



**Negotiating Ethnicity, Sexuality and Gender:  
The Personal Identities of Lesbians  
From Non-English-Speaking Backgrounds.**

This dissertation is presented as part requirement for the Master of Arts(Women's Studies) Degree, Women's Studies Department, Schulz Building, University of Adelaide.

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**DECLARATION**

This dissertation contains no material that has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any University and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference is made in the text of this dissertation.

I consent to this dissertation being made available for photocopying and loan if applicable if accepted for the award of the degree.

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## ABSTRACT

In this dissertation, the intersections of ethnicity, sexuality and gender in the experience of lesbian women from non-English-speaking backgrounds are investigated through use of literary, theoretical and empirical materials. There is a particular emphasis on women from Italian-Australian background.

The roles of social ascription, community acknowledgement and personal agency in the personal identity formation of lesbians from non-English-speaking backgrounds are assessed. The applicability of models of 'cultural conflict' and 'cultural complementarity or choice' are also evaluated when discussing these women's positions within their ethnic families and communities, within the wider Australian society, and within the predominantly Anglo-feminist lesbian movement.

The diversity of experience and situation that exists breaks many of the stereotypes and presumptions made about lesbians, and indeed about all women from non-English-speaking backgrounds.

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## Chapter One: INTRODUCTION

### Section One: Concerns and Objectives of the Study.

I'm a Sicilian-Italian-American Lesbian,  
the scum of the scum of the scum,  
forgotten by those who scream  
in protest because they are  
forgotten,  
and I am neither seen nor heard.

"The Fly"

Rose Romano, an Italian-American poet, presents her personal and social positions clearly in her poetry(1990:40). She explores her triply marginalised identity- as woman, as non-English-speaking background (NESB), as lesbian- and the constitution of this identity as non-existent by her Italian community, as invisible by the wider American society, and insignificant by the predominantly Anglo-American feminist movement.

The triple marginalisation, or further marginalisation if social class is also taken into account, of lesbians from non-English-speaking backgrounds lacks research in Australia. Research by feminists such as Rowland(1988) has given us the awareness of how women receive conflicting messages about who they are. This research has been vital in generating the mechanisms to avoid or resolve conflicts, or make women active agents, when confronted by shaping or moulding to fit the existing socio-cultural and political structures and discourses of

femininity and womanhood. The boundaries of possibilities for women on the sexual, social and cultural continuum have been extended.

Nevertheless, most of these possibilities have become available for white-middle class-heterosexual feminists. Working class, Aboriginal, NESB and lesbian women have often been considered marginal, or their specific issues incorporated into and represented by mainstream feminism. It is largely due to women from these groups that their specific concerns have been raised, myths and misinterpretations discredited, and a more pluralist and inclusive feminism been developed.

Where two or more marginalising factors exist such as Aboriginality and lesbianism, the issues are more complex and their intersections in need of exploring, rather than the woman being expected to identify with one at the expense of the other. A question that arises is, in Pettman's terms, "Can one prioritise oppressions?"(1989:6). Relatedly, Meekosha and Pettman(1990), in their paper on the implications of such categorisation, or "category politics", discuss how multiple identities tend to be spoken of and acted on "as if they were alternative or mutually exclusive definitions". They suggest, for example, that "woman" tends to be positioned as an alternative identity to "Aboriginal" or "immigrant". Even where new collectivities around different shared identities have emerged, such as immigrant women's groups, there are still many other differences within these supposedly multiple categories such as class, occupation and age. Thus, the new categories that allow for a degree of multiplicity or intersection are still "homogenised or universalised...as if you cannot have a complex identity", resulting in the subverting of experiences and objectives shared across the category boundaries(1990:2-3).

The dangers of "category politics", or politics organised on the basis of difference, soon become evident. Smaller identity groups may result in less collective strength, can lead to a pluralism that does not challenge the powerful centre as all "others" are different to the dominant centre and rendered subordinate, and individuals who have a multiple identity may "fall between the category cracks"(Meekosha and Pettman, 1990:7). The categories may also be seen as static and unchanging, and without provision for the modification of the initial developed strategies.

Meekosha and Pettman(1990) suggest ways of dealing with the flaws of "category politics" beginning with a conscious recognition of the many sites of power and oppression, and their commonalities and overlaps. And, in relation to women, there needs to be a recognition that women are not divided by categories such as ethnicity and sexual preference but rather by the consequences of domination and discrimination based on these categories as practised in patriarchal society. This awareness must then be moulded into action, including integrating the categories within mainstream discourses such as multiculturalism, feminism and gay activism, constantly shuffling, reformulating, and pushing at their boundaries. At a practical level, the language of "oppression, solidarity and community need both deconstructing and tightening"(1990:14), and research projects must take on the challenges and multi-dimensional demands of multiple identity studies.

Also highlighted in the paper by Meekosha and Pettman(1990) is the fact that the claim to representation of a community or "category" is often



appropriated by the most privileged members of the minority group. It can be added that this appropriation is also indicative of which members of the minority group are the most acceptable or assimilative to the dominant mainstream. Thus, men from NESB tend to represent both genders, and heterosexual, middle class women from NESB predominate in any discussion or political action without presenting the positions of homosexual women. "Sexuality must not be a code word for heterosexuality, or women a code word for white women"(Espin,1984: 445), or NESB experience really NESB men's experience.

In the light of Meekosha and Pettman's proposals, this study is an attempt to move beyond homogenous categorisation by researching across identity boundaries and by investigating the positions of those who are not the privileged or acceptable representatives of multicultural, feminist and gay activist minority groups. The major questions of this study are indicative of the above precepts. What are the positions of lesbians from NESB backgrounds in constructing personal identities within the available sets of cultural norms and discourses? What alternatives are available in dealing with triple marginalisation? Do they maintain strong identifying links with their ethnic cultures, values and backgrounds? Do they become part of the predominantly Anglo-lesbian-feminist movement and sever links with their ethnic backgrounds? Or do they meander between the two, and whatever other identities/associations are available, their negotiations being based upon choice, need, the availability of supportive social groups, or what is less emotionally and psychologically "costly"?

Lesbians from ethnic backgrounds do not inhabit a separate and invisible part of the social formation. They are engaged in exactly the same institutional structures as other members of a society, in different relations and on different trajectories. If the liberation of some women in society is bound up with the liberation of all women, and if some women are neglected or rendered invisible, or ignorance informs mainstream multicultural, feminist and gay activist judgements, then patriarchal power-relations that have sought to "divide and conquer" women are sustained. Bannerji(1987) and Pettman(1989, 1991) see the need to ask who is speaking, who is listening, and who is being silenced. To these questions could be added whose language is being spoken, what are the listener's prejudicial filters of information, and whose desire for silence is being violated?

By examining the intersections of ethnicity, gender and sexuality, with some specific reference to the experiences of migrant and second generation women of Italian background in Australia as illustrative examples, this study attempts to take several steps forward in understanding the situations and negotiations of all non-English-speaking women in Australia and in challenging the invisibility that often negates the very existence of lesbians from NESB backgrounds, or constitutes them as the insignificant other vulnerable to ignorant speculation or representation.

Section Two: The Structure of the Study.

Given the paucity of material in Australia on the intersections of ethnicity, gender and sexuality, it is necessary to establish a broad and yet thorough theoretical framework which would allow an extension into empirical research at a later stage.

First, the definitions and constructions of personal identity, ethnic identity, and sexual/lesbian identity are examined. The contradictions and convergence of self-identification and social ascription of identity are investigated in each category. By way of example, this theoretical overview is followed by a literature review of the studies of first-generation Italian migrants in Australia and Italy, in particular Italian women's social, sexual, familial identities; and the presentation of the models of 'cultural conflict' and 'cultural synthesis' which seek to explain second-generation Italian-Australian women's social, sexual, familial identities[see Appendix A and the discussion of these terms in Chapter Two]. The investigation, misinterpretation or omission of the intersections of ethnicity, gender and sexuality in regard to Italian women are presented.

The study then progresses to an investigation of the predominantly Anglo-Saxon feminist movement's difficulties with and responses to the intersections of ethnicity, sexuality and gender, evident in the philosophical shift from "universalism" to "unity in diversity"(Eisenstein, 1984).

This study concludes with an attempt to examine the intersections of ethnicity, gender and sexuality in the personal identity formation of lesbians from NESB. The roles of social ascription, community

acknowledgement and personal agency in this process are investigated, as well as the applicability of the 'cultural conflict' or 'cultural synthesis' models in the women's relationships with ethnic family and community, the wider Australian society, and the predominantly Anglo-feminist lesbian movement. The theoretical, anecdotal, and reflective writings of lesbians from various ethnic backgrounds, mainly from America and England, are analysed and supplemented by the opinions and experiences discussed with the researcher by four Italian-Australian lesbians. These will provide a range of experiences and voices where the issues of ethnicity, sexuality and personal identity construction are explored. As Larbalestier(1991) writes, the very act of writing about one's life in all its multiplicities is challenging dominant discourses and is a crucial step in the process of political confrontation.

### Section Three: The Parameters of the Study

Before proceeding with the study, it is necessary to acknowledge its parameters. First, this study focuses on predominantly English-speaking Western societies, with Australia as a sub-focus, and the marginalisation of non-English-speaking and/or non-Western women within these societies. Second, this study of lesbians from NESB in Australia, particularly of Italian-Australian background, is breaking new ground and thus lacks theoretical material. Third, my insider/outsider position in relation to the cultural and sexual issues being addressed- insider as an Italian-Australian woman, outsider as an Italian-Australian heterosexual woman- requires consideration.

As the first parameter is self-explanatory and essential, given the nature of the investigation into marginalised minorities in predominantly English-speaking, Western societies, discussion will centre on the second and third parameters.

Due to the lack of Australian material, this study uses much American and British comparative theoretical, anecdotal and research data. A critical review of overseas material and material from a wide range of ethnic groups can assist in identifying how the construction of personal identity in lesbians from NESB in Australia may be investigated and the application of 'cultural conflict' and 'cultural complementarity' models within which the women negotiate their positions may be examined.

Most of the American and English materials that do discuss lesbians from ethnic backgrounds, apart from a few surveys, are reflections on personal experiences, and opinion-essays. These may seem contentious or polemical in arguments about what constitutes sociological research data. Feminist researchers such as Davis and Kennedy, however, believe that "the vividness" of many stories by lesbians about their lives have the potential "to generate full and rich documents about women's sexuality"(1986:390). Bottomley also believes that genres of writing can be blurred, and the "inter-referencing" of literature and social science genres can reveal a rich variety of "insights and subtleties"(1991:95).

Hence, in the light of the feminist principles that 'the personal is political' and individual women's experiences and stories are to be valued(Pettman, 1991), this study is quite justified in drawing upon

both the conventional sociological and theoretical data, as well as gaining from the richness of personal reflective and anecdotal material.

It can be added that the lack of social science data on lesbians from NESB may also highlight how feminists who study lesbian issues have tended to constitute these women as marginal and insignificant in mainstream research. It is also possible that lesbians from ethnic backgrounds are invisible or non-participants in the predominantly Anglo-lesbian communities which form the research pools(e.g. Wolf, 1979; Kitzinger, 1987).

Thus, the lack of social science data is all the more reason why lesbians from NESB must voice and document their experiences in order not to be rendered non-existent. Indeed, within the qualitative methodological framework, where detailed, interpretative, idiographic descriptions of subjectivity are valid forms of emancipatory feminist research, this material appears to provide significant insights into women's individual perspectives(Espin,1987).

With regard to the third parameter of this study, the relationship between the researcher and researched is a major preoccupation of feminist research. Du Bois discusses how traditional Western science states that the "knower and the known" are separate and must not "contaminate" the other if true objectivity is to be attained(1983:111). Feminist scholarship has frequently disputed this assumption because women constitute the "observer and observed, subject and object, knower and known" and engage in "passionate scholarship". Hence, feminist research has challenged the perpetuation of the image of researcher as

the "objective observer of fixed reality, the neutral seeker after an external and objectifiable truth"(1983:112). As Warren asserts, data is never independent of the researcher's self. She speaks in this context of "reflective subjectivity", the dialectic between "immersion and reflection" in the researching process(1977:104). Thus, it can be added that access to data may actually be blocked or influenced by the researcher's gender, race, class, attitudes, sexual preferences, and other categories.

Several researchers and theoreticians believe the relationship between researcher and researched is of great importance when studying a minority group, such as a homosexual group(Warren,1977; Altman, 1979; Krieger, 1982; Kitzinger,1987). Altman, for example, states that since homosexuality exists potentially within everyone, it cannot be viewed "objectively". Non-homosexuals must accept that "there are subtleties of understanding that can only be reached through extensive dialogue" with homosexual men and women themselves(1979:57). If a researcher identifies herself as lesbian, will respondents be more willing to participate and be more honest in their responses? Krieger believes that as an "insider", the lesbian has an "important sensitivity to offer"(1982:108). She establishes a hierarchical model of researcher-effectiveness in researching lesbians ranging from heterosexual men being the least effective to lesbians being the most effective. Kitzinger believes a lesbian researcher may use her "personal experiences" and "intimate knowledge" as they provide her with "special sensitivities, unusual skills, and privileged access to exclusive groups or elusive information"(1987:30). However, she also raises the possibility of being an "outsider" within the "inside" group due to

factors such as class, race, ethnicity. She presents her own situation as a white, middle-class and non-Jewish lesbian severely limiting the extent to which blacks, working class, and ethnic lesbians could perceive her as an "insider"(1987:88). Other researchers are aware that "closeness may create certain kinds of blindness" which an "ongoing process of analysis" will help guard against(Acker, Barry, Esseveld,1983: 432). Relatedly, Pettman(1991) queries the assumption that women are better placed to research women by virtue of what they share as women. In fact, they may be more dangerous to other women precisely because they seem to be less so.

Thus, although the relationship between researcher and researched is of great importance to any study, who the researcher is appears to be a less significant factor than how the research is undertaken and to what extent the researcher is aware of their own subjectivities and limitations and the need to consciously rise above them.

In this study, the researcher is a second-generation Italian-Australian woman, with pride in her heritage while actively participating in the Anglo-Australian setting. I have "successfully" negotiated both cultures yet at the same time have challenged them from a feminist perspective. In critiquing my own studies of Italian-Australian women's construction of personal identity (Pallotta-Chiarolli, 1989a, 1989b, 1990), I became aware of colluding in upholding the myth of Italian-Australian woman as solely heterosexual. This negation needed to be addressed. Hence, in undertaking this study, the researcher's position is as "insider" due to shared Italian-Australian ethnicity, and as "outsider" due to different sexual preference. Furthermore, in analysing works about women from



different ethnic backgrounds, the researcher is an "insider" due to a similar position of marginal to mainstream culture and "outsider" ignorant of the specificities of the various marginal cultures apart from Italian.

The question is whether this location in relation to NESB lesbians is an obstacle or an advantage. Does it lead to responses from lesbian respondents such as "You don't really understand" or "It's safe for you to study this"? My location also raises the question of what implications this study has for the researcher's relationships, ranging from personal to professional, in undertaking research into homosexuality. Warren(1977) has discussed how the researcher herself is likely to encounter adverse reactions from various sectors of the heterosexual and homosexual worlds. All the above issues surfaced in the planning stages of this thesis[see Appendix B].

If the task of this dissertation in part involves speaking on behalf of others, the ensuing relationship of power between researcher and respondents may be seen as appropriation. As Kitzinger states, this sort of rhetoric and questioning is unavoidable, but "how to use it, in whose interests, and how to recognize and analyze its use" are the key issues(1987:31). Curthoys(1988) argues that if only members of a group can write about that particular group, analysis becomes confined to a decreasing number, attempts to understand experience across categorical boundaries such as gender, race and sexuality become rarer, and the possible formation of strong political alliances intersecting such boundaries less likely. Active allies are thereby lost. There can be a variety of "voices" that assist attempts to develop a feminism which

starts from difference, as long as the "voices" are also aware of their own subjective perceptions(Jolly, 1991).

Thus, there needs to be an understanding of the speaking positions in research. Acker, Barry and Esseveld outline three principles of feminist research with which this study can be evaluated to ensure it is non-exploitative and non-manipulative of women who participate as respondents. First, research should contribute to women's liberation by producing knowledge that can be used by the women themselves; second, it should use methods that are not "oppressive"; and third, researchers should develop a "feminist critical perspective" that questions the dominant intellectual traditions and can reflect upon its own feminist development(1983:423).

If these three principles are applied to this study, it appears that it aims to be a step in assisting lesbians from ethnic backgrounds in gaining better understanding of their multiplicity of identities and of the ways in which they can provide themselves with the support they need and want. It also challenges "white Anglo" and heterosexual "human services professionals" to develop awareness and understanding of NESB lesbian issues. Thus, it should meet the emancipatory criteria of feminist social science by providing different groups of women with an understanding of their everyday worlds and how these are "generated by the larger social structure", as well as suggesting or determining avenues beyond this(Acker, Barry, Esseveld,1983: 425).

In this context, Stanley and Wise have described three main kinds of feminist research. "Muckraking" research examines and publicises the

"shortcomings of institutional sexism"; "corrective" research attempts to fill the gaps in our knowledge; and "movement-oriented" research is designed and conducted in the service of the "women's movement"(1983: 24-25). This study is "corrective" and "movement-oriented" in informing about the situations of lesbians from ethnic backgrounds, and in serving their personal/ political needs. As women, they are "knowers" and agents of knowledge; their experiences and subjective understandings count as knowledge.

Finally, before proceeding with this dissertation, it is important to look at the limitation placed on this study by language usage. As Winter writes, our language is not "adequate to take account of the complexity and diversity of our cultural contexts." Our language reflects "anglocentric culture"(De Ishtar and Sitka, 1991:21). Thus, the words "ethnic" and "non-English-speaking background" both pose as many problems as they seek to resolve. Both are descriptive and displacing persons of cultures other than the predominant "Anglo" culture as the other, inferior, illegitimate. Even the term "Anglo" is often used to incorporate Irish, Scottish, Welsh as well as English people. Thus, even as this study attempts to highlight the cultural diversity of lesbians, it does so within language that promotes uniformity and hierarchy. Sitka(1991) suggests the adoption of at least one other term, ENOL, meaning "English as a Non Original Language", and yet even this term still highlights English-speaking as the centre.

In summary, this chapter has introduced the issues that will be explored in this study as well as the way this study will proceed. It has also outlined the researcher's understanding of the parameters of this study

and established its worth as a step toward a greater awareness of cultural and sexual diversity in feminist theory.

## **Chapter Two: DEFINING THE ISSUES: PERSONAL, ETHNIC, AND SEXUAL/LESBIAN IDENTITIES.**

Before examining the intersections of ethnicity, sexuality and gender in lesbians from non-English-speaking backgrounds, an overview of the general concepts that are needed to understand the broad territory is required. Within the definitions of personal, sexual and ethnic identities, I have chosen 'personal agency', 'community acknowledgement' and 'social ascription' as useful tools in discussing major modes of construction. 'Personal agency' refers to one's deliberate self-identification even if it evokes negative reactions from one's community and/or wider society. 'Community acknowledgement' refers to the negative and positive reinforcement of identity traits in a person by his or her significant others. 'Social ascription' refers to the labelling and categorising of each person within a group by the wider society, resulting in stereotypical and homogeneous groupings and stigmatisation of anyone who does not fit the label.

The contradictions and complementarities between the three seem to determine one's sense of 'cultural conflict'- the sense of being passively caught between self-identity, community acknowledgement and externally ascribed identity- or 'cultural choice/synthesis'- actively negotiating a personal stance between self-identity, community acknowledgement and social ascription by selecting desired or necessary elements of each while discarding the rest.

These terms or matrices will be clarified in the detailed discussions that follow. At this point, it must be stressed that these terms are being employed due to their pragmatic use. They are conceptual tools that are commonly accepted and employed in the body of research and literature on ethnicity, sexuality and gender.

#### Section One: Personal Identity.

In her study of lesbians from Latina backgrounds, Espin challenges the existing models of both ethnic identity formation and homosexual identity formation by stating that personal identity is "what each woman thinks of herself" at a given time(1987:43). Women are constituted by a particular race, age, sexual preference, class, religion and other categories; and by looking at the interaction between the self, social institutions and practices, we can uphold what Lather calls "one's own perspectivity" as valid knowledge(1989:14). Personal identity, sexuality and ethnicity are "fluid, lifelong processes" so that the ways a woman may define herself today may not be how she may define herself tomorrow(Espin,1987:43). As Weeks explained, there is "ambivalence" in the very concept of identity. It "professes to inform us of what we have in common" but at the same time is about "differentiation". The process of identity formation may control, restrict and inhibit but simultaneously provide "comfort, security, and assuredness" according to one's need or desire to conform to social ascriptions or seek community acknowledgement; and it may provide space for self-actualization or personal choice(1985: 187-189).

Henriques et al also discuss the "individual-society dualism": "the individual, as a concept, could not exist without its opposite number, society."(1984:12). In posing the question, "Is the subject constitutive or constituted?" Henriques contrasts the humanist position of the unified individual as the agent of all social phenomena and the anti-humanist position of social, linguistic and cultural structures as the determinants of individual positions in society(1984:95). He theorises that an account is required whereby the individual is seen as both "locked in" ideological and social practices as well as possessing the "agency" necessary for affecting social change. Thus, he critiques Althusser's conceptualisation of "Ideological State Apparatuses", such as the family and the school, "hailing" the individual. According to Althusser, the subject does not exist prior to its "interpellation"(1984:96-97). Henriques also critiques post-structuralist theory which, although displacing the individual as a unitary simple agent, has left a number of unresolved issues. If the individual is the sum total of multiple and contradictory positions in discourses, how is the "subjective experience" of identity accounted for? Thus, Henriques believes post-structuralism is not enough to explain the "possibility of subjectivity" or an individual's sense of personal experience and agency(1984:204).

Moving beyond this impasse, Hollway(1984) appears to link post-structuralist deconstruction of the individual with the humanist construction of personal identity by proposing incorporated values attach to a person's practices and provide the powers through which individuals can position themselves in relation to others. According to Hollway, competing discourses bombard an individual leading to a

position being taken in one discourse rather than another. This study on lesbians from NESB proposes that the choice is not always either/or as Hollway deems it to be, but can be a matter of degree from various discourses.

Hence, constituting an individual identity at any given time is "marked by contradiction and confrontation involving sexuality, authority and decisions about life choices"(Tsolidis,1986:57). Women from any cultural background are confronted by contradictory and conflicting messages about their identities from patriarchal networks within the media, the education system, and the society around them as well as from feminist networks that are making inroads into the patriarchal structures. These are the various forms of social ascription that seek to externally impose an identity or provide avenues for group security on an individual.

Personal construct theorists also see personal identity as an "evolving configuration" reflecting one's "knowledge of the accepted laws" and constructed images of sexuality and ethnicity. One is assigned a specific place in a certain world by oneself and others; "a symbolic universe shared with significant others, apprehended and produced by language"(Falk,1978:6-7). Identity is complicated by the number of social institutions or social groups to which an individual may belong as each group may engage in somewhat different discourses(Espin,1987). This sense of being a passive recipient of socially constructed definitions of identity could potentially lead to 'cultural conflict' in a number of ways: a struggle between the demands of various groups; coercion to prioritise the importance to oneself of various groups to



the extent that a particular group's significance may be denied; a negation of personal needs in order to comply to the needs of the groups. On the other hand, Matthews(1981) and Angelico(1989) explain how a variety of meanings can be identified from which some are discarded as irrelevant, others are maintained as valuable, and new meanings are constantly being incorporated into a constantly shifting personal framework. Herein lies the potential for active negotiation, intersection or synthesis of diverse social ascriptions to complement personal requirements and thus achieve a comfortable multiplicity of identities.

One of the strengths of the personal construct theory is that it acknowledges the agency of an individual in withstanding social ascription, an agency obvious in lesbians who withstand the 'heteroreality' around them. However, personal construct theory may not fully take into account how even these acts of agency are chosen from or undertaken within a socially constructed set of possibilities. For example, a lesbian may still model her relationship with a partner on the conventions and expectations prevalent in heterosexual relationships, such as monogamy and fidelity, as these are the socially constructed forms of having relationships in our twentieth century Western world. Hence, social construction of identity also needs to be examined.

Social identity theorists such as Tajfel(1982) and Skevington and Baker(1989) believe that all available constructions of self fall into two different subsystems: social identification derived from ingroup-outgroup categorizations(such as race, sex, class, occupation); and

personal identifications which are the idiosyncratic descriptions of self that distinguish one from other individuals. Social identity is based on the internalization of social categorizations that distinguish the self and ingroup from other comparable groups. It is how one is defined by others, while personal identity is one's definition of oneself, either as a person or as a member of a social category such as an ethnic group. Hence, ethnic and sexual identity can be seen as externally perceived or internally defined. As each of these forms of identities, social and personal, and sub-identities such as ethnic or sexual, interact with individual and social circumstances, there is a constant process of definition and redefinition. Tajfel(1982) also stressed that society is composed of social groups that stand in power and status relations to one another, having important implications for personal identity formations. Hence, this theory also deals with relations between unequal groups, particularly minority/majority groups.

One of the strengths of social identity theory is that it investigates "how social phenomena come to structure individual consciousness and thus how the individual is a product of society"(Abrams, 1989:63). As Gurin and Markus(1989) point out, an individual can have multiple social identities simultaneously. Women's social identity is "multifaceted and transient" because there is no "static or consensually agreed external criteria for womanhood"(Breakwell, 1976:6).

One of the weaknesses of social identity theory appears to be its potential to render the individual as a passive absorber of social input with little scope for personal choice. If we take the example of lesbians, social identity could mean that regardless of personal sexual

preference and lifestyle choices, lesbians will conform to the powerful heterosexual social expectations. Certainly, some do. However, many do not. Personal identity requirements have resulted in an active denial of many or some of the social ascriptions directed to lesbians as members of the predominantly heterosexual social groups around them. If a lesbian perceives herself as still struggling to locate herself along the continuum between personal and social identity, she may be said to be in 'cultural conflict'. If she has found a comfortable location for herself, her process of negotiation has resulted in 'cultural synthesis'.

Hence, it appears that both personal construct theory and social construct theory provide insights into the constitution of identity and yet do not fully explain the negotiations of an individual. It appears that personal construction is at work within the parameters of possibilities established by social construction. The two theories are dependent upon and in relation to each other.

Some feminists have attempted to illustrate this interplay of personal and social identity. Rowland believes that the self is "a person's total subjective environment", the "distinctive centre of experience and significance"(1988:2). The self is both consistent and variable, moulded and influenced by "the experiences of a particular historical time, and by its own personality and character" as well as being "controlled and limited by social institutions and structures which constrain the availability of some experiences for the individual."(1988:16). The interplay between personal identity formation and social identity formation is evident.

However, social groups are not necessarily negative institutions constraining a woman's "self". For example, 'the family' as a social institution has been the centre of much debate for feminists( Barrett and McIntosh, 1985). That debate has focussed around the question of whether the family is merely a limiting, constraining institution or whether it can also be a supportive, secure framework for women. This latter view may be particularly relevant to Aboriginal, black and NESB women, given the significance of family forms in relation to controlling and constraining white, Anglo-Saxon social institutions. Again, the intersections of race, class, gender, and other factors influence an individual's personal needs and social positions, and the interactions of these will determine which social group or institution is chosen for personal identification. Such interactions will form the "community" or "significant others" supportive network for an individual, which social groups or institutions are negated or resisted, and which social groups or institutions coerce an individual to comply due to their political, social and economic powers. Group or community identities and acknowledgement can provide an "intermediate link between the individual and the mass" and the more one seeks to construct a personal identity, the more likely it will become "to grasp at the reassurance provided by the adoption of available identity types"(Espin, 1987:30).

Hence, in summary, it can be said that the notion of personal identity as employed in this study incorporates individual definition, social categorisation and ascription, and community acknowledgement. It is within this recognition of the interplay of social structure and social and personal history that feminist theory seeks to locate the specific

interests and differing identities of women, and foster the "possibilities for connection and alliance across the differences" (Pettman,1991:21). As Bottomley writes, "people are socially constructed and construct themselves, especially in resisting predefinitions and categorisations"(1991:97). Neither humanist or post-structuralist theory fully explain this interplay of agency and passivity, this individual location between "victim/problem" and "resistance"(Pettman,1991:191), or individual negotiation between coercion/conflict and choice/synthesis.

## Section Two: Ethnic Identity.

Having analysed the definition of personal identity and found it to comprise the three factors of individual agency, social ascription and community acknowledgement, it becomes possible to investigate the relative contribution of particular categories to one's personal and social position and to explore whether the same three factors apply.

Ethnicity can be defined in terms of cultural and linguistic uniqueness that allows for membership in a particular group. It is related to the underlying sentiment among individuals based on "a sense of commonality of origin, beliefs, values, customs, or practices". It is a highly subjective identity as it involves "elements of sentiment, solidarity, and loyalty"(Sotomayor,1977:9). Hence, one's sense of ethnic identity involves many variables that reflect a personal position within a cultural group rather than necessarily speaking for the whole group as a homogenous entity(Matthews,1981; Pettman,1986; Andreoni,1991; Bottomley,1991). There are intersecting categories within ethnic groups that lead to internal variations such as class, religion, gender,

region, age. De Lepervanche labels this a "multiplicity of cross-cutting linkages"(1980:34). As Pettman explains, "who I say I am may not coincide with the views of the group I claim, nor with the others' views of me"(1986:6). Again there is reference here to personal choice, community membership or acknowledgement, and social ascription.

Ethnic communities are mixed and contradictory with both familial and generational variation(Skelton,1986). In Secombe's(1991) discussion of her earlier co-authored theoretical and empirical work with Smolicz (e.g.1979, 1988) she found the maintenance of 'core values', that is shared values essential for group identification, was necessary for the individual's positioning of oneself within a group. However, it may be that outsiders ascribe overarching values or essentialist cultural boundaries to the group as a means of categorisation and establishing difference to the norm(Larbalestier,1991). Anthia and Yuval-Davis highlight this idea in their discussion of how ethnic identity may be constructed outside the group "by the material conditions of the group and its social representations by other groups"(1983:66). Racist and ethnocentric ideologies influence what is seen as "normal", including "who does what" and "who gets what" in a society including the unequal allocation of status and power(Pettman,1986:15). Martin(1991) sees an added danger in racist and ethnocentric ideologies: they can be reproduced in the personal identities of the members of the disadvantaged group as negative self-images and low self-esteem which further prevent access to positions of social and political status and power.

Thus, ethnic identity is not only one's personal definition of group membership, and indeed may differ from other members' definitions, it is also a reflection of the social representations of the ethnic group by other groups. The extent to which an individual can choose one's ethnic identity is open to debate. Hodge believes, albeit rather idealistically, one is free to choose to acknowledge one's ethnic identity: "one's ethnicity can be shed, or it can be cherished and fostered and handed on to one's children, at the same time as the culture that was brought from the country of origin is modified in response to changed circumstances and changed needs"(1988:29). On the other hand, other writers speak of having no agency in their self-concept of ethnic identity:

Culture is not really something I  
have a choice in keeping or discard-  
ing. It is in me and of me. Without  
it I would be an empty shell

(Moschkovich,1981:82)

Supporting a theory of ethnicity as an interplay between social construction, community acknowledgement and personal agency, Novak(1982) proposes "the new ethnicity", a lived experience of important differences between oneself and others within a "Cosmopolitan Ideal", a society where persons uphold the principles of fairness, equality and co-operation while "seeking their own distinctive paths" of cultural development. Each person could comfortably acknowledge her or his ethnic differences while "gladly learning from every other cultural tradition he or she encounters" and incorporating these elements into their own self-definition. This diversity would not be a threat to the society.

Differences would not be used to keep people out or defend privilege. Indeed, the society would eventually comprise individuals with a "pluralistic personality", having participated in one or more traditions and highly skilled in "passing over" from one cultural tradition to another(1982:5). People would not be trapped in what they had inherited, or a single set of perceptions, but would learn to see things in the ways other saw them; "even if we do not exactly embrace" them, "we see clearly the valid points which lead others to choose differently". Novak calls the resultant ideal society, "the City of Humans"(1982:6), displaying an urban bias in his theorising. Although not pointed out by Novak, his ideal of diversity in ethnic identity is quite applicable to the feminist ideal of sexual and social diversity.

Personal construct theorists also see ethnic group membership as a major element of identity formation, a process of self and other ascription based upon a system of differences whereby individuals choose, within various cultural constraints, a "subjective cultural category"(Paterson Royce,1982:28). Most contemporary studies of ethnicity proceed from this liberal humanist perspective of the personal construct theorists. Second-generation women from NESB have been perceived from this perspective as seeking a personal identity in a social milieu that provides more than one set of cultural norms pertaining to women's roles and sexuality(e.g. Pallotta-Chiarolli, 1989a, 1989b, 1990).

From a post-structuralist perspective, Schaffer discusses how "Cultural objects placed in the position of otherness take on the properties of inferiority" in relation to the dominant norm(1988:23). Just as women are the inferior "other" in relation to the dominant masculine norm,



migrants are categorized as "other" and marginalized within Australian culture to uphold the norm of Anglo-Saxon ethnicity. As Said writes, the history of ethnic cultures within a society must be seen within "a highly articulated set of relationships to the dominant culture surrounding it", which represents it according to its own institutions, traditions and conventions(1978:22). However, poststructuralists appear to undermine the significance of personal agency in negotiating within these institutions and conventions.

Social identity theorists believe one's ethnic identity acquires positive or negative value dependent on how mainstream/dominant or marginal/subordinate it is(Ballard,1987; Miller, 1987). Another factor would be the extent of political mobilisation in a group. For instance, the "black is beautiful" political campaign in America took a previously mainstream-determined negative feature and made it a positive political slogan of a minority group. Skevington and Baker explain the three types of responses an individual with an ethnic identity can make, according to the model outlined by Tajfel(1982): assimilation to the dominant group; social creativity where the subordinate seeks to create a new and positive image for itself; and social competition where the subordinate challenges the basis of the status hierarchy by active and passive resistance(1989: 3-4). Here social construct theorists acknowledge the potential for personal agency in resisting, negotiating with, modifying the dominant group's categorisations.

Indeed, several theorists integrate social construct and personal construct theories in their definitions of ethnic identity. De Lepervanche defines ethnicity as an "identity phenomenon with two

meanings": the search for self and the definition of "group boundaries"(1980:30). It involves a struggle of resistance by individuals and factions within the ethnic group against Anglo-Saxon mainstream behaviours and ideals while simultaneously seeking to incorporate ethnic difference within the dominant Anglo-Saxon culture, and thereby achieve social acknowledgement. Pettman(1986) theorises that "race" and "ethnicity" refer to socially constructed ways of categorising and valuing, of including or excluding others. Nevertheless, these social categories are subject to negotiation, contest and imposition. Epstein(1987) debates the two "polar opposite conceptions" of ethnicity: the "primordialist" perception of ethnicity as an inescapable ascription; and the "optionalist" view of ethnicity as open to shedding, adaptation and resurrection as a situation warrants. This "false dualism" needs to be transcended to incorporate some combination of external ascription and chosen affiliation.

In writings on ethnic identity, there is a notable subsumption of women in the category "ethnic"(e.g. Novak,1982; Epstein,1987). To the degree that women are considered in writings about ethnicity, it is often as members of families and as "problems". Women of ethnic backgrounds are often conceived as the "disadvantaged" in contrast to women in the dominant group and their "ideal" positions (Martin,1991:120-121). The claims of women tend to be secondary to, or a sub-clause of ethnic claims. The ethnic group, with a dominant male identity and leadership, represents women, and only heterosexual women, who by virtue of their marital and maternal relationships with men, warrant representation. Hence, in speaking about a woman's ethnic identity, her location as a woman is often ignored as a relevant factor. Moreover, lesbian women are

not even considered. Social ascription and community acknowledgement render personal choice a struggle against ethnocentric, sexist and heterosexist ideologies.

In summary, ethnic identity is determined by varying degrees of social ascription, community membership and acknowledgement, and personal negotiation and choice. It intersects with other group identifications such as class, gender and age to represent heterogenous rather than homogenous images of ethnic identity. Particularly when accompanied by gender differences and biases, ethnic identity is located in positions of dominance/subordination and advantage/disadvantage in relation not only to the mainstream group but also to certain members of the ethnic group itself, such as wealthy, educated, professional males who represent the whole ethnic group.

### Section Three: Sexual and Lesbian Identity.

Another major contributor to personal identity is sexuality. For the purposes of this dissertation, major emphasis will be given to defining lesbian identity and its links to social ascription, community acknowledgement, and personal agency.

Coward(1983) outlines the traditional views of sexuality and sexual identity as heterosexual, reproductive activity, and different sexual entities of women and men. Sexuality and the heterosexual act are often taken to be synonymous. Social policies inscribe the heterosexual unit as the heart of the organization of the social field, and there are

punishments and restrictions for those who do not conform. Hence, sexual identity is not a private, individual matter of personal choice. It is constrained and defined by cultural, social and political generalities.

Traditionally, lesbians have been seen as "deviant". This term immediately implies social ascription and categorisation. Indeed, in his study of deviance-designating of women, Schur considers the definitions of deviance and its implications as socially constructed and ascribed. He cites the work of Becker(1963):

social groups create deviance by making the rules whose infraction constitutes deviance, and by applying these rules to particular people and labeling them as outsiders...[therefore] deviance is not a quality of the act the person commits, but rather a consequence of the application by others of rules and sanctions to an "offender"(1983:5).

Deviance lies in the "eye of the beholder". Beholding is affected by the beholder's social experiences and ongoing interactions. Schur outlined three results of labeling women such as lesbians deviant. First, their deviance becomes their "master status". In other words, they are "seen", identified and responded to solely or mainly in terms of that deviant status. It becomes the individual's essential character, according to the beholder. Furthermore, once this categorical label is applied, people tend to impute to the individual various "auxiliary traits" they believe to be "characteristic of anyone bearing the label". Second,

individuals in the devalued category are thought of as comprising a "unitary or homogeneous type". Schur calls this "maintaining consistency": "they" are a problem; "they" are all alike; "they" are recognizable as such. Selective inattention will occur where whatever contradicts the stereotype will not be noticed. Third, "objectification" occurs where a person becomes nothing but "their membership in the stigma-laden category"(1983:24-30). It is not difficult to draw comparisons with terms of reference used in the previous discussion on ethnic identity, such as dominance/subordination and homogenising of a group by the mainstream.

Schur believes that efforts at deviance-designation usually rest on a powerful group's perception of some threat posed by the "deviants". Therefore, lesbianism might well be perceived by heterosexual men as constituting an ultimate threat to male sexuality. A lesbian lifestyle and choice of emotional/sexual partner represents a break of the heterosexual assumption that biological/reproductive sex, gender identity, and sexual object-choice and orientation should "all neatly fit together." The lesbian is defined as someone "in revolt", rejecting male definitions of how to feel, act, look and live(1983:119). They "defy" and "contradict" man-made "History, Culture, and Science". They are "dangerous evidence that recorded knowledge is inaccurate" (Farley,1985:269). By patriarchal definition heterosexuality denies homosexuality. It is

"the unthinkable alternative, the nonchoice of heterosexuality, to validate it by being a mistake;...To be wrong, so the other can be right; to be bad, so the other can be good; to be

unnatural, so the other can be natural...

(1985: 270)

It is important to note that Schur and Farley both acknowledge personal agency and choice in the formation of lesbian identity. They discuss the dominant group's concern with the existence of a choice other than heterosexuality that actually motivates political and social action to prevent the exercising of that choice or resistance.

Traditional theories purporting to "explain" lesbianism as a psychological, pathological disorder played a major role in the social categorisation of a devalued and stigmatised lesbian identity.

Browning(1984) notes the conclusions drawn by biological theorists who saw lesbianism as a genetic, hormonal, chromosomal, birth abnormality and psychoanalytic theories in which human beings are born with a bisexual disposition and psychosexual development becomes arrested or fixated due to an overgratification or undergratification of needs.

However, a few feminist lesbian theorists have also incorporated elements of psychoanalytic theory and emphasised the importance of socialization in identity formation. In the introduction to their book of essays, Darty and Potter state that personal identity "is scripted by society's socialization processes...,socially bestowed and socially sustained"(1984:2). This line of thought renders the lesbian as passive recipient of social forces and is open to criticism from many feminist lesbians who see lesbianism as refusing to participate in the socially and patriarchally imposed institution of heterosexuality (e.g.Rich,1980; Cameron,1990). For example, Clark(1982) argues that no woman is intentionally socialised to be a lesbian and yet lesbianism has always

existed as an act of personal resistance. What society attempts to do is construct the category, "circumscribe the meanings and limits" within which lesbianism exists and often resists(1982:32):

It is possible to separate oneself  
from the identity imposed by the  
society that has created the category...  
if that part of yourself is in direct  
and immediate opposition to the social  
cultural mores of society...The dichotomy  
between the outside image and the internal  
meaning allows the lesbian if she wishes,  
to move a considerable way in the direction  
of a positive self identity(1982:35).

Clark also acknowledges the need for a community which can provide security and support to a lesbian, although she believes this community should not be romanticised as perfect and necessary to all women. A group identity can reinforce lesbians both individually and collectively and yet can also contribute to "making radical feminist politics a closed system"(Fisher,1977:5). While it protects individuals from the "outside", providing a "buffer" or "escape-hatch", it is not in itself effective political action and has not seriously challenged patriarchal institutions. Indeed, lesbian group identity has alienated many women whose issues are considered irrelevant to or anti-feminism(1977:6-7), or who lack "white-skin privilege" and "class privilege" that make it easier for them to minimise the impact of patriarchal institutions in their lives(Smith & Smith,1981). In her personal essay, Chrystos analyses her past membership of a lesbian community and its "stricture

and censorship" of differences even in dress and hair length, and the "lies, pretensions, the snobbery and cliquishness"(1981:69). Hence, as with any community needed to provide acknowledgement and support to one's personal identity, there is the problem of rigid conformity and uniformity that becomes internal coercion as a means of resisting external social coercion. Such an issue is similar to that which arises in ethnic communities.

Ettorre(1989) discusses five ways lesbians are attempting to define themselves in this process of shifting from an emphasis on sexual preference to being woman-focused and combatting the false polarization of women by dividing them into heterosexual and lesbian categories. In so doing, she moves beyond social ascription of identity to personal agency and negotiation. First, lesbians may discard the "disease label imposed upon them by the psychiatric profession". Second, they may resist the "reversal" concept that asserted lesbians really wanted to be men. They might insist on "erasing the victim role" and not allow themselves to be controlled and thwarted" or submit to what Ettorre calls "Psych/Atrophy". Lesbians may also assert that there is a need for social change in the understanding of human possibilities rather than individual conformity to the "compulsory heterosexist order". Finally, they may become involved in "psychic deliverance and Amazonian asylum" where lesbians may heal and deliver themselves from the debilitating images rather than internalizing them(1989:205).

Feminist researchers such as Ettorre, some of whom identify as lesbians, challenge the previous traditional social definitions of lesbianism which focus on sexual behaviour rather than seeing "lesbian identity" as



involving emotional feelings and a psychological response to "social expectations and pressures...or the individual's own choices in identity formation"(Lockard, 1985:84-85). Lesbians may define themselves according to their subjective truth- "a lesbian is anyone who says she is"- thereby challenging traditional epistemologies by claiming that women's experiences and subjective understandings count as knowledge(1985:85). "Lesbian-feminism" is defined as incorporating the rejection of

the traditional female role in which women are seen only in their relationships to men. It...attributes primary importance to women"(Lockard,1985:86).

Homosexuality challenges definitions of 'the family' by broadening its conception of man in a dominant position over women and children, to different emotional and/or sexual ties between people of opposite or same sex(Moraga, 1986). The collective solidarity of lesbian-feminism has afforded opportunities for the destigmatization and normalization of lesbian identity(Wolf; 1980; Ettorre, 1980). "Women-identified women" are seen as committed to other women for political, emotional, physical and economic support. As Mendola writes in resistance of socially ascribed definitions, "the term 'sexual preference' is ludicrous and serves only to degrade a particular minority group...[as it] presupposes a lifetime of emotionless 'same sex' experiences"(1980:2).

Many radical feminist theorists see lesbianism as one logical personal response to a misogynist political system. Through this perspective, lesbianism is a political idea, a response to patriarchal structures and institutions. In this way, many heterosexual women who are not sexually

involved with other women may also call themselves lesbians, or as Moraga states, "Lesbians from the neck up"(1986:188). The "lesbian continuum" of Rich(1980) explains a range of women-identified experiences, and not simply genital experiences. It means the sharing of an inner life, the giving and receiving of practical and political support. Bunch(1978) defines lesbian feminist theory as a "perspective, analysis and commitment that can be embraced by anyone gay or straight, female or male, etc."(Ettorre, 1989:201). In all the above theories, lesbian identity appears to be personally constructed as well as based on some form of community acknowledgement and sharing.

An example of lesbian identity that encompasses far more than sexual preference is the lesbian separatist who retreats from the specific cultural contexts that have shaped her and attempts to build a cultural-political movement free from patriarchal oppression. Hawthorne(1976) outlines degrees of separatism ranging from valuing other women and engaging in women-only groups to living in an all-women environment without contact with men. Kitzinger(1987) distinguishes between liberal feminism which sees lesbianism as a choice of lifestyle and sexual preference from radical and lesbian separatist feminism which argues that lesbianism is a political rebellion against the institution of compulsory heterosexuality and will overthrow male supremacy. Despite such all-encompassing definitions that do not seem to allow space for internal difference, Kitzinger does acknowledge that "lesbian identity" is ultimately a woman's subjective definition although this approach does not fit with the political view. Again, the emphasis is on choice and community participation.

In this context, Weeks argues that there are "homosexualities" rather than a single "homosexuality", as all sexual identities are "ever precarious, dependent upon, and constantly challenged by, an unstable relation of unconscious forces, changing social and personal meanings, and historical contingencies"(1985:186). Richardson(1981), Darty and Potter(1984) and Golden(1987) also stress this interactionist approach by explaining the fluidity of personal agency and the socially influenced nature of sexuality and lesbianism. For example, for many self-declared lesbians who are not feminist, lesbianism is solely about interpersonal sexual and emotional relationships.

Some feminists such as Martin and Lyon(1972), Clark(1982) and Moraga(1986) disagree with the broad political definition of lesbianism:

A political commitment to women does not equate with lesbianism...What is true, however, is that a political commitment to women must involve, by definition, a political commitment to lesbians as well.

(Moraga, 1986:189)

Raymond(1986) stresses that for most lesbians, their identity does include sexual relationships and with these, the risk that comes from living in a homophobic world which upholds "heteroreality" or the belief that a woman's whole public and private life is in relation to man.

In summary, we can draw many parallels with the presentation of definitions, issues and arguments about ethnicity. Certainly, lesbian identity involves a greater degree of personal resistance to social ascription. It involves a relation to social forces determined to

suppress what is considered a threat. Nevertheless, the concern with the merits and hazards of community acknowledgement and participation are very similar. Epstein(1987) discusses this similarity in great detail. If we agree that ethnicity does not necessarily begin at birth, as "primordialists" try to claim, and if ethnicity involves some combination of external ascription and chosen affiliation, then a homosexual identity is similar to an ethnic identity. To be homosexual has indeed taken on a "quasi-ethnic status", legitimating the minority group so that it can demand protections against discrimination from the mainstream: "by appealing to civil rights, gays as a group have often been able to claim a legitimacy that homosexuals as individuals are often denied"(1987:20). And as with ethnicity, Epstein sees the need to transcend the essentialist/constructionist debate with its "false opposition" of choice and constraint and focus on the diversity of relations between self and society witnessed in ongoing fluid processes since birth. Epstein describes what he sees as a "peculiar paradox of identity politics":

while affirming a distinctive group  
identity that legitimately differs from  
the larger society, this form of political  
expression simultaneously imposes a  
"totalizing" sameness within the group...

He therefore argues for the need to appreciate internal  
diversity(1987:48).

### Chapter Three: DEFINING THE ISSUES: THE PERSONAL IDENTITIES OF WOMEN IN ITALIAN FAMILIES AND COMMUNITIES.

Having established the significance and interplay of social ascription, personal agency and community acknowledgement in identity formation, whether it be ethnic or sexual, it is necessary to see how these three factors have been presented in research conducted on women from non-English-speaking backgrounds. Are social ascriptions and community expectations presented as overriding personal choice, thus leading to conflict within the woman; or are women seen as exercising personal choice, negotiations and synthesis?

Before discussing the intersections of ethnicity, sexuality and gender in relation to lesbians from non-English-speaking backgrounds, I will consider how these issues have or have not been studied in heterosexual women from non-English-speaking backgrounds, since these women are the only ones openly acknowledged as existing in ethnic groups.

Finally I intend to focus on a particular ethnic group, Australian women of Italian background, in order to gain a more thorough understanding of researchers' divergences and convergences.

Section One: First-Generation Italian Migrants and Women's Familial, Sexual and Social Identities.

Beginning with a review of how Italian women's sexual and social identities have been analysed in studies of Italian families and peasant

communities in Italy, I will proceed to a discussion of how Italian migrant women's sexual and social identities in Australia have been presented by researchers.

Studies of Italians in Italy and migrant families in Australia, whether they be anthropological (Cronin, 1970; Huber, 1985); sociological (Tomasi, 1972); or ethnographic (Gambino, 1974), present 'the family' as a close-knit socio-economic unit, the centre of socio-cultural networks in which the individual is not as important as the family itself. The traditional rural family comprised a nuclear arrangement of husband, wife and unmarried children, and the extended family of kinship ties and godparenthood ties. Outsiders and all other social institutions were said to be regarded by the family with indifference, suspicion or contempt. "L'ordine della famiglia", the order of the family, as investigated by historians, had proven to be impenetrable to "sfruttamento" or exploitation by any "stranieri"- outsiders- in the form of economic, political, and religious institutions.

According to these studies, the central theme of family life was maintaining family honour, "l'onore della famiglia". Authority within the family was distributed according to age and sex; parents controlling unmarried children and males controlling females. Honour and shame, "onore e vergogna", were the two poles of social evaluation. Behaviour was regulated by "what will the neighbours say". "La bella figura" and "la brutta figura", the displaying of honourable or dishonourable behaviour in public, were the standards of measurement (Huber, 1985). Hence, the community and public opinion acted as a "court of reputation" resulting in a high degree of conformity in personal identity. For

women, honour and reputation centred around virginity, femininity and domesticity. Young girls were trained in skills necessary to become "sistemate", settled and competent in their roles as wives and mothers. Here, we see the integration of social ascription and community acknowledgement reinforcing a woman's "proper" roles.

Certain studies have also attempted to look beyond popular misconceptions of Italian men and women. Sexuality was not seen by the peasants as abhorrent and evil, but as a "relentless and irrepressible force" in both men and women to be harnessed "in ways that permitted the fulfillment of the irresistible drive for pleasure" while simultaneously preventing it from wrecking familial and social disorder (Gambino, 1974:169). Although it may seem women adopted an attitude of subservience to their husbands in the public sphere, they were the central unifying force in the private sphere. Since power and success were dependent on the status of the family, and women were the vital determinants of a family's honour and prestige, women were relevant and important in almost every crucial facet of their society (Cronin, 1970; Gambino, 1974).

The work of Goddard with Italian women takes a further step in the study of honour and shame, and women's sexuality. It argues for a high degree of women's agency or manipulation of social ascription and community acknowledgement. Women are not simply seen as passive but also as a source of danger. They may "serve as agents for social boundary definition and as 'pawns' in the hands of others", but they are the ones who "ultimately decide how and when to 'allocate' their sexuality."

Women are seen as possessing "power " to "subvert the relations through which they are controlled". Thus, while they are socially ascribed and communally acknowledged as sexually "passive", women are also viewed in terms of their potential to be "predatory"(1987:188-190). Goddard claims the reason for why women are seen and allow themselves to be seen in such a contradictory light is their importance in group formation, their centrality in the home and community.

By the very process of their control by men and their relegation to and identification with the domestic sphere, women are in a unique position to provoke a crisis within the group.

They are "boundary markers and carriers of group identity"(1987:180). Thus, they do have a high degree of agency and power within the group or community, a power and agency that exists because of the concepts of honour and shame, and the contradictory nature of women's sexuality as both passive and predatory.

Italian migrants' outward modes of religious practice have been misinterpreted to signify a great devotion to their Church. The institution of the Church was viewed with suspicion, particularly in Southern Italy, as it was the largest landowner whose clergy acted like the propertied upper class. Moreover it was deemed as exploiting the ignorance and powerlessness of peasants. Of significance to this study is the Church's role as promoting familial and communal unity and identity, and reinforcing social values, through sacramental celebrations such as baptism and marriage, and other village-centred festivities(Gambino, 1974; Cohler and Grunebaum, 1981).



Hence, 'the family' was promoted and defined by religious as well as social and political institutions. When 'the family' is analysed in depth, certain studies have found a model of intra-familial interdependence rather than independence is evident. Likewise, the individual was not totally subjugated to the family. Indeed, the success of the individual was very important for the family. Both boys and girls could resist parental authority and yet remain closely tied to the family for security and stability, although girls were punished more than boys. My oral history study reveals many instances of active and passive resistance to parental and communal laws by Italian women from the time they were adolescents. Rather than being mere victims of social and community expectations and coercion, they were also active agents in matters of education, life choices, choice of marital partner, and social/sexual behavioural codes. Migration to Australia intensified this independent attitude or sense of personal agency(Pallotta-Chiarolli, 1988). However, the family was the "one enduring institution within which the individual finds [whatever is needed] ...to aid him[/her] in his[/her] pursuits"(Cronin,1970:23). Here are the positive contributions a community can make in bolstering the individual while simultaneously threatening to dictate what a member of that family or community must be.

Italian families and communities in Australia have also been subject to studies that ascribe identities to them constructed by the media and post-war Anglo-Australian sociological research. An example of this is the construction of the "recognizable Italian identity". Historical studies show that Italy as a political entity was not unified until the

1860s and Italians are conscious of a high degree of socio-economic and resultant cultural division between North and South. Italians are strongly tied to their regions and "paese", village, as exemplified by numerous linguistic dialects and regional cultural modifications (Lewins, 1976).

Another ascribed and constructed identity is of the Italian migrants as refusing to shed traditional culture. Many commentators (e.g. Storer, 1981; Huber, 1985; Favero and Tassello, 1986; Martin, 1986) have examined the reasons for this ascription and have noted that Italian migrants' isolation from the development of their culture in Italy led to their holding on with great tenacity to value-systems of the 1940s and 1950s that are no longer valid in most of Italy and Australia. However, these studies should not be read as implying that all Italian-Australians have remained culturally fixed in outmoded value-systems, or that all elements of these value-systems are negative and need to be erased. My analysis of Italian-Australian adolescent girls reveals rigid gender differentiation of the maternal and paternal roles are loosening. Fathers are taking a greater interest in their daughters' personal and professional goals. Moreover, they are increasingly communicative and willing to discuss issues with daughters. Parents in this study are not devout practitioners of Roman Catholicism and appear to be passing on this secularization of religious faith to their offspring. The highly regional rather than national identity of Italian migrants is still upheld and recognized by the daughters. A high level of intergenerational communication and identification seem to be common, and many traditional cultural traits are valued by the daughters (Pallotta-Chiarolli, 1990).

A third socially determined misconception is that Italian women do not participate in unions, school activities or the community generally because their husbands do not let them. Employers and unionists often agree that migrant women are male-dominated and declare that this is the reason for the failure of migrant women to participate in union affairs. This submission to patriarchal authority is often cited as the reason why their participation in the women's movement is virtually non-existent. Kalantzis(1990) argues that this view is stereotypical, assuming that because migrant women do not "speak the language of feminism" as it is defined by women of power and privilege, their lives are not indicative of feminist action. Kalantzis believes the "practical struggles of many immigrant women are akin in critical spirit and outcome to feminism itself", involving "self-transformation" via assuming elements of the new culture and retaining what is powerful and positive in traditional women's culture(1990:39).

As part of the construction of 'migrant' and 'ethnic' as homogeneous groupings, migrant women are all placed in one category with little or no indication of their richly varied cultural, political and religious backgrounds, which must inevitably affect their attitudes and behaviour in Australia. Pieri, Risk and Sgro explore these beliefs and ascriptions, arguing that

migrant women...are prevented from fully participating in life in Australia by the whole process of migration, with its resultant problems and insecurities, its frustrations and alienation (1982:389).

While facing all the problems that confront women generally, migrant women have the additional problems of communication and isolation which must be recognized and resolved before they are free to participate in community life. At work, the pressures and speed of their jobs prevent close communication and unionists are distrusted because too few have made real efforts to reach their migrant members. The great geographical distances, work commitments and high travel costs have made it difficult for them to be aware of the social changes in their own countries and so they may cling to rigid values and traditions such as "strict parental supervision of daughters; perpetuating the stigma attached to loss of virginity and pre-marital sex; holding conservative attitudes regarding divorce and abortion"(1982:397). Pieri, Risk and Sgro may be seen here to be positing Italian women as passive victims of social and community forces in Australia without acknowledging the diversity of experiences. In modern Italy, they conclude, attitudes toward sex and the family are evolving and becoming more flexible and women display a greater agency in determining their socio-cultural and economic lifestyles. Hence, in becoming a part of the Italian community in Australian society, Italian-Australian women's personal identities are seen as differing to those of women in Italy where feminism has become a relevant factor in personal and social identifications.

Vasta's research results support the claims of Pieri, Risk and Sgro(1982) that rather than Italian patriarchy keeping Italian women from participating in community affairs, the significant factors are the problems of isolation and loneliness due to migration, Anglo-Australian and structural racism, and Anglo-Australian structural patriarchy. Vasta's claims are open to criticism as they appear to suggest that

Italian patriarchal control is not existent and that all coercion is external. She does add two further points of resistance to Pieri et al's assumption of Italian women's struggles as class struggles(1991:162). Vasta claims that Anglo-centrist perceptions construct migrant women as passive and thus oppressive to themselves, thereby ignoring the diversity of these women's experiences, as well as the strengths and "strategies for survival and resistance to authority" used by them "in negotiating and manipulating an alien environment to their own advantage"(1991:164). For many women, families are sources of political and cultural resistance to racism, having chosen not to assimilate with their discriminators. They developed from within family forms their own forms of resistance as well as accommodation, relying on their own practices and traditions which appear far more relevant to them. Hence, Vasta asserts that traditional practices "froze with them not only because of the need for continuity, but also because Italian migrants were defined as an inferior minority group"(1991:173). Unfortunately, she does not enter into a discussion of Italian women's social and sexual relationships with Italian men. Nevertheless, her work illustrates how social ascription leads to a personal identity relying far more on community and familial acknowledgement, even if this may be problematic in some ways.

Romano also investigates the effect of social ascription on Italian migrants. They often accept the host society's "choice of pieces of our culture" and the way they interpret them: that their culture is patriarchal; that Italian men are "wife-beating male chauvinist pigs"; that Italian women "are weak, helpless wimps who obey any male without question"; and that both Italian men and women are "either jolly and

cooking or fighting and throwing things"(1990:2). Her poems reveal the strength and agency Italian women have within their homes and communities. In "Explaining Again", she writes

...On one side, men  
are small, dark shadows hunched in the  
corner, quiet and useless, ...

... All across the stage, the women are  
big, loud, always moving, determining  
reality in the kitchen...Doesn't the woman  
announce what will be done, only waiting  
graciously until the man finds a way  
to make it look like it was his idea?(1990, 29)

Several researchers reflect Romano's perception. Mediterranean women had a great deal of leverage in the domestic sphere, a clear identity and sense of sisterhood, and primary support from a wider family. In Australia, a bourgeois definition of family life as nuclear may have enclosed and isolated women. They become "individualised in an alien and fragmented environment". Only some benefited from the opportunity for "individual freedom"(Bottomley,1984: 107).

In summary, it becomes obvious Italians in Italy and Australia have been constructed by sociologists and the media in ways that tend to misinterpret the sexual, social and familial relationships between men and women, parents and offspring. Italian women in traditional cultures in Italy and as migrant women in Australia occupy multiple identities and positions within the family, community and society. These identities are not static, and rather than being solely subjected to external forces, identity formation is based on personal struggles and

resistances "wherever and whenever possible, [to] hegemonic constructions of them"(Vasta,1991:177).

Section two:Second-generation heterosexual Italo-Australian women and their positions within two cultures- 'Cultural conflict' or 'cultural complementarity'?

I have outlined how migrant women from Italian background have been studied, and the influence of social ascription, community acknowledgement and personal agency in both the formation of their identities and the manner in which they have been seen by researchers. Before proceeding to investigate the personal identity formation of lesbians from non-English-speaking backgrounds, it is necessary to summarise the studies on second-generation Italian-Australian women which, although never specifying the sexuality of their subjects, appear to imply heterosexuality. By focusing on a specific ethnic group such as Italians, we can see women from one group have been categorised and positioned within 'cultural conflict' or 'cultural complementarity', and utilise this data to inform our study of lesbians from various backgrounds.

Second-generation non-English-speaking-background women face at least three possibly coercive (that is, authoritative and restraining) forces: migrant home and ethnic community; the wider Anglo-Australian society; and more recently, Anglo-Australian, predominantly bourgeois feminism. Each has its own set of powerful discourses, interacting with others to form intricate codes of meaning associated with terms such as

independence, moral codes, value systems, self-esteem, education and career aspirations, child/parent relationships, sexuality and the concept of womanhood. The women negotiate within this interplay of gender and ethnicity in determining their personal identities.

Four major presumptions have been applied to second-generation girls and women seeking to define their identities. These assumptions are reflected in social science research, socio-political policies and educational theories, as well as by the media. First, "children of immigrants will become Australians and will need to be seen as Australians" after being "freed from the environment of their Italian homes"(Borrie, 1954:152). Hence, second-generation girls are conceived as "problems" and their ethnic backgrounds "problematic" in contrast to any perspectives which might recognise possibilities such as bilingualism, biculturalism, adaptability and a commitment to Australia's future(Cahill and Ewen,1987).

Second, there is the stereotype that second-generation women will be torn between two worlds as they embrace Anglo-Australian values and reject the conflicting culture of their parents. Guilt, emotional insecurity and psychological trauma would ensue and permanently scar their lives. This closed framework has been challenged for overlooking

how much of the discomfort about being part of a NESB community is a response to media images..., peer group pressures, ethnic discrimination, and the 'normal' dilemmas of...[adolescents]challenging parental authority(Tsolidis,1986: 64).



Bottomley(1991) believes that constraints and oppressions are also based on class, gender and other variables such as the size and knit of kin groups, rather than solely being due to the ethnic culture of a woman.

Third, any cultural change or shift occurring in both Italian parents and daughters is presumed to represent moves toward an acceptance of superior Anglo-Australian views. This overlooks three facts: that no culture is static- that there is no uniformity within a culture but instead a range of personal, familial and communal locations- and that similar changes are occurring in Italy and throughout urban post-industrial societies "as the forces of cultural pluralism, feminism and liberalism gain precedence"(Taylor, 1976:133).

Fourth, the bourgeois, Anglo-Saxon feminist framework of "universalism" assumes that second-generation Italian-Australian girls want to be like their Anglo-Australian peers and perceive their peers to be superior role models of modern, liberated womanhood. This assumption is questioned by other feminists, particularly non-English-speaking-background feminists. As Kelly and Ciccarelli write, feminists must be aware of two erroneous assumptions: "that bicultural girls succeed despite their background" and "that there is inevitable conflict" between parents and daughters(1984:9). A more recent study shows that it is not "necessarily contradictory for Italo-Australian girls to broaden their career choices and espouse feminist principles, while valuing their cultural background"(Pallotta-Chiarolli, 1990:6).

The intersections of personal identity, ethnicity and gender related to second-generation Italian-Australian women mainly appear in four types

of research. First, there are theoretical, empirical and ethnographic studies of immigrant youth in Australia with little or no attempt to specifically consider the girls in their Italian cultural context, although valuable insights into second-generation socio-cultural status and experience are provided (Storer, 1976; Tsolidis, 1986). Second, empirical research and ethnographic studies of Italian migrant families and communities have been conducted that provide glimpses of the lives of these women rather than specific studies from their perspectives (Cronin, 1970; Bertelli, 1980). Third, there exist theoretical and empirical studies of the Italian second-generation without specific reference to the experiences of women (Bernardi, 1982;) or where gender is unspecified implying that experiences of boys and girls from Italian backgrounds are the same (Favero and Tassello, 1986).

Fourth, there are a few specific empirical and action research studies of Italian second-generation girls, mostly within the 'cultural conflict' model presupposing conflict with parental demands, and the girls' need to break free from negative, damaging ethnic backgrounds (Vasta, 1975; Greco, 1976). Recently, studies have appeared that attempt to explore bicultural girls in the process of cultural negotiation and synthesis instead of presuming they experience "trauma" and which look at the sexual values of the girls and women (Gucciardo, 1987; Pallotta-Chiarolli, 1989a, 1989b, 1990). No studies of second-generation Italian-Australian women, or men for that matter, incorporate homosexuality, even where sexuality is a key issue of discussion, as in the abovementioned recent studies.

It would seem that a pervasive element of most studies of Italian-Australians presume that 'cultural conflict' is a pre-eminent feature in the personal identity of Italian-Australian women[see Appendix A for a diagrammatic representation of the model]. It defines the hierarchical system of differences between dominant cultural norms and ethnic cultural norms. The women "live in two worlds" and experience a "double generation gap"(Taylor, 1976:5). Ethnic parents are seen as inferior and ignorant in the wider society and thus offspring will deny their ethnic background. They will be caught between competing authoritative sources and experience confusion. Nevertheless, some sociological theorists are able to perceive that the dilemmas are not due to just the ethnic background but also the rejection, prejudice and stereotyping of the Anglo-Australian society(Banchevska, 1974; Edgar, 1980). As Kalantzis writes,

they become caught in the intersection of a double racism...being stereotyped as ethnic and morally backward by the dominant group, and being warned by parents of "Anglo-Australian" cultural and moral 'looseness'. Will they become victims of assimilation or acquiescent dupes of traditionalism?(1990, 51).

Social ascription and community acknowledgement are generally seen as more powerful than personal agency in personal identity formation. For example, Greco, Vasta et al speak of the "double disadvantage" of being female and ethnic, and their sense of belonging to "neither" the Italian or Australian "set". The woman is a "marginal individual" with "emotional growth and striving towards independence" "stifled" by a

repressive background(1977:26). Greco uses the theoretical framework of Child(1943) based on his study of Italian-American men and women to explain how Italian-Australian girls can respond in one of three ways to cultural conflict: rebel and "sever self-identification" with Italians; become "in-groupers" and reject "host society patterns and identifications"; or become "apathetic" and avoid any "ethnic concern" or identification(1976:123).

The 'cultural conflict' model was prevalent in the 1950s to 1970s when assimilationist and Anglo-conformist discourses had not yet given way to discourses of cultural diversity, pluralism and multiculturalism. By the mid-1980s, mainstream social service agencies were being criticised as monocultural, deficient in dealing with the complexities of ethnicity and gender (Karanastasis, 1984; Loro,1984). The 'cultural conflict' model also led to negative forecasts concerning the future of Italian-Australians and the maintenance of Italian culture. For example, Bertelli predicted "the emergence of serious intergenerational conflicts...at a faster rate"(1980:5).

In contrast to this 'cultural conflict' model is the 'cultural synthesis and choice' model. During the 1970s, a few sociologists began to speak of a two-way interchange, of two or more ways of life, language and traditions, gradually approaching each other(Smolicz and Secombe, 1979:15). Taylor(1976) was one of the first sociologists conducting empirical research on Italian-Australian girls which queried the inevitability of conflict. In the 1980s, the 'cultural conflict' model came under increasing attack(Singer, 1987).

In this setting, Young, Cox, et al(1983), in their demographic study, find second-generation adolescents asserting themselves as 'bi-ethnics' and without fear of intrafamilial alienation. Similarly, the Girls and Multicultural Education(GAME) Report(1984-85) states that girls are applying a selective process in order to define their self-identity and personal feminist frameworks. Gucciardo's respondents no longer consider themselves marginalised or conflict-ridden, but are learning to "synthesize...the more valuable elements of biculturalism", extracting "the best from both worlds"(1987:3). She accords this development directly to the theory of multiculturalism and the "sensitization" of the Anglo-Australian society to the fact that cultural difference is not "undesirable"(1987:3).

In 1988, I conducted a qualitative questionnaire study of twelve Italian-Australian women in their late twenties in regard to the issues of ethnicity, gender and sexuality. The women had gradually achieved a position of synthesis as reflectors of Italian traditions and experimenters with Anglo-Australian mores, giving them lucid insights into the flaws of both groups(Pallotta-Chiarolli, 1989a, 1989b). In 1989, I undertook another qualitative questionnaire study involving twenty-five sixteen and seventeen year-old girls and found they were experiencing less cultural conflict and undertaking more cultural choice in sexual, career, familial and social issues and values than the women in their late twenties had done as adolescents. Far from seeing themselves as disadvantaged or inferior, they perceived their positions to be positive and fulfilling(Pallotta-Chiarolli, 1990). The study appeared to suggest that personal agency is as powerful or possibly more powerful than community acknowledgement and social ascription.

It appears that as the paradigm for inter-ethnic sociocultural and gender relations has changed over the last few decades, this change is reflected in individual attitudes to inter-ethnic and intergenerational relations. Figure One, Paradigm A, [see Appendix A], represents the monocultural and assimilationist attitudes and policies of the 1950s to the mid-1970s. Together with the beginning of the Anglo-feminist movement in the late 1960s, they led to the ethnocentric and stereotypical images of Italian migrants and families. Moreover, the insecurity of being in a different society and the strong unifying tradition led to an insulating effect and the establishing of a subculture based on a system of differences to the host culture. This system of differences was also based on ethnocentric and stereotypical images of the Anglo-Australian society. The second-generation either felt coerced to comply to the codes of one world at the expense of the other, or experienced a sense of being split between the two worlds and not being able to combine the two.

Since the beginning of the 1980s, arguments for cultural synthesis have been put forward, revealing changes in research paradigms as well as the structural features of Australian society. Multicultural, pluralist attitudes and policies of the host society, together with an emerging pluralist discourse within feminism, has resulted in decreasing ethnocentrism and stereotyping of Italian migrants and their families within research as explained in Section One of this chapter. Moreover, the establishment and familiarisation of the Italian migrants in Australia has led to a greater confidence in allowing change in their offspring as their views of the Anglo-Australian society become less

ethnocentric(Gucciardo, 1987; Pallotta-Chiarolli, 1990). The second-generation have or make a choice of the precepts of both worlds. Figure Two, Paradigm B in Appendix A illustrates how personal identity thus involves a negotiation between both worlds and, based on an understanding of the 'whys and wherefores' of both worlds, selections of personal value-systems and identity concepts are made.

On this issue, Angelico discusses how a coherent set of meanings can emerge from diverging sources of reality. A "clarification process" occurs where meanings are identified, irrelevant meanings are discarded, meanings considered to be of value are retained, and new meanings are incorporated. There are many advantages to this multiplicity of identities such as "exposure to a broader range of possibilities" which provide more "options to choose". Also, "potentially conflicting situations can be a stimulus for self challenge and growth" rather than necessarily being a "liability"(1989:9). Andreoni(1991) supports this view that there are times when identities will clash but having diverse insights and perspectives assists in the eventual "working through" of these times.

Nevertheless, the question that precipitated this dissertation remains unanswered despite a reasonable amount of theoretical and empirical investigation into the personal identities of second-generation Italian-Australian women. Are lesbians from ethnic backgrounds taken into account when discussing the shifts in paradigms and social thinking from "cultural conflict" to "cultural complementarity"? Are their situations even considered when exploring the "options" and "possibilities" available in personal/sexual/cultural identity formation?

Before endeavouring to respond to these questions, we need to review what responses feminist research has made to issues concerning the intersections of ethnicity, gender and sexuality.



#### Chapter Four: FEMINIST RESPONSES TO THE INTERSECTIONS OF ETHNICITY, GENDER AND SEXUALITY- FROM 'UNIVERSALISM' TO 'UNITY IN DIVERSITY'?

How do feminist researchers and feminist theories respond to the intersections of ethnicity, gender and sexuality in women's personal identity formation? Issues relating to women must be analysed with reference to commonly shared experiences and attitudes and also a multitude of differences constructed with reference to ethnicity, race, class and family background(Eisenstein, 1984; Skelton, 1986; Pettman, 1989). As Smith and Smith state, "it is really radical to be dealing with race and sex and class and sexual identity all at one time"(1981:126). Rather than advocate "universal feminism", it becomes possible to speak in terms of what can be called "pluralist feminism". In this way, our aim becomes to create an Australia

where being a female will cease to be a disadvantage, and being from a minority ethnic culture will cease to be a double disadvantage(Tauscher, 1984:4).

The hegemonic stance of Anglo-Australian feminists can prove to be just as ethnocentric as patriarchal Anglo-Australian cultural hegemony(Sitz, 1986). Noble(1986) writes of the insidious devaluing of culture and "anglicizing" of non-English-speaking background girls occurring under the term "liberating".

Additionally, Pieri, Risk, and Sgro(1982) believe that the women's movement in Australia still does not reach the bulk of working class women, to which most non-English-speaking background migrant women

belong. The bourgeois bias and ethnocentrism in the women's movement may be exacerbated by concerns with ideological purity and fear of divisiveness in confronting powerful and established traditions (Bottomley, 1984). Other feminists such as Martin point out the minimal attention to multiculturalism within feminism. What she calls the "female versus ethnic" opposition in her view is inappropriate for feminism(1991:125).

Anthias and Yuval-Davies(1983) and Guvendrini(1985) also call for a more inclusive feminism which allows for and is responsive to a range of women's needs, as defined by the women themselves, within the mainstream movement. "Sisterhood" is certainly a misleading concept unless contextualized, yet the very use of the word "mainstream" implies a hierarchical model of significance. Feminists like Martin discuss this insidious important/less important differentiation and believe the pluralism or diversification of feminism has potential traps. It could, she argues, increase marginality and not resolve the question of the domination of Anglo feminists. "Anglo feminism continues at the centre...as the point of reference for difference"(1991:126). Any current methodological forms eventually display this bias. Certainly, as I explained in Chapter One, Section Three, our language for discussing difference is still describing hierarchical difference as in the use of the word "mainstream". Martin can only suggest some methodological "do-nots" such as not comparing oppressions, and avoiding theoretical modes that deploy assumptions about the universal and specific and which thus still define a hierarchical relationship between the dominant and the subordinate specific(1991:131). It appears that terminology which does not imply hierarchy and dominance is yet to be devised.

Despite calls for inclusive feminism, the intersection of lesbian sexuality, gender and ethnicity has rarely been taken into account in Australian studies. Only in the last few years has the abovementioned intersection been specifically addressed by feminists as well as the need to highlight that being a lesbian from an ethnic minority culture should cease to be a triple disadvantage(De Ishtar and Sitka, 1991).

In the American context, Moraga writes that no major change is possible if feminism keeps "some of us silenced, and makes us keep others silenced" for any "movement built on the fear and loathing of anyone is a failed movement"(1986:190). Feminists must understand that what constitutes sexual conformity and sexual defiance in one culture and ethnic community, and how it affects values, attitudes, and lifestyle, may differ from sexuality with a "white-rooted" or Anglo-Saxon interpretation(1986:183). Moraga also believes that Anglo-feminists often fail to recognise that "women of color" are not just anti-racists but often have "a real belief and commitment to the integrity" of their own race and culture(Sorrel,1982:5).

Feminists from non-English-backgrounds also face reactions from members of their own ethnic communities who may define their political actions and ideologies as "Anglo-feminist". Moraga explains, "We are the colored in a white feminist movement. We are the feminists among the people of our culture"(1981:23). This situation with Chicana feminists has been well-documented. Sections of the Chicana community in the United States attacked feminists within the community for developing an "Anglo-inspired" "divisive ideology" which would undermine Chicano(a) unity by

raising an issue that was not a central one and would undermine values associated with Chicano(a) culture such as the family (Garcia, 1990). Chicana feminist lesbians experienced even stronger attacks, being labelled "vendidas" or "sellouts", assimilating into feminist-lesbian ideology of an alien culture. In this reversal of ethnocentrism, an ethnic community ascribes fixed stereotypes of Anglo-American feminism to its own women, thereby depriving them of community acknowledgement and power. Garcia summarises the results of the struggles of the seventies and early eighties by pointing out the personal agency and resistance of Chicana feminists to both ethnic community and Anglo-feminist ascription:

Chicana feminism went beyond the limits  
of an exclusively racial theory of oppression  
that tended to overlook gender and also  
went beyond the limits of a theory of  
oppression based exclusively on gender that  
tended to overlook race(1990:426).

The Chicana women have developed autonomous feminist organisations that simultaneously address the struggles of Chicanas as members of an ethnic minority and as women. They also come together for political purposes with the Anglo-feminist movement if racial and class differences are understood and respected.

"Women's culture" exists within the contexts formed by race, class, geography, religion, ethnicity and language. "White" feminism may not integrate the concept of "the simultaneity of oppression" as Third World feminism is attempting to do.

When Anglo-American women speak of

developing a new feminist or women's culture, they are still working and thinking within an Anglo-American cultural framework(Moschkovich,1981:83).

For, if race and color can be as oppressive to women as sexual identity, then "white" feminists must see themselves as oppressors due to their position within the dominant culture, and consider how men in subordinate cultures may suffer more than them. Anglo-feminists may see male power and the family as oppressive while 'black' feminists may see racism as the main oppressor and the family as a source of resistance, economic and emotional survival (Fisher, 1977; Curthoys 1988). In imposing their viewpoints on black women, Anglo-feminists run the risk of being perceived as "imperialists" and members of "just another elitist, prurient white organisation" (Davenport,1981:89). For example, Hooks believes that rather than pretend there is no racial conflict among women, we need to work through it in order to move beyond it. NESB women's strengths and strategies of resistance are often excluded in white Anglo feminist thought which focuses on shared victimisation. There is a need for disagreement and difference if the feminist movement is to grow.

We do not need to share common oppression to fight equally to end oppression...We can be sisters united...in our appreciation for diversity(1986:40).

'Black' feminists have challenged what they see as a "bourgeois individualistic theme" in mainstream 'white' feminism. For example, the emphasis on participation in the paid labour force and escaping the

"confines of the home" may seem foreign to black women who "would readily have accepted what they saw as the 'luxury' of being a housewife"(Dill,1983:133). Similarly, "sisterhood" for 'black' feminists often comes out of the extended kinship networks rather than being established as a political contrivance among women who may have very little in common. There is also a feeling among many 'black' feminists that white women will abandon their 'sisters of color' in favor of self-preservation if the situation presents itself(Dill,1983:136). Hence, Dill and other 'black' feminists argue for the abandonment of the concept of sisterhood as it is a "global construct based on unexamined assumptions about our similarities". A more pluralistic approach that recognises and works within the differences between women needs to be substituted (1983:146). Difference is "a fund of necessary polarities between which our creativity can spark like a dialectic"(Lorde,1981:99). The ensuing interdependency forges powerful connections to work more effectively for change(McCormack, 1988).

Aboriginal feminists in Australia also tend to believe that the Australian women's movement is irrelevant to Aboriginal women since 'white' women are unable to confront their own racism and understand the intersections of class, cultural/familial background and gender in Aboriginal women's lives that do not necessarily mirror their own(e.g.Sykes, 1984; Huggins, 1987). For example, Aboriginal women are statistically better educated and better employed than Aboriginal men and are more likely to be heads of household and political leaders (Burgmann,1982). Fesl(1984) and Bell(1987) believe Aboriginal women have always maintained a separate powerful sphere from men, as witnessed in ritual, and rather than operating on a notion of the battle of the

sexes, the emphasis is on dialogue with Aboriginal men to combat common concerns such as racism and classism. Sykes believes the "recruitment" of Aboriginal women to the Australian feminist movement is "to dress up the argument of the women's movement as it seeks more power and control for white women" rather than for the purpose of "seeking solutions to problems in the black community". The "trickle down theory" describes the fragments of power and control black women will gain along the way, a by-product of 'white' feminism (1984:66).

More general discussions of the intersections of ethnicity, sexuality and gender appear to indicate how some feminists see postmodernist influences in feminism as a threat to the increasing voices of Third World and other non-Anglo feminists. Just when non-Western peoples, including women, have begun to speak for themselves and challenge "global systems of power differentials", Western thought, predominated by Western white males, now decides that there is no truth and undermines the status of the subject just as women and non-Western peoples have begun to claim themselves as subject. Therefore,

postmodern theorising can be understood  
as socially constructed itself,...the sense  
of the dominant that the ground has begun  
to shift under their feet...[and it] may  
work to preserve the privileged position  
of Western white males...[and] exclude  
feminism(Mascia-Lees,et al,1989:16-17).

On the other hand, postmodernism encourages women to "tolerate and interpret ambivalence, ambiguity and multiplicity"(Flax,1987:643). It has helped feminists argue that women's inferior status is a product of

cultural and historical construction but the danger is that in deconstructing categories of meaning, "we deconstruct not only patriarchal definitions" but also the categories of feminist analysis such as "feminism" and "oppression"(Mascia-Lees et al,1989:27). Difference may be erased implying that all stories are about the experience of decentering and fragmenting faced by white Western males. Multivocality, by claiming an equality of voices, may deny the existence of exploitation and power differentials and so women must be suspicious of postmodern claims and apply some of its own methods of inquiry onto itself such as who speaks it, for whom, and for what purpose(Mascia-Lees et al, 1989:29).

However, the postmodernist debate is just a part of feminist theory. Feminism is not a "unitary category which encapsulates a consistent set of ideas within a readily identifiable boundary"(Griffin, 1989:174). Broom(1987) states that this expectation is unrealistic given that feminism is now a worldwide political and intellectual movement drawing upon and emerging from the specific socio-cultural, political and economic conditions of each society. The resultant "theoretical heterogeneity" can be an asset rather than a liability and feminists have to make it so. Adams also believes feminists need to explore the power of diversity and yet avoid its "mirror image", the "powerlessness of fragmentation"(1989:28). By moving away from identity-based organising, feminism can choose allies on the basis of their political commitments, not according to their ascribed identities. This belief has been widespread amongst 'black' feminists and other non-English-speaking background feminists. For example, Smith and Smith, in discussing the narrowness of separatist politics, state that what is really radical is



trying to make coalitions with people  
who are different from you...The more  
wide-ranged your politics, the more  
potentially profound and transformative

(1981:126-127).

Thus, feminists need to be aware that there are no clearcut delineations between non-feminists, anti-feminists, and the various feminist identities. By believing there are such clearcut delineations, feminists may be internalizing patriarchal attempts at dividing women through neat categorization.

As Rowland(1984) writes, a major division is that between lesbians and non-lesbians. Some heterosexual feminists may display heterosexist thinking and behaviour instead of broadening their perspectives to another form of discrimination and social ascription. Some lesbians may see heterosexual women as collaborators with the enemy. Writers like Adrienne Rich(1980) and her "lesbian continuum", as discussed earlier in this dissertation, have done much to extend the definition of sisterhood and love between women.

Hence, this study may be perceived as working within the "lesbian continuum" framework as an attempt at blurring the divisions between lesbian and non-lesbian women. It seeks to empower lesbian women in voicing issues such as the intersections of ethnicity, gender and sexuality alongside the voices of heterosexual women.

In summary, it is possible to identify feminism's growing awareness of and active responses to the issues concerning NESB women and 'women of

colour' in the theoretical shift to 'unity in diversity' from 'universalism'. What remains to be investigated is to what extent this pluralist feminism considers the multiple intersections of ethnicity, sexuality and gender in lesbians from non-English-speaking and non-white backgrounds.

## **Chapter Five: LESBIANS FROM NON-ENGLISH-SPEAKING BACKGROUNDS.**

When analysing the interviews and available material on lesbians from ethnic backgrounds, both within the 'cultural conflict' and 'cultural complementarity' models, there are two sets of converging factors as established by the preceding theoretical discussion: the intersections of ethnicity, gender and sexuality; and the roles of personal agency, community acknowledgement and social ascription in personal identity.

In order to thoroughly investigate the above, the following study will be subdivided into three main areas of daily experience for the lesbian. First, the lesbian woman's relationships with and participation in her ethnic family and community; second, her participation and experiences in the wider Anglo society; and third, her participation and experiences with the predominantly white, middle class, Anglo-feminism. The socio-economic class of the lesbian is also considered within each category, particularly when discussing the situations of Third World and Black lesbians.

The voices of many women from various backgrounds will be provided in order to give an intercultural point of reference to the similarities and differences of experience. Simultaneously, the voices of four Italian-Australian women in Adelaide (identified in this study as Caterina, Luisa, Silvana and Melina) will provide an intra-cultural example of the diversity of experience within one culture.[See Appendix C for information on methodology].

Before proceeding with the analysis, it is necessary to provide some relevant background information on the four Italian-Australian women. Three of the women were in their late twenties and the other was in her early forties. Occupations varied: social service, clerical, business ownership, postgraduate studies. Their parents had migrated to Australia from Southern Italian rural areas. Hence, by seeking a high degree of sameness of Italian background, I was interested to note the diversity of opinion and experience amongst these women.

#### Section One: The 'Cultural Conflict' Model and Lesbians from Ethnic Backgrounds

This model constructs lesbians from ethnic backgrounds as victims, experiencing alienation and assimilation, caught and coerced by the dominant culture, ethnic subculture, and homosexual and/or feminist subcultures. Or, as Dykewomon writes, one is made to feel "an outsider among outsiders" even when one possesses a "sense of self that is strong" and a "clear understanding" of available choices(1982:153). Hence, social identity construction is prevalent rather than an active personal identity construction. In other words, the woman feels coerced by social group expectations and condemnations rather than feeling able to exercise personal agency in selecting her own personal identity. The 'cultural conflict' model would state that lesbians feel compelled to negate their lesbianism to participate in their ethnic communities, or negate their ethnicity in order to participate in their lesbian communities. They would feel outside the mainstream society due to their varying degrees of ethnic and lesbian identification and the lack of

available role models that have openly and successfully dealt with their three-pronged dilemma.

I feel caught between two irreconcilable worlds which should be able to exchange the benefits of the respective cultures but, because of their priorities, cannot do so at the present time(Rivera, 1978:226).

Luisa explains the compartmentalisation in her life:

I don't particularly like it...I go to work and I automatically change. When I'm at home with my parents I'm their daughter and aware of the way they see me. Then I'm amongst lesbian women..., and heterosexual friends that know, and heterosexual friends that don't know, and I'm literally different all the time. Sometimes they feel like they clash.

Silvana believes she has a great deal of control over her life choices and situations and yet also experiences what she calls "clashes":

if I'm visiting my family, then there is a definite clash between the side of me that's related to women, and the side of me that wants to be with my family. And I'm forced to remove one hat in order to wear the other. I cannot live both at the same time...There are times at a women's event where I'll want different music to dance to, or to talk about my father and our relation-

ship around separatists.

In reviewing the available studies, personal essays and theoretical papers, it appears that most perceive lesbians from ethnic backgrounds within the 'cultural conflict' model. Baetz writes of this conflict in terms of "violence" in a "culturally constructed minefield" perpetrated by few role models, lack of writings in ethnic literature, racism in the lesbian community and heterosexism in the ethnic community. The question of whether to 'come out' and risk jeopardizing their effectiveness in the ethnic movement, their family's support and standing in the community, and then find themselves "thrown out" into a racist society positions the woman in traumatic conflict(1984:45-48). For example, Smith writes of the "isolation and alienation" she experiences in her black cultural world, dominant white world, and the predominantly white lesbian world(1984:73).

Jewish-American lesbians, as investigated by the essays in Beck's anthology Nice Jewish Girls, add anti-Semitism onto their agenda of what constitutes this conflict with both the dominant Anglo-American society and the Anglo-American lesbian-feminist subculture. "Jewish invisibility is a symptom of anti-Semitism as surely as lesbian invisibility is a symptom of homophobia". Invisibility of any component of the self has a "trivialising, disempowering and ultimately debilitating effect" and each group has absorbed some of the myths and distortions about the other(Beck,1982:xv). For example, Berkovitch finds herself pressured to conform to her family's perception of her gender role of a "nice Jewish girl" as educated, married, maternal; and pressure to conform to leftist, feminist and homosexual movements' perceptions of needing to

throw off ties with the Jewish community and deny Jewish heritage(1982:30). Rich speaks of

too many disconnected angles: white, Jewish, anti-Semite, racist, anti-racist, once-married, lesbian, middle class, feminist, exmatriate Southerner, split at the root: that I will never bring them whole. . .if you really look at one reality, the other will waver and disperse... I feel the history of denial within me like an injury, a scar...(1982:83).

Similar to these examples of cultural conflict in Jewish lesbians, Caterina feels that even if she was not a lesbian, she would still be rejected by her Italian family "because I'm not your traditional Italian young woman. I'm not in the pretty little box that they want me to be." Similarly, Luisa states her father always told her she would soon divorce if she got married because of her refusal to accept traditional gender roles and regulations.

An empirical study conducted within the 'cultural conflict' model is Espin's questionnaire study of sixteen Latina lesbians. It reveals the dilemma of "how to integrate who they are culturally, racially, and religiously with their identity as lesbian and women" in a sexist, heterosexist and racist American society, sexist and heterosexist Latin culture, and racist and often heterosexist feminist movement. Identity development thus "frequently demands the submerging of different fragments of the self"(1987:35-36).

Yet, despite such strong coercive forces acting on the women, lesbians do pursue varying forms of lesbian lifestyles. The 'cultural conflict' model does not incorporate into its theoretical branches the idea of the "victim" actually exercising degrees of personal agency in the form of resistance and rebellion against community expectations and negative acknowledgements, and against social ascriptions and stereotyping. This drawback will become apparent in the following discussions for even as the women discuss the conflict and divisiveness experienced, they are alluding indirectly to the fact that they have exercised some level of personal agency in still identifying as lesbian. Caterina expresses this very clearly:

You can't look at lesbians and say, "You poor thing, it's difficult." It has its difficulties but I wouldn't change the way I am... At the moment, I don't feel free to be me. I can't go dressed the way I want and I have to put up with sexist men...[but] I can't put on a costume, put on another face, and be another person. You lose yourself totally and I've seen what happens and I'm not going to do it.

For a more specific investigation, the three domains of women's daily reality will now be studied separately.

a) Conflict with Ethnic Family and Community

Lesbians are not womanly enough,



not Madonna or puttana enough,  
to be recognized by the Italian-  
American community.

. . .  
I'm standing now and I'm speaking  
yet I am neither seen nor heard.

(Romano, "The Fly", 1990:40).

As this example from an Italian background illustrates, some ethnic families and communities may still uphold rigid role specifications for women: as "womanly enough" to sexually satisfy men within the context of marriage; to be good mothers or "Madonna". Even to be "puttana" or engaging in numerous sexual relations with men is understood although not condoned. Yet, a woman who may be none of the known categories may be rendered non-existent or impossible. Families may continue to coerce a woman into taking on one of the acceptable or known roles even if she has 'come out' about her lesbianism. For example, Caterina feels that her parents hope she may one day get married and have children. "Being a young woman, and not being married, I have no standing at all. If I married, I'd get a bit more respect". Although Silvana has 'come out' to her family, when she became involved with a man inbetween lesbian relationships, her parents began to think her lesbianism was a "phase" after all, and hoped she would get married. This problem is well documented in regard to Jewish lesbians. The Jewish religion and traditional culture "confine and define" women in marital and maternal roles as guardians of the family. For Jewish law, lesbianism is an impossibility(Beck, 1982; Gottlieb, 1983). In her play, The Gay Divorcee, Fischer shows her protagonist Gretel reminding her mother over

the telephone she will not "find a nice Jewish boy" and is not interested in the successful sons of middle class Jewish relations. Nevertheless, Gretel feels guilty that her mother will not have any grandchildren(1990:7).

Examples from other ethnic communities support this conflict between traditional gender role expectations of women and lesbianism. In her research, Hidalgo(1984) found the highest degree of nonacceptance in the Puerto Rican community was experienced by lesbian mothers. Moraga believes lesbianism and homosexuality challenge the very foundation of "la familia" for the Chicano(a) community. Lesbianism is the most "visible manifestation of a woman taking control of her own sexual identity and destiny"(1986:182). This statement reveals that an open declaration of one's lesbianism is seen as a resistance to women's gender role expectations, therefore an act of personal agency that is negatively acknowledged by the community.

As Collins writes, "the sex/gender hierarchy functions smoothly only if sexual nonconformity is kept invisible"(1990:194). She cites Jordan's contention that the male bias in the Black intellectual community has used the notion of Black lesbians to discredit Black feminism. Thus, second-generation males in ethnic communities who are working for their cultures' rights may hold traditional sexist values about women's roles and may find lesbianism a convenient argument to deter ethnic women from feminist resistance to traditional women's roles. Garcia argues that Chicana feminist lesbians experienced strong attacks from the intellectual leaders of the community who viewed feminism as a divisive ideology that confronted the images of Chicanas as "good wives and good

mothers"(1990:423-424). As lesbian women of color, such as Cherrie Moraga, published their writings in the 1970s and early eighties, attacks against them by ethnic leaders, including women, increased. As stated earlier in this study, Chicana lesbian-feminists were labeled "vendidas" or "sellouts" for melting into white society and dividing the Chicano(a) movement.

Responses to this negative community acknowledgement are to pursue a separatist strategy within their own ethnic communities, form lesbian coalitions across racial and ethnic lines, or continue to work within broader ethnic movements and the feminist movements within them in order to challenge heterosexual biases and homophobia. These actions again highlight a degree of personal agency within cultural conflict in refusing to remain silenced within their ethnic communities by adopting one or more strategies to circumvent the sexist and heterosexist attitudes of the ethnic community.

Thus, it appears that second-generation lesbians in Australia may have been raised within a strong cultural, historical, political heritage that allows no room for difference. Rainone writes of the "crippling effects a strong community has on dissenters, progressives, and visionaries" as she witnessed in her Italian-American community(1987: 344). As stated earlier, lesbianism may be interpreted as resistance or rebellion to ethnic heritage and culture:

All those childhood stories of resistance,  
courage, bravery, of sticking together,  
holding on to beliefs, each other, life,  
struggling against people who wanted to take

everything away, starting again in another country twice- I'm proud of it all but...I want to let go of it all- I want to be free and float beyond the world of why...

(Fischer, 1990:26).

It may also appear to be a betrayal and ingratitude to the sacrifices and difficulties their parents have been through in order to establish economically secure and educated lives for their daughters. Caterina says of her parents, "they're starting to get old and sick and I can't make their life more of a misery for them. It would be the worst thing that could happen to them." Luisa feels "they've always done so much for me and want to do so much" that she could not "shock" them with her lesbianism, and so she "will do anything to please" her parents "at the expense" of her partner or her lesbian identity. As a Chicana lesbian states in Baetz's collection of personal accounts in Lesbian Crossroads, it is "disrespectful" to say to her parents

'Look, I'm a lesbian, and you're going to have to deal with it.' I don't have the right to do that. They've been through so much in their lives about being Chicanos and living in this society. They've just taken so much shit that I won't do that to them

(1980:244).

Moraga also believes that a lesbian is seen as a "traitor to her race" by contributing to the "genocide" of her people. Homosexuality is a white man's disease and the lesbian is "the white man's agent" in destroying the minority culture(1986:184). Jewish lesbians may be seen as promoting anti-Semitism because their identities and actions are

"impossible" within Jewish law(Klepfisz,1982b :47). Again, we see several examples of personal agency in the form of resistance to these ethnic group and gender expectations.

Lesbians may also need the closeness of family, friends, neighbours "to share in the commonality of ethnicity for surviving in a blatantly racist society"(Shockley, 1979:135). This issue particularly applies to Third World and Black lesbians (Cameron, 1978; Elizarde, 1979; Chrystos,1981; Lockard, 1985) who may not want to risk the total rejection by families and community on whom they rely for strength and support, and often economic security in a white, racist, patriarchal society(Carmen, Gail, Shaila, Pratibha, 1984). Others fear the pain of ostracism from positive elements of their ethnic culture:

The idiosyncracies of our families, our  
relationships to food, our hand gestures  
and body mannerisms, our humour - all felt  
like home. I miss that language, that  
shared knowledge which needs no explanation

(Mennis, 1982:93).

Kaye/Kantrowitz speaks of the "visceral tug" of family and her Jewishness as "a leitmotif in and out of my brain"(1982:30).

Lockard(1985) found that Mexican-American lesbians did not join the predominantly white lesbian community of Chicago but preferred to set up their own networks within which they could maintain a strong sense of ethnic identification and culture, despite being closeted or ostracised from the wider Mexican-American community.

Frequent contact and a strong interdependence among family members, even in adult life, are essential features of many ethnic groups; so the threat of possible rejection and stigmatisation becomes a heavy psychological burden. Espin(1987) found that Latina families tend to treat lesbian daughters or sisters with silent tolerance: no open acknowledgement but no denial of a place in the family either. Caterina's parents call her "the different one". Although she feels they know of her sexuality as they have met her women-friends, disapprove of her hairstyle and living away from home, they do not ask her about her sexuality. Silvana, whose immediate family are well aware of her lesbianism, spoke of excuses being found to explain away her lack of interest in marriage and motherhood, such as her being too intelligent or too dedicated to her work. Indeed, her immediate family have not even told relatives that Silvana has left home. "As far as they know, I've been living there for the last ten years." Shockley believes that Black lesbian writers need to live in their black communities and need the support against the racist wider society, and thus often do not write about "negating misconceptions and fallacies" but live peaceably within their communities by writing about "what is socially acceptable"(1979:135).

If lesbians from ethnic families decide, with great difficulty it appears, to live openly as lesbians, they usually move away from their ethnic families and communities, as did all four of my participants from Italian-Australian background. Espin labels this an "ambivalent choice" as many are "extremely unhappy" at having to forfeit much of their cultural background in order to live lesbian lifestyles (1987:47). In discussing her moving away from her Indian community, Valerio explains,

It is hard to be around other people talking about their lives and not be able to talk about your own in the same way. It causes a false and painful separateness.

She sincerely believes in the sturdiness and healthiness of extended families and feels "lucky to have been touched by such a situation while growing up"(1981:44).

Other lesbians welcome the chance to negate their ethnic culture as it has brought only unnecessary pain for them. Hence, cultural conflict has led to the negation of ethnicity in order to live out one's sexuality. Caterina sees the Italian community as "insulated", "trapped in their own culture", and her extended family being an added burden:

if I could just deal with [coming out] to my immediate family, that would be one thing, but then I'd have to deal with all the cousins [and] Mum also has to put up with what the rest of the family say about me.

Thus, she concludes,

I'd love to totally deny my Italian background. I could still have a cappuccino and a pizza...[but] I feel much more comfortable not being involved with Italians.

Again, throughout the above discussions, the active negotiation of ethnicity, sexuality and gender is apparent, albeit often accompanied by

pain and ambivalence. Individual women who want to locate themselves within their communities and families as well as maintain their lesbian identities openly or secretly, negotiate a position of least discomfort from which to do both.

The decision to keep her lesbianism secret or undiscussed may be based on the second-generation Australian woman's awareness of how unfamiliar homosexuality is to her family and thus an acceptance that she may be confronting them with a lifestyle choice that they do not possess the knowledge or skills to deal with. As Luisa states, "it wouldn't even be in their vocabularies, in their minds, to think that sort of world exists, especially for their children". Shockley(1979), Mays(1981) and Espin(1987) discuss the difficulty that ethnic community members may have in understanding what homosexuality or lesbianism is, as they were never mentioned in their traditional societies. This lack of comprehension aids in "fueling the flames of animosity and misinterpretation" (Shockley, 1979:134). For example, the black community constructs lesbianism as a white, middle class problem, and so it is viewed with distrust and contempt, and as part of the dominant culture's classist and racist oppression and potential fragmentation of minority cultures. It is "unfortunate that oppression is not a good instructor". Victims of oppression will resort to "intolerances and persecutions" in dealing with others in their own groups "who are different and whom they do not understand" and from whom they feel a threat to the strength and survival presumed to come from homogeneity (Clayborne,1978:458). For instance, black heterosexual women may be very reluctant to examine their own homophobia. A major reason for this silence is that heterosexual privilege is usually the only privilege



black women have(Smith, 1983; Collins, 1990). Clarke also believes they fear risking the displeasure of homophobic males with whom they unite on anti-racist issues. "Black bourgeois female intellectuals practice homophobia by omission"(1983:203). She talks about Bell Hooks' famous book Ain't I a Woman: Black Women and Feminism which seems to purposely ignore the existence and central contributions of black lesbians to the feminist movement."Ain't lesbians women too?" asks Clarke in analysing the fears of alienating the black community and the bourgeois political/intellectual establishment women such as Hooks reveal(1983:205). Thus, black lesbians become the "outsider/within" (Collins, 1990:194). Barbara Smith offers another reason: the "attraction-repulsion thing". Ethnic women speak out against lesbianism because "if they don't they may have to deal with their own deep feelings for women"(Smith and Smith, 1981:124). Lorde also stresses the idea that the Black lesbian is "an emotional threat only to those Black women whose feelings of kinship and love for other black women are problematic in some way"(1984: 49).

Indeed, this raises another issue for lesbians who are dedicated to "leading the community in obtaining its goals" and so have decided their private lives remain closeted or given second-rate attention(Rivera, 1978). In her ten-year interview study of over six hundred Puerto Rican lesbians, Hidalgo(1984) found many lesbians were involved in political organizations and although these organizations may have accepted their lesbian lifestyle, they were frequently asked to remain in the closet because their organizations believed that open identification of gay members would hurt its political goals. Another revealing finding was the high number of closeted Puerto Rican lesbians in positions of

leadership in many of the most respected and established institutions and organizations. Espin(1987) believes it can be assumed that the professional experiences and educational levels of Hispanic lesbians will tend to be higher than that of other Hispanic women, as they are unencumbered by motherhood and marriage. This status and prestige within their communities, and their ability to serve the needs of their communities, would be easily threatened if their lesbianism was revealed. Yet, it must be noted that these women did not actually negate their lesbianism as the 'cultural conflict' model's concept of the victim would indicate, but negotiated a position that allowed them to maintain two identities that were both important to the women: as lesbian, as ethnic community leader.

Another issue that needs to be explored as contributing to the conflict lesbians may have with their ethnic communities is the preponderance of traditional religious beliefs within some communities. An option may be to totally negate their religious upbringing as Caterina has done:

"Until it can accept women, I can't see why it is important in my life". Luisa also went through a phase of negating her strong religious beliefs until becoming involved in the Catholic group for gay men and lesbians and their allies made her feel that God was calling her again, saying, "Hey, you don't need to be away from me because I love you the way you are". Melina and Silvana see themselves as very religious and spiritual, but having discarded the Catholic "man-made" "dogma". In regard to the experiences of black lesbians, Clayborne believes the religious beliefs of the Black communities are a major factor for the widespread homophobia. The church's influence remains considerable because blacks have "long depended on their faith for sustenance in difficult times and

guidance in their day-to-day existence"(1978:459). Clarke believes black Americans have tried so hard to "debunk the racist mythology which says our sexuality is depraved" that they have overcompensated and assimilated the Puritan values of sex as heterosexual and procreative(1983:199).

b) Conflict with the Wider Anglo Society

The white super culture...continually seeks  
to erase my individual freedom to be  
different...The brown community feels the  
awful terrifying pressure and transmits  
urgent messages to me to blend, hide, retreat,  
in order to survive...by any means necessary  
including self defacement, self negation, and  
the allowance of powerlessness

(Canaan, 1981:236).

This quotation illustrates how lesbians from non-English-speaking backgrounds may feel coerced to conceal or negate their sexuality and ethnicity in the wider community and how their ethnic communities may internalise this pressure. Hence, social ascription is a major factor in the 'cultural conflict' model as it supercedes or determines personal agency. As Caterina explained, "so many people are cheated and conform to social brainwashing. There'd be a lot more difference...if they were free and safe to be who they wanted to be". Luisa finds it difficult to acknowledge her lesbianism as "a good part" of her because of the way society portrays it and stereotypes lesbian women: "I don't like their ideas of it being put onto me".

Romano analyses her insignificance in the wider Anglo-American society despite her holding all the "right" credentials.

I speak the right language.  
I follow the right customs.  
I dress in the right clothes.  
I believe in the right religion.  
I earn a good living  
(for a woman).

( "All My Life", 1990:34)

Nevertheless, her Italianness and lesbianism both render her insignificant. Even when one of the two is acknowledged, the other will be stereotyped or caricatured, as she presents in the poem "Vendetta":

I'm tired of being assured by  
know-nothing non-Italians that  
every women's bar in the  
entire history of mankind  
has been owned and operated  
by the Mafia

(1990:42)

Eva Johnson, an Aboriginal playwright, presents her lesbian protagonist facing the same issues in the monologue "Alison":

pissed off at having to always justify  
my Aboriginality  
to everyone-  
because I don't live in the bush,  
because I have a relationship with a woman,  
because I own a house,

because I won't be patronized,  
because I don't sell out for a well-paid job,  
because I look as if I have my shit together,  
(1990:141-142).

Combinations of economic, racist, sexist and heterosexist oppressions are the major reasons why lesbians from ethnic backgrounds do not emerge within the "outside world"(eg.Elizarde, 1979). Beck details the limits that the dominant culture places on "otherness". One can be Jewish and recognized as an ethnic "other", or one can be lesbian and recognized as sexually "other"; but if a woman tries to claim both identities publically and politically, she is "exceeding the limits" of what is "permitted to the marginal"(1982:xiii). Patriarchy is one of the major forces that fragments the loyalties of those who belong to more than one minority group. This fragmentation disempowers the woman, coercing her to choose between aspects of her identity to present to the wider society.

Racism or anti-Semitism come from the wider society; social ascription in the form of media stereotypes and caricatures of homosexuality come from the wider society. As Romano writes, "According to the media, both mainstream and alternative,... we're all such wonderful lovers, there aren't any Italo-American lesbians or gay men"(1990:2). Both racism and heterosexism are internalized as negative by the lesbian and her ethnic family and community leading to further discrimination, prejudice and rejection. Hence, the lesbian faces alienation from the wider society which feeds its social ascriptions to the ethnic community, which internalizes them, adds them to their own repertoire of reasons for

repression, and ostracises the lesbian as well if she 'comes out'. Thus, to deal with the racist and heterosexist hostility of the wider world, lesbians may conceal their sexual identities from their ethnic communities where at least they can receive a greater warmth and support without dealing with racism and ethnocentrism(Mays, 1981; Quintanales, 1981; Berkovitch, 1982; Lockard, 1986; Espin, 1987).

Te Awekotuku from New Zealand recalls her attempts to be involved in the wider Anglo society's world were "shrugged off" even within radical political organizations. "Apart from being Maori, good god! I wasn't even a real woman!"(1984:118). Likewise, to avoid "additional oppression where unnecessary," Clayborne writes of the belief amongst black homosexuals that although they may be active in the wider society's campaigns for gay rights, once these rights are secured, "blacks will still have to contend with racism while white homosexuals will be free of any oppression"(1978:463).

Thus, it is evident that cultural conflict with the wider community stems from two factors: the social ascription and stereotyping that imposes identity labels on lesbian women from non-English-speaking backgrounds; and the effect of this ascription on the women's ethnic community who internalise the messages received from mainstream sources in regard to lesbianism and thus place added pressure on the women. A crucial situation would be where the ethnic family members' only knowledge of homosexuality has come from heterosexist media presentations.

Nevertheless, the personal agency of these women cannot be denied for they are still maintaining an ethnic and lesbian identity in resistance to, or circumventing, wider heterosexist and ethnocentric social attitudes.

c) Conflict with the Predominantly Anglo-feminist Movement.

In her poem "The Fly", Romano examines her precarious position within the American lesbian-feminist movement:

Italians are not Olive enough,  
not light or dark enough,  
to be recognized by the American  
Lesbian community.

I'm standing now and I'm speaking  
yet I am neither seen nor heard.

(1990: 40).

This is an example of cultural conflict where the lesbian community may not positively acknowledge the woman's ethnic identity and indeed imposes another form of assimilation on her. Members of this community may have internalised racist or ethnocentric attitudes that posit lesbians from ethnic backgrounds as outsiders. Melina no longer sees herself as part of the "feminist movement" precisely because her past experiences left her feeling like an outsider.

I don't have a lot of respect for quite a  
lot of the women in the so-called 'women's  
movement'...Most of them were fairly  
narrow in their outlook and the only  
women who lived, as far as they were

concerned, as far as their blinkered eyes  
could see, were white Anglo-Saxon women,  
of educated middle-class backgrounds...

Silvana describes the lesbian-feminist movement as imposing a "fishbowl syndrome" on herself and other lesbians from non-English-speaking backgrounds. At women's events, they feel like they are in a "goldfish bowl" with other women "looking at you, peering in at you, and you tend to feel a little exposed". They become objects of curiosity due to their ethnic backgrounds just as in a heterosexual setting their lesbianism might evoke the same "fishbowl syndrome".

However, we must be aware of the reversal of ethnocentrism that leads to lesbians from ethnic backgrounds constructing a homogenised picture of white feminists and/or white lesbians. De Ishtar is a lesbian of Irish background who does not want to be included under the label "Anglo" and she speaks of the diversity within the "Anglo-Celtic" group- Irish, Scottish, Welsh(1991:10). The diversity that exists within the Anglo-feminist movement needs to be recognised, and indeed rarely is acknowledged by many of the researchers and essayists that will be cited in this section. An "us" and "them" situation is still being perpetuated that can only contribute to the sense of conflict. Luisa presents this "us/them" dichotomy in several statements, such as,

Australian lesbians just don't realise  
how strong our culture is and how much  
it means to us...I feel out of the  
lesbian-feminist movement because I'm  
not what they would accept. I don't look  
like the norm-feminist. They set up their



own rules and if you don't fit in, like  
shaving the legs, shaving under the arms,  
some of these women create more barriers.

By virtue of her race, the Anglo/white lesbian may have a certain power and privilege, and resources, that may facilitate her visibility and socio-political effectiveness. She may have family connections, education, and time to generate a body of lesbian-feminist ideology or build a support network through volunteer activities. Lesbians from Third World and Black backgrounds may not even have women's centres, a body of literature, or human resources to generate visibility and support structures (Mays, 1981:76). For example, Romano talks about the feeling that "big sister is watching you". Having little or no power beyond their community, lesbians with power within their community often abuse it, developing their own definitions that still coerce women into specific categories that suit white women's needs:

I look white, therefore I am white...[and]  
assigned wasp history and culture...It means  
that whatever problems I have that might be  
caused by anti-Italian bigotry are of less  
significance...If I am Olive, if Italo-Americans  
have suffered oppression, my story deserves space  
in a lesbian literary journal (1990: 1-3).

She reviews three novels about Italian-American lesbians that have been published by the lesbian press. Each falls into one of three categories allowed by "lesbian censorship": all problems are blamed on the male-dominated Italian culture; racism in the lesbian community only occurs against black lesbians; and Italian-American lesbians are white and

middle class, and therefore ethnically insignificant. In attempting to publish her own poetry that often honours her family and ethnic community, she is often told that her Italian-American values are "feeding into negative stereotypes"; that poems protesting against anti-Italian bigotry are racist; that Italian-American images should be made acceptable to the "majority culture", and that independent immigrant women appear in her writing because she has been influenced by Anglo-American images (1990: 8).

Lesbian communities' acknowledgement of women could both threaten as well as affirm individual constructions of identity. As with any other minority group, efforts to achieve solidarity and cohesiveness often conflict with efforts to foster individuality and internal diversity. Women may become alienated and disillusioned with lesbian communities because of unrealistic expectations of mutual support and idealistic views of "sisterhood". Melina experienced this disillusion:

"They[lesbian-feminists] get around and write their papers and say all these wonderful words...but if I fall over or pass out, they'll keep walking...because we're all so alienated". Instead, she finds her models of "sisterhood" in the Italian women from peasant backgrounds who "love each other, who are there when your bum needs wiping, who will be there to put their arms around you and hold you... When you kill the pig, everyone comes and helps you...That is sisterhood to me." Silvana also feels marginalised in the feminist-lesbian movement, and disillusioned by the concept of "sisterhood":

I'm disillusioned with a lot of feminist women and their politics... 'Sisterhood is bullshit'...because there are women who

aren't sisters and will never be sisters.

Exclusion, alienation, and coercion to group norms become apparent in lesbian communities (Krieger, 1982; Lockard, 1985). They may demand conformity and commitment as much as ethnic communities do, and thus may place the lesbian from an ethnic background, such as Luisa who felt the lesbian-feminist movement had its own regulations, in a situation of coercion from two strong communities. For example, Rainone finds lesbians "policing one another's behaviour", dress and values. The previously quoted section from Luisa also commented on this, as does her following statement:

I like dressing up...You know some lesbians go out of their way not to look like a feminine woman. Whereas I prefer to keep that femininity..., another reason why I feel out of that lesbian-feminist movement.

I'm not what they would accept.

Melina also felt coerced to conform to feminist and lesbian-feminist "rules": "I'm not into Fascism and I'm not into uniforms, and I'm not into ghetto lifestyles." And it was her refusal to assimilate or passively retreat from the women's groups that caused her to be "thrown out" of a women's studies course and become alienated from the feminist movement.

Lesbians in communities may have so little in common and instead of acknowledging and utilising this diversity, they may force each other into sameness; a sameness not acceptable when discussing an ethnic community and yet it is set up artificially in a lesbian community. "Our

problem is how to recognize our diversity and still feel enough connected to one another to work together" (Rainone,1987:349). Chrystos also believes the "superficial rules" of lesbian communities result in "stricture and censorship". Throwing off "the outer trappings" of their cultures has not led to new joys but rather dissatisfaction with one another, "lies, pretensions, the snobbery and cliquishness"(1981:69). Thus, in doing away with the need for ethnic community acknowledgement, lesbians may find their personal identities moulded by the positive and negative acknowledgements from a lesbian community. Again, personal agency is undermined or seen as a threat to group stability. Silvana speaks of how Anglo-feminist-lesbians often feel "threatened by cultural differences and become defensive." Assumptions were made about the way she responded, behaved, and the way they should behave with her. She could see this happening to other women from different ethnic or Aboriginal backgrounds, or in the way migrant women were being spoken about in feminist circles.

Espin's study found that reliance on support groups in an "Anglo context" only increases the invisibility of the lesbians in their Hispanic community as well as leaving them vulnerable to discrimination from Anglo-lesbian communities. Even when they believe

it is easier to be Cuban among lesbians than it is to be lesbian among Cubans, they do not feel fully comfortable not being both...However, because of the realities of racism and heterosexism that they have to confront, they are forced to choose for their lives those alternatives



that are more tolerable or less costly to them (1987:48).

Davenport outlines the dilemma:

When we attend a meeting or gathering of theirs[lesbian community], we are seen in only one of two ways: as being white-washed and therefore sharing all their values, priorities, and goals..., or if we mention something particular to the experience of black women we are seen as threatening, hostile, and subversive to their interests(1981:86).

However, despite this pressure to assimilate to group expectations, the above statements reveal the women's agency in challenging such prescriptions of identity, albeit with the potential for difficult outcomes. They "choose" alternatives, and speak out at lesbian community meetings despite the risk of hostile reactions.

Lees(1986) theorizes that because feminist ideals frequently clash with cultural practices, the call to respect cultural patterns uncritically is problematic for feminists. For example, Arnup(1983) believes that if emphasising the importance of 'coming out', radical lesbians may contribute to the guilt and frustration experienced by women who decide they are unable to be open about their sexuality. Luisa has experienced this coercion in groups:

They[Anglo-Australian lesbian-feminists]  
just think, 'What's wrong with coming out  
to them[family]? They'll be alright, they'll

get over it eventually'. It was bad enough  
just moving out of home.

She has also experienced this with past Anglo-Australian partners,  
causing a painful feeling of divided loyalties:

It just used to frustrate her[my partner], make her  
angry to the point that she would take it  
out on my family and then I would find myself  
protecting my family after I'd put them down.

A greater sensitivity to all issues involved and the need to respect  
personal choice are therefore required.

According to Smith(1984), lesbian separatism and cultural feminism only  
work when the more stringent realities of class and race are either not  
operative, because everyone involved is white and middle class, or when  
these realities are "ignored or forcibly denied". Lesbian separatism may  
not be useful for poor and working class white women, nor the majority  
of women from ethnic backgrounds because, "in attributing the whole of  
women's oppression to one cause, the existence of men (or of  
patriarchy)", it tends to leave out many other forces that oppress women  
who are not economically or socially privileged(1984:84). White lesbians  
often accuse lesbians of color of being "man-identified" rather than  
understanding these women's concerns with issues of race. Another issue  
that lesbians from ethnic backgrounds find contentious in lesbian  
separatism is the idea that it is politically effective to work on  
racism or any other system of oppression solely within a women's  
movement context. Smith(1984) stresses that working on these problems  
only with other feminists is not going to substantially affect the power  
structure from which these problems spring. The Combahee River

Collective stress their "solidarity with progressive Black men...around the fact of race...which white women of course do not need to have with white men, unless it is their negative solidarity as racial oppressors"(1981:213). In her research, Hidalgo(1984) also found that Puerto Rican lesbians often subordinate the lesbian issue to devote more energy to fighting oppression based on race and ethnicity. These actions are felt to be misinterpreted by white middle-class lesbian-feminists as lack of interest and responsibility in feminist issues. The problems of the Puerto Rican community often seem contradictory to the goals of the white, lesbian-feminist movement(Rivera, 1978).

Although helping to destroy the stereotypical role of women with regard to men, feminism may not be concentrating on destroying the stereotypes that women place on other women because of their ethnic or racial backgrounds(Elizalde, 1979; Canyon Sam, 1982; De Ishtar and Sitka, 1991). Silvana is very aware of the stereotyping of Australian women from non-English-speaking backgrounds as ignorant of homosexuality. She recalls an incident at a women's meeting on trade unions and labour issues:

There was a big plenary session and lesbians were getting up and saying, 'We have to talk about these issues of sexuality' and the migrant women were standing up and saying, 'We've got more important things to talk about'. And these Anglo women were turning around and saying 'But what do you know? Do you really know what lesbian issues are about?' And one Greek woman stood up and said, 'Have you ever

heard of Lesbos? This is not an Anglo island.

It's not an Anglo world we live in'.

Bulkin discusses the anger she feels when, as a "feminist academic, community activist, progressive Jewish", she has to remind other women that "we were there", and recognizing the concerns of lesbians from ethnic backgrounds as serious, and "not a divergence from the 'real' issues"(1984:146). Being black and lesbian may mean being on the outside of feminist academia:

It is time for Black lesbians to stop internalizing our own invalidation. A feminist culture without our voices will be as limited and limiting as the culture it is trying to be an alternative to (Birtha, 1982:149).

Elizarde believes that when dealing with white feminist groups, lesbians from ethnic backgrounds should always introduce themselves with their ethnicity:

you are saying, 'Just because I am lesbian like you doesn't mean that I want to be swallowed up into your white feminist culture (1979:71).

She also advocates the "herstorical" search by feminist academics for lesbian women within various cultures in order to validate and provide the necessary sense of affirmation. Hidalgo(1984) found that Puerto Rican lesbians experienced more overt racism from the Anglo- gay community than the wider society. Although lesbians had faced difficulty in raising their issues in heterosexual women's groups, they do not appear to empathise with ethnic women's efforts to have racism



discussed. In her study, Lockard finds ethnicity is a significant factor in not belonging to the lesbian community. Mexican-American lesbians maintain their own social networks. Cultural and linguistic differences, plus a history of prejudice and discrimination, have created a barrier that is "not overcome by the bond of common sexual preference"(1985:92). Beck recalls her experience of having given "a great deal of energy to the lesbian-feminist movement", but when deciding to find out whether she would be accepted "as a Jew", she was "terribly disappointed and confused to feel invisible" and discriminated against because of her claim to Jewish identity(1982:xviii). As she questions,

Need one oppression cancel out another?

Would the recognition that it is not either/or

but both/and be too overwhelming? What would

happen if we admitted that oppressed groups

can themselves be oppressive?

(1982:xxii).

The values of family and the strong sense of belonging felt in an ethnic community may not found in the white lesbian-feminist community. There may be no place for a NESB lesbian to share her music, language, food, cultural values. Her "white sisters" may advocate the creation of their own family structure without understanding the importance of existing families:

I may be looked upon as unliberated by

lesbian feminists, and would like not to feel

as totally obligated to my family as I do,

but I ultimately don't want to lose that sense

of family identity as much as my white sisters

do (Rivera,1978:226).

Luisa believes that many Anglo-Australian lesbians are "loners", without their biological family and "no others", and she "could not understand how they survive like that". She believed a group of lesbians could not be a replacement for her family. Rainone finds it difficult to belong to any lesbian community because the Italian-American values, customs and beliefs are different and sometimes "antithetical" to those of Anglo-American lesbian-feminists(1987:349). In the questionnaire issued to nine hundred black lesbians, Cauthern(1979) found 82% felt alienated within white lesbian communities, were treated as a novelty, sought as lovers because of the stereotype of their sexual prowess, or were used as tokens or symbols of the white lesbian's liberalism.

Although a lesbian from an ethnic background may adopt the predominantly white lesbian community as her support system, she may do so at the expense of integrating her lesbianism with her ethnicity, leaving her fragmented. Due to this "cultural" or "racial" conflict, ethnic minority lesbians and black lesbians such as Audre Lorde write of the need for establishing their own support networks, and of role modelling on each other:

silence has been a burden laid upon us...  
creating a lack with which we all struggled  
...I do not wish to share in laying that  
same burden upon my younger black sisters  
who search for some word intimating, Yes,  
indeed we did exist (1978:222).

In her public letter to Mary Daly, Lorde writes

When radical lesbian feminist theory dismisses

us, it encourages its own demise...[and]makes  
it far easier to turn away from you completely  
than to attempt to understand the thinking  
behind your choices...(1981:96).

Smith also writes of this need to establish black lesbian networks that  
will provide an oasis amidst the conflict and coercion from the black  
community and the white lesbian community:

There are subliminal nuances of communication,  
shared fixations on reality, modes of expressing  
oneself, and ways of moving through the world...  
in relationship to the dominant culture.

Women need to turn to each other as "potential allies"(1984:72-73).

Alice Lee, co-founder of the Chinese Lesbian Group in 1983, writes how  
wonderful it was "to be able to say exactly what you wanted without  
having to explain a whole history of colonialism and racism and so  
on"(1990:338). Quintanales believes it is "admitting failure" when she  
says "only other Latina, bicultural lesbian women can satisfy my needs",  
but it is not only a "personal failure" but a failure of "millions" in  
ethnic minority enclaves" and thus a significant indication of failures  
of white feminism and the wider society as well(1981:148). However, the  
"pain of ethnic invisibility" and "the perils of 'passing'" as white are  
too pronounced not to warrant a seeking out of other Latina lesbians  
with which to form a new community and "family"(1981 :151). Luisa  
believes that forming a support group of Italian-Australian lesbians  
would be very useful:

only they can really understand what  
it's like, not only being a lesbian but  
being an Italian lesbian and how our family

background is so strong, the culture, the religion, all of that.

She was glad that she had one other Italian-Australian lesbian as a close friend as they could support each other. Silvana also found that having another Italian-Australian lesbian as one of her closest friends was very important. From the moment they were introduced by mutual friends, they "grabbed hold of each other and hung on":

We spent night after night just talking about the way we related to our families and our backgrounds".

Her partner is also of European background and Silvana finds they understand each other's negotiations with family. For example, they will visit their families separately but at the same time so that the other is not left feeling isolated at home.

Again, we see how the conflict with the predominantly Anglo-feminist movement and what may be its community expectations and ascriptions actually leads to personal agency in locating and identifying with support groups of women from one's own background. Thus, assimilation to both Anglo-feminist and ethnic communities is achieved through resistance and actively establishing one's own support networks of other women who also want to incorporate elements of both into their personal identities.

Thus, we have seen how Anglo-feminists and lesbian communities may practice their own forms of ascription and assimilation to which lesbians from ethnic backgrounds must react, thus involving a degree of personal agency. This may take the form of ethno-specific lesbian

support groups that provide the community acknowledgement a lesbian needs of both her sexuality and her ethnicity. It is also apparent how easy it is to discuss ethnocentrism within the "white" or Anglo-movements in quite ethnocentric terms, declaring that the movements wish to homogenise or assimilate ethnic women while at the same time homogenising and stereotyping all "white" or Anglo-lesbians in the process.

#### d) Summary

This constant need to homogenise and assimilate individuals to particular groups or categories has been a significant factor throughout this chapter's discussion of the 'cultural conflict' model. Cultural conflict arises mainly because an individual feels coerced to conform to homogenous and assimilative groups that propose contradictory identities. Nevertheless, this chapter's discussion has also shown how, despite ascriptive forces and constraints, lesbians from non-English-speaking backgrounds do exercise varying degrees of personal agency by resistance and circumvention, albeit in rather emotionally difficult ways. The very fact that these women do not deny their lesbianism completely is indicative of their determination not to be passive victims caught between conflicting categorisations.

#### Section Two: The 'Cultural Complementarity/Choice' Model and Lesbians from Ethnic Backgrounds.

In contrast to the 'cultural conflict' model that posits lesbians from ethnic backgrounds as victims of negative community acknowledgement and

social ascription, the cultural synthesis or complementarity model constructs lesbians from ethnic backgrounds as active agents, negotiating and selecting from the dominant culture, ethnic subculture, and homosexual and/or feminist subculture. They understand the "whys and wherefores" of each group, and embrace and discard various values and concepts according to personal needs and wants within the available options. Melina explains this clearly:

I don't really feel that I'm ever denying  
or keeping silent...People like me are really  
lucky because we live in a lot of different  
worlds and it's a buzz. I can communicate  
on any level...and it's exciting to have this  
multiple identity.

Silvana also feels that despite some clashes, she has great control over her life and enjoys her "multiplicity " or feeling of "floating" between and within groups:

I'm absolutely in control of my choices in  
life. I'd be a fool if I said nobody defines  
me ...[but] where is this rule written that I  
have to be one or the other in order to be  
happy? I can find my strength within me to  
be wherever I want to be and take what I want  
and give as much as I want back...We all  
wear lots of hats. What's wrong with that?

Fewer studies perceive lesbians from ethnic backgrounds within this model and it is significant that the majority of these studies and essays are by Jewish lesbians who have formed solid support networks for

each other within their ethnic background framework. Economic and class factors seem to be less prevalent in their discussions of their family and communities although anti-Semitism is significant. There appears to be a greater confidence and power to focus on one's personal identity construction rather than the need to put aside personal concerns for the wider socio-economic concerns and social identity construction of the family and ethnic group. For example, Wahba(1982) speaks of straddling two support systems: the lesbian community and her family of origin. Segal, whose background is black and Jewish, sees herself as being on a "vantage point" which affords her "a unique and invaluable perspective on Jewish racism and Black anti-Semitism"(1982:56). When the various subjectivities are considered, one must conciliate the multiple selves:

To choose to be a Jew only gives you a  
home among the Jews. To choose to be a  
lesbian gives you no peace...To be a lesbian  
separatist remembering the Jews, the Jews from  
which you came and whom you carry in you,  
makes you remember over and over again being  
an outsider among outsiders(Dykewomon,1982:153).

Wolfe reiterates this idea of blending the elements of the fragmented self in some way for she is "at once a Jewish mother and a Lesbian, a Lesbian feminist and the mother of a Jewish son"(1982:164). A combination of lesbian and Jewish consciousness means creating different patterns of seeing and experiencing the world, the "angles of vision become more multiple"(Beck, 1982:xiv). Happy Ho also sees being a lesbian from Asian background living in a predominantly Anglo-Australian heterosexual society as having given women like her "eyes that are forever open and minds that are free to learn." She labels herself a

"displaced person", due to minority ethnicity, gender and sexuality and yet this very displacement is an asset as she can "live with a code" of her own(De Ishtar and Sitka,1991:8).

Lesbians of ethnic backgrounds thus challenge the "lesbian as passive victim" theory. Garcia(1990) believes her multiple self makes her able to challenge the white feminist movement's racist tendencies, the ethnic movement's sexist tendencies, and in both as well as in the wider society, challenge homophobic tendencies. Some lesbian groups believe socio-economic factors should not be allowed to impede the development of strong support networks that assist in the negotiation of ethnicity and sexuality. Te Awekotuku identifies as a "Fourth World woman" who is often "compelled to consider the colliding urgencies" of her life and of her "tribal world"- sexism, racism, classism.

I move within many worlds, yet share the confidence and security of my community of tribal women, and a branching global network of lesbian sisters...I refuse to reject any one facet of myself. I claim all cultures, all my conflicts (1984: 120-121).

Several ethnic and black lesbians write about the need and possibility of synthesizing elements of ethnicity and sexuality and that this process can be quite liberating, free from the restraints and discourses of any single subculture. Lesbians can accept and enjoy their negotiated positions of "connectedness and difference" (Lorde,1978:225). They see the process as one of working within all constructs of the self, all the representations of subjectivity available to one, selecting what is the best for oneself, and understanding the "whys and wherefores" of each



available discourse in order to inform the daily selection/negotiation process (Clayborne, 1978; Sorrel, 1982; Louise, 1989). Teubal (1982) sees herself as wearing a coat of many colours; Segal (1982) sees her interraciality as a strength to challenge and educate the ignorant about the other, and to "dispute misconceptions" about what she is supposed to be (1982:58).

This centering of marginality means all women are aware of their negotiations within the politics of difference. All women are defining themselves across difference, whether they identify as homosexual or heterosexual, Anglo-Australian or one of the many so-called ethnic-Australian identities. Melina refuses to be seen as a victim:

I get so angry with women's movement's stuff  
where everybody has to be in bloody agony  
and pain all the time. Some of us actually  
don't like being the victim. We get on with  
it and work it out...and we don't want to  
be pitied. We are very proud and we hold our  
heads high.

She refuses to locate herself within any community because she cannot prioritise her ethnicity or sexuality and prefers the equal complementarity of both.

I don't feel torn between groups at all.  
If anybody puts down my cultural group  
or lesbian women, I'll fight for whichever  
is relevant at the time...I'm independent.

Silvana acknowledges how "complex" her identity is but does not regard herself as a victim because of it. She sees her identity as fluid,

constantly being made by her social, political and other associations, and her responses to these. And this diversity has its toll but far more rewards:

I'd like to know who wrote this rule  
book that says human beings have to fit in,  
like there are hooks and everyone feels like  
they have to hang themselves on a hook, like  
it's too perilous not hanging on a hook...[I'm]  
really strengthened by...float[ing] from one  
group to another.

Feminism is seen as having the potential to acknowledge and utilise the diversity of women. As Adams questions,

if you can't be sure that the other Xs,  
Ys, or Zs are going to be sympathetic to  
your additional identity as a V or a W, with  
whom will you organize? (1989:28).

Women should be able to speak of the positive appreciation and upholding of their multiple subjectivities in ways similar to the following:

Zionism brought me out as a Jew. The  
women's movement brought me out as a  
feminist. The gay liberation movement  
brought me out as a lesbian. All are self-  
affirming. All are life-affirming. All have  
made the difference between the denial of  
who I am and the affirmation of who I am

(Bauman, 1978:236).

As with the studies of lesbians from ethnic backgrounds within the 'cultural conflict' model, a more thorough investigation of the 'cultural complementarity' model's concept of the prevalence of personal agency over community acknowledgement and social ascription will be possible if the discussion is subdivided into ethnic home and community, the wider Anglo society, and the feminist movement.

a) Choice with Ethnic Home and Community.

I know you just want me to be happy...It's  
not your fault I'm a lesbian Mumma and it's  
not bad- it's good

says Gretel to her mother in Fischer's play(1990:8). She has been 'out' to her family for some time, still participates in family and community events such as her parents' Golden Anniversary (to which her partner Rita is invited) and the Jewish Pesach religious ritual. She is also educating them about lesbianism, gently calming their concerns and allaying their fears with humour:

my Jewish Lesbian group. I thought I told  
you about them...don't worry...I thought you'd  
be happy...at least they are Jewish...What do  
lesbians do at Pesach? Just the same as you...  
I'm using the Jewish Lesbian Prayer Book from  
the Lesbian and Gay Synagogue in San Fran-  
cisco Mumma...What! Papa wants a copy...

(1990: 26-28).

In her poem, "To Show Respect", Romano also talks about Italian-American lesbians feasting, praying, attending mass and participating in

Christmas and other rituals (1990:22-24). Her ethnicity and religion have combined to make her strong:

When I think of my Italian-American Catholic childhood, I think of strong women- my mother, my grandmother, the nuns, and the Virgin Mary (1991:1).

These are examples of cultural complementarity and personal agency in the intersections of ethnicity, sexuality and gender in action. As Biren(1982) writes, lesbians should be able to decide which aspects of their ethnic and religious heritage have value for them and be aware of the special contribution they will be making to the continual redefinition of what it means to be a Jewish woman or Italian-American woman or Chicana, and so on. Te Awekotuku sees her role models as being the fierce woman fighters and writers of Maori legend and myth; and the "resilient, courageous women" of her own extended family. It is thus her responsibility to "ensure their stories are not lost" in "male-translated history"(1984: 119). By investigating lesbianism within traditional societies, such as in the American Indian cultures, lesbians can redefine and validate elements of that "herstory" that would otherwise be omitted or lost over time. "We must not allow this conspiracy of silence to prevent us from discovering who we have been and who we are"(Allen,1981:84). Lee found the lack of role models for Chinese lesbians a major problem. Upon discovering the previous existence of a "sisterhood" in Chinese history, she felt a greater sense of validation; "the security of knowing we are not the first, or by any means the last" led to her co-founding of the Chinese Lesbian Group(1989:338).

Most writers believe the only way this complementarity or synthesis will be achieved is by 'coming out' to one's sexual, cultural and ethnic self(eg. Horwitz, 1982). Zitter writes that minority ethnic lesbians often report that their mothers have an easier time accepting their lesbianism than they had expected. This could be because of the mother's familiarity with oppression and being an outsider."Her own stigmatisation may allow her greater empathy with a daughter who encounters stigma within their shared culture"(1987:186). Melina has 'come out' to her family and is very close to them. When her mother asked her, "Are you more comfortable with women than with men", Melina thought that "if she had the courage to ask such a question, there was no way" she could lie to her. In response, her mother gave her total acceptance, related her own experiences and those of others she knew as a young girl in Italy, and made it her "duty" to inform other members of the extended family. Melina is "loved and respected" and seen as a "very significant person" by members of her family of all ages. For example, family members often turn to her to interpret documents and assist in other official matters due to her tertiary education.

Silvana has also 'come out' to her family and will do so to anyone if she is asked. Her mother asked her about her relationships and although 'coming out' proved difficult at first, such as being thrown out of home for awhile, her family is presently "well aware I'm in a relationship with a woman". They "fluctuate between accepting the relationship" and her partner- who her father in particular likes very much- and rejection of the idea of this being a sexual as well as loving relationship. On the one hand, her family is "relieved" that she has settled into a "good" relationship and on the other hand they think "it's not right".

Now, she sees her issues of acceptance with her parents as no better or worse from many offspring and the numerous issues they have with parents.

Clarke(1983) believes poor black communities have often accepted those outside the ruling culture due to their greater empathy, radicalism and earthiness. Melina believes Italians are very aware of homosexuality. She has met many Italian women "who have relationships with other women and they are all esconced in marriage". The first-generation Italians are "down-to-earth and gutsy", with a "good understanding" of homosexuality. Silvana recalls the girls in high school from Italian background being very aware of homosexuality and some of them relating the conversations they had had with their parents. One girl's mother had "given her a speech" about "the different kinds of love" between people, including two people of one sex. As Clarke finds in the black community, it is the conservative middle class who endeavour to emulate white conservative power that oppress black lesbians. She suggests that the Black intellectual community is more homophobic than the larger Black community:

Since no-one has bothered to study the  
black community's attitudes on ...homo-  
sexuality...it is not accurate to attribute  
homophobia to the mass of black people

(1983:205).

Although speaking about his experiences as a gay man from Maltese background in Australia, Chetcuti's assertions are highly relevant for lesbian women:

Ethnic communities, especially their

leadership, should be exposed to what is really happening in society. They should be forced, also, to speak on behalf of all ethnic people, not just heterosexuals.

(Wotherspoon, 1986: 143-144).

In her social service work with first-generation Italian migrants, Melina believes there would be less difficulty than with Italian community leaders,

if you stood there and said, 'Look, I'm a radical lesbian communist feminist'.

They'd maybe say, 'But you're a nice lady, so it doesn't matter'.

She does not declare her lesbianism because "I'm there to provide a social service so my sexual preference, like my religious affiliation, has no bearing". She does not believe ethnic community leaders "have their finger on the pulse of the community", and because they are mostly male, would have great difficulty in accepting her credibility because of her lesbianism. With Italian relatives, friends and acquaintances, she is very open, however. For example, if the women she is with "are really carrying on miserably about their husbands, I just tell them there is a solution. 'Marry a woman'. And they laugh because they agree."

Several lesbians have written about the need for exposure to their ethnic communities and thus exemplify the high degree of personal agency in their personal identity formation. They assert an awareness that they can actively influence the community's attitudes and acknowledgement of

gender and sexuality issues. Ishatova believes in "flaunting" all elements of the self as she is

a very important link in the liberation of women, the liberation of Jews...I am not a contradiction or impossibility. What could make more sense than my casting off, in my lifetime, the remaining vestiges of woman and Jew as victims, and asserting my love of self by being woman-identified? I am not here to undermine what is good in Judaism and Jewish culture. I come to shake up that which is no longer useful... Tradition carries me back to my ancestors and keeps their wisdom and struggles alive in my heart. But please, spare me the oppressive nonsense...We are strengthening the fabric of Jewish identity by stretching what it can include(1982: 174-175).

Klepfisz also sees much value in her Jewish culture:

It is from Jews that I adopted ideals that I still hold and principles that I still believe in...It was from Jews that I learned about the necessity for resistance...I am clearly their product...[and] I write as much out of a Jewish consciousness as I do out of a lesbian/feminist consciousness...They merge and blend and blur- for in many ways they are the same (1982: 107-108).



In both the above examples, the writers are not just mixing elements of ethnicity, gender and sexuality until they arrive at a comfortable point of complementarity. Rather, they are challenging or critiquing elements such as traditional ethnic or religious values and thereby actively redefining these categories.

Similarly, Jewelle Gomez and Barbara Smith see their positions as Black lesbians being difficult and yet enriching of themselves and their communities. As Gomez says,

we straddle the fence that says we cannot be the uplifters of the race and lesbians at the same time...But you know, I think that our ability to see the need to keep the family intact is what is going to be our saviour and help preserve the Black community. As lesbians, we have so much to teach the Black community about survival

(1990:54).

On the other hand, lesbians such as Carmen, Gail, Shaila, Pratibha believe we need to respect and understand a woman's choice not to 'come out' to her ethnic family and community. Nevertheless, it must be recognized that not 'coming out' "does exact a terrible toll" of living a "huge personal/political lie". The maintenance of silence means that the women that follow also find it more difficult to break that silence(1984:54). Again, they speak in terms of a woman choosing not to 'come out' despite the difficulties this may ensue rather than a lesbian feeling coerced into a position of silence. It would appear that the

lesbian needs to decide which is the greater "terrible toll": 'coming out' and risking discrimination and alienation, or remaining closeted and risking the internal discomforts and social juggling that may entail. Thus, the choice may be based on the better of limited, difficult options, but nevertheless the lesbian must decide and act upon her choice and make her decision a positive one. Caterina states that "not coming out" is her "choice" with her family and community albeit an "uncomfortable" one until a time when her parents will ask her, "Are you a lesbian". Luisa has decided she will never 'come out' to her parents because she does not want to jeopardise the "strong bond" she has with them and which she sees as valuable. Neither does she want to break her bond with the Italian community as her "Italianness" is "a good part of her".

Hidalgo has conducted a research study within the 'cultural complementarity' model that investigates the issues concerning 'coming out'. From her 1976 study of 61 lesbians to her 1984 study, she identifies the trend in the young Puerto Rican lesbian community of becoming more visible, political and organized, both within their background community and within the mainstream American society. Families are increasingly accepting of lesbian members, having been influenced by the "sexual revolution" and having become aware of the existence and realities of lesbianism from the first women who bravely 'came out'. Thus, the more exposure to lesbians, the more likely are the families and community to accept or at least tolerate them. Individuals who have positive interactions with lesbians are the most accepting and supportive of a lesbian lifestyle regardless of class and educational level of either the lesbian or heterosexual person. Female members of

families are more accepting than male members, and younger women more so than older women. Puerto Rican lesbians are therefore increasingly able to rely on two "extended families": their blood-relatives, and their Puerto Rican lesbian sisters. More and more are "in charge" of their individual and community lives. "Harmony" as a Puerto Rican and a lesbian is becoming more accessible, and fewer women are allowing themselves to be coerced and torn apart by their "triple oppression"(1984:115). And as Melina believes, they can make an impact on modifying gender expectations for all women within the ethnic community. For example, she was raised with the traditional expectations of marriage and motherhood, and although she still detects a wish among some that "things could be different", she also feels "that if I had a baby and was in love with a lovely lesbian woman, my mother would be rapt with the grandchild". Likewise, her example has lessened the degree of gender role coercion heterosexual women members of her family may face.

Romano has achieved significance and acclaim within the Italian-American society for writings on Italian-American, both lesbian and heterosexual, concerns. Her poems, such as "The Fly" and "Vendetta" were accepted for publication by 'straight' academic Italian-American journals. Moreover, she is on the board of advisors of Voices in Italian Americana, an academic and literary journal. Her paper, "Coming Out Olive in the Lesbian Community: Big Sister is Watching You" created a controversy in the Anglo-American lesbian community but was well-received at the American Italian Historical Association conference in 1989. She was nominated for the Association's awards as a Notable Italian-American woman, and edits her own magazine of Italian-American writing called La

Bella Figura. Her poetry explores the intersections of ethnicity, sexuality and gender or discusses each category separately in ways that readers can associate with: mothering, families, Italian culture, racism, lesbianism, American stereotyping of ethnic cultures. The publishing of essays and literature by Black and ethnic lesbians is very important in validating lesbian existence, dispelling myths and stereotypes, and helping families to understand their lesbian members (Mays, 1982; Gottlieb, 1983). As Romano proves, the ethnic community can certainly be made aware of the reality of lesbian identification through publishing and participation at leadership levels.

Travelling back to the "home country" may also be significant in a lesbian woman's awareness of forces and trends away from the potentially insulated and "time-warped" culture of a migrant community. Connecting with women who have similar cultural backgrounds and yet are well on the way to claiming visibility as lesbians may be significant. Eulalia (1979) speaks of travelling to Italy as having led to a new pride in being Italian. In Italy, research studies by feminist-lesbian groups such as CLI (Collegamento Fra Le Lesbiche Italiane or Italian Lesbian Link) show that lesbianism is gradually gaining acceptance and a political voice. In 1985, 70 women responded to a questionnaire issued by CLI. Of the 70, 47 said their families knew of their lesbianism, out of which 13 had openly accepted it. 43 women said the knowledge had not ruptured familial relationships, and 45 said they had not faced verbally or physically violent repression from their families. 42 actively participated in feminist groups and 46 mainly associated with other lesbians. Despite this familial openness, 45 women said they did not

feel accepted in the wider society and 37 had experienced verbal and physical violence in the wider society. Indeed, 53 felt offended at media representations of lesbianism. Nevertheless, and perhaps because of growing familial support and loyalty, 66 preferred to be lesbians.

The above discussion points to the fact that lesbians choose whether to 'come out' or not, and those who do 'come out' are actively engaged in re-educating family and community members, and challenging the wider society's stereotype of traditional, patriarchal ethnic families and communities that condemn or are ignorant of homosexuality. Personal agency thus affects both community acknowledgement and social ascription and paves the way for future lesbians to have an easier time in negotiating their sexuality, ethnicity and gender locations.

b) Choice with the Wider Anglo Society.

As mentioned above, the wider society also stands to benefit from lesbians from ethnic backgrounds actively challenging ethnic and sexual stereotypes. Yet, very few writings approach the intersection of ethnicity and lesbianism with the wider Anglo community from the model of 'cultural complementarity'. Dunsford and Hawthorne, in the introduction to their collection of Australian and New Zealand lesbian writings The Exploding Frangipani, believe that "daughters of immigrants" are adapting more easily to "lesbian existence" and vow "never to be assimilated or colonized like their parents were" (1990:9).

Or perhaps, what the wider society thinks of one is not as important as what one's ethnic and lesbian community think. Espin(1987) believes that

rejection from the mainstream society does not carry the same weight as rejection from ethnic and lesbian-feminist communities. For example, Caterina chooses to be quite open about her relationship with her partner in the streets of Adelaide: "We don't hide it when we're out because that put too much strain on our relationship". She speaks of cases where people are "rude" but "that's the price you pay. I'd rather get shouted obscenities and shout them back". And if the "news" found its way to her parents, there is the chance that they would ask her about her sexuality and then she could 'come out' to them.

If they were to ask me, "Are you a lesbian?", I would say yes. That would be such a load off my shoulders...Then I could say, "Well, take me or leave me".

Hence, Caterina chooses to be quite open in the wider community and use it to her eventual advantage with the hope that her parents will hear of her actions and be forced to ask her about them. This would give her the opportunity to assert her sexuality and place the onus back on her parents to decide whether they will accept it or not.

Silvana also feels that what the wider society thinks of her is insignificant and she is quite open with her partner in the streets of Adelaide. She recalls a picnic next to an "Anglo family fishing" and the difficulties the family experienced at having two lesbian women being "loud and loving" were a source of amusement. However, she also speaks of harassment in her own neighbourhood and in the street when they are openly affectionate but she adds, "I don't think we should let society stop that in us."

Chrystos(1981) writes that the wider society tends to be indifferent to lesbians and ignorant of lesbians from ethnic backgrounds. Yet, these attitudes are less damaging to a woman than the blatant racism often encountered in the feminist community, and the heterosexism encountered in the ethnic community, as these two groups are significant to her.

On the other hand, Maggid(1982) believes it is possible to work with sections of the wider society to tackle specific issues of concern:

We do not have to agree with our allies  
on every point in order to join in coalition  
around specific issues. Even when we encounter  
less than enthusiastic support of a lesbian/gay  
lifestyle, or when we encounter anti-Semitism  
[and/or racism] in other movements, we can  
continue to work with people, trying to educate  
them in the process. This requires firmly  
standing up for ourselves and taking the risk of  
speaking out. These alliances also require  
introspection(1982: 119).

Clarke believes the wider society can and is learning vital lessons from lesbians of ethnic backgrounds, such as "freedom from antiquated gender prescriptions and proscriptions", the idea of bonding and relationships as "mutual, reciprocal, as infinitely negotiable", and the complexities and intricacies of ethnic cultures. The taboo between interracial relationships is also further confronted as lesbians resist being bound by "white man's racist, sexist laws" by presenting interracial lesbian relationships(1981:88). Melina does not feel marginalised within the wider Anglo-Australian society. She is "good" at saying what she wants

to say about ethnicity, sexuality and gender issues and does not feel "squashed". In this way, we can see her personal agency in speaking out and educating members of the wider society.

Thus, lesbians from ethnic background display personal agency in either acknowledging the importance of the wider society's ascriptions and working with sections of the society to modify those ascriptions, or choosing to ignore or render irrelevant these social ascriptions. Certainly, there is little evidence of a sense of victimisation that makes one feel totally powerless. Instead, lesbians from ethnic background choose to either dissociate themselves or ignore as much as possible situations that may make them feel like powerless victims, or work with factions to assert their sense of powerful resistance. As Canaan writes,

To see him[the white male] as the evil all-powerful enemy, however, forces me to accept little responsibility for my own oppression. It negates my power to change my status...We must...distinguish friend from foe rather than accepting prefabricated enemies...The enemy is our urgent need to stereotype and close off people, places, and events into isolated categories(1981:235-236).

c) Choice with the Predominantly Anglo-feminist Movement.

The 'cultural synthesis' model sees the pointing out of differences that exist among women as not intending to fracture any hope of unity but to



propose a new feminist discourse that provides possibilities for unity without the erasure of differences. As Sitka describes, feminists need "to make a circle that holds us all inside but radiates out like a ripple in a lake"(1991:4). Attention to the construction and ideological consequences of every community and identity would result in a new form of "community-building" and representation for all women. Race, culture and class cannot be erased when considering lesbian-feminism as a community. Dunsford and Hawthorne(1990) believe there are global similarities women share that help in cross-cultural understanding and the feminist movement is in a better position to "understand the struggles of others" than any "other group on earth has done" for its members understand about invisibility and assimilation that affect all women to varying degrees internationally(1990:7). Lesbians, for example, are women who are all outside their cultures to varying degrees. Thus, there is a unity or a form of solidarity or sense of sameness in that outsiderhood. Caterina draws her main support from the predominantly Anglo-Australian lesbian community in Adelaide. She acknowledges that they cannot really understand, but they try to, and say things like, "Gee, it must be hard being an Italian lesbian". At times there are frustrations, especially with lovers who have "come out to their families and have good relationships with them", and find it difficult to accept the juggling that remaining closeted to one's family involves.

Quintanales is concerned that lesbians create "false enemies" among themselves by overlooking these intersections of unity. A Latina lesbian who generalizes about all white women as racist and classist need only look at some of the privileges she may have over darker-skinned women. Black lesbians who dismiss all non-black women are also being racist in

creating "false differences" and denying the specificity of history, culture, identity of the various non-black women. "She also falls prey to the racist mythology that color differences are the end-all indications of social inequality"(1981:153). It is unlikely that a small group of Latina or Black or Italian-American lesbians will, on its own, create the feminist transformations needed in our Western society.

To find us squabbling over who may or may not be called a feminist, who may or may not join or take part in this or that particular political group...[is a] privilege...[as] most women in the world just eat shit.

A "common, human-woman-lesbian bond" is necessary and possible, overarching our various specific groupings (Quintanales,1981:155).

It would seem that women can actively resist social ascriptions of what it means to be a lesbian or lesbian-feminist as well as actively resist internal assimilative forces in lesbian and/or feminist community acknowledgement of sameness and negation of differences which may be integral parts of a woman's personal identity. Rainone believes that the power of feminism is its insistence on "connections between types of oppression", and sees the future as necessitating the development of a connectedness "that allows for diversity and inspires us... to work in coalitions...with other lesbians and allies who are radically different from us"(1987:350). Adams also sees the feminist movement as "small autonomous groups" serving as "building blocks" for larger-scale coalitions, for the differing contexts of our lives forestall the development of any singular purpose among us(1989:27). Racial separatism

is good "for forging identity and gathering strength" but the strongest politics are coalition politics that cover broader issues( Smith and Smith,1981 :126). The women's movement can exist as a cluster of smaller groups constantly negotiating the tension between diversity and fragmentation. These clusters can be organized as a multi-voiced coalition. The remaining penchant for homogeneity, the need to see the world as ordered and understandable at a glance, stems from a reluctance by women of privilege to see themselves as oppressors as well as oppressed, to acknowledge our complicity in each other's oppression (Lorde,1981). Sitka provides "tips for well intentioned lesbians who want to become more aware around the issues of racism and cultural prejudice" in Connecting Cultures, thus proving how important issues of culture have become for the lesbian movement in Australia(1991:13).

Thus, women can organize smaller groups within the feminist movement according to ethnic backgrounds and lesbian concerns. Margaret Fischer is the co-founder of JAFL (Jewish Adelaide Feminist Lesbians). In San Francisco, BASIL (Bay Area Sicilian and Italian Lesbians) exists with over fifty women on its mailing list. SAL (Sydney Asian Lesbians) was formed in 1990 and joined ALOA (Asian Lesbians Outside Asia), an international network. Many ethnic-American and ethnic-English lesbians speak of establishing ethnically-based support networks that synthesize the specificities of ethnicity, lesbianism and feminism. Thus, there is the need for separate spaces in order to prevent "ethnic death", as well as the need for "merging"(Quintanales, 1981:151-154).

Lesbians from ethnic backgrounds have much to offer the feminist movement and must assert this. Whatever issue they confront, it is

usually processed from the perspective of ethnic identity (Hidalgo, 1984). These assertions assume personal agency on the part of all women within the feminist movement. They also assume that lesbians from ethnic backgrounds can rely upon the feminist movement and/or lesbian community to provide options from which the individual selects aspects that complement or synthesise with other aspects of the self. For example, the Anglo-feminist movement can assist in the peeling off of "layers of false instruction and deception" that women "absorb in terms of morality and being female", whether it is from an ethnic background and/or wider society source (Eulalia, 1979:3).

Silvana has had experiences of marginalisation and coercion with the predominantly Anglo-feminist movement but provides some insights into where she sees feminism as heading in the future, and why she will probably "float" back in at times of need. She also explains why she believes feminism will provide far more for lesbian women from non-English-speaking backgrounds in the future than it has in the past or does now:

Women are trying to say to each other, 'I understand that you're like this, I understand that I'm like this, but let's just be aware of it.' That's the first step toward being able to work together to achieve whatever each of us wants to achieve. It [feminism] is really going to diversify more as young women with ideas of difference grow into it. It's going to boom in terms of academic theory...[with]different strategies.

d) Summary

A major criticism of the 'cultural conflict' model was its depiction of lesbians from non-English-speaking backgrounds as passive victims. The 'cultural complementarity or synthesis' model upholds a lesbian's personal agency as a comparatively significant factor in personal identity formation. Without pretending that there are no difficulties in negotiating with ethnic family and community, the wider Anglo society and the predominantly Anglo-feminist movement, this model clearly presents a variety of ways of undertaking these negotiations in order to arrive at a "comfortable" position. Another positive feature of this model is its acknowledgement that these negotiations are ongoing, shifting and modifying, as ethnic, Anglo and feminist groups shift and modify as well. The 'cultural conflict' model appears to fix or render unchangeable the position of passive victim and the cultures of the social groups around each individual.

## Chapter Six: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

If the aims of this study are reconsidered, this dissertation attempted to move beyond homogeneous categorisation by researching across identity boundaries and by investigating the positions of those who are not the privileged or acceptable representatives of multicultural, feminist and gay activist minority groups.

This study attempted to take on the challenges and multi-dimensional demands of multiple identity studies. It has revealed the variety of positions lesbians from non-English-speaking backgrounds can hold, based on a personal prioritising of the relative importance of social ascription, community acknowledgement and personal needs within the available sets of cultural norms and discourses. It has revealed the diversity of alternatives, experiences and opinions that exist from which lesbians from different ethnic backgrounds, and indeed those within the same ethnic group, make selections. They must consider which are the most comfortable or less problematic. Thus, some will maintain strong identification links with their ethnic cultures, values and backgrounds. Some become part of the predominantly Anglo-lesbian-feminist movement. However, it appears that the majority meander between the two, their negotiations being based upon choice, need, the availability of supportive social groups, or what is less emotionally and psychologically "costly". Thus, cultural conflict is present in these women's experience to varying degrees, as is cultural negotiation and complementarity. Nevertheless, this study has shown the significance

of women's active agency rather than passivity in dealing with conflict and selecting elements for complementarity or synthesis.

Hence, in response to Henriques' question posed in Chapter Two, "Is the subject constitutive or constituted?"(1984:95), it appears that lesbians from non-English-speaking backgrounds are both "locked in" to social ascriptions and possess "agency" in resisting or negotiating within those ascriptions. In other words, this study appears to uphold Epstein's theory(1987) that both essentialist and constructionist debates should be transcended with their "false opposition" of choice and constraint. The challenge lies in perceiving individuals as exercising choices within constraints.

By examining the intersections of ethnicity, sexuality and gender, this study aimed to take several steps forward in understanding the situations and negotiations of lesbians from non-English-speaking backgrounds. My intention has been to question the invisibility that often negates their very existence, or constitutes them as the insignificant other vulnerable to ignorant speculation or representation. Along the way, the study has demonstrated the dangers of other long-standing ethnocentric, sexist, racist and heterosexist claims based on the need to homogenise, categorise and simplify. In so doing, this study posits the potentialities of a conception of men and women as "displaced persons", displaced from traditionally narrow notions of category positions, and refusing to be locked into one of them. Instead, a multiplicity of places is upheld which recognizes what can be termed, "multiplaced persons".

The above conclusions are based on three interconnected contradictions continually faced in this study in discussing the personal identity formations of lesbians from non-English-speaking backgrounds, and thus the intersections of ethnicity, gender and sexuality. First, categorisation and self-categorisation within these three areas may control, restrict and inhibit while simultaneously providing "the springboard for self-definition and individual and collective resistance"(Weeks, 1987:38). Identity is an interplay of constraint and opportunity, necessity for group affiliation and desire for individual freedom. This leads to the second contradiction. Identity is as much ascribed as it is a 'choice'. Ethnicity, sexuality and gender are socially defined and personally defined. The predominance of one or the other will lead to a greater or lesser feeling of marginalisation and victimisation, and/or a greater or lesser feeling of personal agency.

The third contradiction is that ethnic, sexual and gender identifications are about flux and fixing. Identities are "precarious unities of conflicting desires and social commitments"(Weeks, 1987:49). While attempting to analyse, describe and define, there is a risk of artificially fixing a category or ascription. From an individual to the wider societal level, identities are in a constant state of flux (Meekosha and Pettman, 1990). Silvana deals with this dichotomy of flux and fixing on an individual level in the following words:

I don't identify as a lesbian. I don't identify as a heterosexual...I don't want to be boxed in. Defining myself in any way is a problem...[and] whenever I speak I am constantly making myself.



Relatedly, Weeks deals with the "necessary evil" of identity analysis on a societal level in the following way:

Identity may well be a historical fiction, a controlling myth, a limiting burden. But it is at the same time a necessary means of weaving our way through a hazard-strewn world and a complex web of social relations

(1987:49).

This study proposes that "multiplaced persons" may find weaving through a "complex web of social relations" far easier than "placed persons" who can only deal with difference from a narrow categorical position that defines everything outside itself as the inferior "other". The "complex web" has intricate patterns and points of contact that afford a greater interconnectedness between all its inhabitants, such that in acknowledging diversity in others and oneself, new unities may be forged. Feminism has an increasing role to play in illustrating how this unity in diversity is possible. It is illustrating how to broaden the agenda to incorporate the intersections of categories such as ethnicity, sexuality and gender.

Thus, this study has not provided one all-encompassing conclusion or solution. It would be of grave concern if it did. Indeed, its very aim has been to break open past socio-cultural conclusions and solutions and reveal the negations and omissions that made them temporarily possible. Asian-Australian lesbian Happy Ho explains the intersection of social ascription, community acknowledgement and personal agency in a powerful

metaphorical declaration that captures the spirit and aims of this study:

This is a time of unrest. The world is  
losing its boundaries. The Wall has  
fallen and the closets are opening...  
As lesbians we are also a form of  
displaced persons. We live with a code of  
our own, we have a culture that often runs  
against the grain of heterosexual conventions

(De Ishtar and Sitka, 1991:8).

The "boundaries" of social ascription appear to be loosening while the "closets" in which persons hide due to negative community acknowledgement are opening. And an important factor encouraging these shifts is personal agency, the running "against the grain" in pursuit of a personal identity negotiated from constantly shifting options.

The role of personal agency is debated and contested by major theories such as its negation in post-structuralism in opposition to its importance in liberal humanism. As this study seems to indicate, it does have a place in determining one's personal and social identity. If the feminist belief that "the personal is political" is considered, it would appear that theorists may need to move beyond the limitations of both structuralist and essentialist arguments to a re-acknowledging of individual agency as a significant force. As Edwards writes in her study of social control, "human agency" and "resistance" balance the structuralists' emphasis on domination and cultural hegemony. Feminists and others who are

working for change must be chary of giving the

impression that 'the oppressed' are totally powerless,...at the mercy of those with the power or authority to decide their fate...[because] protest, struggle and resistance by oppressed and less powerful groups [and individuals]

is a significant part of human history, leading to major political, economic and social change. This is because the "structures of domination" and control "always contain weaknesses and contradictions" that can be manipulated by individuals and minority groups(1988:61). This study has attempted to provide an example of personal agency at work against or within the dominant discourses of ethnic relations, sexual relations and gender relations.

Appendix A: Models of 'Cultural Conflict' and 'Cultural Complementarity/Choice'.

Source: Pallotta-Chiarolli, 1990

FIGURE 1:

Paradigm A (approx. 1950's - late 1970's)

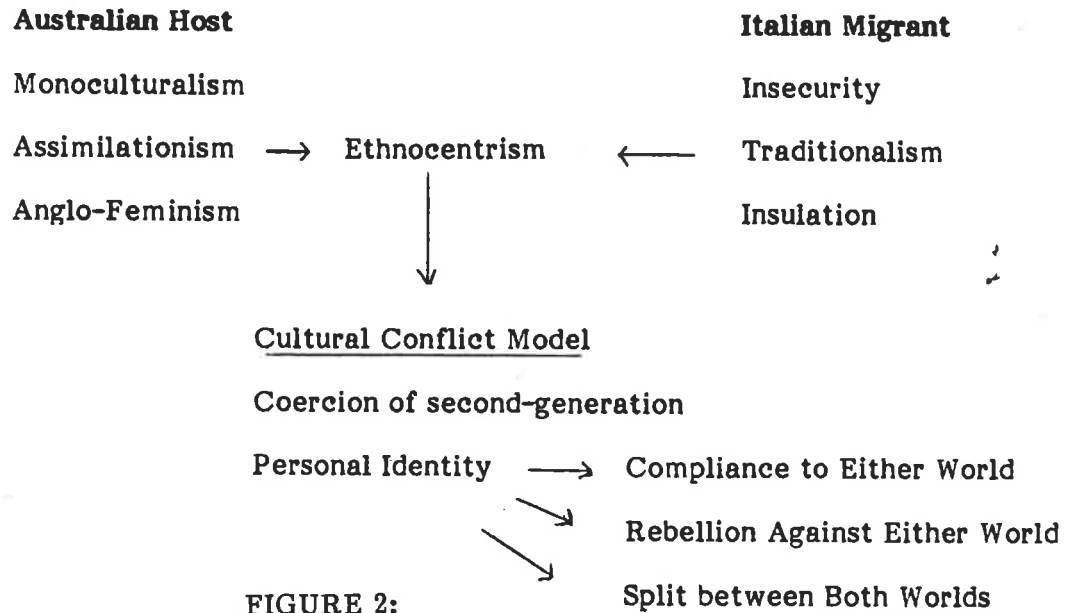
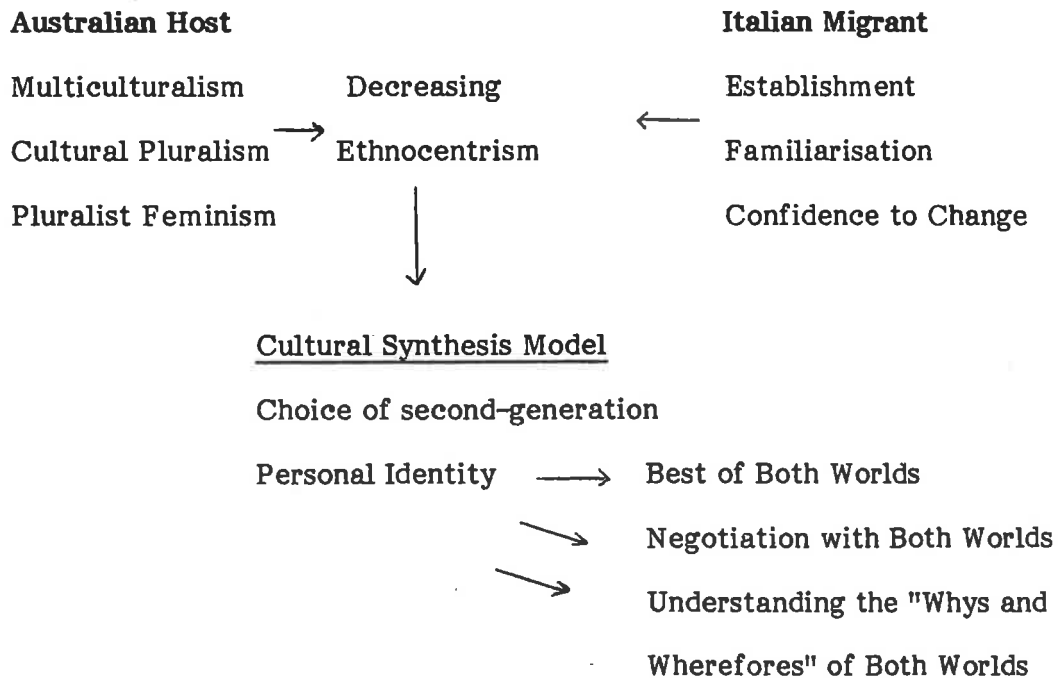


FIGURE 2:

Paradigm B (approx. 1980's)



## Appendix B: The Implications of Conducting This Study: The Position of the Researcher.

From personal to professional levels, I received very interesting and telling responses to my decision to undertake research into homosexuality. Certainly, most responses were encouraging. However, there were a range of other reactions that revealed prejudices and ignorance.

Several people wondered whether it would be possible to "find" lesbians from Italian background to interview. Did they exist? These initial queries were followed by regular requests for updates on my progress and, aware of the need for anonymity and confidentiality of the interviewees, I provided some information. Thus, this study proved indirectly to be a learning experience for many heterosexual men and women, some of whom were from Italian-Australian background and yet had never considered the possibility of the existence of Italian-Australian lesbians.

Another question that was frequently posed to me by both heterosexual and homosexual men and women, of both Italian-Australian and Anglo-Australian backgrounds, was "Why do you want to study them?"

My own sexual identity was questioned and several people intimated that I could be a "closet lesbian". One man approached my husband and asked him whether he was aware that his wife was conducting "such a study" and "mixing with such people". My husband's casual unconcerned manner and his statements that he also knew some of the women involved in my

research as friends, further heightened this man's suspicions that "something was not right" with this married couple.

These types of responses highlight the extent to which homophobic and lesbophobic attitudes still prevail, and the evident need to justify such a study by presuming the "closet homosexuality" of the researcher. It appears that many people in our society may know of the existence of homosexual persons and yet assume that they remain detached from heterosexual persons, who would not want to associate with "them" anyway, let alone wanting to work with "them" in uncovering heterosexist views. Thus, some of the "stigma" of homosexuality was transferred onto me, giving me a "taste" of what lesbians and gay men from any background must deal with on a daily basis.

A major example of this stigmatisation was the political use of my study topic to discredit a group of women from non-English-speaking backgrounds in the Education Department, who ranged from classroom teachers and principals through to women in senior administrative positions. This support and professional development group is known as MARIA.

Newspapers headlined their articles with a label that had been applied to the MARIA group, the "women's mafia", and allegations were made that the women in senior positions within the group had manipulated their way into these positions. It was also suggested that these women included a radical lesbian group. As stated in Hansad parliamentary papers 4-11-91, the women were said to include a "radical feminist mafia fringe" which was "using the group for its own purposes". The one piece of evidence

for this allegation proved to be the note I had placed in the minutes asking for assistance with my project. I was labelled "Ms X" and my minutes' notice was quoted in full. It read:

[Ms X] is researching the intersection, conflicts and issues concerning the above broad categories [ethnicity, sexuality and gender] particularly the lack of a non-English-speaking background lesbian voice in Anglo-feminism and Anglo-lesbianism in Australia. Anyone knowing of any literature or resources available on the above may contact MARIA ...strictest confidentiality assured.

I received much support from the other members of MARIA who believed my dissertation proposal had been used to sensationalise, stigmatise and raise hostility to the group in order to assert other ethnocentric, racist and sexist claims. Claims commonly revolved around the view that some of these women could not have achieved such prominent positions in the Education Department without "dirty dealing" and "mafia tactics".

I also found that I was criticised by a number of Anglo-Australian feminist-lesbians who did not believe I should be conducting such a study as I was appropriating other women's stories and I was not a lesbian woman myself. They also queried my sexuality which proved worthwhile in not only reversing the usual situation of homosexual persons being expected to justify and explain their sexuality, but in challenging me to carefully consider my identities and choices. I was working on a study that evaluated Anglo-feminist-lesbianism, and one which suggested that a dilemma within this lesbian grouping consisted of its negative potential to demand conformity and make hierarchical

divisions among feminists and all women. I was forced to face the issues of 'belonging' and 'difference' in my own life.

The final weeks of the writing of this study also coincided with the publication of my biographical book, Someone You Know, which arose out of my friendship with a homosexual man who died of AIDS. This intensified criticism by one lesbian-feminist who saw me as "perpetuating the good wife and mother, and woman as nurturer myths", and thereby "removed" from the issues of gay men and lesbian women. Meanwhile, a very traditional woman from Italian background was to attack me for not representing myself as a "good wife and mother" and for being neglectful of nurturing responsibilities in my biography, my study and "types of friends". Thus, I found myself with two women at two representative extremes trying to locate, deconstruct and fix me according to their particular perspectives. Understandably, neither was satisfied with my explanation that as far as possible I refuse to be dictated to by both patriarchal and feminist politics that seek to confine me within one category.

On the other hand, many NESB lesbians were very supportive and believed I was in a "safe" position to make their stories accessible to others, thereby hopefully making it easier for them to raise their own voices at a later stage. They commented that they felt close to me due to a shared Italian background, the sense of belonging in many worlds and uniting across difference, and were critical of the attitude displayed by the critical lesbian-feminist which was seen as an example of copying patriarchal "conform or divide" methods. Nevertheless, it was concerning that there often appeared to be a reversal of ethnocentrism in action



whereby "all Anglo-Australian lesbian-feminists" were generalised about or criticised in several of the discussions by NESB lesbians. Indeed, I found I had to consciously be aware of not voicing those generalisations myself, and realised how easy it is to speak in simple categories and stereotypes.

**Appendix C: METHODS CONCERNING THE INTERVIEWING OF ITALIAN-AUSTRALIAN LESBIANS.**

Four second-generation Italian-Australian women living in Adelaide were interviewed. Three were in their late twenties and one in her early forties. Their occupations included employment in social services, clerical work, business, postgraduate studies. The parents of these women had migrated to Australia from southern Italian rural areas. I sought as far as possible women with very similar backgrounds because I was interested in noting the diversity of opinion and experience amongst even these women.

The interviewing schedule involved three steps: initial introductions and discussions by phone; the actual interview at the home of the interviewee usually consisting of a half hour of discussion; the reading of the transcripts by the interviewees, which was then followed by the inclusion of further explanatory material and editing to conceal identities.

A detailed list of questions was used but discussion flowed freely with the questions serving as guide. The following are the broad questions used from which specific questions particularly related to the lives of the interviewees could be drawn:

1) Family

What are your relationships with your family? Have you 'come out' as a lesbian? Why or why not? Is your family important to you? Why or why not? How?

2) Ethnicity

Is your ethnic background significant to you? How? Why or why not? What values, attitudes, customs are valuable to you, if any? Do you feel invisible, silenced as a lesbian in the Italian community?

### 3) Wider Australian Society

Do you feel triply marginalised- as ethnic, lesbian, woman- in the wider Australian society? Does it matter to you? What do you think of media stereotypes /silences on lesbians from NESB?

### 4) Anglo-feminist Movement

What are your relationships/ points of participation in the predominantly Anglo-feminist movement? With the predominantly Anglo-lesbian movement? Is your ethnicity an issue- ignored, positive, problem? Does it provide a supportive framework, a community?

These interviews were of equal value to the written sources. As stated in the introduction, the diversity of sources- oral, written (anecdotes, essays, research), and literary(poetry and play)- complemented each other. The sources provided an intricate and thorough representation of the diversity of theoretical and experiential positions.

Oakley's approach to interviewing women proved a valuable guideline for it critiqued "textbook recipes" and traditional criteria for interviewing, such as the interviewer as detached expert and interviewee as "objectified data base"(1981:30). I consciously attempted to avoid adopting exploitative attitudes toward the Italian-Australian lesbians I interviewed and instead tried to make the interviewing process useful to the interviewees. Indeed, the participants found the sessions useful in clarifying their own attitudes, in finding out about each other's existence and experience, as well as gaining information about other

studies on lesbians from non-English-speaking backgrounds. In these and other ways, the interviewing could be viewed as 'empowering' for the participants. The interviews did, for example, provide the women involved with new information, positive feedback and encouragement. Moreover, the interviews opened up new avenues for reading about and engaging in discussions on issues that they had wanted to voice but had not known how to begin or if anyone else was interested. Indeed, an important outcome of this dissertation will be found in the meeting of the participants and other friends to celebrate the completion of the research and to start a new support network.

As Oakley's approach proposes, the relationships between the researcher and interviewed were hopefully based on a degree of "reciprocity" and were comparatively non-hierarchical. I answered the interviewees' questions about my own sexuality, upbringing, relationships, and feminist principles and thus, the words "conversations" and "participants" are far more accurate than the one-sided and hierarchical exchanges denoted by the words "interview" and "interviewee". Indeed, the laughter, intimacy and conversational 'sidetracks', as well as the sharing of photos and memorabilia in the couple of hours it took to gather about twenty minutes of information, were indicative of a pleasurable, even joyful, exchange celebrating both similarities and differences.

The participants were also given control over what they wished to say and what they wanted to conceal. They were given the opportunity to edit the transcripts and provide further explanations and elaborations.

Both the participants and myself agreed that the relationships that began or were deepened through the research process were enriching and valuable. Melina was delighted to be introduced to the writings of Rose Romano and be able to correspond with her in the United States. Luisa believed she had gained much positive affirmation from knowing there were other women in her position with whom she could perhaps speak. She was pleased to discover that at the very least, issues of importance to her were being raised overseas and increasingly so in Australia. Caterina considered her participation had helped her reconsider her own stereotypes of heterosexual Italian-Australian women, while Silvana was pleased to have an opportunity to share her ideas on issues that she had been carefully thinking about for many years.

As Oakley writes, "personal involvement", subjective bias and influence over the participants is unavoidable. Indeed, she asserts "personal involvement is...the condition under which people come to know each other and to admit others into their lives"(1981:58). Oakley proposes that the traditional male model of scientific or 'hygienic' research should be challenged. This study, within its limited scope, demonstrates the advantages of that challenge. Without 'personal involvement', the oral sources would simply not have been available and hence an invaluable counterpoint to the largely non-Australian written materials would have been lost.

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