no. We were friendly through a mutual friend. I met him through . . .
- Barbara: A girlfriend.
- Kevin: Ja, a girlfriend.
- Tanya: And everyone was in love with you . . .
- Kevin: Who I thought . . . I was mad about him, from the first moment I saw him, I though he was divine and I thought that he was in the closet because of course I had gone through all of my business at that stage . . . umm I came out of the closet in '87, July '87 - end of June '87 and Paul and I started going out in June '88. I really started to get to know Paul at the beginning of '88, then he started coming out of the closet and I had a dinner party one night, all I remember is that I had a dinner party and I invited him and our mutual friend and they came an hour and a half late and Paul was in tears the entire evening, he kept on running out and I knew exactly what was going on and she wouldn't tell me that this whole ... it must have been when you told Hilary . . . that night, was a Saturday night.
- Paul: No, I only told Hilary after the Saturday night. I told Michelle the night before.
- Kevin: Anyway .. you were going through that whole thing. I know what was going on. I could pick up the vibes that he was having an absolute trauma, she wouldn't tell me because she knew that I was after him. .
- Barbara: She was jealous . .
- Kevin: Even though I knew, even though I wasn't really sure if he was gay or not, but I had a feeling and that's how it all sort of happened. And this poor boy was trying to get a grip, with himself and coming out and the whole sort of thing and I was chasing after him like you can't believe. .
- Tanya: Rushing for the kill!
- Kevin: I never left him alone and I think it was not even . . . it was possibly 2 or 3 weeks after you'd told everybody, that we started going out. But I just didn't

leave him alone. I didn't give him a chance at all, and that was it . . . I don't know.

Paul: I told my friends before I told my mom. I only told them when we actually started going out.

Kevin: Oh, did you?

Researcher: Was it easier to tell your friends first?

Paul: It was quite difficult but I just did it and I don't think she really believed me you know. It was like "I don't really believe what you saying" I think she didn't want to believe it because of her feelings towards Kevin. Maybe she thought "Well now I'm going to take Kevin away".

Kevin: Who you talking about?

Paul: Michelle

Kevin: Oh, so you not talking about Hilary?

Barbara: Hilary's in love.

Paul: And it was quite traumatic and we cried and sobbed.

Researcher: Who cried?

Paul: My friend and I. You know it was quite a traumatic experience. She was the first person I told.

Researcher: Was the very first person the scariest?

Kevin: Yes. the first two people I told was hard and thereafter . . . It's easy.

Researcher: Do you find you have to tell as much now or is it just more generally seen and accepted?

Kevin: It's very seldom. Do you? (to Paul)

Paul: I work in a different environment to you, so I mean . . .

Kevin: Ja, I had a second coming out 'cos I went overseas to study and then I'd already established friends and it was like a whole thing all over again.

Researcher: Did you not tell them initially?

Kevin: I didn't have to tell them and then Paul pitched up and I had to introduce him as my boyfriend and then I came out completely . . . and then everyone knew he was my boyfriend. It's very exhausting, really exhausting but I had to do it al over again, because I'd established new roots and started all over again.

- Researcher: How long were you overseas for?
- Kevin: For three years.
- Researcher: Was it easier, coming out again?
- Kevin: Ja, I think so and I regretted it afterwards . . .
- Paul: It was traumatic
- Kevin: It was still traumatic and I regretted it afterwards.
- Researcher: Why did you regret it?
- Kevin: Because I don't know . . . I just felt that it was unnecessary. People didn't have to know.
- Barbara: You still feel like that.
- Kevin: I still feel like that
- Barbara: You are going to have to do a third coming out in your work situation.
- Kevin: Ja, work, they must have a suspicion, they must think . . .
- Tanya: But you will never . . .
- Paul: You've discussed it with . . .
- Kevin: Ja, I've discussed it with two people and that was just because they hounded me . . . well the one knew 'cos she's got lots of gay friends and the other didn't stop hounding me about who I lived with, who I went on holiday with, where did I go for dinner. You always going out etc, who dropped you off, who was there. She didn't leave me alone, so eventually, I just turned around and said, "it's my whore and if you'd like to see a picture of him I'll bring you one, if you'd like to meet him, you can too". You know she drove me up the wall and now she leaves me alone. We hardly ever discuss it . . . she just wanted to know.
- Researcher : What do you think will happen if it did have to come out suddenly at work?
- Barbara: What have you told your boss for instance?
- Kevin: Nothing
- Barbara: Nothing
- Kevin: He doesn't know
- Barbara: What if you had to tell him?

- Kevin: I don't know. I just don't want to.
- Tanya: No, I agree.
- Kevin: Because in the back of my mind, I've got this thing that one day, somehow, somewhere somebody will turn around and use it against me. It's like being black. If you've got a white person and a black person in a canoe and something goes missing, who stole it? Who stole it?
- Researcher: Is prejudice as strong as that ?
- Kevin: No, I'm just saying. What about the Jews . . . The Jews have got all the money, all the bloody blacks... They killing everybody in the road or it's the gays- the gays are spreading all the AIDS around. As far as I am concerned, that's how I feel. If people have got something on you, they'll always throw it back in your face or use it against you when the chips are down and I don't ever want that to happen. People say to me, "you ridiculous, you silly. You good at what you do, you do the job, it doesn't make any difference who you go home with to sleep with at night, just be open about it" and I say "I don't agree with you". I don't agree with you at all because people, if they want to destroy you, they'll use something... If they've got a bit of dirt on you, they'll use it, as far as I'm concerned.
- Researcher: So you think they'd use it in terms of "oh, you going to spread AIDS" or something like that?
- Kevin: No, ja, I don't know. You know anything can happen. If people really wanted to, they could say I'm sleeping with clients... you know anything-anything is possible. They can be vicious, actually vicious. So that's my choice at the moment. It's quite hard at times, like last year, because we were a new team that were about to open a restaurant, the GM said we getting together for drinks at one of the other restaurants. Everyone must bring their husbands or wives or boyfriends or girlfriends. So the restaurant industry is very demanding, you work long hours. It's nice for the other people to know who the other half in your life is. That was a perfect opportunity to take him and it was the last thing I ever would have done.
- Researcher: Did you take anyone?
- Kevin: No
- Researcher: (to Paul) How did you feel about him not taking you? Did you understand it?
- Paul: It's fine you know. I understand that side of his life.
- Kevin: It's hard for him. I used to be neurotic about it. When I did my one traineeship here, he was never allowed to come to the restaurant to see me, he was never allowed to phone me at work in case people recognised his voice, and

- it was hard for him. Now I've relaxed.
- Paul: I'll phone him, come to the restaurant.
- Kevin: I've really relaxed with things like that
- Paul: Well I'm sure everybody knows.
- Kevin: Ja
- Researcher: That's what I was thinking...
- Paul: Ja, they just don't have the confirmation.
- Kevin: I don't know about the GM (general manager), he's so ... sometimes the things he says are just...
- Paul: Maybe it's just to test you.
- Kevin: I don't know . . . he said to me the other day, "I want to see you married one day with children" and I just looked at him, like 'what are you talking about?' but that's probably because he's just so 'toe' . . . I don't know, I really don't. But that's just the way I want it. It's got nothing to do with people. Why should I wear a sign around my neck.
- Researcher: Ja, I agree with that.
- Kevin: I don't need to tell them.
- Researcher: What do you think Barbara, do you agree with that?
- Barbara: It wouldn't bother me. I mean he went overseas. How he (Paul) stuck around and waited for you, I don't know. . .
- Kevin: That's not the question! The question was 'how . . .' Your mind's gone. (laughing).
- Barbara: My mind's far away, I'm dying for a cigarette.
- Tanya: I don't know. I don't think you should tell anybody either. It's too much of a risk . . . everybody . . .
- Barbara: I was just asking you because I don't think it would matter if you actually told them.
- Tanya: I think it would
- Paul: I think nowadays it would.
- Tanya: I think it would. If you think how many people replied to the ad, it would. Doesn't matter how people are supposed to be . . .

Paul: I think people don't apply . . .

Tanya: I think it doesn't matter how people are supposed to be open, when it comes to that, they wouldn't want to know . . . I'm telling you.

Phone rings, conversation that it may be researcher's husband on phone. Interview then ends.

General chit-chat then follows. The daughter tells me she is getting married in December and that she is now on a diet for the wedding. Both daughter and mother say in exactly the same phrase that the weight problem is due to twelve years of neglect. Mother then congratulates daughter on sticking to her diet. When we are offered something to drink, mother says "only diet coke for Tanya".

I set up another interview, telling the family that the focus will be more relationally focused next time. They all agree.

Second Interview

Focus on Relationships after "Coming Out"

- Researcher: I wanted to talk tonight about perceptions of relationships, ... before and after attitudes, that kind of thing. I'll be more specific in the actual questions. Before I was saying, you had a certain perception of Kevin as a certain type of person, whatever he was. Did that change at all afterwards, the way you were towards him, perceptions of him ... too abstract?
- Barbara: I'm just trying to think what sort of perception I had of him.
- Tanya: You always said the ..., you know, the sort of sensitive type.
- Barbara: Yes
- Tanya: Never one of those hard, sort of macho, revolting, usual men types.
- Barbara: Soft and sensitive and he always got on with people, everybody thought he was marvellous. I don't know what my perceptions were. I think after ..., at one stage, remember you moved out, and we were fighting, "and what happened to the nice guy I used to know?"
- Tanya: But this was before.
- Barbara: Yes, but then after you got over all the trauma of coming out and, I think you went back to being 'Mr Nice Guy' eventually.
- Kevin: But Ma, it must have been different because my sexuality was out in the open and ... , being sexual.
- Barbara: The sexual didn't bother me.
- Tanya: It was quite novel him bringing boys home.
- Kevin: That must have been strange because I had never been a sexual type of person before. I wasn't really in touch with my sexuality.
- Barbara: You were, but I didn't know about it.
- Kevin: Exactly, so obviously that's why your perception must have changed, 'cause you saw me differently.

- Barbara: But I never had hang-ups about sex, I mean I saw two ladies, I swear holding hands in Rosebank today, like they were in Mykonos. I didn't want to look too hard but I looked and looked.
- Tanya: But what was worse was at the airport the other night, right outside, there were two lesbians having a big cling-on smooch in a coffee bar, so I said, "Ag sis man" They were!
- Barbara: Anyway so it didn't really bother me, you bringing guys home. My main concern was, as I told you, the disease.
- Researcher: AIDS. Your perceptions of your actual relationship with him, were there any differences in the relationship or in the way you interacted with him?
- Barbara: I think we got on even better than we did before, once everything had been cleared away. Don't you think?
- Kevin: I'm trying to think, um ... I think it was quite strained for some time.
- Barbara: But I'm talking after all that.
- Researcher: Explain what you mean by strained.
- Barbara: I kept screaming at him, "Are you taking precautions?", That's all I was worried about.
- Kevin: I thought it was quite a strained time because I was going out, I was looking, I brought a few guys home, um ..., it was difficult because I didn't know how my mother would react. I always knew that on the surface she would be completely cool about this, you know .. she was just so cool about it. But I saw at times she could get very, I don't know, into a state, especially to come into the room, or she would never come in. She would always knock and say "Can I come in" or "Come out". It was quite strange.
- Researcher: How did you react to her afterwards? Did you feel tense?
- Kevin: No, I just ..., it was just new for everybody. It was just new. Ummm, and I've lost my train of thought.
- Barbara: I got upset at times because I knew he wanted a permanent relationship. I knew that was what he wanted. He'd bring these awful guys home.
- Kevin: Tramps
- Barbara: Really awful and it upset me cause I knew he deserved better than that. That's the part that upset me.
- Researcher: In terms of, as Kevin said, did he appear like a different person because he was obviously the same person? But did you look at him differently in any way?

- Barbara: I really, I was very upset about it, I didn't know what he was going to bring home next, and every time a relationship didn't work out and he'd get into a state, and then back to therapy, or you weren't in therapy, were you?
- Kevin: No, I only started therapy in October, after I had that whole break up in the park.
- Barbara: Yes, and you were in a dreadful state, ja and um, and his father couldn't recommend anyone. He said, "I'm personally involved", and that's when I phoned the Help Line, and found that wonderful person and she spoke to Kevin ..., and then I used to get uptight about the things you used to say about me, and you used to come home and say this, this and this.
- Researcher: So what do you mean?
- Barbara: The family break-down of problems. He used to come give us little anecdotes about why we were so messed up, at the Friday night dinner table. He loved telling us.
- Yes, you used to tell us bits and pieces, didn't tell us everything that went on, just about the parts pertaining to us, and I used to scream about the shrink.
- Researcher: So what happened?
- Barbara: We used to argue about that, no, but we always argue, we still argue to this day. But it's different.
- Researcher: In what way is it different?
- Barbara: He'd just move out and you know ... do something.
- Researcher: So before there was more animosity?
- Barbara: Yes
- Researcher: And at the Friday nights ...?
- Barbara: Now what happened when I tried to kill your brother? (Flippant) I don't know.
- Kevin: It was a very sort of "fuck you" stage, you know it was very rebellious. But that's what it was before I moved out to Dad. It was very much like that. I thought, 'this is the way it's going to carry on, now put up with it'.
- Researcher: Did they put limits on your freedom?

Kevin: Oh no. This is before I came out. It was just being out of school and independent, sort of free. But I suppose anybody goes through that, and then, ja, we went overseas and I was still ... I suppose it was quite rough Ma! It must have been. For at least a year.

Researcher: Explain how it was.

Kevin: I don't know ...

Barbara: Just couldn't get on, and we were very close.

Kevin: Ja.

Researcher: So how was that for you? (to Mom)

Barbara: I hated it.

Tanya: And I was in the middle, "tell Mommy I say this" and "Tell Kevin I say that. I won't speak to him".

Barbara: (continuing from Tanya) "go and speak to him". I didn't realise what turmoil he was going through. Then we used to fight and he was so involved with his friends, he didn't come home. Whatever little thing he did, I used to scream at him, 'your family are more important than your friends'. Eventually, when all the friends dropped him and this, ... And when he was all alone, he knew his mother was right. He hated it. He'd come and tell me a year or two later, 'you were right', but he wouldn't admit it at the time.

Kevin: Ja

Barbara: He hates coming to tell me

Kevin: You mustn't try and convince her. She'll never back down. She will sulk and be stubborn ...

Tanya: For days.

Barbara: I don't sulk any more.

Tanya: You do! You have to go and say, 'Sorry Ma' and you'll relent, but you'll never do it.

Barbara: Never. Sulking is what I did when I was married to your father.

Tanya: You will not say a word.

Barbara: That's not sulking. That's giving you the cold shoulder. (To Researcher) I sound like a witch, don't I?

- Researcher: No, I also say I don't sulk, I just keep quiet.
- Barbara: I do keep quiet.
- Researcher: But it appears as a sulk. Tell me, when you say it was rough, how was it rough for you Kevin?
- Kevin: I don't know. I just remember, I must have been in my first year of study. I didn't really spend much time at home. I was really wild. I remember my mother saying 'you running away from yourself'. She said to me, "You always running around and going out and going out". She said something to me like, "You too scared to be alone".
- Researcher: Was this after you'd come out?
- Kevin: Ja, afterwards. And I sort of said, 'well, that's what I want to do'. And I think that's exactly what I was doing. It was such a big thing to come to terms with, and to live with, that ..., ja, that's exactly what I was doing. I didn't want a spare minute of time to ...
- Researcher: Think?
- Kevin: Ja, and to be by myself.
- Researcher: It sounds like it was actually more heavy for you than ...?
- Kevin: Ja, it was
- Barbara: It was kind of 'please everybody at once'.
- Researcher: In what way?
- Barbara: I don't know. To keep the home calm and keeping the family. He couldn't cut himself into 10 pieces.
- Researcher: Did you think you'd disappointed your family by coming out?
- Barbara: That's exactly what he said to me, 'Just another disappointment for Dad ...' he used to say to me. That's exactly what he said to me. Just another disappointment for Dad.
- Tanya: Oh darling, you still young. I've been at it for 13 years.
- Barbara: Those were his words to me when I said, 'You know, I've got to tell your father' ... 'just another disappointment for him'.
- Researcher: Did you feel that way for long?
- Kevin: That's why I said, initially after I'd had that meeting with him, that whole Saturday morning meeting, I obviously must have felt a bit different.

But I'm sure there were times that I thought, 'Ja, it must have been a disappointment'.

- Barbara: That he was letting him down, I don't know, because his brother before him was a big macho type. He was bringing the girls home and he plays rugby and he got into fights and he drove a big motorbike, that you tried to ride and weren't very successful (Kevin saying 'ja' in the background)
- Tanya: And he was the one child who had the best relationship with Dad.
- Barbara: Ja
- Researcher: Who?
- Barbara & Tanya: Michael (older brother)
- Researcher: And for you, Tanya, how was it? Did you see any change of relationships ?
- Tanya: Well, Kevin and I were always close but when he got older, we ...
- Barbara: drifted apart . . .
- Researcher: How did you understand the drift?
- Tanya: You see he was growing up and I was, you know, I was, I didn't have much of a life and I was just trying to hold onto him to provide one for me, and he wasn't interested ...
- Barbara: Mmmm ...
- Researcher: And it was hard for you?
- Tanya: Ja, it was
- Researcher: And when he came out?
- Tanya: I was worried about how his life would be, but, as far as he was concerned, it didn't bother me. Nothing really disgusted me.
- Researcher: Do you think you acted differently in any way?
- Tanya: No.
- Researcher: Did you notice any differences in you family's attitude towards you?
- Tanya: I don't know. There was so much going on at the time.
- Barbara: Ja, it was all very busy.

Researcher: What was going on?

Kevin: I mean with myself, it was just so much

Barbara: He never wanted to tell my family, my side of the family.

Kevin: Ja, I was quite neurotic.

Barbara: You were very neurotic.

Kevin: About all that

Researcher: Did you agree with that?

Barbara: I said, "eventually I've got to tell my two sisters". You know, my middle sister is a good Christian, goes to church and all that. I don't know. She was sad for you, Kevin, My elder sister, to this day calls them 'those people', but she's a difficult person. Look, you know ...

Kevin: I think they've accepted it.

Barbara: Look I mean, they live in Cape Town, we don't see them all that often.

Kevin: But I mean, my aunt who is a devout Christian who thinks 'dammit' is a swear word ...

Barbara: She's a beautiful person.

Kevin: Uh, she's a lovely lady, she accepted it. It was quite something for her, because I thought, 'wow, these people must really, really love me. That's all it must be is just pure love, that they can accept.' It must have been terribly difficult for them to understand, to the extent that when I was overseas, my aunt went to fetch Paul from the midnight flight, gave him my cousin's car, took ... I mean ... my boyfriend, and these people ... you know ... it was something ... I'm sure probably today it's something they don't understand, but they accept ... that's just the way it is. I've been very, very lucky. There was a guy that I knew, who I met through somebody else who came out of the closet and his parent's disowned him. Kicked him out of home ... a little bit before I came out. I didn't know him at the time, but I met him afterwards and he was studying at 'varsity and he could never finish his degree, he didn't have the money. His parents cut him off. He didn't have a cent of anything. He had to hold down 3 jobs. It was chaos and I always looked to the skies and thought, 'wow, You really are lucky' and people said to me I was lucky. Friends of mine who came here and relaxed and were themselves and camped it up and did whatever they wanted, and when they went home, they had to, you know, buckle down and be a different type of person.

- Tanya: The more camped up the better. We just loved it.
- Barbara: Kevin, I really objected the time when you wore a bit of eyeliner.
- Tanya: Oh, that was the rock stage, with the eyeliner.
- Barbara: And the hair, and the ... I don't know, you know, I would say to him, 'don't you think you pushing it a bit?'
- Tanya: And the false eyelashes - dyed.
- Barbara: At one stage, he was getting too much on the ... queen side and I said, "no, this is too much. Next thing he'll be borrowing my clothes". But you know we had a sense of humour with it.
- Kevin: Mmm ...
- Barbara: We did have a sense of humour.
- Researcher: When you say you used to love it. What about it did you used to love?
- Tanya: It was just so different to straight people. It was in their difference. Some of them had decided they are gay and that's the way they going to be and screw the rest of the world - that's the way they are. They were so outwardly fem and camp and would say, 'I don't care'. It's just the way they are, so I don't know. They seemed to have not as many inhibitions as straight people do, and they'd just carry on having a good time and laugh and whatever.
- Kevin: I mean my friends started talking about a gay guy they know, Kurt. This must have been about 1988.
- Barbara: Told you I met him in February.
- Kevin: I mean, how anyone could ever have thought anything else, besides ... I mean he was screaming, screaming. He used to enter gay competitions as Brigitte Nielsen because he was tall and blonde and had short hair.
- Tanya: And did full on dancing and the whole toot.
- Kevin: Ja, I don't know.
- Barbara: Now the same sister I'm talking about . . . I was in Cape Town in February and I went to Woolworths to buy my niece something, as I'm walking out, there is Kurt.
- Researcher: This Brigitte Nielsen?
- Barbara: In the middle of Woolworths, Kurt, and on the top of his voice "Oh, my G-d!" (very gay accent) he screams. My sister and her husband

ran away (lots of laughter). He was dressed normally, but he carried on in this voice. Did he give me his address, or did I give him your address?

Kevin: Well, whatever.

Barbara: He wanted Kevin to phone him. But they couldn't handle it, they ran away, (some conversation about this man's job that I couldn't make out) Not that he's using it. He's manager of Arthur Murray. But you know, that's people's reaction. I didn't care.

Researcher: You didn't care because of the way you've always been?

Barbara: Ja

Kevin: And your friends, Ma, what about your friends?

Barbara: I tell everybody my son is gay.

Researcher: How do you think they react?

Barbara: I don't care ... I don't care.

Researcher: Tell me something, it sounds like Kevin, when you came out, it was rough for you, there was a lot going on for you, so when did things start to settle down a bit? How did it happen?

Kevin: Ja, as I said I went through a very bad stage. I was on the medication for a while which my mother also wasn't happy about.

Barbara: Hated it ... hated it. It also changed him. I didn't like it.

Kevin: I would say just before I met Paul things started settling down, and I don't know ... I suppose the whole security of the relationship and knowing that ... well Paul knew nothing really very much. He hadn't had another boyfriend before and that also made me feel much better. I don't know why. It was like nothing to compare me to. This, that and the other thing and it was really just the ideal situation and I was very much in love. Then things started settling down. I didn't stop with therapy. I went off the medication soon after I met him because I felt I didn't need it anymore... but I found this very difficult. I was very difficult.

Researcher: In what way?

Kevin: I used to have terrible mood swings. I mean we laugh about it now but ... what did you say at one time? We'd be driving the car...

Paul: "Turn the car around", and I'd just swerve around in the road, "we going home."

- Tanya: "Paul just open that mouth, Paul. Speak will you ... speak!"
- Barbara: I used to say to him, 'I don't know how he puts up with you' (to K)
- Researcher: So were you living already with Paul at that stage?
- Kevin, Barbara & Tanya: No, no
- Barbara: Paul used to spend weekends with me.
- Kevin: Ja, Paul lived at home and I lived here. We were both still studying, but ja, there were many times... obviously I was going still through a lot of.. I don't know...
- Barbara: change
- Kevin: Ja, change ... turmoil
- Researcher: Did you see a change?
- Barbara: He was impossible. I used to say "you know Paul's not your blady servant ... do this, do that ... His knees were shining. Stop it!" You know ... but Paul, through thick and thin. G-d knows how many years now, Paul?
- Kevin: Five years on Sunday.
- Tanya: I can't believe that long. How you put up with him!
- Barbara: And how he stayed and waited the three years he was overseas.
- Researcher: And how did it affect your relationship, with Kevin going through all the turmoil?
- Barbara: I quite honestly can't remember. We battled on and we came through, that's all I know. We just battled through. We argued, we fought, we screamed, we shouted, loved each other, we cried, we laughed, you know.
- Researcher: And for you, Tanya?
- Tanya: I wasn't really in the picture
- Kevin & Tanya both said something about her being in her room.
- Researcher: You were taking messages?
- Tanya: The arbitrator
- Kevin: I don't know. I still remember there were things like... then I wanted

to take them to gay places, then I wanted them to see gay places.

Researcher: What were your motives behind it?

Kevin: I don't know. Just to say, 'this is my world. Come have a look, you know. There other things on the other side of the fence.'

Researcher: And your dad? (I think that was said)

Kevin: Ja, he used to come.

Tanya: I went a lot.

Kevin: Ja, you went a lot.

Some conversation I couldn't make out then Barbara continues: 'but I'd been before'

Kevin: One night we were supposed to go to a gay coffee place and my mother said she didn't want to go and I got upset. She said she'd feel uncomfortable, and I still remember there was a whole drama.

Barbara: Why did I say I would feel uncomfortable?

Kevin: I don't know.

Barbara: We walked into that place and there wasn't any place to sit, so then I got aggravated.

Kevin: Ja

Barbara: I had nothing against going to gay places ...I had a nice time at The Dungeon.

Kevin: I wanted to show them, you know... I suppose... and I did it with all my friends, 'come and see, there's so much you don't know. There's so much to see and so much to learn.' I suppose I was also learning and I suppose to show them that I was really serious about all of this and it wasn't just a phase.

Barbara: A phase...

Kevin: They thought I would grow out of it

Barbara: ... wouldn't want us to think it was a stage

Researcher: Did you ever have the impression that it was a stage?

Barbara: No

Researcher: Did you think they thought that?

Kevin: I don't know. Just in case they did, I wanted to make sure that they didn't think it was, and I think that was what the whole need was for. Besides my personal insecurity, my emotional insecurity, whatever, that may have been a very big need in my life, was to show them that I meant business and that this was the way things would be and I can be just as normal as anyone else and can share things and you know, it was very much like that. I really wanted to prove to them... although, why did I have to do that? I don't know 'cos there was never any problem. It was like an instinct, 'show them. Show them everything is the same'. There's no difference between straight and gay.

Researcher: And how did you do that?

Kevin: Mm, it was fine. I still remember when we used to go away, my father would book a room for, we used to laugh about it, for my step-mother and himself, my mother and my sister, me and my boyfriend... and that's just the way it was. We were always included in everything and it was accepted. So as you say, in that way, there was never any drama, there was never any 'he can't come' or 'it's not going to be right' or 'it's Christmas day so he shouldn't come.' I think there was the first December, I'm sure we were in a bit of a state, about Paul meeting the family. It was quite stressful for you.

Tanya: I think they even knitted him a pair of socks during the year so he didn't not have a present

Kevin: They bought him a little present to put under the Christmas tree.

Barbara: Shame. My family is not Jewish as I told you.

Researcher: You told me.

Kevin: So I suppose everybody tried to make it really easy and just to be very relaxed about the whole situation and I was probably the one who was tense about it.

Researcher: Did you ever feel that they were different to you or putting on an act?

Kevin: Ja, I think so. I think at times I just used to... I don't know... I remember getting a bit irritated with my mother. I can't even remember what it was, but it was probably just irritability. Maybe 'cos she tried too hard, I don't know, just in order to be, you know, cool. My mother was very like that, everything was 'just fine' everything's dandy, and that sort of thing.

Researcher: Did your perception of gay people change when Kevin came out?

Barbara: No. I don't think I realised that they'd have to go through all this turmoil to come out.

- Researcher: Did you think it would be easier?
- Barbara: No, but when it happened to him... well, he was my child. I never thought, 'what did Lawrence tell his parents when he came out of the closet? Did he also have the same... I never thought about anybody else'
- Researcher: I remember immediately afterwards you turned to Lawrence and said "what do I do? How do I handle this?"
- Barbara: Mm
- Researcher: Did you feel your role as a parent had changed?
- Barbara: I just didn't know what to do. You know... I didn't know how to handle it. I told you, his father handled it better than I did, even though I suspected all the years.
- Researcher: Was it still a shock?
- Barbara: Yes
- Tanya: Of course Dad handled it fine. You told him as if he lived here and participated.
- Barbara: No we weren't living together at that stage.
- Tanya: I mean, we told you he doesn't have much to do with our lives
- Barbara: If you accept things as they are. His favourite expression is 'you can't unfry an egg'. It's there, and deal with it.
- Researcher: Do you think your parents being divorced made it easier for you, the whole process?
- Kevin: Uhm, it could have been. Ja, possibly. Yes, I think it would have been very different if my father was living in the house and I had to bring boys home. Yes, I think it would have been a complete drama. I would have been very stressed out by that. It was very easy 'cos there was no other male in the house. I was the only male for a long time since my brother left... so, not that I wore the pants in the house, but I think it would have been very different if my father was a strong, sort of fatherly figure, around a lot
- Researcher: How do you think it would have been?
- Kevin: I think it would have been more difficult... much more difficult. I think it would have been quite, ja, I can't say, but it certainly would have been difficult.

- Researcher: Do you think the actual process of coming out would have been different?
- Kevin: I think that if I was closer to my father, he would have... I don't know, it's assumption. It's a hard question. Umm, somehow the distance between us, the gap between my father and myself, probably it helped. It wasn't that real closeness of a father-son type of thing. I think it would have been much more difficult if he was around.
- Researcher: Do you think your Dad's actual perception of you changed at all?
- Kevin: Uhm, I don't know, it's hard. I think, uhm, as I said, he had a lot of respect for me. I think he saw the changes and thought my mind was growing up, and not living with the blinkers on all the time. I think he once said to me that it's hard in life, and that life is hard. There's a lot of pain and suffering, and that kind of thing.
- Barbara: And he said "you're going to have it hard 'cos you're different".
- Kevin: Ja, he said to me that I'm going to have it even harder. He said life is difficult enough for normal people. I don't know if he used that term, but he said it's going to be even harder for me.
- Researcher: Did your relationship change in any way with him?
- Kevin: Uhm, ja, but not drastically. Over the years it's improved a lot.
- Researcher: What do you attribute it to?
- Kevin: A lot of things. I've changed a lot, therapy I think has helped quite a bit and my father has done things for me that I don't think many fathers would do for their sons. He has gone to the edge of the earth when his back was breaking, and I think that showed me that he loves me that much that he would do anything and that was very, very important. So even though I'm not close to him, I still know in my heart that even though he couldn't be a father, like come up and hug me when he came home from work and say 'Howzit my son...' uhm, I still...
- Barbara: He was there for you.
- Kevin: Ja, always and if I think of it he always will be, although he shows it in a very different way. But it's improved (can't make out).
- Researcher: Do you see it further improving in the future?
- Kevin: Uhm, I'd like it to. I don't think it will ever be fantastic because he's not that type of person, and he's really sort of got a new life with his two little ones and . . . you know he must get on with it. Not that he's not interested but uhm, ja, I think it would take a lot of work from both sides, but I've got no problem with that (all through discussion about

her father, Tanya pulled faces about him).

Researcher: Tell me something, the relationship between you, Tanya and your mom, did that change at all or did you have different ideas about each other when Kevin came out?

Barbara: We all just screamed and shouted our way along. We don't mince words in our family.

Researcher: Did you have different perceptions of yourselves, like in role of sister, role of mother?

Barbara: Did you tell all your friends your brother was gay?

Tanya: I didn't rush around telling people.  
I think next thing you screamed at me, 'You told people!'

Barbara: I didn't at first, I didn't at first.

Tanya: No, you had to make sure who you told.

Kevin: (to Barbara) I don't think you ran around telling

Barbara: I do now.

Kevin: Well now, ja, but then it was different.

Researcher: What was different then?

Kevin: I was quite sensitive. I had this thing about people knowing. I only wanted people to know who had to know.

Barbara: Need to know.

Kevin: Ja, it was need to know, then I'd tell them

Researcher: And now you . . . ?

Kevin: It depends, it really depends. I'm still a bit like that. People that don't mean anything don't really need to know. I'm sure they've got a suspicion. I'm sure they've got a pretty good idea but I haven't told them. The whole rigmarole . . . and then people justifying, saying 'it's okay'. Some of my best friends are gay . . . the usual. Really, I don't need to hear it.

Barbara: You father came to me yesterday or the day before and said 'guess who came out the closet after 20 years', so and so, from Holiday Magic. I cast my mind back 20 years ago. I think he was married with children.

Barbara: Now, you should go and interview a woman who was married with children and then her husband suddenly announces he's gay. G-d knows how

that would be.

Researcher: It would be a helluva shock.

Barbara: Of course it would be.

Researcher: It's like knowing two different people, your whole idea of them . . .

Barbara: Ja, ja.

Kevin: Your children, the person you've grown up with as a father. Even as a gay person, I think that would be absolutely traumatic, for me. It would be absolutely traumatic, you know.

Tanya: That is something about gays that I find disgusting. They go through their whole life being married to a woman, have children. . . they've lied to themselves for so long and they do this for so many years, and this woman, for all you know he's been going and getting something on the side and risking and passing on diseases and the wife never knows. I think that's one thing about the gay aspect that I don't like. I think it's very unfair.

Researcher: Why do you think they do that?

Tanya: I don't know, maybe it's denial. They think . . . they repress it! They go and do the right thing, they get married, have their children, and once they've done everything, they hurt the people that are there. I don't like it at all. A lot of them do it, a lot of them go to gay bars, their wives are at home, or their girlfriends, and they go out.

Researcher: I want to know, did you have an idea of what kind of family you were before, your expectations, like is Kevin going to get married one day? Did you have a view of a family reality, so to speak, and then that was changed?

Barbara: Ja, my gripe is that I'm never going to have any grandchildren at this stage (Kevin laughs), because my eldest son, they not keen on having children because of the state of the nation and the world and everything else. These two (Kevin and Paul), I don't know if there ever gonna be, if they want, if they'd be allowed to adopt if they'd want. This one (Tanya) doesn't want to have any in the near future, so I don't know if I'm ever going to be a granny. That's my . . .

Tanya: In the near future? Who can afford the things?

Barbara: That's my heartache.

Researcher: Is it a bad heartache?

Barbara: No, I've accepted it.

- Researcher: How does the process of acceptance work?
- Barbara: Can't change it. It's not my life, it's theirs. But it affects mine. We can't live their lives for them.
- Researcher: Ja, what are your expectations now? What is your view of the family now?
- Barbara: My family?
- Researcher: Mmm
- Barbara: I've got a beautiful family. I've got three great kids, the kids are adults. They still my children.
- Researcher: Do you think family relationships have changed over the years?
- Barbara: Mm. I think we've reached a compatible state all round. I mean Michael (elder brother), did you ever think Michael would accept you, with his macho male?
- Kevin: Ja, (as in contemplating) and he was the most relaxed of all.
- Barbara: Absolutely.
- Researcher: How come? I mean, you expected something so different?
- Kevin: I don't know. He'd, when he was in the army, there was a gay guy that was after him and I still remember . . .
- Barbara: He wasn't too averse to . . .
- Kevin: Well I still remember my brother coming home and telling us at the breakfast table how this, what did he say? (to Tanya)
- Tanya: We have to get the right words like Michael would say
- Kevin: He said something like mm, 'I really', what did he say, 'I really didn't mind him giving me a blow job, but I couldn't kiss him' or something like that.
- Barbara: I told you, we don't mince words. My eldest son, from the age of 12, he told me everything. I mean I used to walk around with my hair like this (demonstrating hair on end). He told me every sexual experience. He never minced any words.
- Kevin: That's my brother.
- Barbara: Walk around stark naked. I haven't seen these two (Kevin and Tanya) naked since they were about eight. To this day my son will walk around naked in front of me. You know, that's the kind of relationship we have.

- Kevin: So I still remember that ...
- Lot of laughter.
- Researcher: You've got manners!
- Kevin: Ja, I must have been around 13 at the time when he came home from the army camp and announced this at the breakfast table. I nearly choked on my fried egg.
- Barbara: He's one of those guys that has, and will try, everything and anything. He tried every drug, he told me afterwards, when he was at school, from trying to smoke proper grass to basil, and sniffing and cough syrup. He says everything that was going, he tried. He was that kind of guy. Homosexual experience in the army, so what?
- Kevin: And he said to me, he said to me afterwards. 'I'm bok for anything. Try it, if you don't like it, leave it!'
- Researcher: And who told him you (Kevin) were ...?
- Kevin: I don't think I told. It must have been my mother who did. I think she just picked up the phone, wherever he was living at that stage, ja..., I don't know.
- Barbara: laughing in the background.
- Researcher: Did your relationship change in any way?
- Barbara: It got better.
- Researcher: How?
- Kevin: Uhm, I don't know. Even though he's always been very far away, he's, as I said, when he left home, I hated him, I couldn't stand him. I was the happiest person on earth when he went into the army.
- Researcher: Why?
- Barbara: I was heartbroken.
- Kevin: Cause, shit, he's finally out of my life.
- Researcher: Was he horrible to you?
- Kevin: Ooh, he used to drive me mad. I hated him, I couldn't stand him.
- Barbara: He was teasing him.
- Tanya: And also 'cos the two of you (Barbara and Michael) ...

- Kevin: And also 'cos I suppose I never really fitted in with his sort of friends. They were quite rough ... they were always bringing girls home and screwing them. I don't know, and I felt uncomfortable 'cos I knew I could never sort of be like that, and go out and smooch the girls and, you know. I knew that, even from a young age, so I suppose from that point of view, I felt uncomfortable and also he drove me mad. He used to absolutely drive me insane, so when he left I was very happy, and than I suppose over the years as well, things just got better.
- Tanya: Michael's a very warm person. I think he's got a lot of soul and a lot of heart and he's easy to talk to and he's ...
- Kevin: Ja, you can talk to him about anything.
- Barbara: Anything.
- Tanya: You can talk to him about anything and he's got a great heart and he's a very nice guy.
- Barbara: A great philosophy. He'll come and say "howzit Ma. Is death looking attractive today?" and depending on my mood I'd say, 'yes' or 'no'.
- Kevin: He's just, I don't know, he's like a hippy.
- Barbara: He's a thirty year old hippy.
- Tanya: He is. He looks 18 and he acts 18.
- Barbara: He walks around all year long in bermuda shorts
- Tanya: And a shirt ...
- Barbara: And a T-shirt and ...
- Tanya: And wears his hair long
- Barbara: And with, the hair on the shoulders.
- Tanya: And he only got married last year and is still exactly the same.
- Barbara: At age thirty he got married, he's going to be 31 this year. He lives his own life. You know, I say to him, 'For G-d's sake, buy decent pants, a shirt and a jacket'. I cannot believe he got married in a morning coat, top hat and tails because his wife wanted it. I haven't seen Michael in a suit in ...
- Tanya: Ten years.

- Barbara: He used to steal your clothes (to Kevin)
- Kevin: Ja, "I'll come and steal from my brother, the queen"
- Barbara: Mm, take some clothes from the queen.
- Kevin: The queen. 'What have you got in your wardrobe?'
- Researcher: How did you react?
- Kevin: He's like that, he's like that.
- Barbara: Yes.
- Kevin: He's say 'oh, you such a queen, Stop with the hair', or you know, he would tease me like that and I used to laugh.
- Researcher: Did it worry you?
- Kevin: No.
- Barbara: That's his sense of humour.
- Kevin: That's the way he is
- Tanya: They love to mock.
- Kevin: Mock you till the cows come home.
- Researcher: Did you have a picture of your family that has changed at all?
- Kevin: Uhm, I don't know. It's so different. Of before and after?
- Researcher: Mm, and on the way from rough to settled.
- Kevin: I think we just coast, you know, and unless there's a bump in the road.
- Barbara: We haven't had any major issues in a long time.
- Kevin: Ja, and if there's a bump in the road, then, you know, ... I think we are quite lazy, in terms of working and things, in that when I say, coast, you just go with the flow. If something crops up in terms of a crisis or if somebody's having a bad time, then we'll deal with it.
- Barbara: We don't speak to each other every day.
- Kevin: Mm, I don't know, it's hard to think if there's been a change. I suppose, ja, I went through a lot of changes overseas. My sister got a fiancé and she got engaged and she started working and she went through a helluva change. She was the most timid, quiet, little wilting rose.

- Barbara: She couldn't get into a shop to buy an ice-cream, I had to do it. I used to call her violet, you know, shrinking violet.
- Kevin: She couldn't do a thing for herself.
- Barbara: She now can do everything but she's also so biady lazy, if she doesn't have to do it, I'll do it, I'm still the doormat.
- Kevin: She's a remarkable change from what she used to be.
- Researcher: Did it change your relationship with her?
- Kevin: Not really. I was always away. When she went through that whole ...
- Barbara: Metamorphosis.
- Kevin: My mom phoned me up and said to me "your sister's engaged". When I came back, she had a fiance and she was all different. She was, ja, all different. That happened while I was overseas.
- Researcher: You weren't witness to it.
- Kevin: Well I saw it when I was back and forward. Ja, I wasn't really here in the beginning when she met him and dated him and whatever ...
- Researcher: And Tanya, for you, your perception of your family?
- Tanya: I think it's a great one, and a lucky one. Some families ...
- Barbara: You've got an extended family as well. Don't forget, 'You've got a little brother and sister as well, and a wicked stepmother who always was wicked, but is wicked no more.
- Kevin: Well, that's changed a lot.
- Barbara: Even the two of them. He and his stepmother were like that (showing closeness)
- Kevin: Ja.
- Researcher: Now, no longer?
- Barbara: She now (Tanya) and the stepmother are like this. For ten years she told me (Tanya), she (stepmother) hates me, she can't stand me. I'll never get on with her. I don't know whether it's because she's grown, not in age, but as a person ...
- Kevin: Ja, I think so.
- Barbara: And made a bit of an effort.

Researcher: How do you see it, Tanya.

Tanya: I don't know. I think deep down I always wanted to be friendly with her and I always wanted to have a relationship with her, but then I thought of all the water that had gone under the bridge, that she'd never want to have anything to do with me, and if you keep on thinking like that, you don't do anything to ... that's what you keep on thinking, unless it changes and, you know. It's just now that, especially with this wedding, I mean she went to Kevin, so upset that I had not told her about the date, and I hadn't asked her to help and she was feeling left out and I didn't even know any of these things, and you know, the day I decided I'd take her along to look at things with my mother, Kevin said to me, 'but Janey says she feels left out,' and I decided she's be in on everything, before we even told her that. You know, I suppose when I was younger I always used to think she took my father away and that was that. And we had lots of fights. Remember how many fights between Dad and Janey and I, and Dad used to scream and shout at us. I used to make mountains out of molehills and all sorts of things. There were some bad times between Janey and I. I now realise she's never been a wicked stepmother in any way at all.

Researcher: How do you perceive, I know I'm asking abstract questions, relationships between each of you, I mean your relationship with Kevin now, and your relationship with your mom?

Kevin: Well, as I said, going overseas was very difficult, very difficult.

Researcher: In what way?

Kevin: Well, because we'd always been so close. Not only was I leaving Paul, I was leaving my mother. I was leaving everybody and everything I knew and I was completely freaked out about going away. I was terrified.

Researcher: Was it your choice to go?

Kevin: It was my choice, it was my choice. I got accepted, I think, possibly three months after I met Paul. I'd applied before I met him and then there was a whole dilemma then of what to do - to go or not to go, and the relationship-career-study whole dilemma, but I decided to go and it was actually traumatic, and that's where I went through my whole personal crisis and change, because I was stuck there all alone with nothing, no support systems, absolutely nothing. I had to stand on my own two feet for the first time in my life and do things for myself and just cope 'cos I had no other choice. But I think it was the first year ... (changing track) he hung onto me at the airport and just cried and I pushed him away from me and I turned around and just walked.

Tanya: I remember I was there ...

- Kevin: Because I didn't know what to do. I was in such a state. It was terrible, and my mother, everytime I went overseas, lo and ...
- Barbara: My baby's coming, they quite ...
- Tanya: I remember at the airport, I think, Paul and I were there, my mother would not go to the airport ...
- Kevin: My mother ...
- Tanya: And we were there in the lounge and I'm getting a bit upset, and then Paul, now Paul doesn't show any emotions, most of the time ...
- Researcher: Ja.
- Tanya: I saw this little face crumple and my heart just sank at his distress because I'd never seen it. He just, he crumpled, the two of them ...
- Barbara: The traumatic phone calls, the crying on the phone. You know me, "Get on the plane and come home". I was like forcing him not to come home, but you know, I couldn't take it.
- Researcher: What was traumatic for you, when you said it was traumatic?
- Barbara: Him going and losing another child, and going so far away and not being able to do things for him or help him or support him or anything.
- Kevin: Ja, also when I decided, I said I didn't want anybody ... any family to come to the airport. I banned the family. I said 'You are not coming to the airport. I'm not having a trauma and a drama when I leave', so that was fine. I said goodbye to my father and my stepmother. I still remember, as clear as daylight, my mother was always rushing out. Whenever I went overseas ...
- Barbara: To scrabble ...
- Kevin: She had to go to scrabble, or ...
- Paul: To the supermarket ...
- Kevin: No, or she had to go to the gynaecologist, to take my sister to have a test ... or I don't know what ... (lots of laughter around this), So, ja ...
- Barbara: I worked it like that.
- Kevin: Ja, she especially did it that way 'cos it was easier.
- Barbara: I can't stand saying goodbye ...

Kevin: Ja, it was easier. Uhm ... in terms of relationships, I suppose it's changed all the time. I'd come back from overseas, I suppose I'd gone through a new change, uhm, when I came back. Then I worked here and I'd been independent. I'd had my independence for a year and a half and I came back and I had to come home and live with mother again which was quite difficult, and then I went back again and then I came back here, and I said to her, 'I love you to bits, but I can't live with you anymore'

Researcher: (to Barbara) How was that for you?

Kevin: And I'd moved out and she... I thought it was going to be the biggest drama on the earth, but she handled it so beautifully, there was not a drama in the world, 'OK', and then she started shopping and off we went and it's, 'We've got to buy curtains, we've got to buy this'

Barbara: Utensils

Kevin: She didn't stop shopping. Everyday she bought home a new appliance, or a new spatula or whatever.

Researcher: Were you moving in with Paul then?

Kevin: Ja, that was last year. Last year in September. It wasn't long ago at all. I came home, I'd been back three weeks and found a flat and we were moving in...

Researcher: Were you upset when...?

Barbara: No, I was just so happy that they were going to be together

Kevin: And also it was easier because I'd been away anyway. Ja, it was much easier. That's why I did it so fast. I already started telling her when she came for my graduation that I was going to be moving in ... mentally preparing her.

Researcher: Before you got entrenched again?

Kevin: Ja, cut the apron strings, you know

Researcher: I know I'm backtracking now. At first you said things were rough and there was a lot of fighting, and you were going through a lot of stress, and then you said things calmed down. How did it change in your relationship with your mom, with your sister, the calming down, the whole process?

Kevin: I think it was just ...

Barbara: I think we'd worked through everything. I think we all had to work through

- Researcher: Explain that to me, how it was.
- Barbara: It all went in stages, him coming out, and then it was this, and then settling down and it was all a whole lot of things, going overseas. Then he met Paul and I don't know, we all had to work through everything, everybody.
- Kevin: And to adapt to the change.
- Barbara: Ja.
- Kevin: Human beings hate change.
- Barbara: Especially me.
- Kevin: Ja, it was hard, whatever changes they were ...
- Tanya: Boy, do you hate change!
- Researcher: How did you adapt?
- Barbara: Well, I had to.
- Researcher: How did you do it?
- Barbara: Slowly and painfully.
- Researcher: How did you actually work it through, the whole thing?
- Barbara: I don't know. I'd get into bed ... we just all pulled together.
- Researcher: For you Kevin, how did you see it?
- Kevin: I don't know. I always wanted my mother to go to therapy. At one stage I said, 'everybody must go to therapy. Everybody's so fucked up, they have to go,' and that didn't work at all.
- Barbara: Probably replied that you were the one who'd fucked us up.
- Kevin: Ja, probably. I don't know. Ja, I suppose I put a lot of emphasis on that and it helped me a bit, and I suppose through that, through me going to therapy, I don't know ... I suppose ...
- Barbara: Well, that was every week when he came back 'and Suzette (the therapist) said this about you, and Suzette said that about you' ... I was definitely not going to therapy. I was married to a psychologist who analysed every damn ... if I scratched my ear ... he'd have something to say about it, you know. So I really wasn't in the mood for that.
- Researcher: Do you think initially it was traumatic, and would you say it's been a

positive experience now?

Barbara: Oh, yes. It was a growth experience for everybody.

Researcher: How did you grow?

Barbara: I've got much more tolerance ... I was never great on tolerance. I'm sure I got much more tolerant and more accepting.

Researcher: And for each of you?

Kevin: I think it was an eye-opener for everybody around me. There were so many things that had never really concerned anybody. I means AIDS for one thing, the whole stigma attached ... the whole stereotype about gay people and that whole side of things. Maybe it had crossed their minds but it had never seemed like reality, and discrimination and all things like that. I thing that was a complete eye-opener for everybody and having to deal with it, having to learn. Ja, I think it was very different, very new for everyone as well.

Researcher: For you, Tanya?

Tanya: Well I think I cruised along in life, but now if I see like these letters they write to the magazines about how gays are dirty, disgusting, my back gets up. People mustn't tell me that.

Barbara: Ooh, yes, that infuriates me too. I sat on the phone once ...

Tanya: People are people. What they do in the bedroom is nobody's concern. People just don't grasp that idea and I don't know why. Don't tell me gays are disgusting, that what they do is against the Bible and all that rubbish ... I get very cross.

Barbara: I sat on the phone for 20 minutes one morning. Some person ... phoned in. I don't know how they were on the subject of gays, and this person phoned in and was just so awful. I can't remember the whole gist and he said ... 'and they are disgusting, they practise anal sex and I don't know ... ' I sat on the phone for twenty minutes and eventually I just hung up because I didn't get through, because I was ... I said to the guy 'I'm shaking. I have a gay son and I object to what this person has to say'.

Researcher: Did he put you on the air at all?

Barbara: No, he cut me off. After twenty minutes ... I , you know, I was just going to tell him exactly that what his impression was, was wrong and that heterosexuals also practise anal sex, so what's his problem? It was a whole ... I can't remember, it was a long time ago. I get very annoyed..

Researcher: Do you think, I mean you were always friendly with gay people and

always accepted ...

Barbara: No ... now my son is gay, and don't say things like that.

Researcher: Now it's your son?

Barbara: Naturally

Researcher: Do you think the fact that you've always been an open-minded family, as you said, do you think that contributed to it being ... easier maybe?

Barbara: Ah, I'm sure.

Kevin: Well it wasn't as easy as I thought it was going to be.

Barbara: No, it wasn't.

Kevin: I thought it was going to be very easy and it certainly wasn't, it really wasn't, it was hard.

Barbara: Your turmoil affected everybody.

Kevin: Ja, because everybody was worried about me. They were worried that I was in a depression, they were worried about what I was going to do, if I was going to try and slit my wrists. I don't know. They were all worried and very concerned because I was unhappy, I was very unhappy, and that's why it affected everybody.

Researcher: Did you think if it had been easier for you, it would have been easier all round?

Kevin: Ja, probably, probably .. but I don't think it is easy. I don't think it's easy on whatever scale it may be.

Researcher: What was the hardest part?

Kevin: The hardest part. About coming out or about being gay generally? You know there's always this fear at the back of your mind that somebody's going to say something or for me, that is, if they going to say something or if they going to use it against you, but I think that comes a lot from my experiences at school and how I was persecuted. I think that's you know, that people say ... or I don't know, people degrading me.

Tanya: People used to say things to me too about him. It used to upset me terribly.

Barbara: Did you stick up for him?  
Did you defend him?

Tanya: Look, I was shrinking violet. Don't have hopes.

- Barbara: Today you would.
- Tanya: But also 'cos we were in high school at the same time, for what? About two years, and they also used to say to me 'Your brother's funny' or this and that, and it used to upset me. I get very upset when people say things against my family.
- Barbara: We're a very loyal family.
- Tanya: It will get me everytime.
- Kevin: I don't know. It's just that there's always a worry or an insecurity that somebody, somewhere, somehow is, you know ...
- Researcher: Going to use it ...
- Kevin: Well, ja ... or I don't know.
- Tanya: Well I would say it's a valid one. Society's nowhere near accepting yet.
- Researcher: And what was the hardest part about coming out?
- Kevin: I don't know. Just actually ...
- Barbara: Saying it out loud.
- Kevin: Living it - living what I'd always fantasized about or pictured, actually became a reality.
- Researcher: Was the fantasy easier?
- Kevin: Of course, much easier. You can turn it on and off. Like a movie.
- Researcher: Did any of you have to reconstruct your relationships, your perceptions of each other?
- Kevin: No, I don't think that was that drastic a change.
- Researcher: I want to ask more on an individual level. Remember I was saying before that my idea was that it can be almost a rebellion against the family, or a different perception? Did you feel now that they knew a different person, or that you were somehow different in any way to how they'd thought of you before?
- Kevin: I think in a way I thought that . . . in a way I was testing them as well. They must just accept whatever I do because if they going to accept me, they must accept me a 100%, not 85% or 60%. Then I think that all the phases that I went through, whatever, I was testing. I was feeling the waters to say "Well, how far can I go - how much will you accept before you actually put your foot down, and say, 'Uh, uh, this is too

much for me'.

Researcher: So how far did you go?

Kevin: I went as far as I wanted to go, and it was fine. You know, I think it was just a reassurance type of thing, 'let's see', you know. 'Let me shock them as much as I can. Let's see how they take it.' But it was a very subconscious thing. It wasn't a conscious thing at all that, you know, this is what I thought and I'm going to be rebellious or whatever. It was subconscious. Now I realise, but it was a subconscious thing.

Researcher: What did you think about it Barbara, the way he was acting and everything?

Barbara: Oh, I thought he was impossible, totally impossible and I let him know about it. We don't keep quiet.

Kevin: I'm sure there were times I said to her, 'Alright, I'll just get out.'

Barbara: And I'd say to him, 'well go', knowing full well he had nowhere to go.

Researcher: So you were safe! Do you feel more .. did you ever feel before like you were kind of living two lives, like one is 'this is what I am' and the other is what your family sees?

Kevin: Mm, I suppose so. There was always like this deep, dark side of me, you know. However, in terms of being a person I was always the same. It was just certain aspects of my life that were two lives. I suppose the relationship, sort of that I had, that was a deep dark secret. The whole fantasy of being gay and knowing what I wanted, etc, etc, that was very secret, that was very ... it was sacred as well. I was terrified of anybody finding out for fear of what would happen, but in terms of a person, I was always the same. My personality didn't change that much. I've never really thought about it. I suppose so - two sides to me, one that people saw and knew, and then the other side that was the hidden side.

Researcher: Were you ever uncomfortable that there was that hidden ...?

Barbara: You must have felt guilt about it.

Kevin: No, I never felt guilty.

Barbara: Never felt guilty.

Kevin: I was scared. More than guilt. I was scared.

Researcher: Before you were part of your family in a certain way, did that change at all?

Kevin: It definitely changed, I suppose. But I still felt part of the family. Although

at times I felt very alone but that was - that wasn't 'cos there wasn't any support around, it was because I was lonely from the inside.

Researcher: When you say everything changed ...?

Kevin: Everything was changing. My whole life changed but I don't think my role in the family changed. I was always there.

Barbara: Stop expecting me to do butch things (Quoting Kevin)

Kevin: We used to joke around a bit but I think that I was still the same. I was always the one who thought it was a tense vibe, trying to look, put it under the carpet, that type of thing. In terms of my role in the family. I still played the same role.

Researcher: And in terms of belonging and separateness, that kind of thing?

Kevin: Mm, ja, I suppose I felt quite left out at times. That was just because there weren't people around, other gay people around. Sometimes I hoped someone else in the family was gay.

Barbara: Well, we do have a suspicion, don't we?

Kevin: Ja, but you know, somebody immediate and close that I could talk to and share with and that's what I tried to seek in friends and I didn't really find that, So ja, I suppose there was quite a bit of loneliness and separateness, but that was all due to ... the lack of association I suppose, being able to identify with what I was going through, because nobody had been through it before.

Researcher: How do you think it was for them?

Kevin: Frustrating, because at times I think they didn't know how to help me.

Barbara: Mm

Kevin: They didn't know what to do, they really didn't know what to do to try and alleviate this darkness that I was in, so ja, frustrating and quite upsetting.

Researcher: Helpless?

Kevin: Ja, I'm sure that was ... one of their feelings.

Researcher: And since then, how've you changed?

Kevin: Well, now I've established my own roots and settled ...

Researcher: Was that because of Paul?

Kevin: Paul, and friends and people. I had to start all over again when I went

overseas, but then things improved as I improved and got myself more together, then so it improved for everyone around me.

Researcher: So you think as you came more to terms with it, it was easier for your family to deal with?

Kevin: Ja, because I wasn't having such a hard time anymore. I wasn't having such a difficult, lonely time, so I think everyone got more relaxed, and things came together.

Researcher: Did you ever regret any part of it?

Kevin: Ja, I regret that I never did it earlier. I could have had such fun at high school, G-d! (laughter), I do, I really wish that I had stood up for myself at high school and said, 'Bugger you. That's the way I am and I'm gonna be just who I want to be', I do, I regret that. I regret ... look I came out when I was 18. Some people wait fifty years before they come out, but still I didn't feel it was suitable. It could have happened, it should have happened ... it shouldn't have happened at all. It should have just been there, you know. It should have just been ...

Barbara: Wouldn't need to make the whole effort.

Kevin: There had to be this whole statement, you know. There had to be this whole trauma. It should have just been easy, you know. I just wish it had been the most natural thing in the world, that at age 13 I came home and said to my mom, 'I've got a crush on my male teacher', and then I would have said, 'Ok, I'm going on a date on Saturday night', and David (eg) would come pick me up.

Researcher: A whole society re-think

Kevin: You know, that would have been ...

Barbara: ... wouldn't have handled it if you were uncertain. They would also have thought it was just a stage.

Kevin: Ja, but if that had happened, it would have been utopia. It would have been just wonderful.

Researcher: Did you ever wish it was different (to Barbara)

Barbara: I don't think I ever wished anything, you know. Take it as it comes. And I told you there, look in there (pointing to a set of family photos on the wall), he was still trying to be a girl there. I'm sure, Kevin.

Tanya: Nobody get me right in that picture.

Barbara: I mean, he was just him ... wanted to play with the dolls and help the maid clean.

Kevin: I definitely didn't - I think

- Barbara: No, you did.
- Kevin: Nobody stopped me.
- Barbara: I drove my ex-husband crazy. I always was a full believer in everybody in their own fashion, if that's what makes them happy, do it. He didn't understand. If I was feeling down, I would not smile for his boss, if I didn't want to smile. Today he's a 100% worse than me. Does exactly as he feels and as he likes. In those days he didn't understand that.
- Researcher: At the stage Kevin was playing with dolls, did you think, "Wait, shouldn't he be playing with trucks?"
- Barbara: No (emphatic). If the child wants a doll, why not? His father hit the roof.
- Researcher: So do you think at that stage he was thinking, 'no, there are certain gender behaviours'.
- Barbara; Well as I said, he was busy in his career. And it was cute when he dressed up in all the scarves and went and disrupted the wedding, and everybody was smiling at this little creature at the back. Nobody's looking at the bride, you know, it was cute. Maybe if he was 13 I would have slapped him. (Laughter). You know, it was just the way he was, and he kept it all so well hidden. I mean, I'm very into vibes, I pick up things. I never even thought he was doing anything, never. He kept it very well hidden.
- Researcher: You were saying about, 'Now you can be who you really are' and people knowing what you all about as opposed to before?
- Kevin: I don't know. I'm still quite closed. Paul and I fight about it. We used to fight a lot about it because he says . . . and still we do . . . still sometimes if we walk into a restaurant, I feel self-conscious, and he doesn't, and he says to me 'Don't be silly'. Because people are looking. I've got much better now but there were times when he'd say to me, 'I want to hold your hand' in a restaurant and I'd say 'Go away. You mad. Absolutely mad. We going to get beaten up!' Now we joke, now we joke about it. We'll be sitting at a robot with 3 lanes of traffic and he'll lean over and put his arm around me and give me this huge kiss and I'll slap him because he knows, he knows that I hate it with five thousand people looking into the car, and I'm plutzing (hebrew word for freaking out) and having an absolute fit and he gets absolute nuchas (hebrew word for joy, delight) out of it. He loves it! But he's sensationalist, he loves doing that sort of thing.
- Tanya: I was wondering, you haven't mentioned. I think I just remembered it, maybe it was to do with his whole coming out, was Kevin used to have a weight problem and he went into 'varsity that first year and he became totally anorexic - didn't eat a thing!

Kevin: I don't know. It was after ... I started losing weight, but after ... after Mark, after I broke up with Mark, I went completely anorexic.

Tanya: All he had was a can of diet cooldrink and chewing gum. He went as thin as a rake with hair to his shoulders, had his nose done and became totally desirable.

Kevin: I used to fit into a size 35 woman's esprit jeans - 35! I was this thin. Look I wasn't anorexic but I used to punish myself.

Researcher: For what?

Kevin: I don't know. I used to hate myself. I was just cross. I used to eat. I would eat a fortune and then I would starve myself, and eat and starve ...

Researcher: That was all in the process of coming out?

Kevin: That was afterwards. That was when I was, ja, it was about the December. I still remember. I was very thin. When I had my nose done, I had a black eye (from the op), I looked terrible!

Researcher: This was really a heavy, heavy, period.

Kevin: Ja, it was.

Researcher: Were you more comfortable with yourself amongst your family after you'd come out or once things had settled down?

Kevin: I wasn't comfortable anywhere at all. I was agitated, I was ...

Barbara: I kept saying to his father, "he's not coming to terms with it, he's not coming to terms with it." I still don't know to this day if he has. Are you still in therapy? Have you come to terms with your sexuality? I doubt 100% that he has.

Kevin: I don't know

Researcher: Have you? (To Barbara)

Barbara: Yes. I don't think he has. At one stage I screamed at you, 'you are the most unhappy person on earth.'

Kevin: Sure.

Barbara: I told his brother, 'your brother is so unhappy. It's breaking my heart and I don't know what to do about it'.

- Researcher: What did you try and do?
- Barbara: I was helpless. I didn't know what to do. I was glad he could go and talk to a stranger every week, even though she denigrated me and his sister and everything else ...'Go and talk to her. Let someone objective help you, I can't. I'm too emotionally involved'.
- Researcher: And for you Tanya?
- Barbara: Tanya just plods along.
- Tanya: Mm, yes ...
- Barbara: Doing the best she can.
- Tanya: It was between the two of them and I didn't participate much. Nobody wanted me (laughter from Barbara and Kevin).
- Researcher: What did you think about what was going on in the family?
- Tanya: I just really accepted it, it never bothered me. I mean we've got one of everything in the family, it's great. Got a 'man's man' ...
- Researcher: Variety is the spice of life  
Would you say you happy now?
- Kevin: There's still so much. I mean, as my mother says, I'll be in therapy for the rest of my life, I love it. It's my favourite.  
I do. I went today. I love it. It's my ... my therapy.
- Barbara: Does Paul get it every week now?
- Kevin: No
- Researcher: What did you think when she denigrated you?
- Barbara: I got cross! I can't remember what it was all about. Every week we got a little run down at the supper table.
- Tanya: Fridays, you used to see her on a Friday.
- Researcher: Did you think to yourself, 'I've been a good mother, and this is what I'm getting?'
- Barbara: No, I just thought, 'If that's what she want to think, let her think it.'  
You know, 'I couldn't give a shit'
- Kevin laughs.
- Researcher: Obviously the therapist was saying thing to you that were insulting you

or making you angry or whatever?

Kevin: I never used to come home and scream and shout. I don't know. We'd just be talking.

Barbara: Give an example.

Kevin: I can't remember.

Barbara: Have to rack our brains here.

Researcher: I know.

Kevin: But anyhow, I changed therapists, I left her.

Barbara: Or you'd say: 'Your and Tanya's relationship doesn't help it' Did she say that?

Tanya: No, it was Jean!

Barbara: Jean, She (Tanya) also went for therapy - in and out.

Tanya: Therapy didn't help me a damn bit. After the fourth one I decided not to waste my money anymore. I hate therapy. If you need help, help yourself. Don't need anybody else.

Researcher: Is that what you believe?

Tanya: Yes.

Barbara: It relieves the tension to talk. Nobody else can solve his problems.

At the point the interview was ended as I did not have any more to ask. Kevin and Paul left the room to make tea and Tanya and her mother told me that Tanya was going to a neurologist about her pituitary gland as the reason for her being overweight may be due to a problem with this gland. According to Barbara, Tanya's weight is unnatural for how much she eats.

When Paul and Kevin returned to the room, a conversation ensued about Kevin, Barbara and Paul travelling together to the Far East.

I then thanked them for their co-operation in participating in the interviews.