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The relationships between sexual desire, sexual frequency and fusion in lesbian relationships

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THE RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN SEXUAL DESIRE, SEXUAL FREQUENCY AND FUSION IN LESBIAN RELATIONSHIPS

by

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A Dissertation submitted to the Faculty of Arts, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts (Clinical Psychology)

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation explores the relationships between fusion (operationalised as a very high level of intimacy), levels of sexual desire and the frequency of sexual activity in lesbian relationships of duration longer than one year. The viability and appropriateness of the research method is also assessed, as this is an under-researched area. Fusion is theoretically and clinically posited to be associated to be associated with low levels of desire and sexual activity for lesbian couples. The questionnaire used consists of the Personal Assessment of Intimacy in Relationships Inventory, demographic questions and measures of the frequency of sexual activity and levels of sexual desire. This last had to be discarded as invalid. Participants were found via friendship networks and the media, and questionnaires were distributed and returned postally. The sample of thirty-six women covers a broad range of ages but is predominantly English-speaking and skewed towards higher education and salary levels. Spearman correlation coefficients were calculated for the variables. The frequency of sexual activity does not correlate significantly with any form of intimacy, including sexual intimacy. Sexual activity does decline in frequency with an increase in the age of the participants and their partners and with an increase in the duration of the relationship, a finding in accordance with overseas reasearch.

Happiness in the relationship correlates positively with levels of intimacy, but does not correlate significantly with the frequency of sexual activity. The low response rate (16%) suggests that other means of data collection need to be explored. A more appropriate measure of social intimacy needs to be developed for lesbian couples, and sexual desire and fusion need to be more adequately conceptualised and operationalised for future research.

DECLARATION

I declare that this dissertation is my own unaided work. It is being submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts (Clinical Psychology) at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted for any degree or examination at any other University, nor has it been prepared under the aegis or with the assistance of any other body or organisation or person outside the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg.

Signed: SBlyth

Susan Blyth

SIXTEENTH day of MARCH , 19 93

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my mother, whose love and support has made such a difference to my life, and who sincerely hopes that she will never have to see me through another degree.

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I. INTRODUCTION

It is generally accepted that between four and twenty per cent of the population are primarily interested in people of the same gender in terms of sexual object choice (Masters & Johnson, 1979). The majority of these gay, lesbian and bisexual people believe, or have learnt (as Oscar Wilde did), that the "love which dares not speak its name" should be kept hidden because of legal, moral and social sanctions against homosexual behaviour (Boswell, 1980).

This obviously has an effect on their lives: influencing (among other things) the way they interact with society at large, the way they meet and develop relationships with others, and the way they perceive themselves and those whom they love.

It has also had, and continues to have, an effect on what is known about the experiences and interpersonal relationships of gay, lesbian and bisexual people. Literature and research has been affected by the prejudices of professionals (Stein, 1988), and research continues to be affected by factors such as limited access to this hidden population, and, possibly, by the perceived need for researchers not to identify their own sexual preference. This is particularly true of South Africa, where the legal, moral and social sanctions against homosexual behaviour have not decreased to the extent that

they have in the United States of America, Britain, Australia and much of Europe (Glanz, 1988).

As a result, any attempt to carry out research on the intimate relationships of South African lesbians at this stage is necessarily preliminary: because of the small amount of previous research which can be built on, the very limited access to participants, and the biased nature of the resulting samples. It is usually not possible to carry out a pilot study, as the pilot study itself would exhaust the number of available participants. At present, research in this field in South Africa therefore has to fulfil two functions: to assess the viability of the study and the validity of the research method, and to attempt to answer the research question(s) posed.

The aims of this study are to explore the relationships between the levels of intimacy, the frequency of sexual activity, and the levels of sexual desire within lesbian couples who have been together for longer than a year; to assess the viability of the research and the validity of the research method used; and to suggest more appropriate ways of exploring these issues on the basis of what is learnt here.

After a brief discussion about terminology and some definitions, the aims of and rationale for this research are presented in more detail in this chapter.

1. TERMINOLOGY

When dealing with complex and value-laden topics such as sexual identity, it is necessary to select and clarify one's terminology carefully.

A number of different terms are used in various contexts to refer to women whose primary sexual object choices are other women, e.g. homosexual, dyke, gay, lesbian. The term "homosexual" is not used in this dissertation because of its clinical history and its inaccuracy (Boswell, 1980); and "dyke" is not accepted as standard terminology. While the term "gay" was used in correspondence with the participants, as it appears to be the one which causes the least offence or discomfort (Blyth, 1989), the term "lesbian" is used in the dissertation itself, as it refers unambiguously to women. (Men whose primary sexual object choices are other men are referred to as "gay men" as this is the generally accepted terminology.)

The definition of the term lesbian remains a problematic issue. Most people's sexual and emotional relationships are complex and, for some people, change over time (Blyth, 1989). Some women define themselves as lesbian and participate in lesbian communities without being sexually involved with women, while others are sexually active with women but do not define themselves as lesbian (Weeks, 1987). The majority of women who define themselves as lesbian, however, consider this to be a <u>sexual</u> identity in terms of the gender of those with whom they choose to have sexually intimate relationships,

although they may consider the sexual components of their relationships to be less important than other factors (Blyth, 1989).

Existing definitions are numerous and varied as a result (e.g. Armon, 1960; Ferguson, 1981; Kenyon, 1970; Kitzinger, 1987; Loney, 1973; Weeks, 1987), although the majority define lesbians on the basis of their sexual relationships with other women (Kitzinger, 1987).

As this research focuses on the dynamics between two women involved in an intimate sexual and emotional relationship, and not on lesbians or lesbianism *per se*, the complex issues surrounding the definition of "lesbian" do not need to be dealt with here. A "lesbian relationship" is defined in this dissertation as one which involves a sexual and emotional relationship between two women; and a "lesbian" is defined as a woman involved in such a relationship.

"The terms `merger', `fusion' and `enmeshment' are often used interchangeably" (Burch, 1986, p. 57), but in the context of lesbian couples "fusion" appears to be used more frequently, and is thus used here. Fusion can be defined briefly as a state of psychological unity between two (or more) people, in which individual ego boundaries merge or are crossed. The concept will be explained in more detail in Ch IV.

2. RESEARCH AIMS

The basic aim of this research is to establish whether there is a significant correlation between levels of sexual desire and frequency of sexual activity, and levels of intimacy (as reported by the participants) within lesbian relationships of duration longer than one year.

An additional aim, given that this area does not appear to have been explored at all via research, is to assess the viability and appropriateness of the research method and tools chosen for the examination of the relationships between these variables. Previous research in South Africa which used lesbian women as participants (Blyth, 1989) clearly showed the difficulties involved in finding an adequately sized sample, and it was thus decided not to attempt a pilot study, but to carry out a preliminary investigation instead.

Research hypotheses

Null hypothesis 1. There is no significant linear or non-linear correlation between reported levels of frequency of sexual activity and reported levels of intimacy within lesbian relationships of duration longer than one year.

Null hypothesis 2. There is no significant linear or non-linear correlation between reported levels of sexual desire and reported levels of intimacy within lesbian relationships of duration longer than one year.

3. RATIONALE

Lesbianism remains under-researched by South African social scientists, and research done elsewhere cannot be assumed to be applicable here (Blyth, 1989), although it can be used as a basis for South African research. The experiences of South African lesbians thus provide scope for psychological research.

Like most people, many lesbians are, or wish to be, involved in a long-term monogamous relationship with another person (Pendegrass, 1975). However, there is little non-fiction literature available which explores these relationships. Duffy & Rusbult (1985/86) point out that

> Considering the importance of close relationships for individual well-being and life satisfaction, it becomes critical that we develop a greater understanding of the causes of happiness and stability in relationships (p. 2).

Moreover, Mencher (1990) points out that an examination of the "behavior, emotional dynamics, and patterns of intimacy in lesbian relationships" (p. 2) may offer new insights into women's psychological development.

Roth (1985) found that although lesbian couples are much like other couples in terms of relationship dynamics (Pendegrass, 1975), there are differences between their relationship patterns and those of heterosexual couples. Some of these differences are in the areas of distance regulation and boundary maintenance, and sexual expression. In addition there

do appear to be areas in which they experience particular difficulties (Burch, 1986; Elise, 1986; Ussher, 1991). Even within lesbian communities, "there is a growing recognition that relationship difficulties tend to follow a certain pattern" (Elise, 1986, P. 305). Two of these areas of difficulty are problems with fusion, and decreased sexual desire and activity (e.g. Burch, 1982, 1986, 1987; Elise, 1986; Kaufman, Harrison & Hyde, 1984; Krestan & Bepko, 1980; Mencher, 1990; Rose, 1989; Roth, 1985).

In a comprehensive study of married, cohabiting heterosexual, gay male and lesbian couples, Blumstein and Schwartz (1983) found that lesbian couples had the lowest frequency of sexual activity of all the couple types they studied. Bell and Weinberg (1978) found that the sexual difficulty mentioned most frequently by their lesbian participants was not having sex often enough, while Blumstein and Schwartz found that sexual dissatisfaction and conflict were more highly related to break-ups of lesbian couples together for more than two years than for any other couple type. In addition, clinical impressions indicate that inhibited or low desire is a common problem among lesbian couples seeking therapy (Clunis & Green, 1988; Nichols, 1987a, 1987b, 1988).

Low levels of sexual activity and desire are thus a problem for some lesbian couples, and are therefore of interest to researchers and clinicians. Moreover, attempts to understand the causes of infrequent sexual activity and low sexual desire are important, as it is only from this understanding that ways of dealing with or treating such problems can be developed.

Although there are a number of possible explanations for low levels of sexual activity and desire within lesbian couples (the more important of which are discussed in Ch III), the factor which has most frequently been posited as an explanation is that of fusion (discussed in Ch IV).

Literature discussing the relationship between fusion (or other factors) and low sexual desire and infrequent sexual activity is theoretical or has been based on observations in clinical practice. There does not appear to have been any research in this area carried out on a non-clinical sample of lesbians in relationships. Ussher (1991) points out that the "lack of a solid data base" (p. 133) about psychological or relationship problems, or the effectiveness of interventions for these problems, may result in false assumptions about the problems or the interventions. This can then adversely affect the clinician's choice of therapy.

Thus the primary purpose of this research is to begin to provide some data on specific problems which may be present in some lesbian relationships - namely infrequent sexual activity, low sexual desire and fusion - and the relationships between these. If appropriate, this data can be used as the basis for interventions.

The secondary aim of this study is to assess the appropriateness of the research method and the questionnaire used, in order to suggest changes and developments which would enable researchers to explore lesbian relationships more accurately and comprehensively.

This research is not only for research psychologists and clinicians, but also for lesbians themselves, who, through "fear, embarrassment, and stereotypes ... have kept the problem of lesbian sexual dysfunction under wraps" (Nichols, 1987a, p. 242). The necessity of research <u>on</u> women also being <u>for</u> women is stressed in the principles of feminist research (Acker, Barry & Esseveld, 1983).

The following chapter provides a very brief outline of the development of research on lesbian relationships and of research on lesbians and lesbian relationships in South Africa.

II. RESEARCH ON LESBIAN RELATIONSHIPS

Psychiatry's definition of homosexuality as a mental illness (prior to the APA's decision to reverse this in 1973) resulted in a research bias that meant that little was known about the lives and relationships of gay men and lesbians outside of clinical, military and prison settings (Stein, 1988). Cabaj (1988) points out that before real efforts were made to study gay men and lesbian couples, "the myth that homosexuals were incapable of maintaining intimate relationships had to be challenged" (p. 21). This process was fostered by the work of people such as Bell and Weinberg (1978), Masters and Johnson (1979), and the feminist and gay liberation movements (Cabaj).

Despite these changes, social science literature on lesbian and gay male relationships has remained sparse, particularly when compared with the amount of literature and research on heterosexual relationships. Most of the existing work on lesbians and gay men focuses on them as individuals; for example, the development of a gay/lesbian sexual identity (e.g. Cass, 1979; Ponse, 1978), and the personality characteristics of gay men and lesbians (e.g. Allen, 1969). Internationally, little research into the sexual behaviours, relationships and problems of lesbians and gay men was published prior to the late 1970's (Moses and Hawkins, 1982).

Lesbians, in particular, are under-represented in the literature.

All of this is equally true of work done in South Africa. Most of the little psychological and sociological research on homosexuality in South Africa is based on a variety of models of homosexuality as pathology and has focused on "white" gay men. The research on gay men has focused primarily on the "aetiology" (Kotze, 1974; Prinsloo, 1973) and the "treatment" (Botha, 1975; Jacobs, 1975; Kotze, 1974; Loedolff, 1951) of homosexuality. The limited number of studies on women have generally been less negative (e.g. Budlender, 1980; Liddicoat, 1956; Schurink, 1981; Tucker, 1986; Woolfson, 1976) but focus on much the same areas. It appears that Knight's (1989) study of lesbian couples is the only one which focuses on lesbian relationships per se.

Since the early 1980's, however, there have been an increasing number of articles and books in the U.S.A. and Great Britain which do examine lesbian relationships (e.g. Boston Lesbian Psychologies Collective, 1987; Duffy & Rusbult, 1985/86; Elise, 1986; Krestan & Bepko, 1980; Kurdek, 1988; Mencher, 1990; Stein & Cohen, 1986; Zacks, Green & Marrow, 1988).

Two of the important issues which have emerged in this literature are what has come to be known as fusion, and problems with sexual desire and frequency. Clinicians have posited a direct relationship between these two, arguing that the lack of separateness in a fused couple leads to lowered sexual desire and therefore to lower frequencies of sexual

activity. The aims of much of this literature have been to foster an understanding of the dynamics of lesbian relationships, and to suggest ways for therapists to assist lesbians who report these problems.

In the following chapters, evidence of and explanations for lowered sexual desire and low frequencies of sexual activity will be explored.

III. LOW SEXUAL DESIRE & INFREQUENT SEXUAL ACTIVITY

Definitions of, research evidence for, and possible explanations for low sexual desire and infrequent sexual activity will be discussed. Some problems with measures of and assumptions about these variables will also be mentioned.

1. DEFINITIONS OF LOW SEXUAL DESIRE AND INFREQUENT SEXUAL ACTIVITY

Sexual desire is a complex concept which is intuitively understood but difficult to define. Simply put, it is the desire to engage in sexual activity of some kind, and derives from biological and emotional bases (Masters, Johnson & Kolodney, 1992). It manifests as physical arousal and/or as emotional needs or wishes. The triggers for sexual desire are multitudinous, and are influenced by biological factors (e.g. hormones), emotional states, and social and cultural norms and expectations (Newton & Walton, 1983). Sexual desire is usually acted on alone, acted on with one or more other people, or ignored by the individual (Masters et al.).

Although this definition may seem to indicate that sexual desire is easily defined, it is in fact difficult to conceptualize and much more difficult to operationalise. Some of the questions which appear to remain unanswered at this

stage of theoretical and research sophistication are: Can it be said that desire exists before physiological arousal is present? Can the measurement of desire be separated from the presence of triggers for desire? What is the relationship between sexual intimacy and sexual desire?

Indeed, it seems that many of these questions are not even asked. Much of the literature appears to use the concept of "desire" without adequately defining or operationalising it and, as will be discussed, relating it in a very direct way to sexual activity. An attempt is made in this research to conceptualize and operationalise sexual desire in a slightly more complex manner; an attempt which has proved to be less than successful. This is discussed further in Ch's V and VII.

Sexual activity is, generally speaking, any activity which is experienced as sexual by the individual. Within the context of this research, the term sexual activity is used to refer to interactions between two partners in a couple which are experienced as specifically sexual, i.e. "making love". Affectionate physical contact and solitary sexual behaviour is therefore not dealt with here.

Low levels of sexual desire and infrequent sexual activity can only be defined in relation to some set of standards or norms, but the enormous variation found among human beings (Masters, Johnson & Kolodney, 1992) makes the development of meaningful norms impossible. In addition, Ussher (1991) points out that "one must be careful before making suppositions about ... [low sexual desire and infrequent sex] being problematic" (p. 142),

as it is inappropriate to use norms based on heterosexual relationships to make assumptions about lesbian relationships (Jeffreys, 1990). When lesbian sexuality is defined according to male or heterosexual norms, these norms can be used as a form of oppression (Nichols, 1987a). For example, Blumstein & Schwartz (1983) note that lesbian couples often see non-genital activity as an end in itself, placing less emphasis on genital sexual activity. Low sexual desire and infrequent sexual activity can therefore only be understood in terms of the needs and wishes of the individuals within a relationship (Masters, et al., 1992), such that infrequent sexual activity and low sexual desire are only "dysfunctional" if they are a problem for the individual or cause difficulties or distress in the relationship.

2. EVIDENCE FOR LOW SEXUAL DESIRE AND INFREQUENT SEXUAL ACTIVITY IN LESBIAN RELATIONSHIPS

According to research and clinical evidence, low or inhibited desire may be the most common sexual dysfunction in all intimate relationships (Frank, Anderson & Rubinstein, 1978; Hyde, 1986). Clinical impressions indicate that low or inhibited sexual desire is a common problem among lesbian couples seeking therapy (Clunis & Green, 1988; Nichols, 1988, 1987a, 1987b). While research evidence is not available to support these clinical impressions about problems with levels of desire, there is good research evidence to show that lesbians have the lowest levels of sexual activity among couple types.

In their survey of 3603 heterosexual married, 637 heterosexual cohabiting, 950 gay male and 768 lesbian couples, Blumstein and Schwartz (1983) found that lesbian couples were substantially less sexually active than any of the other groups of couples.

The following two graphs (adapted and shortened from Blumstein & Schwartz's 1983 findings) illustrate this clearly.

Figure 3.1. The percentage of couples sexually active once a month or less often.

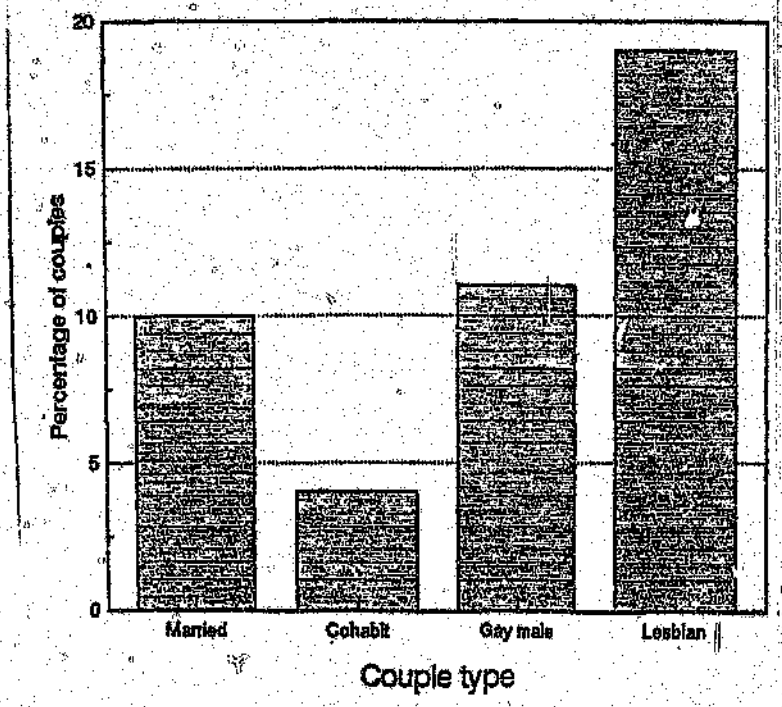
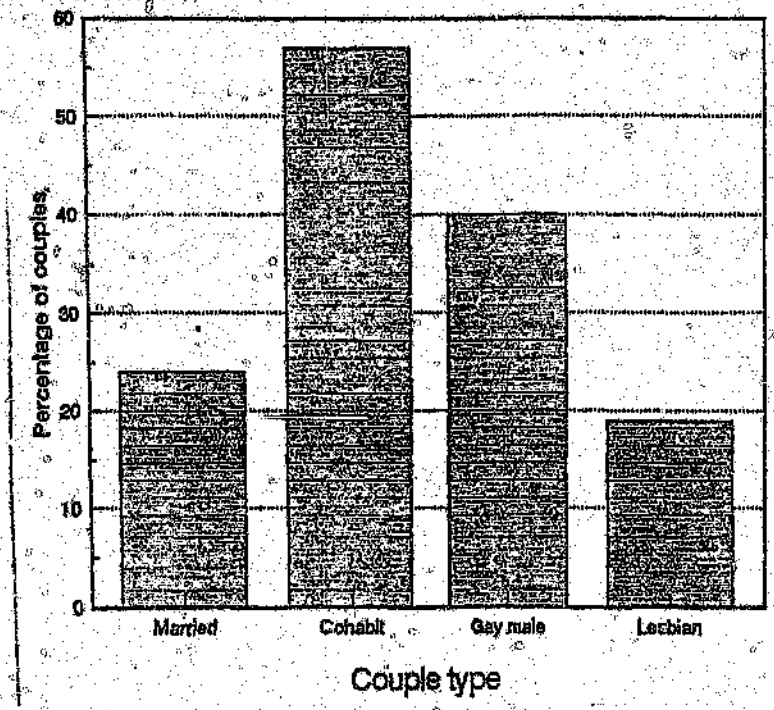


Figure 3.2. The percentage of couples sexually active three times a week or more often.



Of Blumstein & Schwartz's (1983) total sample, 19% of the lesbian couples were sexually active once a month or less, compared with 10% of married, 4% of cohabiting heterosexual, and 11% of gay male couples. In addition, only 19% of lesbian couples were sexually active three or more times per week, compared with 24% of married, 57% of cohabiting heterosexual, and 40% of gay male couples.

Moreover, while there was, in all groups, a decrease over time in the percentage of couples who were sexually active three or more times a week, and an increase in the percentage who were sexually active once a month or less, lesbian couples showed the greatest decrease and increase respectively.

The following table, adapted and shortened from Blumstein & Schwartz (1983), and represented in Graphs 3.3. and 3.4, illustrates this.

Table 3.1. Percentage of couples sexually active once a month or less and three times a week or more, by couple type over time.

	Once a month or less				Three times a week or more			
Years together	Marr	Coha	Gay	Lesb	Marr	Coha	Gay	Lesb
0-2	6%	1%	3%	5%	45%	67%	33%	
2-10	6%	7%	13%	28%	2	22%	7%	
10+	15%	-	33%	47%		%	1%	

[Marr = Married; Coha = Cohabiting heterosexual; Gay = Gay male; Lesb = Lesbian]

Figure 3.3. Percentage of couples sexually active once a month or less often, by couple type over time.

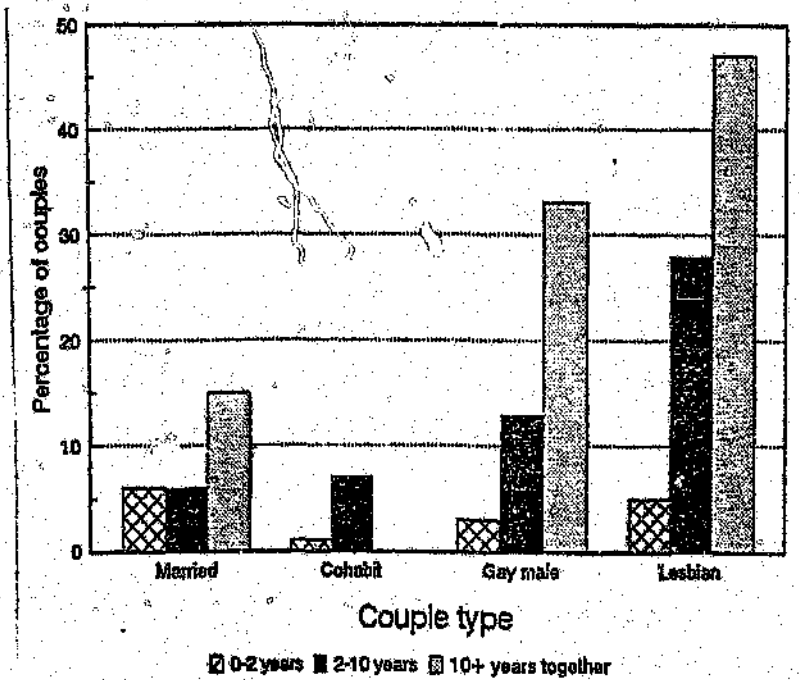
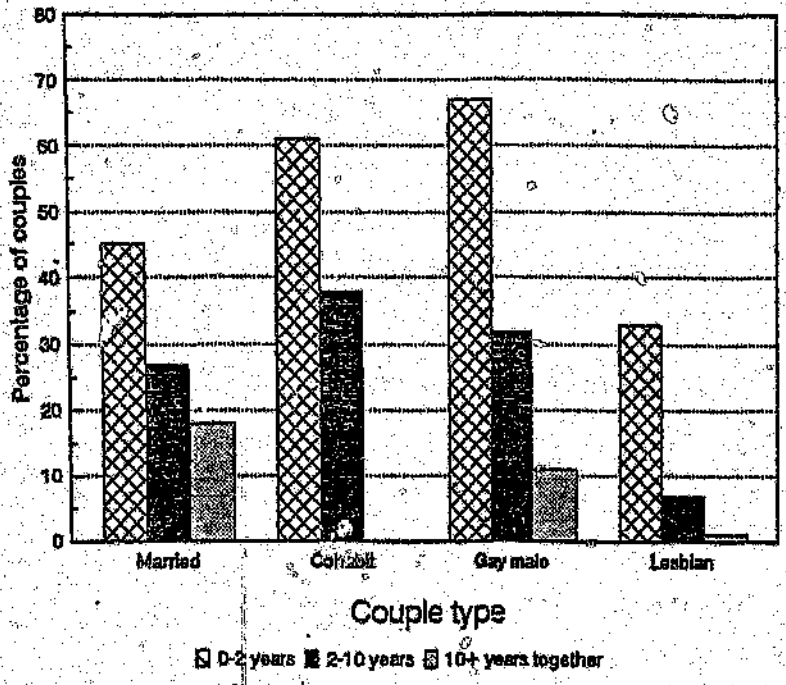


Figure 3.4. Percentage of couples sexually active three times a week or more often, by couple type over time.



In addition, Blumstein & Schwartz (1983) found that the less sex a couple engaged in, the less satisfied they were with their sex lives. Although lesbian couples report that sexual satisfaction is not related to relationship satisfaction (Blumstein & Schwartz, 1983; Duffy & Rusbult, 1986; Kurdek, 1986), this finding is contradicted by the evidence from Blumstein & Schwartz's follow-up study of half their sample eighteen months after the original survey. The study indicated that lesbian couples were more likely to have ended their relationship than any other couple type. Twenty-two per cent of lesbian couples together for less than two years had ended their relationships, compared with 4% of married heterosexual and 16% of gay male couples. Of the couples who had been

together for two to ten years, 20% of lesbian couples had ended their relationships, compared with 6% of married heterosexual and 16% of gay male couples; and of couples together for more than ten years, 6% of lesbian couples, compared with 4% of married heterosexual and 4% of gay male couples, had ended their relationships. They found that, although sexual dissatisfaction was not significantly related to the ending of relationships for lesbians who had been together for less than two years, sexual dissatisfaction and conflict over sex were more highly related to relationship endings for lesbians who had been together for between two and ten years than for any other couple type, and even more strongly related to relationship endings for those lesbian couples who had been together for more than ten years.

In addition, Bell and Weinberg (1978) found in their research on homosexuality that the sexual problem mentioned most frequently by their lesbian participants was not having sex often enough.

Thus, although lesbians <u>say</u> that relationship satisfaction is not related to sexual satisfaction, sexual dissatisfaction does appear to be strongly related to the ending of relationships for lesbian couples. Hall (1987) feels that many couples in therapy who report infrequent sex but who say that the lack of sex is not a problem, have "muffled various disappointments, sex among them, under layers of compromise and denial" (p. 144).

There is thus some clinical evidence to suggest that lesbian couples experience problems with low sexual desire, and strong research evidence to support the idea that low levels of sexual activity are a problem in many lesbian relationships.

The question that needs to be asked is why these problems occur. A number of different explanations have been put forward in an attempt to answer this.

A difficulty emerges at this point. There appears to be some confusion in the literature about the relationship between sexual desire and sexual frequency. Because the measurement of desire is problematic, measures of frequency are used to provide an indication of levels of desire (Rose, 1989). While Rose articulates this assumption, others (such as Burch, 1986, Hall, 1987, and Krestan & Bepko, 1980) do not do so. Hall, for example, uses Blumstein & Schwartz's (1983) data as direct evidence for problems with sexual desire and erotic feelings. As a result, the two variables are generally dealt with as if they were directly related.

Common sense should call this assumption into question. It is unlikely that couples will be sexually active each time one or both of them experience desire. Conversely, sexual activity can be a way of meeting needs for, for example, comfort or closeness, or even a way of expressing emotions such as anger or the wish to hurt or humiliate the other; rather than simply being a response to one's own sexual desire.

An attempt will therefore be made to distinguish between explanations for low sexual desire and for low levels of sexual activity in lesbian couples. Moreover, the research method used differentiates between these two variables.

3. EXPLANATIONS FOR LOW SEXUAL DESIRE AND INFREQUENT SEXUAL ACTIVITY IN LESBIAN RELATIONSHIPS

Clinicians have posited a number of explanations for dysfunctional low sexual frequency in lesbian couples. These include boredom, large discrepancies in desire between the partners, specific sexual disorders (e.g phobias), symptoms of other disorders such as depression, and relationship problems manifesting in sexual symptoms (Nichols, 1987a). None of these are specific to lesbian couples. However, some factors appear to affect lesbian couples more frequently. Rose (1989) argues that inhibited desire is one factor affecting sexual frequency and suggests reasons (particularly inhibition problems related to women's sexual development, or "sexual shame") for inhibited desire. Nichols (1987a) argues that sexual script problems arising from "sets of expectations about how sex should be between partners" (p. 249) are an important factor. The most frequently suggested factor is fusion which manifests, at least in part, through infrequent sexual activity and/or low levels of desire. This last will be discussed in more depth in Ch IV.

a) Sexual shame

> Sexuality is often a complicated, even troubled, area for women because most women have experienced conflict related to their bodies and sexual expression (Burch, 1986, p. 64).

Rose (1989) uses Kohut's (1971 & 1977) concepts of the grandiose self and the idealised other to argue that sexual shame is a primary factor in inhibiting sexual desire among lesbians.

Kohut's (1971) theory suggests that two central psychological structures, the grandiose self and the idealised other, are involved in the development of the self. If the grandiose self (the infant or young child's perception of him/herself as all-powerful) is adequately responded to and "mirrored" by his/her primary caregivers, the child will develop a "sense of pride and a mature, cohesive self" (Rose, 1989, p. 8). However, if caregivers do not respond appropriately to the grandiose self, shame will arise. As the grandiose self is challenged by reality, the child needs an idealised other with whose perfection and power the child can merge, leading to the development of a strong ego, an ego ideal, and the "capacity for empathy, creativeness, humor, and wisdom" (Rose, p. 8). If the person who represents the idealised other is not able to meet the child's needs, then these failures of the idealised other will be attributed to perceived defects in the self (such that the idealised other remains perfect) and a sense of shame will develop.

On the basis of the above, Rose (1989) constructs four possible developmental paths that could lead to sexual pride or shame. These are: bodily shame or pride; entitlement to sexual pleasure; internal competence versus self blame; and the sexual ideal.

She (Rose, 1989) suggests that if caregivers respond appropriately to the child's sense grandiose sense of their own bodies, bodily pride will develop; whereas inappropriate responses such as inadequate mirroring or sexual abuse may lead to bodily. If caregivers respond to a child's sexuality with positive responses, a sense of entitlement to sexual pleasure will develop; while responses of anger or embarrassment may lead to shame around sexual needs. The presence of an adequate idealised other would enable the child to internalise a sense of adequacy and stability; while the lack of an idealisable other leads the child to attribute parental failures to defects in the self, and to deal with relationship problems primarily through self-blame in later life. The "availability of an admired same-sex selfobject" (Rose, p. 10) would allow the development of a positive sexual self-image; but if the same-sex caregiver cannot be admired, then a negative or diffuse sexual self-image may develop.

She then argues that

> the socialisation of women virtually guarantees that outcomes connected to the grandiose self and idealized other are more likely to cause shame (including sexual shame) than pride, regardless of a woman's sexual orientation (Rose, 1989, p. 10).

The basis for this is research that supports the beliefs that caregivers tend not to respond to girls' bodies as positively and appropriately as they do to boys' (e.g. the number of girls who are abused, Russell, 1984), that girls' physical competence is not mirrored as it is for boys (Maccoby & Jacklin, 1974), and that girls' sexuality is strongly curtailed (Laws & Schwartz, 1977). On the other hand, girls are strongly reinforced for caring for others rather than for expressing their sexual needs. Rose also suggests that others, who belong to a less powerful group than fathers, do not provide as adequate an idealizable other for girls as fathers can for boys.

On the basis of a review of theory and existing research data, she suggests that lesbians are more likely to experience particular shame around a feeling of entitlement to sexual pleasure, as opposed to only caring for their partners (so that lesbians are less likely to play an active role in requesting sex, Nichols, 1987a), and in apportioning responsibility for sexual problems (being more likely to take the responsibility themselves). She suggests that sexual shame leads to lower levels of sexual desire, and that this then plays a role in lowered levels of sexual frequency.

Rose (1989) points out that the effects of shame in lesbian relationships are different from those in heterosexual relationships. This is because heterosexual relationships are socially sanctioned and encouraged and involve only one partner who has had "gender-based shame-producing experiences regarding sex" (p. 13).

The notion that sexual shame is a causative factor in low sexual desire is challenged by the work of people like Behrendt & George (1987). They found in clinical practice that, contrary to other reports by, for example, Masters and Johnson (1979), the most frequent sexual dysfunction reported by gay males was inhibited sexual desire. They found that the source of stress is frequently a traumatic experience early in life arising out of religious, social and family taboos against homosexuality, leading to sexual shame. Nonetheless, gay male couples report substantially higher levels of sexual activity than lesbian couples, suggesting that gay men may experience higher levels of desire than women in lesbian relationships.

Thus, although sexual shame is an important factor to consider, it does not appear to provide a sufficient explanation for the problems lesbians experience in terms of sexual desire.

b) Sexual script problems

More specific to lesbian couples are problems derived from the overt and covert sexual scripts internalised and accepted by women and, more particularly, by lesbian women. Sexual scripts can be understood as the "sets of expectations about how sex should be among partners" (Nichols, 1987a, p. 249).

Forms of sexual expression, as opposed to desire, are more strongly influenced by cultural and social norms than by

biological drives and emotional needs (Masters, Johnson & Kolodney, 1992). With few other lesbian role models available to them, lesbians are likely to base their perceptions of appropriate behaviour patterns within their relationships on norms from within the lesbian community (Nichols, 1987b; Roth, 1987) and on the representations of lesbian relationships in literature (both fiction and non-fiction). People look to fiction "for information, reassurance, affirmation about the ways in which other (fictional) people feel, believe, act and ... love" (Hennegan, 1985, p. 3). In a discussion of lesbian sexuality, Ardill & O'Sullivan (1989) refer to an "internal agenda of 'shoulds' and 'shouldn'ts'" as well as "external demands and attacks" (p. 130) which strongly influence lesbians' sexual practices.

Although sexual scripts are varied and complex, there appear to be two main relationship "scripts" or "discourses" about lesbian relationships in lesbian communities and in the literature. The first is what this researcher has termed the "anti-masculine" script or discourse and the second, which is less pervasive, has been termed the "anti-feminine" script or discourse.

The "anti-masculine" script is one in which all the aspects of female socialisation which are perceived of as positive and "female" are reinforced, and all the aspects of heterosexual relationships which are perceived of as "male" are rejected. For example, promiscuity, lust, aggression, pain, exploitation and domination are perceived of as masculine and therefore believed to have no place within lesbian relationships. A

lesbian relationship based on such a script is portrayed as one in which there is an "idealised romantic relationship of lovers, riding off into a sunset, escaping worldly pressures and reality in their isolation, making their promises of lifelong fidelity, and believing that they belong to one another" (Kaufman, Harrison & Hyde, 1984, p. 531). This script, which has been strongly influenced by feminism, emphasises mutuality, reciprocity, gentleness, nurturing and sensitivity (Burch, 1986), and is referred to by Nichols (1987b) as "Sexually Correct".

The "anti-feminine" script or discourse is based on the belief that the dominant male social order foists certain limitations of behaviour onto women, demanding that they be pure, monogamous, passive, gentle, etc.; and that lesbian women can and should reject these limitations and claim their full sexuality (Vance, 1984). This discourse is represented in pornographic lesbian magazines such as "On Our Backs" and discussed in books such as Pleasure and Danger (Vance, 1984).

Although there is a strong move towards placing less emphasis on "Sexually Correct" behaviour, with lesbian clinicians such as Nichols (1979a, 1979b) suggesting that "lesbian sexuality needs to get more 'male' in its orientation, with more emphasis on sex itself and less on romance" (Nichols, 1978a, p. 259), the "anti-masculine" script appears to remain the norm.

While the theory of sexual scripts goes some way to explain why lesbian couples have lowered levels of sexual activity,

it fails to explain why desire – which is less influenced by social and cultural factors – also seems to be lowered in these couples. The concept of fusion offers a more satisfying explanation for low sexual desire.

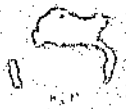
c) Relationship problems: fusion

As with all couples, low or inhibited desire (as well as infrequent sexual activity) is frequently a symptom of other problems within the relationship. What appears to be more specific – but not exclusive – to lesbian couples is lowered sexual desire as an expression of fusion within the couple. Fusion itself is explored in Ch IV, before the relationship between fusion and inhibited sexual desire is examined.

4. EXPECTED FINDINGS

If the theories of sexual shame and sexual scripts are accurate, then certain findings could be expected from this research. Both theories suggest that the levels of sexual desire and sexual frequency within lesbian couples should be lower than those found in other couple types, while following the same pattern. This is because sexual shame and sexual scripts would simply result in decreased desire and/or frequency, without affecting these variables in more complex ways.

Indeed, in terms of frequency of sexual activity, this is what was found by Blumstein and Schwartz (1983), who found that lesbian couples had the lowest overall level of sexual activity of all couple types. On the other hand, while the percentage of couples who had sex once a month or less often increased over time for all couple types, the rate of increase was substantially larger for lesbian couples. For example, the increase over time for couples sexually active once a month or less often, from 0-2 years to 10 or more years, was 9% for married couples, but 42% for lesbian couples. This suggests than even if sexual scripts and sexual shame play a role in the levels of lesbian sexual desire and/or frequency, additional factors are needed to provide an explanation for this discrepancy.



IV. FUSION AND LOW SEXUAL DESIRE

As fusion is the most frequently presented explanation for the difficulties that lesbian couples appear to experience in terms of low sexual desire and infrequent sexual activity, it is discussed in more depth than the other explanations offered.

1. DEFINITIONS OF FUSION AND INTIMACY

The use of the concept of fusion (otherwise referred to as "merging" or enmeshment") to attempt to explain certain dynamics within lesbian relationships is fairly recent, and there does not appear to be clarity about its definition. On the one hand, it is sometimes defined within the literature as if it were a dynamic which is separate and different from other relational dynamics. On the other hand, it is usually used within the same literature as if it fell on a continuum of intimacy. This continuum runs from autonomy and separateness on one end to fusion on the other. As a result, it is not always clear whether authors understand it to be a distinctive dynamic or an aspect of intimacy.

Fusion has been defined as: the "merging of two ego boundaries" (Roth, 1987, abstract); "a dissolution of individual boundaries, a submergence of the self in the larger

arena of the relationship" (Hall, 1987, p. 138); and as "a state of psychic unity; individual ego boundaries are temporarily crossed and two persons experience - consciously or unconsciously - a kind of oneness" (Burch, 1986, p. 58). Burch defines temporary fusion with another as "a transcendence of existential aloneness, an experience of deep connectedness with the world outside oneself" (p. 58). Fusion can thus be understood as a state of psychological unity in which individual ego boundaries merge or are crossed. Fusion can indicate a temporary relief from boundaries or a lack of them (Burch, 1986).

Within the literature, fusion is dealt with as an aspect of intimacy. Nichols (1987b), for example, states that fusion lies on a continuum of intimacy, with fusion being excessive intimacy or overinvolvement.

The characteristics of fusion appear to be "intense intimacy, a lack of separation, and overidentification" (Mencher, 1990, p. 2). Burch (1986) suggests that partners who are not in a fused relationship usually shift between the ends of the intimacy continuum, coming together for moments of intense intimacy, and separating again. Couples who are fused, however, respond to any desire for separateness within the relationship with intense anxiety (Krestan & Bepko, 1980).

Fusion within a relationship is not only an internal dynamic but manifests through certain behavioural patterns. Kaufman, Harrison & Hyde (1984) suggest that the following behaviours

may be typical of fused couples:

a) sharing all activities,

b) sharing some friends and isolation from other friends,

c) no separate space or belongings, and

d) enmeshed communication patterns.

All of these are extreme examples of the levels of intimacy and involvement shared by most couples.

On the basis of the above, it was decided to use the concept of as if it lay on one end of a continuum of intimacy. Fusion is therefore understood as a relationship dynamic involving intense intimacy maintained for long enough to have implications for the functioning of a relationship.

Intimacy itself is difficult to define as it is a subjective concept. Kieffer (1977, p. 269) suggests that "a definition of intimacy is every bit as elusive as the search for intimacy itself". As with the other concepts used in this research, there have been numerous attempts to define and understand intimacy (e.g. Cozby, 1973; Gilbert, 1976; Schaefer & Olson, 1981).

Intimacy can perhaps best be understood as a closeness to another person on a variety of levels (Dahms, 1972), which could include sexual, emotional, aesthetic, recreational, commitment and communication intimacy (Clinebell & Clinebell, 1970). Clinebell and Clinebell also consider the mutual satisfaction of needs to be an important aspect of intimacy.

2. EVIDENCE OF FUSION WITHIN LESBIAN RELATIONSHIPS

Fusion is not necessarily restricted to lesbian couples. Although many family and marital therapists assume that the more intimacy the better (Waring, 1984), other researchers and clinicians (e.g. Bowen, 1978; Minuchin, 1974; Olson, Russel & Sprenkle, 1983; Olson, Sprenkle & Russel, 1979) have indicated that some couples may be too enmeshed or feel smothered by too much cohesion (Harper & Elliot, 1988).

The majority of the evidence for fusion in lesbian couples comes from clinical practice (e.g. Burch, 1982, 1986, 1987; Hall, 1987; Krestan & Bepko, 1980). Krestan and Bepko found that the theme of fusion was invariably a critical issue, whatever other problems were presented by their lesbian clients, and they point out that

> It has been postulated that fusion and attempts to deal with it are crucial issues in treating the lesbian couple and that these issues exist in concert with a wide range of clinical problems generally encountered in practice (p. 289).

Burch (1986, 1987) found that lesbian couples often come into therapy with symptoms such as loss of sexuality, lack of conflict, continual conflict, or one partner having an affair. A complete lack of conflict suggests that there may be insufficient space between the partners for conflict to develop. Loss of sexuality, continual conflict, or having an affair could indicate an attempt by one or both of the partners to create boundaries between them in order to lessen

the fusion. Although problems with fusion are not the only possible explanations for these relationship dynamics, she found that the increased autonomy and separateness achieved through couple therapy frequently resulted in a lessening of the symptoms.

High levels of cohesion can be perceived a valuable way for lesbian couples facing a predominantly heterosexual world to cope, helping them function more successfully as a couple, rather than as "a pathology" (Zacks, Green & Marrow, 1988). Moreover, fusion is a normal part of the early stages of a relationship, and is often actively pursued as it deepens the intensity of the interactions (Burch, 1986; Mattison & McWhirter, 1987). But if fusion continues to replace the "ebb and flow of connection and separation" (Burch, p. 59) during the later stages of the relationship, then problems such as the symptoms listed above may begin to develop.

3. EXPLANATIONS FOR FUSION IN LESBIAN RELATIONSHIPS

Explanations for fusion within lesbian relationships have been related to two main factors: sexual preference and gender. Explanations based on sexual preference relate the development of fusion to the effects on the relationship of the fact that it involves two homosexual people in a predominantly heterosexual society. Explanations based on gender involve the understanding that gender has significant implications for the individual in all areas of life. As a result, these focus

on the social or intrapsychic consequences of the fact that the relationship involves two women.

Duffy and Rusbult (1985/86) found in their research on satisfaction and commitment in lesbian, gay male and heterosexual couples, that gender appeared to be a more important predictor of behaviours related to maintaining relationships than sexual preference. For example, women reported higher investment in and greater commitment to maintaining their relationships than men did. This would support theories which argue that there are gender differences in terms of relationship behaviour, probably resulting from differing developmental paths for males and females. They argue that theories which explain fusion in terms of gender related variables rather than variables related to sexual preference are likely to be more powerful, as all of us develop as gendered beings before we develop a sexual preference.

Despite this observation a number of theorists point to the role of external pressures on lesbian couples in the development of fusion.

a) Systems theory: a response to homophobia.

Burch points out that "... the [lesbian] relationship bears the strain of illegitimate status in the eyes of the dominant culture. The partnership must find ways of dealing with this stigmatization" (1986, p. 57).

Glanz's (1988) examination of the attitudes of "white" South Africans towards the legalisation of homosexuality and other legal issues (based on a Human Sciences Research Council survey), indicates clearly that South African lesbians have to contend with attitudes which are predominantly negative.

She found that 70,9% of a sample of over a thousand South Africans were against the legalisation of homosexuality between consenting adults. The respondents were also overwhelmingly opposed to allowing both gay male couples (92%) and lesbian couples (89,4%) to adopt children. They were also opposed to the granting of custody (64,5% for gay male couples and 57,9% for lesbian couples).

Thus, although most of the research on South African lesbians has not been overtly negative, it is the negative attitudes of the general public which form the social context within which they attempt to live as couples. In research on lesbian and gay couples, Kurdek (1988) found that levels of social support were related to relationship quality and to psychological adjustment. This finding was supported by Berger's (1990) research. External social support thus plays an important role in the maintenance of relationships.

Krestan & Bepko (1980) point out that lesbian couples attempt to maintain their relationship within the context of a larger system which ignores the relationship or treats it as pathological or illegitimate. Because of the lack of positive support (of the kind offered by society for heterosexual relationships) for lesbian and gay relationships (Jones &

Bates, 1978; Kaufman, Harrison & Hyde, 1984), the members of the couple tend to turn to each other for support and limit contact with the outside world (Elise, 1986), adopting a "two against a threatening world" stance (Krestan & Bepko, 1980, p. 278). According to systems theory, the lack of legitimation for their relationship by society results in the boundaries between the couple and society not being recognised. This then forces the couple to intensify the boundary between them and society. This in turn would result in an increasingly closed system in which individual boundaries become blurred. The more tightly enclosed the relationship becomes, the more likely it is that the partners will fuse (Krestan & Bepko).

While it cannot be denied that stigmatisation and the lack of social support will have an enormous impact on lesbian relationships, Elise (1986) argues that this explanation is not valid because gay men face the same lack of support and generally do not respond with fusion. In addition, Krieger (1983) points out that even when lesbian couples do have supportive social networks (e.g. women's groups), they still tend to fuse.

While systems theory provides an explanation based on the implications of the relationship being a homosexual one, socialisation theory and object relations focus on the issue of gender.

The differences between lesbian and gay male couples in terms of their response to homophobia, suggests that these

differences are more probably based on gender-related issues. Thus, explanations for fusion based on the gender of the partners may provide more answers. Stein (1988, p. 16) points out that

> two women in an intimate relationship bring with them intrapsychic and interpersonal similarities that may increase the capacity for some forms of intimacy at the same time that they create certain problems in maintaining psychological boundaries.

b) Socialisation theory: Sex-role socialisation

Socialisation theory argues that males and females are socialised from early childhood to focus on different cues, and to respond to cues in different ways, leading to different ways of behaving and relating.

Women are trained as part of their sex-role socialisation to focus on relationships, to respond to the needs of others (Krestan & Bepko, 1980), and to deny their own needs (Kaufman, Harrison & Hyde, 1984; Zacks, Green & Marrow 1988). It appears that women invest more energy than men do on being intimate, although men do not necessarily fear intimacy (McAdams, Lester, Brand, McNamara & Lensky, 1988).

This socialisation is frequently supported within the lesbian community, as was evident in the discussion on sexual scripts. Burch (1986) points out that there is an underlying ethic in many lesbian relationships that values "openness of emotional

expression, mutual nurturing, sensitivity to the other's needs, and a willingness to be vulnerable" (p. 61). This observation is supported by Cancian (1987) who says that lesbians "place a higher value on tenderness and verbal self-disclosure" (p. 76) than gay men.

Sex-role socialisation thus encourages women to focus on relational issues and to pursue intimacy, leading to a greater tendency for women to fuse. Hall (1987) even suggests that the messages that prescribe women's roles as "supportive and self-effacing" are so pervasive that the "notion of ego boundaries simply does not apply" (p. 139). Although Hall is no doubt overstating the case, it would seem that the socialisation of women would have implications for the way women are able to deal with intense intimacy.

Socialisation theory offers an explanation which remains, to some extent, on a behavioural level; while object relations theories provide explanations on an intrapsychic level for the same phenomena.

c) Object relations theories: gendered intrapsychic dynamics.

Burch (1986) argues that within a relationship where both partners are of the same gender, "... gender-related intrapsychic dynamics will characterize the partnership" (p. 57), and Elise suggests that the relationship pattern involved in fusion results from "the nature of female ego development, stemming from the preoedipal period" (1986, p. 305). Indeed,

psychodynamic theories provide the most powerful explanations for infants' development into gendered beings, and the ways in which this impacts on all relationships in later life.

Chodorow (1978) has been one of the psychodynamic theorists who has provided a coherent explanation for the ways in which infants become gendered at a very early age, and the ways in which this manifests itself later. She views the gender of the preoedipal infant/child's primary caretaker to be the determining factor in the development of intrapsychic gender differences, arguing that boys and girls are different because, in both cases, the primary caretaker is a woman. Unlike Freud, who questioned why women ever give up their primary attachment to a woman (Starzecpyzel, 1987), Chodorow argues that girls do not give up this primary attachment, but usually add secondary heterosexual attachments. Because the mother is female, she is similar to a daughter in ways in which she is not to a son, leading to more psychological relatedness, and a complex relationship in which separation and individuation are more difficult. There is thus less boundary definition and separateness between mothers and daughters, resulting in a longer, never fully resolved, preoedipal period for the daughter. While this developmental pattern may enable women to relate more easily than men do, it does mean that women's egos are likely to be less rigidly boundaried, resulting in relationship difficulties such as unresolved fusion (Burch, 1987).

Boys, on the other hand, develop defenses which enable them to separate from their mothers and develop a sense of maleness

by identifying with their fathers. Although men in heterosexual relationships may experience the fusion of the mother-child dyad, they are able to employ the defenses which are already developed (Mencher, 1990), and separate from the intense intimacy.

A lesbian relationship in which two women form a couple thus recreates, to some degree, the primary daughter-mother relationship with all the concomitant problems around separation and individuation (Burch, 1982; Elise, 1986; Mencher, 1990), and, as we shall discuss, associated problems with sexual expression (Starzecpyzel, 1987).

In a paper which criticises the use of traditional object-relations theories to explain fusion, Mencher (1990) uses the work of Stern (1985) to argue that the "primary experience of the self is relational; the self is organized and developed in the context of important relationships" (Surrey, 1985) and that fusion involves a highly developed relational process rather than being a regression to the preoedipal mother-daughter dyad. It appears that she believes that all clinicians and theorists who use the concept of fusion to explain certain relationship dynamics in lesbian couples are necessarily implying that this is pathological, an idea with which she strongly disagrees. Unfortunately, she does not offer an explanation for why women's relational capacities should differ from men's.

It seems that those using the concept of fusion do not assume that it is necessarily dysfunctional. Like low levels of

sexual desire and activity, fusion is only dysfunctional if it causes distress within the relationship. Conversely, fusion can be a positive relationship dynamic in that it can create "the trust and safety which fosters self-actualization and risk-taking" (Mencher, 1990, p. 4).

Burch (1986, p. 69) points out that

> lesbian relationships are often closer than other coupled relationships. This is a natural, even predictable outcome of women's desire and capacity for emotional connection. Lesbian relationships will look and feel different from other relationships. Their emotional intensity may be misunderstood or interpreted pathologically if we assume they should reflect the norms of heterosexual relationships.

d) Multi-factorial explanations

Most of the theorists whose work is presented above seem to assume that there is a single explanation for fusion, but all of the theories are probably valid to a greater or lesser extent. Thus, like most psychological variables, fusion is likely to be caused, affected and intensified by a number of different factors. Mattison and McWhirter (1987), for example, suggest that "the sameness in gender, and similarities in socialization, values, and participation in the gay communities can intensify [the process of fusion]" (p. 69). What is missing in the literature are clearly articulated multi-factorial explanations for fusion.

The following is an example of a possible multi-factorial explanation.

When relationships are not recognised as legitimate by society, as is generally true of lesbian relationships, systems theory suggests that the partners will intensify the boundary between the couple and society, with a resulting decrease in the boundary between the partners. When both partners are women, this decrease may interact with other factors related to gender. Women's sex-role socialisation encourages them to be intimate in relationships, by providing role models for and social and cultural pressures towards such ways of relating. In addition, according to Chodorow's object-relations theory, women experience an intrapsychic developmental pattern which results in their having less rigid boundaries than men do. This is more likely to have more significant consequences for levels of intimacy in relationships where both partners are women, rather than when one partner is a man. The result of the above factors could then be a fused relationship.

4. THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN FUSION AND SEXUAL EXPRESSION

Although research data and clinical observations have not shown a clear causal relationship, fusion does appear to be related to low sexual desire. Clinical observations indicate that sexual desire and sexual activity both increase as separateness and autonomy within the relationship increase

(Hall, 1987). Kaufman, Harrison & Hyde (1984, p. 533) found that "the desire for more sexual expression of love following the lifting of formerly oppressive demands for intimacy". This suggests that insufficient separateness and autonomy within a relationship may have a negative impact on levels of sexual desire and the frequency of sexual activity.

Two main explanations for the relationship between fusion and low sexual desire have been posited.

The first is based on the understanding that some difference or distance is needed to create sexual desire (Burch, 1986; Hall, 1987). Burch (1986) argues that when a couple is fused, sexual interest can become muted because the distance necessary to "create the draw of sexual attraction" (p. 64) is missing. She points out that frequently, when one partner in a relationship is not available for whatever reason, the other partner experiences increased sexual desire. According to Hatfield and Walster (19), for example, it is a lack of adrenaline which accounts for low sexual desire in a fused couple. They argue that eroticism flourishes under adversity - that this provides the adrenaline necessary for erotic feelings. Others suggest that because the fused couple is so intimate, there is no need for more closeness, and "the bridging function of sex becomes redundant" (Hall, 1987, p. 140). In this scenario, sexual intimacy is not necessary in a fused relationship, because there is sufficient emotional intimacy.

The second explanation is based on the assumption that too much intimacy provokes anxiety, and that partners need to increase distance before needs for intimacy reemerge (Feldman, 1979). From a psychodynamic perspective, partners both "crave and dread" the intensity of the mother-infant dyad (Hall, 1987, p. 139), which is re-enacted intrapsychically during sexual intimacy. Because fused lesbian couples have recreated, to some extent, this early relationship with the mother, they fear that physical union will result in a "re-engulfment in the original mother-child unity and subsequent loss of self" (Burch, 1987, p. 133). This is a greater fear for women, as men have already had to develop defenses against this "engulfment" to enable them to separate from their mothers and identify with their fathers (Mencher, 1990). It is the fear of the intrapsychic implications of sexual intimacy that results in low sexual desire in fused lesbian couples.

The resulting lower levels of sexual desire are then presumed to result in low levels of sexual activity.

5. EXPECTED FINDINGS

If the theories about the relationships between fusion and sexual desire and fusion and sexual frequency are valid, then one would not expect to find a linear correlation between intimacy and the two sexual variables.

What might be expected would be a positive linear relationship at lower levels of intimacy, so that levels of intimacy,

desire and frequency increase together (as fusion is not present). At higher levels of intimacy a change would be expected. If very high levels of intimacy are synonymous with fusion, then the levels of the sexual variables would be expected to decrease. If very high levels of intimacy are associated with fusion for only some couples, then both higher and lower levels of the sexual variables would be expected. If, however, high levels of intimacy are not synonymous with fusion for any couples, then no change would be expected in the relationship between intimacy and the sexual variables as intimacy levels increase.

The following chapter outlines the methodology used to explore the relationships between intimacy/fusion, sexual desire and sexual frequency; in order to see whether there is any supporting evidence for the theories outlined above.

V. METHOD

Attempts to research subjective areas such as intimacy and sexuality are invariably beset by numerous problems. The variables are difficult to operationalise, the validity of the participants' responses difficult to verify, and the meanings and implications of the findings difficult to assess.

As this is a small and preliminary study, no attempt was made to answer all the possible questions about the relationships between the variables. The method was designed in order to look at the following issues:

What is the relationship between levels of intimacy and frequency of sexual activity in lesbian relationships which have lasted longer than one year?

What is the relationship between levels of intimacy and levels of sexual desire in lesbian relationships which have lasted longer than one year?

In addition, the method and questionnaire used will be examined critically in order to identify problem areas and suggest ways of overcoming these in future research.

1. THE QUESTIONNAIRE

The literature on fusion and its implications for sexuality in lesbian relationships has been clinical and anecdotal. While this is of great importance, as it allows for the development of new ideas and theories, it is equally important to establish a data base with which to assess the assumptions and theories, and to use for the development of new theories. For this reason a closed-ended questionnaire, which would facilitate empirical data analysis, was used in this research.

The questionnaire used (see APPENDIX A) consists of three parts: 1) demographic details, 2) the PAIR inventory, and 3) measurements of desire and frequency.

It was decided not to translate the questionnaire, because the difficulties involved in translating a questionnaire - particularly one which has been validated in English only - are well documented (see Blyth, 1989), and the preliminary nature of the research did not warrant the lengthy process involved. It was thus available in English only, limiting participation to lesbians who are reasonably fluent in English.

The scoring of the questionnaire is discussed under DATA ANALYSIS below.

a) Demographic details

The first part of the questionnaire deals with the demographic details of the participant and her partner (such as age, education level and income), and the basic details of their relationship (such as duration of the relationship).

b) The PAIR inventory

The second part of the questionnaire (questions 1-30) is the Personal Assessment of Intimacy in Relationships (PAIR) Inventory developed by Schaefer and Olson (1981).

Because fusion is an intrapsychic dynamic between two (or more) people, operationalising the term is difficult. As was discussed previously, fusion can be understood as a construct in its own right, which would then be extremely difficult to measure objectively as an intrapsychic construct but which could be measured in terms of its posited behavioural manifestations (although this would pose difficulties in terms of the relationship between intrapsychic dynamics and external behaviour patterns). Alternatively, it can be understood as one endpoint on a continuum of intimacy. It was decided to use the latter in operationalising the term, as it provides a richer scale (rather than a two-point scale) against which to compare different levels of desire and frequency, and because a validated research instrument is available for the measurement of intimacy. No research instrument was found which measures fusion per se.

The PAIR Inventory is a self-report inventory with 30 statements. Responses are given according to a 5-point Likert Scale ranging from "Strongly agree" to "Strongly disagree", and it is designed to measure 5 types of intimacy:

1) emotional intimacy: experiencing a closeness of feelings;
2) social intimacy: having common friends and similarities in social networks;
3) intellectual intimacy: sharing ideas;
4) sexual intimacy: sharing general affection and/or sexual activity; and
5) recreational intimacy: shared experiences of interests in hobbies and sports.

Two additional types of intimacy originally described by Olson (1975) - spiritual and aesthetic intimacy - were dropped from the inventory as they were conceptually and empirically unclear (Schaefer & Olson, 1981).

Although the inventory was developed to measure intimacy in dyadic heterosexual relationships, the researcher could find no reason for it not being valid for lesbian relationships, as "the close relationships of lesbians, gay men, and heterosexual women and men are really quite similar, driven by similar general forces" (Duffy and Rusbult, 1985/86, p. 21). The only changes made in the inventory were to alter "him/her" to "her", and "sexual intercourse" to "making love".

The PAIR Inventory has been found to be acceptably valid and reliable. According to Schaefer and Olson (1981), the PAIR Inventory has been found to have concurrent validity when

correlated with the Locke-Wallace Marital Adjustment Scale (Locke & Wallace, 1959), and with certain scales on the Moos Family Environment Scales (Moos & Moos, 1976). Harper and Elliot (1988) report that the PAIR Inventory also correlates well with the Waring Intimacy Scale (Waring, 1984). Split-half reliability coefficients for the PAIR scales range from .70 to .82 (Schaefer & Olson). Harper and Elliot found the PAIR Inventory to be valuable in the measurement of differing levels of intimacy within relationships, including excessive closeness. The PAIR Inventory was thus felt to be sufficiently valid and reliable for use in this research.

The PAIR Inventory was also selected because it seems to be able to measure the main behaviours suggested by Kaufman, Harrison & Hyde (1984) as being typical of fused relationships fairly well. These behaviours are: sharing all activities, sharing some friends and/or being isolated from other friends, and enmeshed communication patterns.

Sharing all activities would be indicated by a high score on the recreational intimacy scale, which includes statements such as "We enjoy the same recreational activities" and "We like playing together". High scores on the emotional intimacy scale (e.g. "My partner really understands my hurts and joys") and the intellectual intimacy scale (e.g. "My partner helps me clarify my thoughts") would indicate enmeshed communication patterns to some extent, as they suggest a very high level of understanding between the partners. Unfortunately, the social intimacy scale would not provide a good measure of sharing some friends and/or being isolated from other friends as Harrison and Hyde's (1984) behaviour includes both ends of a

spectrum. The social intimacy scale includes statements such as "Many of my partner's closest friends are also my closest friends" and "We enjoy spending time with other couples". A high score would thus suggest that they share friends, while a low score would suggest that they are isolated from other friends. Thus both a high score or a low score could suggest fused behaviours according to Harrison and Hyde's list of behaviours.

Thus, although the PAIR Inventory was not designed to measure fusion, there some correspondence between its measures of intimacy and behaviours presumed by Harrison and Hyde (1984) to indicate fusion within a relationship.

c) Measurement of sexual desire and frequency

The third part of the questionnaire relates to the question of sexual desire. Leiblum and Rosen (1988a) point out that "... present research on sexual desire has been handicapped by the lack of operational and standardized laboratory measures" (p. 457). An attempt was made within this research to operationalise desire as a multi-faceted construct related to an individual's subjective desire to participate in sexual activities (Schreiner-Engel & Sciavi, 1986). Following Garde and Lunde (1980) a distinction was also drawn between spontaneous and elicited desire. Four questions related to desire were included in the questionnaire, and were based on: the wish for sexual activity, the experience of feeling sexual, and an enjoyment of sexual activity. The questions were as follows:

Q31: I really enjoy it when my partner and I make love.

Q32: I hardly ever feel sexual towards my partner any more.

Q35: My partner usually initiates our lovemaking.

Q37: I often feel sexual even when we don't make love.

However, further investigations (inter-question correlations) carried out after the questionnaires were returned, and further examination of the literature, revealed the inadequacies of this attempt to operationalise desire. With the exception of Questions 31 and 32, which showed a significant negative correlation ($p<0.005$), none of the other questions correlated significantly with each other. In addition, the strong correlation between this measure of desire and the measure of Sexual Intimacy in the PAIR Inventory ($p=0.000$) suggested that these two variables may have been conflated. It was thus decided to discard this portion of the questionnaire. This obviously has serious implications for the study, which will be discussed in Ch VI.

As frequency of sexual activity is a measure of behaviour it was assessed using a simple five-point scale:

(5) more than 3 times a week;

(4) more than once a week;

(3) more than twice a month;

(2) about once a month; and

(1) less than once a month.

The instructions given were to "please tick the response which seems most accurate at the moment". Because the frequency of sexual activity will not necessarily remain constant, it was

decided to use the fairly broad categories listed above, which were developed on the basis of Blumstein and Schwartz's (1983) categories.

2. THE PARTICIPANTS

Most of the previous work on fusion has focused on lesbian couples in therapy, which greatly limits the findings as they are then not applicable to a non-clinical population. While the participant group in this research is also limited, an attempt was made to broaden the research population as much as possible in order to make the findings more generally applicable.

It was decided to limit the research to participants who had been involved in relationships which had lasted for more than one year, as the beginning of an intimate relationship appears to have a very different quality from the dynamics in a more established relationship. In examining the development of gay males' relationships during the first three years, Mattison & McWhirter (1987) found that the first year was characterised by "merging" and "limerance" or "the intensity and euphoria of romantic love" (Kurdek & Schmitt, 1986, p. 305), and high sexual activity. It appears that lack of sexual desire and sexual inhibitions tend to surface only after the limerance phase of the relationship has ended (Nichols, 1987a).

As has already been mentioned, the sample was limited to those women who were at least reasonably fluent in English.

a) Lesbian samples

Most forms of adequate participant sampling assume that the characteristics of the population are, or can be, known. This, however, is not possible where a hidden population is used, as the parameters of such a population cannot be known (Weinberg, 1970). As with all groups which are labelled deviant (Hedblom & Hartman, 1980), lesbians, particularly in homophobic societies such as South Africa (Blyth, 1989; Glanz, 1988), are a hidden population. As a result, neither a random nor a representative sample can be found. However, the assumption that lesbians are found in all groups and levels in society is supported by research such as that by Hite (1989), who found that lesbians were represented in all the age, education, annual income and race/ethnicity categories used in her study.

b) Finding participants

In an attempt to obtain as broad and heterogeneous sample as possible, within the limitations of the questionnaire, a number of different methods were used.

1. Lesbians known to the researcher were used to establish "friendship networks".
2. Questionnaires, and letters asking them to pass these on if possible, were sent to participants in previous research (Blyth, 1989). These participants had been found via requests for participants which appeared on the letters pages of several popular South African magazines (De Kat, Drum, Fair Lady, Thandi and You)

and an advertisement in Exit (South Africa's gay newspaper).

3. Advertisements were placed in the personal columns of several newspapers (Weekend Argus and Weekly Mail) in an attempt to broaden the base of participants further.

c) Demographics of the participants and their partners

Thirty-six women participated in the research. They ranged in age from 22 years to 60 years with a mean age of 36 years, and a median age of 33 years. The majority were in their thirties (47,2%) and forties (27,8%). (Refer to Figure 5.1.)

Twenty-six (72.2%) were English-speaking, nine (25%) were primarily Afrikaans-speaking, and one (2,7%) was Xhosa-speaking (these last ten are bilingual). One of the Afrikaans-speaking women was involved with an English-speaking woman, while all the others were involved with same language speakers.

It was decided to use education levels and salary instead of the more usual socio-economic class as referents, as these were believed to be sufficient and easier to measure.
One participant (2.8%) has an education level less than Std 10, eleven (30,6%) have Std 10 or the equivalent, nineteen (52,8%) have a Bachelor's degree, post-school diploma or similar, and 5 (13,9%) have at least one post-graduate degree. (See Figure 5.2.)

Two (5,6%) participants earn salaries of less than R1000 pm, five (13,9%) between R1000 and R1999, six (16,7%) between R2000 and R2999, nine (25%) between R3000 and R3999, nine (25%) between R4000 and R4999, three (8,3%) between R5000 and R5999, and two (5,6%) between R8000 and R8999. (See Figure 5.3.)

Nine (25%) of the participants have been married, and eight (22,2%) have children.

The participant's partners ranged in age from 24 years to 57 years with a mean age of 36,2 years and a median age of 33.5 years. The majority were in their thirties (36,1%) and forties (30,6%). (See Figure 5.4.)

Twenty-seven (75%) of the partners were English-speaking, eight (22,2%) Afrikaans, and one (2,8%) Xhosa speaking.

Six (16,7%) of the partners have education levels lower than Std 10, seven (19,4%) have Std 10 or the equivalent, seventeen (47,2%) have a Bachelors degree, diploma, or other post-school qualification, while six (16,7%) have at least one post-graduate degree. (See Figure 5.5.)

Five (13,9%) of the partners earn less than R1000 pm, four (11,1%) between R1000 and R1999, five (13,9%) between R2000 and R2999, ten (27,8%) between R3000 and R3999, seven (19,4%) between R4000 and R4999, two (5,6%) between R5000 and R5999, one (2,8%) between R6000 and R6999, one (2,8%) between R9000 and R9999, and one (2,8%) between R10 000 and R10 999. (See Figure 5.6.)

Ten (27,8%) of the partners have been married, and seven (19,4%) have children.

Figure 5.1. Participants' ages.

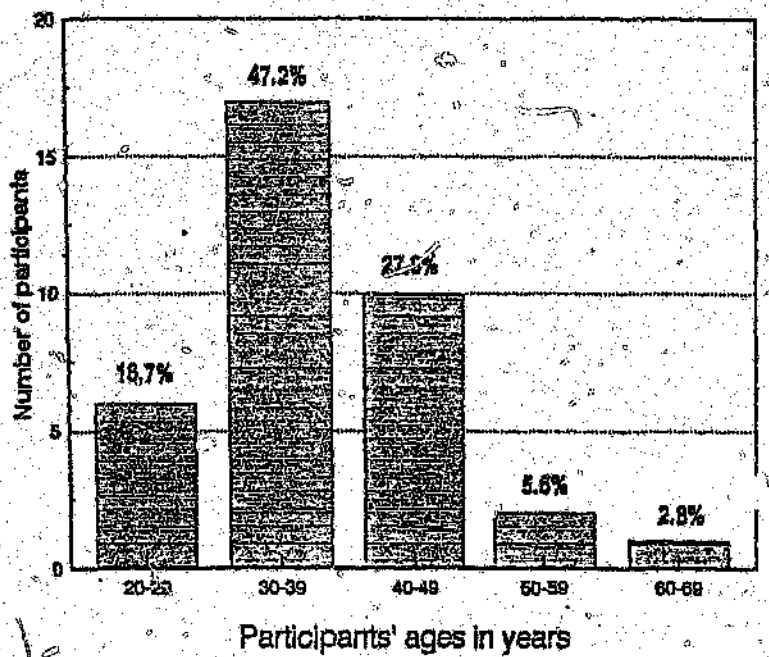


Figure 5.2. Participants' education levels.

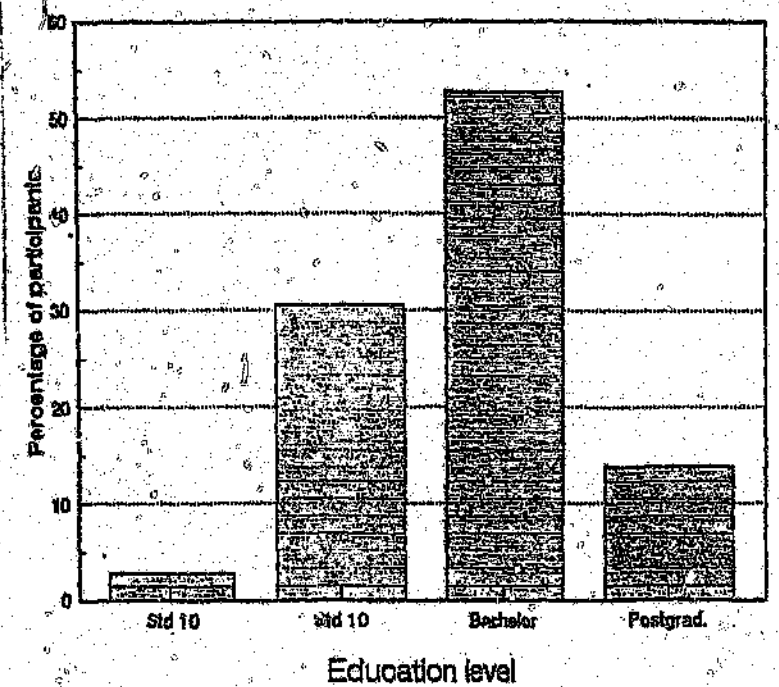


Figure 5.3. Participants' monthly incomes.

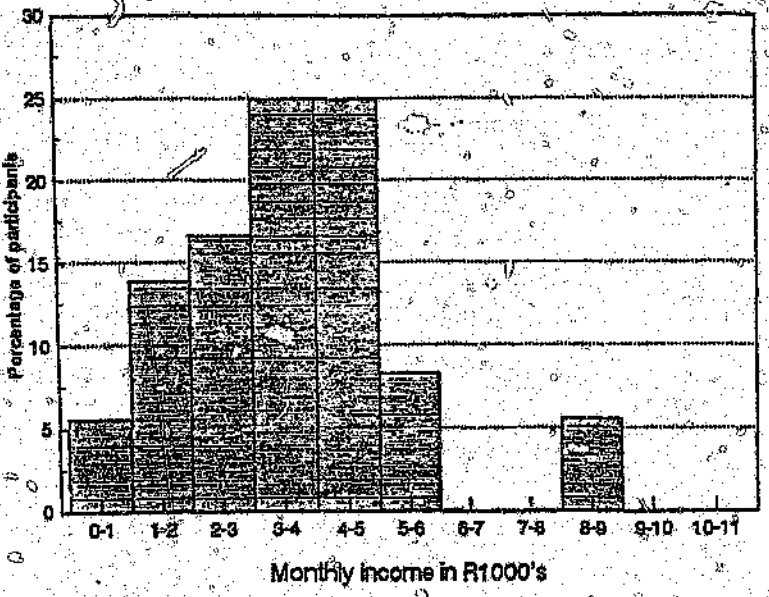


Figure 5.4. Partners' ages.

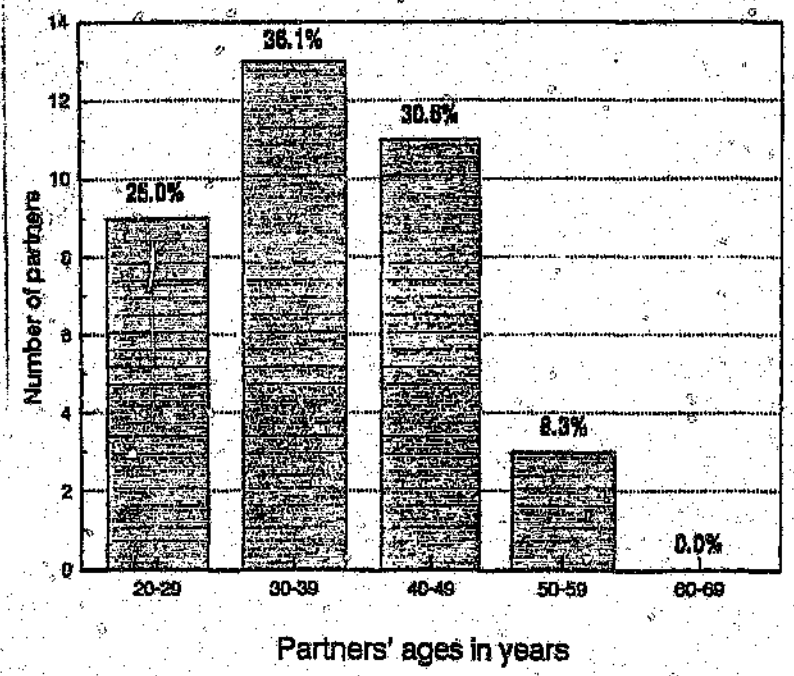


Figure 5.5. Partners' education levels.

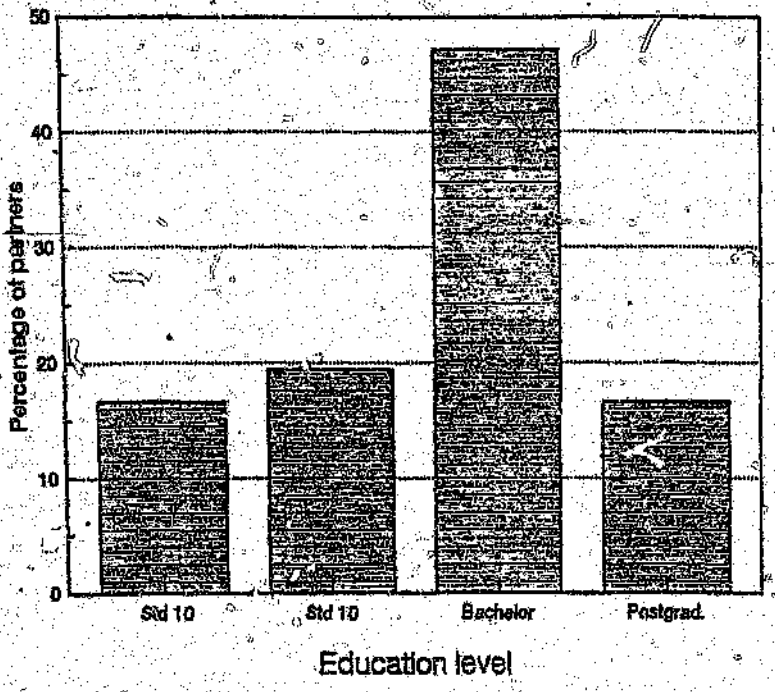
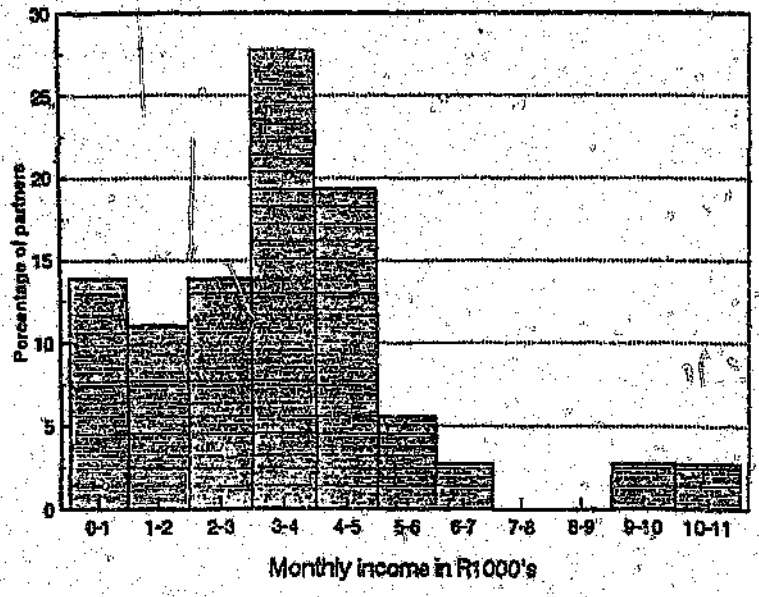


Figure 5.6. Partners' monthly incomes.



It is clear from the above figures that the participants and their partners cover a broad range of ages, educational levels and incomes. However, they do not constitute a representative sample of South African women, who are largely poorly educated and badly paid (Wilson & Ramphele, 1989). Of the participants, the large majority (66,7%) hold at least one post-school qualification, as do their partners (63,9%). Their income levels are also high, with 38,9% of participants, and 33,3% of their partners, earning more than R4000 per month. In addition, the participants included only one woman whose home language an African language, indicating that "black" women are almost entirely excluded from the study.

This skewing is likely to be partly due to the necessity for most lesbian women to support themselves, with a correspondingly greater emphasis than among heterosexual women on post-school qualifications and good salaries. It is also likely to be due to sampling bias. Firstly, the sampling methods used will have reached certain groups of women and not others. Secondly, women with post-school qualifications are more likely to have been exposed to research and may therefore be more willing to participate in research.

The length of time that the couples have been involved ranges from 1 to 10 years, with a mean of 4,95 years and a median of 5,0 years. Of the 36 participants, 30 (83,3%) are living with their partners. The length of time that these 30 have been living with their partners ranges from 2 months to 10 years, with a mean of 4,2 years and a median of 5,0 years. The majority of these 30 (63,3%) began living with their partner at the beginning of the relationship.

3. DATA ANALYSIS

a) Data Collection

Each potential participant was sent copy of the questionnaire (Appendix A); a signed letter with some information about the researcher, the research, and a guarantee of confidentiality; and a stamped self-addressed envelope. They were asked to return the completed questionnaires as soon as possible.

Reminders were sent to women who did not return questionnaires after one or two months - if their addresses were known - on the assumption that they may simply have forgotten to return them. The response rate did increase slightly after these letters.

Two hundred and twenty-eight questionnaires were distributed, excluding those which were returned undelivered. Of these, thirty-nine were returned. One had to be discarded, as the individual had been in a relationship for only four months, and two were too late for the data analysis, leaving a total of thirty-six questionnaires. Because the questionnaires could be completed anonymously, it was not possible to ascertain the channels through which the final respondants came to participate.

The response rate of usable questionnaires was thus only [illegible]%. This compares very poorly with a response rate of 56,6% on the previous research (Blyth, 1989), which involved the completion of two lengthy and very complex Q-sorts.

The difference could be explained in terms of three variables. Firstly, the content of the questionnaires was more personal than the content of the Q-sorts (which focused on identity and feminism). Potential participants who were experiencing relationship difficulties may therefore have avoided answering the questionnaire. Secondly, the questionnaire was very simple, so that potential respondents may have been bored and may thus have felt less invested in the process. Thirdly, participants had to have been in a lesbian relationship for more than one year, which was not a requirement for the previous research. This would have limited the number of women who could have responded to the questionnaire.

b) Scoring the questionnaires

Completed questionnaires were scored by hand, using hand-made templates. Scores for all eighteen variables listed below were used in the analysis (although "Sexual Desire" was later discarded).

1. **AGE:** Participant's age listed in years.

2. **EDUCATION:** Participant's level of education scored as follows:

   1 = less than Std 10

   2 = Std 10 or equivalent

   3 = Bachelor's degree, post-school diploma or similar

   4 = one or more post-graduate qualifications

3. **SALARY:** Participant's approximate monthly income, scored from 1 = less than R1000 per month, to 11 = between R10 000 and R10 999.

4. **PARTNER'S AGE:** Partner's age in years.

5. **PARTNER'S EDUCATION:** Partner's level of education scored as in 2 above.

6. **PARTNER'S SALARY:** Partner's approximate monthly income, scored as in 3 above.

7. **INVOLVED:** Length of time that the participant has been involved in a relationship with her partner, scored in years to one decimal place.

8. **LIVING TOGETHER:** Length of time that the participant has been living with her partner, scored in years to one decimal place.

9. **DESIRE:** As has already been mentioned, this variable had to be discared as unreliable and invalid.

10. **FREQUENCY:** The scoring for sexual frequency was calculated on a five point scale as follows:

5 = more than 3 times a week
4 = more than once a week
3 = more than twice a month
2 = about once a month
1 = less than once a month

[NOTE: For the following five variables, unmarked questions were scored from 5 = strongly agree to 1 = strongly disagree, while questions marked with a * were scored in the opposite direction.]

11. EMOTIONAL INTIMACY: The score for emotional intimacy was calculated by adding the scores from all six emotional intimacy questions, resulting in scores ranging from 6, which indicates a low level, to 30, which indicates a very high level of emotional intimacy.

Emotional Intimacy Scale:

1. My partner listens to me when I need someone to talk to.
6. I can state my feelings without her getting defensive.
11. *I often feel distant from my partner.
16. My partner can really understand my hurts and joys.
21. *I really feel neglected at times by my partner.
26. *I sometimes feel very lonely when we're together.

12. SOCIAL INTIMACY: The score for social intimacy was calculated in the same way as that for emotional intimacy, resulting in scores ranging from 6, which indicates a low level, to 30, which indicates a very high level of social intimacy.

Social Intimacy Scale:

2. We enjoy spending time with other couples.
7. *We usually "keep to ourselves".
12. *We have very few friends in common.

17. Having time together with friends is an important part of our shared activities.
22. Many of my partner's closest friends are also my closest friends.
27. *My partner disapproves of some of my friends.

13. SEXUAL INTIMACY: The score for sexual intimacy was calculated in the same way as the above two scores, resulting in scores ranging from 6, which indicates a low level, to 30, which indicates a very high level of sexual intimacy.

Sexual Intimacy Scale:

3. I am satisfied with our sex life.
8. *I feel our sexual activity is just routine.
13. I am able to tell my partner when I want to make love.
18. *I "hold back" my sexual interest because my partner makes me feel uncomfortable.
23. Sexual expression is an essential part of our relationship.
28. *My partner seems disinterested in sex.

14. INTELLECTUAL INTIMACY: The score for intellectual intimacy was calculated in the same way as the above three scores, resulting in scores ranging from 6, which indicates a low level, to 30, which indicates a very high level of intellectual intimacy.

Intellectual Intimacy Scale:

4. My partner helps me clarify my thoughts.
9. *When it comes to having a serious discussion, it seems that we have little in common.

14. *I feel "put down" in a serious conversation with my partner.

19. *I feel that it is useless to discuss some things with my partner.

24. *My partner frequently tries to change my ideas.

29. We have an endless number of things to talk about.

15. **RECREATIONAL INTIMACY:** The score for recreational intimacy was calculated in the same way as the above four scores, resulting in scores ranging from 6, which indicates a low level, to 30, which indicates a very high level of recreational intimacy.

Recreational Intimacy Scale:

5. We enjoy the same recreational activities.

10. *I share in very few of my partner's interests.

15. We like playing together.

20. We enjoy the out-of-doors together.

25. *We seldom find time to do fun things together.

30. I think we share some of the same interests.

16. **PARTIAL INTIMACY:** This was a total intimacy score calculated by adding the emotional, social, intellectual and recreational intimacy scores. The sexual intimacy score was excluded in order to allow for a correlation to be calculated between a measure of sexual desire (9 above) and a measure of intimacy that did not include sexual intimacy as it was felt that the inclusion of sexual intimacy may confound the results. Possible scores ranged from 24 (low intimacy) to 120 (high intimacy).

17. **TOTAL INTIMACY:** This was a total intimacy score calculated by adding all five intimacy scores. The resulting possible scores ranged from 30 (low intimacy) to 150 (high intimacy).

18. **HAPPY WITH SEX:** This was the score from Q34: "I am very happy with our sexual relationship", which was included in order to see which variable(s) it correlated most closely with. The possible scores ranged from 1 = not at all happy to 5 = very happy.

All eighteen variables were then transferred onto a table in order to facilitate data analysis, and variable 9 (Desire) was later discarded.

VI. RESULTS

Following consultation with a statistician the following analyses were computed using SAS Version 6.0 (Cody & Smith, 1987), on the mainframe computer at the University of the Witwatersrand.

1. DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS

Descriptive statistics were calculated for the variables, and are presented in Table 6.1. below. (Variable 9, Desire, has not been included.)

TABLE 6.1. Descriptive statistics

VARIABLE	MEAN	MED	MODE	STD DEV	MIN	MAX
1. Age	36.0	33.0	40.0	8.52	22	60
2. Education	2.8	3.0	3.0	0.72	1	4
3. Salary	4.1	4.0	5.0	1.81	1	9
4. Partn.age	35.2	33.5	30.0	8.76	24	57
5. Partn.ed	2.7	3.0	3.0	0.92	1	4
6. Partn.sal	4.0	4.0	4.0	2.24	1	11
7. Involved	5.0	5.0	6.0	2.56	1	10
8. Live tog	4.2	5.0	0.0	3.07	0	10
10. Frequency	3.2	3.0	3.0	0.80	2	5
11. Emot.int	24.1	25.0	26.0	3.83	15	29
12. Soc.int	21.3	23.0	23.0	4.65	11	29
13. Sex.int	25.1	26.0	26.0	3.50	15	30
14. Int.int	24.8	24.0	23.0	3.52	13	30
15. Rec.int	24.4	24.0	24.0	3.26	17	30
16. Part.int	94.6	95.5	98.0	11.54	69	118
17. Totalint	119.3	119.0	119.0	14.06	89	148
18. Happy	4.0	4.0	5.0	1.12	2	5

While some of the variables cover a broad range of possible results, others are positively skewed towards higher scores only. No variables were strongly negatively skewed.

This skewing has an impact on the correlation coefficient used, but is also significant in that many of the scores were higher than might have been expected. The five Intimacy Scales (Variables 11-15) have potential ranges of 6 to 30. The lowest mean was 21.3 (Social) and the highest 25.1 (Sexual); so that the overall scores for intimacy were high. Although Sexual frequency has a mean and a median of 3 (out of a possible range of 1 to 5), none of the participants gave a score of 1. This narrowed the range of scores used in the analysis. Some of he implications of the above are discussed in the following chapter.

2. SPEARMAN CORRELATION COEFFICIENTS

Spearman correlation coefficients were calculated for all the variables, using significance levels of $p < 0.05$ (*) and $p < 0.005$ (**). Although a significance level of 95% is generally accepted (Howell, 1988) it was decided to use a significance level of 99,5% as well, because the sample size was relatively small and a stricter significance level is therefore more appropriate (Miller, 1984) and allows the findings to be accepted with more confidence.

Although some statisticians argue that it is acceptable to use Pearson's correlation coefficient for non-parametric data as it is a more powerful test (C Tredoux, personal

communication), it is still customary to use Spearman's correlation coefficient for data collected using Likert scales and for data which may be skewed (Howell, 1988). Both sets of coefficients were calculated, and Spearman's were retained as there was no real difference between the two sets of results.

Spearman correlation coefficients are presented in Table 6.2. on the following page.

SPEARMAN CORRELATION COEFFICIENTS

variables	AGE	EDUCATION	SALARY	PARTN AGE	PARTN ED	PARTN SAL	INVOLVED	LIVE TOG	FREQUENCY	EMOT INT	SOC INT	SEX INT	INTEL INT	RECR INT	PART INT	TOTAL INT	HAPPY
AGE		0.09 p=0.581	0.16 p=0.352	0.70** p=0.000	0.13 p=0.467	0.0[illegible] p=0.[illegible]02	0.36* p=0.032	0.27 p=0.116	-0.45* p=0.006	-0.07 p=0.668	0.03 p=0.884	-0.24 p=0.166	-0.06 p=0.733	-0.27 p=0.118	-0.14 p=0.419	-0.17 p=0.318	-0.13 p=0.455
EDUCATION			0.27 p=0.117	0.17 p=0.499	0.48** p=0.003	0.51** p=0.00[illegible]	0.06 p=0.714	0.18 p=0.286	-0.15 p=0.390	-0.08 p=0.662	0.24 p=0.157	-0.10 p=0.549	0.08 p=0.633	0.10 p=0.577	0.18 p=0.199	0.11 p=0.522	0.00 p=1.00
SALARY				0.13 p=0.448	0.41* p=0.013	0.63** p=0.000	0.04 p=0.818	-0.04 p=0.803	0.10 p=0.557	-0.02 p=0.91	0.05 p=0.78	-0.03 p=0.88	0.20 p=0.253	-0.11 p=0.518	0.04 p=0.823	-0.00 p=0.984	0.09 p=0.624
PARTN AGE					-0.03 p=0.856	0.06 p=0.713	0.34* p=0.044	0.27 p=0.108	-0.47** p=0.004	0.01 p=0.940	0.08 p=0.641	-0.22 p=0.194	0.08 p=0.626	-0.32 p=0.053	-0.04 p=0.745	-0.09 p=0.598	-0.14 p=0.426
PARTN ED						0.35* p=0.034	0.13 p=0.450	0.10 p=0.578	0.07 p=0.671	0.11 p=0.518	0.13 p=0.438	0.18 p=0.299	0.25 p=0.136	0.03 p=0.844	0.19 p=0.271	0.19 p=0.264	0.14 p=0.413
PARTN SAL							-0.08 p=0.633	0.01 p=0.945	-0.11 p=0.525	-0.05 p=0.778	0.21 p=0.211	-0.00 p=0.988	-0.02 p=0.893	0.03 p=0.857	0.16 p=0.359	0.09 p=0.606	-0.05 p=0.787
INVOLVED								0.88** p=0.000	-0.51** p=0.002	0.06 p=0.721	0.12 p=0.477	0.19 p=0.260	0.06 p=0.714	-0.21 p=0.220	-0.02 p=0.909	-0.02 p=0.913	-0.29 p=0.089
LIVE TOG									-0.48** p=0.003	0.17 p=0.310	0.25 p=0.147	-0.03 p=0.870	0.12 p=0.473	0.02 p=0.906	0.18 p=0.280	0.19 p=0.268	-0.23 p=0.182
FREQUENCY										-0.06 p=0.722	-0.28 p=0.100	0.31 p=0.062	0.04 p=0.830	0.12 p=0.474	-0.09 p=0.583	-0.02 p=0.921	0.33 p=0.052
EMOT INT											-0.25 p=0.13	0.75** p=0.000	0.72** p=0.000	0.52** p=0.001	0.74** p=0.000	0.80** p=0.000	0.63** p=0.000
SOC INT												0.21 p=0.210	0.31** p=0.002	0.35* p=0.038	0.71** p=0.000	0.61** p=0.000	0.07 p=0.673
SEX INT													0.37** p=0.000	0.64** p=0.000	0.65** p=0.000	0.78** p=0.000	0.81 p=0.000
INTEL INT														0.60** p=0.000	0.84** p=0.000	0.85** p=0.000	0.60** p=0.000
RECR INT															0.76** p=0.000	0.80** p=0.000	0.58** p=0.000
PART INT																0.96** p=0.000	0.59** p=0.000
TOTAL INT																	0.70** p=0.000

An examination of Table 6.2. indicates that the majority of significant correlations are significant at the $p < 0.005$ level.

In terms of demographics, there is a significant relationship between participants' ages and the ages of their partners. There is also a significant relationship between both of these variables and the length of time they have been involved. Participants' educational levels are related to their partners' education levels and salaries, although not with their own salaries. Participants' salaries relate to their partners' salaries and partners' education levels. The partners' education levels and salaries are related.

There is a very strong positive relationship between the length of time the participants have been living with their partners and the length of time they have been involved.

The frequency of sexual activity is significantly related to a number of the demographic variables, but not to any of the intimacy scales or to how happy the participants are with their sexual relationships.

The intimacy scales, with the exception of social intimacy, correlate significantly with the other intimacy scales and with how happy the participants are in their relationships, but not with any of the demographic variables or with the frequency of sexual activity. This is particularly important in terms of the relationship between sexual intimacy and the frequency of sexual activity, where the correlation coefficient is only 0.31 ($p=0.062$).

In order to facilitate the reading of important results, two summary tables - of variables correlating significantly with the frequency of sexual activity (Table 6.3) and of variables correlating significantly with the intimacy scales (Table 6.4) - are presented below.

TABLE 6.3. Variables correlating significantly with the Frequency of sexual activity.

variables	AGE	PARTN AGE	INVOLVED	LIVE TOG	HAPPY
FREQUENCY	-0.45*	-0.47**	-0.51**	-0.48**	-
AGE		0.70**	0.36*	-	-
PARTN AGE			0.34*	-	-
INVOLVED				0.88**	-
LIVE TOG					-

* indicates that $p<0.05$ ** indicates that $p<0.005$

There is a significant negative relationship between the frequency of sexual activity and a number of variables, namely the participants' ages, their partners' ages, the length of time they had been involved, and the length of time they had been living together. In other words, the frequency of sexual activity declines relative to the increase in both partners' ages and the length of the relationship, whether they live separately or together.

TABLE 6.4. Variables correlating significantly with measures of intimacy.

var's	INTIMACY SCALES SOCIAL	SEXUAL	INTELL	RECREA	PARTIAL	TOTAL	HAPPY
EMOTION	-	0.75**	0.72**	0.52**	0.74**	0.80**	0.63**
SOCIAL		-	0.51*	0.35*	0.71**	0.61**	-
SEXUAL			0.57**	0.64**	0.65**	0.78**	0.81**
INTELL				0.60**	0.84**	0.83**	0.60**
RECREA					0.76**	0.80**	0.58**
PARTIAL						0.88**	0.59**
TOTAL							0.70**

* indicates that $p<0.05$ ** indicates that $p<0.005$

Social intimacy is the only intimacy variable that does not correlate significantly with all the other intimacy variables, which correlate significantly with each other. There is no significant relationship between social intimacy and emotional intimacy, and between social intimacy and sexual intimacy and the relationship between social intimacy and recreational intimacy is significant at $p<0.05$ only.

Being happy with their sexual relationship relates significantly to the intimacy variables excluding social intimacy. Therefore, the more intimate the participants experience their relationships to be, the happier they are with their sexual relationships.

3. SCATTER GRAPHS

Scatter graphs of important non-significant relationships (i.e. the frequency of sexual activity against all the measures of intimacy) were plotted. This was in order the assess the viability of calculating non-linear regression equations and in order to see if there were any patterns evident which were not represented in the statistics. It was decided not to calculate regression equations, as there was insufficient evidence to suggest that there were any significant non-linear relationships. No clear patterns emerged in the graphs. These graphs are presented in Appendix B.

VII. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The primary aim of this study was to explore the relationships between levels of intimacy (including fusion), the frequency of sexual activity, and the levels of desire in lesbian couples in order to provide some research data which might support or refute the theoretical and clinical proposals about these relationships. The secondary aim was to critically examine the research method and questionnaire used, in order to make suggestions for improved future research in this area.

Although the results of this research are severely limited by the small sample size, the bias of the sample towards "white", English-speaking, well-educated and high earning women, the possible self-selection of participants, and by problems with the questionnaire (specifically the measurement of sexual desire), some conclusions can be drawn from the findings.

It must be noted at this point that no causal relationships can be drawn from the data, as correlation coefficients only are used. Any causal links which are tentatively drawn are done so only on the basis of theory.

1. MAIN FINDINGS OF THIS RESEARCH

The main findings of this research are discussed below, in relation to the two hypotheses outlined in Chapter I. A number

of additional findings are discussed in the following section.

The implications of the research in terms of the secondary aim of this study - to assess the viability and validity of the research method and questionnaire - are also discussed.

a. Null Hypothesis 1.

The first hypothesis states that

> There is no significant linear or non-linear correlation between reported levels of frequency of sexual activity and reported levels of intimacy within lesbian relationships of duration longer than one year.

The Spearman correlation coefficients indicate that there are no significant linear correlations between the frequency of sexual activity and any of the intimacy scales used in this study.

The graphs plotted for the relationships between the frequency of sexual activity and the intimacy scales do not indicate any non-linear regression relationship between these variables.

On the basis of this, the null hypothesis must be accepted.

It is important to note that

> Statistically non-significant results are usually uninterpretable, as they can be attributed to either

> an inadequate research design ... or to the fact that there is no relationship between the ... variables (South African Journal of Psychology, 1987, p.9).

The research design may therefore be responsible for the non-significant findings mentioned above.

In the design of this research, it was decided to measure fusion as one end of a continuum of intimacy, rather than as a distinctive construct, as this is the way it appears to have been used in most of the literature. It may well be, however, that fusion is a construct related to, but not synonymous with, very high levels of intimacy. It could be that certain factors related to early development, such as those discussed in terms of object relations theory, might result in internal dynamics for some women such that they tend to fuse in lesbian relationships (Burch, 1986; Roth, 1987). These developmental factors could be related to problems with separation (Burch, 1986); and possibly to a fear of separation from or loss of the other (Mencher, 1990). If this is the case, it would suggest that while very high levels of intimacy may result in a healthy relationship between some partners, they could also lead to fusion between other partners because of a merging of boundaries and a fear of separation from the other. This latter situation then is more likely to lead to the problematic symptoms reported by some clinicians (Burch, 1986; 1987).

What does seem to be fairly clear is that it is not acceptable to simply conflate fusion with high levels of intimacy.

It would seem that future research in this area should include measures of intimacy on a continuum, as well as a measure of the internal dynamics or behavioural manifestations of fusion. The behavioural manifestations would be fairly simple to measure, and questions could, for example, be based on the work of Kaufman, Harrison & Hyde (1984), which was mentioned in Ch IV. Examples of these could be questions around issues such as whether they share all their hobbies and activities, whether they share all their clothes and other belongings, and whether they find themselves completing their partners' sentences. It is difficult to know how the internal dynamics related to fusion may be measured, and might require some form of projective assessment. Having separate measures for intimacy and fusion would allow for the exploration of the relationship between levels of intimacy and fusion as well as of the relationship between fusion and the frequency of sexual activity.

b. Null hypothesis 2.

The second hypothesis states that

> There is no significant linear or non-linear correlation between reported levels of sexual desire and reported levels of intimacy within lesbian relationships of duration longer than one year.

Because of the difficulties experienced in the development of a reliable and valid measure of desire, and the resultingly invalid data, this hypothesis could not be explored.

It seems that the development of an adequate measure of desire is substantially more complex than was expected. This is discussed further in section 3 below.

2. ADDITIONAL FINDINGS

A number of additional findings are discussed below. These involve the relationship between levels of sexual intimacy and the frequency of sexual activity, the high levels of intimacy and sexual activity reported, the relationship between the frequency of sexual activity and a number of the demographic variables, the specific nature of social intimacy in lesbian relationships, and what factors are related to lesbian women's happiness with their sexual relationships.

a. Sexual intimacy and the frequency of sexual activity

No significant correlation was found between the measure of sexual intimacy on the PAIR Inventory and the frequency of sexual activity reported. This would seem to contradict the common-sense notion that levels of sexual intimacy and the frequency of sexual activity would vary together, such that, for example, higher levels of sexual intimacy would be related to a higher sexual frequency. However, it has already been noted that women in lesbian relationships often see non-genital sexual activity as an end in itself and seem to place less emphasis on genital sexual activity (Blumstein & Schwartz, 1983). A previous study on lesbian women by this researcher (Blyth, 1989) found that the participants generally

considered the emotional aspects of their relationships to be more important than the sexual components.

Lesbian relationships do not, by definition, include a man; and these findings could be seen to reflect the needs and desires of women. The question that has not yet been satisfactorily answered is to what extent these findings represent a positive and healthy perspective on the relationship between sexual intimacy and sexual activity, and to what extent they reflect the impact of socialisation and sexual scripts on the sexual activities of women. The answer to this question, which has frequently been posed before, always seems to have been influenced by the experiences and desires - and biases - of the respondent, and it would seem unlikely that an objective answer will ever be available.

b. The high levels of intimacy and sexual frequency reported

The descriptive statistics presented in Table 6.1. indicate that many of the variables are positively skewed. In particular, the responses to the intimacy scales are generally high. Even the measure of the frequency of sexual activity is higher than would be expected on the basis of Blumstein & Schwartz's (1983) findings. None of the participants in this research reported frequencies of less than twice a month, while Blumstein & Schwartz reported that 19% of their sample of lesbian couples reported having sex once a month or less often.

There appear to be two possible explanations for this. Firstly, as was discussed in Ch V, potential participants who were experiencing relationship problems may have avoided completing the questionnaires. This would have biased the results towards those whose relationships involved high levels of intimacy and sexuality. Secondly, there appears to be a strong underlying ethic which influences and provides norms for lesbian relationships (Nichols, 1987a; 1987b). There seems to be a tendency to idealise lesbian relationships (Kaufman, Harrison & Hyde, 1984) and it may be important to some lesbians to present this idealised picture to the world to avoid further accusations of "pathology".

The extent to which lesbians may or may not idealise their relationships, whether it be amongst themselves or in front of "outsiders", is unclear, but would again provide a fruitful area for further research. An additional reason for exploring this area further is that a tendency to protect an idealised picture of the relationship would hinder one or both of the partners from seeking necessary help.

c. Frequency of sexual activity and demographic variables

Although there are no significant correlations between frequency of sexual activity and the intimacy scales, four factors have a significant negative correlations with frequency: viz, participant's ages, the age of their partners, the length of time they have been involved in the relationship and the length of time they have been living together. In all

cases, as time passes, so the frequency of sexual activity decreases.

These findings are in agreement with those of Blumstein & Schwartz (1983) and Masters, Johnson & Kolodney (1990), and would appear to be part of a normal decline in the frequency of sexual activity over time in all relationship types. The data available here does not permit comment on whether sexual frequency declines more for South African lesbians than for other couple types in South Africa (as was found in Blumstein & Schwartz's 1983 study in the U.S.A.).

d. Social intimacy in lesbian relationships

The findings indicate that social intimacy is the one intimacy scale that does not correlate well with all the other intimacy scales: it did not correlate significantly with emotional intimacy or sexual intimacy.

This suggests that the relationship between social intimacy and other forms of intimacy in lesbian couples would perhaps differ from that seen in other couple types, given that in heterosexual couples the social intimacy scale correlates significantly with the other scales.

The questions in the PAIR scale emphasised socialising with others outside the relationship, which may form an important part of social intimacy for heterosexual couples. Systems theory argues that the lack of social acceptance of and support for lesbian relationships may result in a

strengthening of the boundary between the couple and the "outside world" (Krestan & Bepko, 1980), leading to a concomitant avoidance of contacts with most others outside the dyad (Elise, 1986). This is obviously not true for all lesbian couples, but may be true for some, who attempt to avoid dealing with others who may identify, label or reject them.

This finding then also indicates that the assumption made on beginning this research - that questionnaires suitable for heterosexual couples would also be suitable for lesbian couples - is not entirely accurate. While it appears to be true for the most part, it would seem that certain factors do differ between couple types, and that questionnaires which, for example, measure social intimacy need to be developed more specifically for lesbian couples. This would involve the development of a clearer understanding of the patterns of relating in lesbian couples.

e. Reported levels of happiness with sexual relationships.

Answers to the question about whether participants were happy with their sexual relationships did not correlate significantly with the frequency of sexual activity, but did correlate significantly with levels of intimacy. This would provide support for the point made earlier: that sexual activity *per se* may be less important for lesbians than the quality of the relationships in terms of intimacy, including sexual intimacy (Burch, 1986).

This finding, however, does contradict that of Blumstein & Schwartz (1983) who found problems with sexual frequency to be more highly related to breakups for lesbian couples than for any other couple type. This contradiction could again be related to a possible tendency among lesbian couples to idealise their relationships, to a possible tendency to avoid admitting to sexual problems, or to the skewed sample (which may have excluded those experiencing relationship problems).

3. LIMITATIONS OF THIS RESEARCH

There are a number of problems with and limitations to this research. These include problems with the measurement of the variables and limitations in terms of sampling methods.

a. Problems with the measurement of variables.

A number of problems with the measurement of variables have already been discussed. These include the measurement of fusion and of social intimacy. A much more serious criticism which can be levelled against this research is in respect of the measure of sexual desire developed.

An attempt was made to operationalise it in terms of an individual's subjective desire to participate in sexual activities (Schreiner-Engel & Sciavi, 1986) and to include both spontaneous and elicited desire (Garde & Lunde, 1980). The questions used attempted to cover the wish for sexual

activity, the experience of feeling sexual, and an enjoyment of sexual activity.

However, the strong correlation between the measure of sexual intimacy and that of sexual desire, and the lack of direct questions around physiological arousal, suggests that the two variables may have been conflated. Although the measure of sexual desire used did tap some aspects of desire, it thus also seems to have tapped some aspects of sexual intimacy and not to have tapped other important aspects of desire (such as physiological arousal). Although, as has already been discussed, lesbians appear to value intimacy more than sex, there are clear differences between sexual desire and sexual intimacy. One difference is that intimacy requires the presence of an other, while desire does not necessarily involve an other (although it often does so).

In terms of the measurement of sexual desire, this research has merely confirmed that the concept of desire is still so poorly understood that an adequate operationalisation of the concept is exceptionally difficult. The development of an adequate, valid and reliable measure of levels of desire would require a greater understanding of desire as it functions in people's lives and intimate relationships.

b. Limitations in terms of sampling methods

Some limitations of this study in terms of the biased sample have already been discussed in Ch V. The major bias is that the participants tended to be more affluent and better

educated than the general population of South African women, and that a large proportion of the population (e.g. "black" women) was not represented in the sample.

Another bias is related to the fact that anonymous questionnaires were distributed and a very small percentage returned. It is likely that the participants were self-selected in terms of their willingness to answer questions about their relationships, and those with relationship problems may have chosen not to respond.

The low response rate, and probable self-selection of participants, suggests that a short postal questionnaire may not be the most effective way of exploring issues around intimacy and sexuality. On the basis of this and previous experience (Blyth, 1989) it is suggested that a method which allows participants to feel motivated and involved, and from which they can learn something about themselves and/or their relationships would probably result in a higher response rate.

An additional problem is related to the use of volunteers as participants. Research has suggested that volunteers differ from non-volunteers on a number of characteristics. Rosenthal (1970) found that volunteers tended to have greater intellectual ability, interest and motivation; to be more unconventional; to be younger; to be less authoritarian; to manifest greater need for social approval; and to be more sociable. He concluded that volunteers would "differ appreciably from unsampled non-volunteers" (p. 35). As it is extremely difficult to access non-volunteers among a stigmatised population, it cannot be known what these

differences might be within a lesbian population, and no solution to this problem is evident.

It is clear from this that the findings of this research are limited to a small section of the population of South African lesbian couples.

4. CONCLUSIONS

This research supports the notion that there are complex relationships between intimacy and the sexual activity within lesbian relationships. No significant correlation was found between the frequency of sexual activity and levels of intimacy. Most importantly, between the frequency of sexual activity and sexual intimacy - reported by the participants. Moreover, reported levels of happiness with their sexual relationship correlated significantly with levels of intimacy, but not with the frequency of sexual activity. It seems that sexual activity per se may be less important for women in lesbian relationships than the quality of the intimacy in the relationship. However, this finding could also be related to a tendency to idealise lesbian relationships, perhaps as a response to external messages about the "pathology" of lesbian relationships. If this is true, it is unfortunate as it may prevent lesbians from admitting to sexual problems and/or seeking appropriate help.

As has been found among other couples, there appear to be fairly straightforward relationships between the frequency of sexual activity and various demographic variables. It would

seem that as lesbians and their partners grow older, and as the duration of their relationships increase, so the frequency of sexual activity declines.

This research has also highlighted a number of problems which need to be overcome before further research into this area can be carried out.

The study has clearly shown that a much more theoretically sophisticated conceptualisation of sexual desire is needed before an adequate operationalization and therefore measure of this construct can be achieved. These need to be developed before further research into the relationships between sexual desire and other relationship dynamics can be carried out.

This research also suggests that adequate ways of measuring fusion in terms of its behavioural manifestations and/or internal dynamics, and distinguishing it from very high levels of intimacy, need to be found.

In addition, perhaps because of social sanctions against lesbianism, social intimacy may be different for lesbian couples than for non-homosexual couples. Thus, a measure of social intimacy appropriate for lesbian couples need to be developed, which may require further exploration of the dynamics of lesbian relationships, particularly in relation to the external environment.

5. A FINAL NOTE OF CAUTION

"The observation that [fusion] is frequently a problem in lesbian relationships is relatively recent; yet it has proved to be so useful that it is already in danger of being overworked. we must remember that [fusion] is a concept, a metaphor, not an empirical reality. It is a valuable concept as long as we continue to observe it as a theoretical construct, modifying it or dropping it altogether when its limitations outweigh its value" Burch, 1986, p.69

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APPENDIX A: THE QUESTIONNAIRE

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this research. I have included a letter guaranteeing confidentiality with this questionnaire, which means that your identity will remain completely confidential, and that the information you give about your work, etc. will be written up in such a way that you cannot be identified.

The questionnaire below consists of two sections. The first section includes questions about your work, education, etc. This information is necessary for the research. The second section involves statements relating to your present relationship. Although you are obviously free to refuse to answer a question, I would appreciate it if you could try to answer all the questions. Please do not discuss this questionnaire with anyone until you have complete it, and if you do then discuss it, please do not change any of your answers. It is very important that your answers are as honest as possible, and that no-one influences what you say.

QUESTIONNAIRE

A.

NAME/PSEUDONYM: .....

AGE: ..... HOME LANGUAGE .....

WHAT EDUCATION HAVE YOU HAD? .....

WHAT WORK DO YOU DO AT THE MOMENT (OR WHAT ARE YOU STUDYING)?

.....

ABOUT HOW MUCH DO YOU EARN PER MONTH? .....

HAVE YOU EVER BEEN MARRIED? .....

DO YOU HAVE ANY CHILDREN? .....

HAVE YOU EVER BEEN IN THERAPY OR SEEN A COUNSELLOR? .....

(COULD YOU PLEASE GIVE A FEW DETAILS? .....

.....)

HOW LONG HAVE YOU AND YOUR PARTNER BEEN INVOLVED? .....

ARE YOU LIVING TOGETHER? .....

(IF SO, FOR HOW LONG? .....)
HOW OLD IS SHE? .....
WHAT IS HER HOME LANGUAGE .....
WHAT EDUCATION HAS SHE HAD? .....
WHAT WORK DOES SHE DO NOW (OR WHAT IS SHE STUDYING)? .....
ABOUT HOW MUCH DOES SHE EARN PER MONTH? .....
HAS SHE EVER BEEN MARRIED? .....
DOES SHE HAVE ANY CHILDREN? .....
HAVE YOU EVER BEEN INVOLVED IN A LONG-TERM GAY RELATIONSHIP BEFORE? .....

B.

Please read all the statements below carefully, then ring the answer which expresses your response to each statement most accurately. The statements refer to your relationship with your partner as it is now. For example:

a. I like dogs

Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree

There are 37 questions like this. For the last question, please tick the response which seems most accurate at the moment.

1. My partner really listens to me when I need someone to talk to.

Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree

2. We enjoy spending time with other couples.

Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree

3. I am satisfied with our sex life.

Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree

4. My partner helps me clarify my thoughts.

Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree

5. We enjoy the same recreational activities.

Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree

6. I can state my feelings without her getting defensive.

Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree

7. We usually "keep to ourselves".

Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree

8. I feel our sexual activity is just routine.

Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree

9. When it comes to having a serious discussion it seems we have little in common.

Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree

10. I share in very few of my partner's interests.

Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree

11. I often feel distant from my partner.

Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree

12. We have very few friends in common.

Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree

13. I am able to tell my partner when I want to make love.

Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree

14. I feel "put-down" in a serious conversation with my partner.

Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree

15. We like playing together.

Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree

16. My partner really understands my hurts and joys.

Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree

17. Having time together with friends is an important part of our shared activities.

Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree

18. I "hold back" my sexual interest because my partner makes me feel uncomfortable.

Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree

19. I feel it is useless to discuss some things with my partner.

Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree

20. We enjoy the out-of-doors together.

Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree

21. I feel neglected at times by my partner.

Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree

22. Many of my partner's closest friends are also my closest friends.

Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree

23. Sexual expression is an essential part of our relationship.

Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree

24. My partner frequently tries to change my ideas.

Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree

25. We seldom find time to do fun things together.

Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree

26. I sometimes feel lonely when we're together.

Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree

27. My partner disapproves of some of my friends.

Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree

28. My partner seems disinterested in sex.

Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree

29. We have an endless number of things to talk about.

Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree

30. I think we share some of the same interests.

Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree

31. I really enjoy it when my partner and I make love.

Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree

32. I hardly ever feel sexual towards my partner any more.

Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree

33. Even when we don't make love, we are physically affectionate towards each other.

Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree

34. I am very happy with our sexual relationship.

Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree

35. My partner usually initiates our lovemaking.

Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree

36. We make love much less often now than we used to.

Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree

37. I often feel sexual even when we don'tmake love.

Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree

38. We make love

more than 3 times a week
more than once a week
more than twice a month
about once a month
less than once a month

APPENDIX B: SCATTER GRAPHS

Figure B.1. Emotional Intimacy and Frequency of Sexual Activity

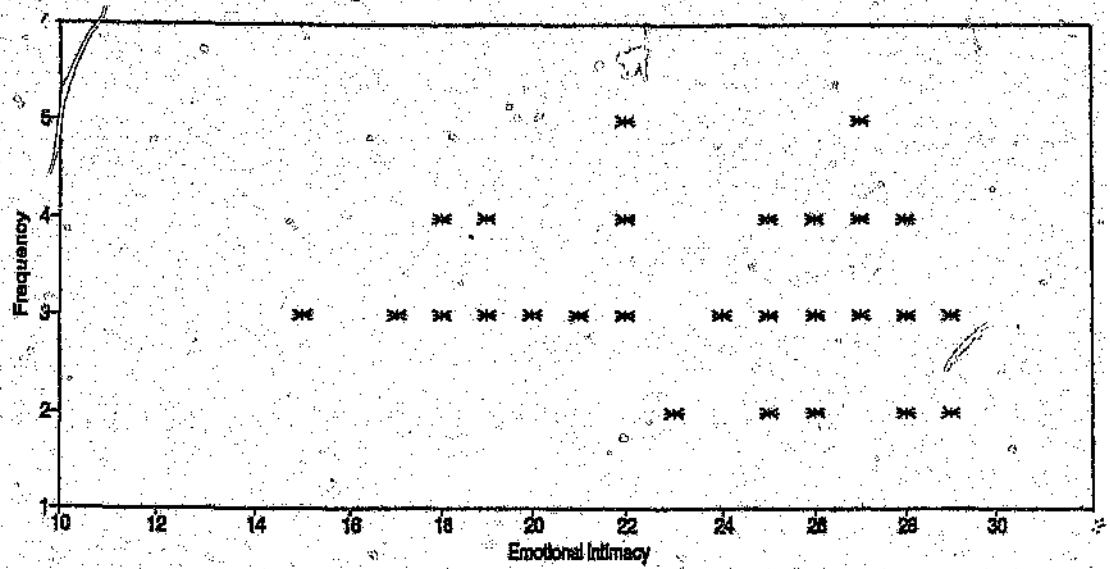


Figure B.2. Social Intimacy and Frequency of Sexual Activity

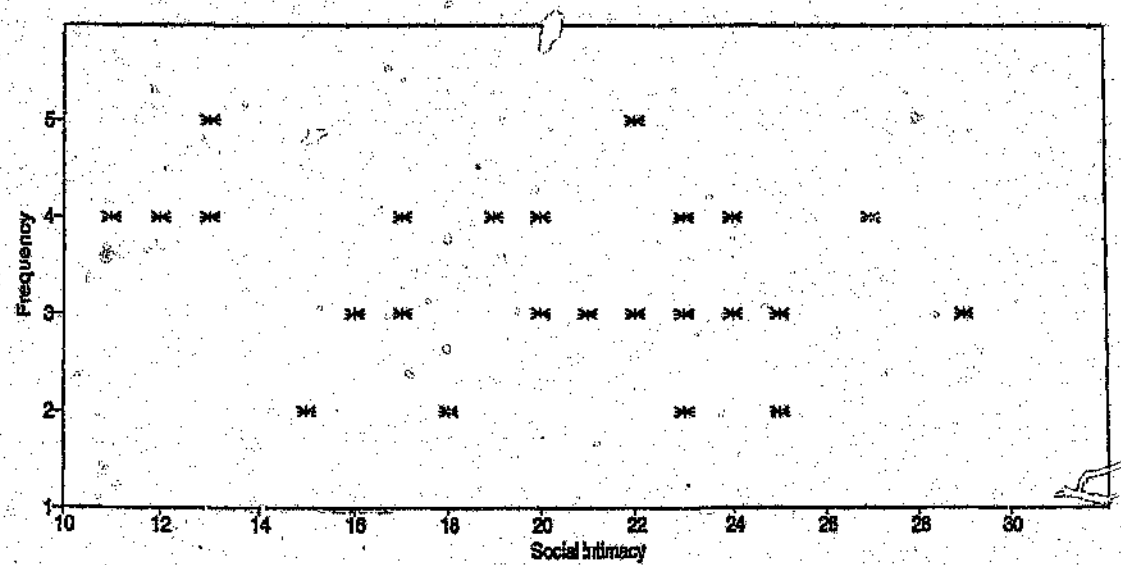


Figure B.3. Sexual Intimacy and Frequency of Sexual Activity

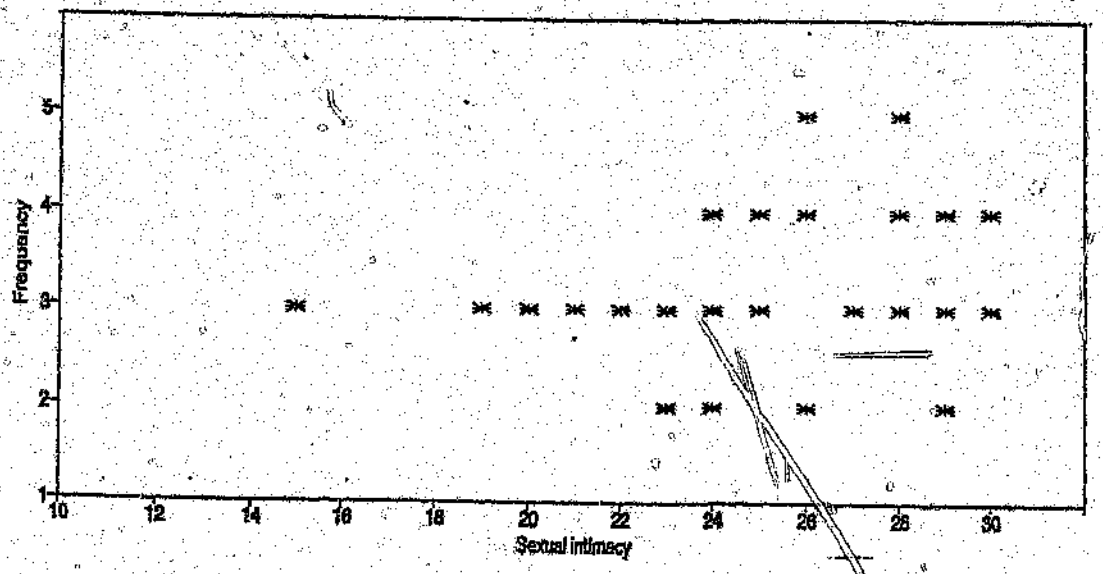


Figure B.4. Intellectual Intimacy and Frequency of Sexual Activity

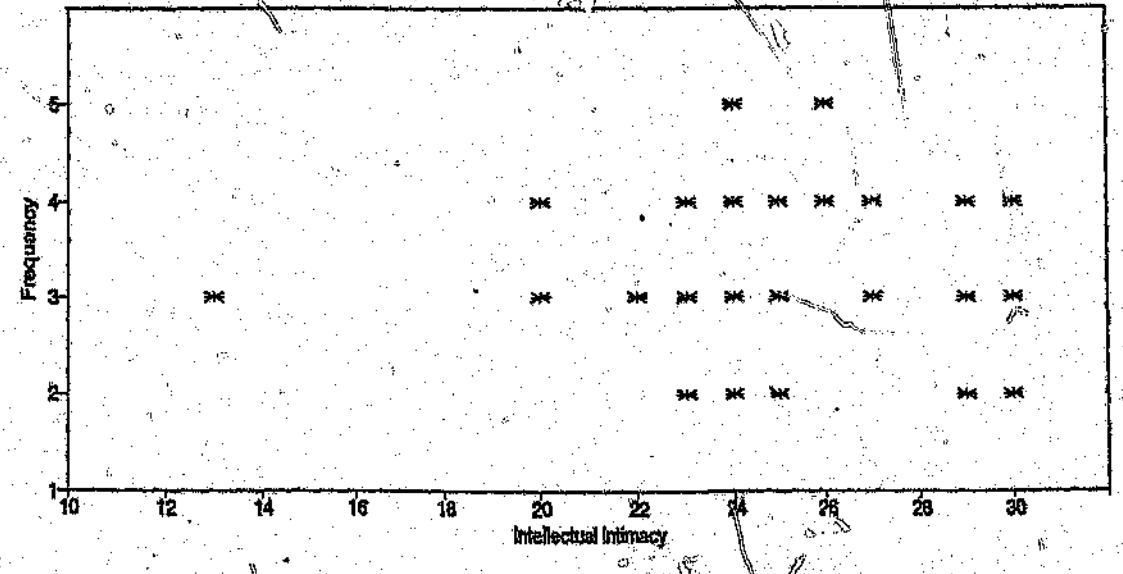


Figure B.5. Recreational Intimacy and Frequency of Sexual Activity

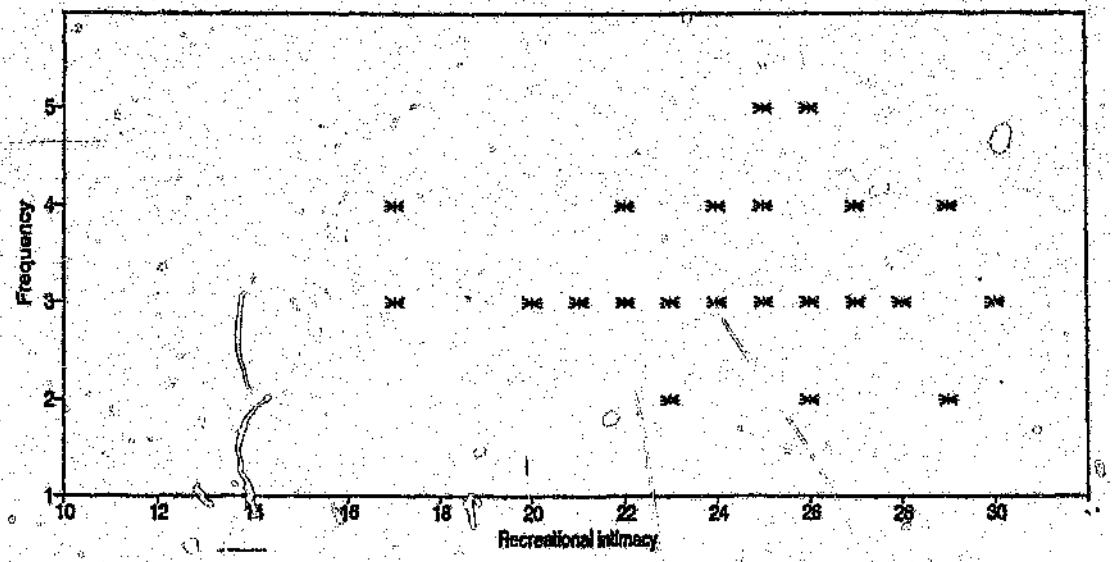


Figure B.6. Partial Intimacy and Frequency of Sexual Activity

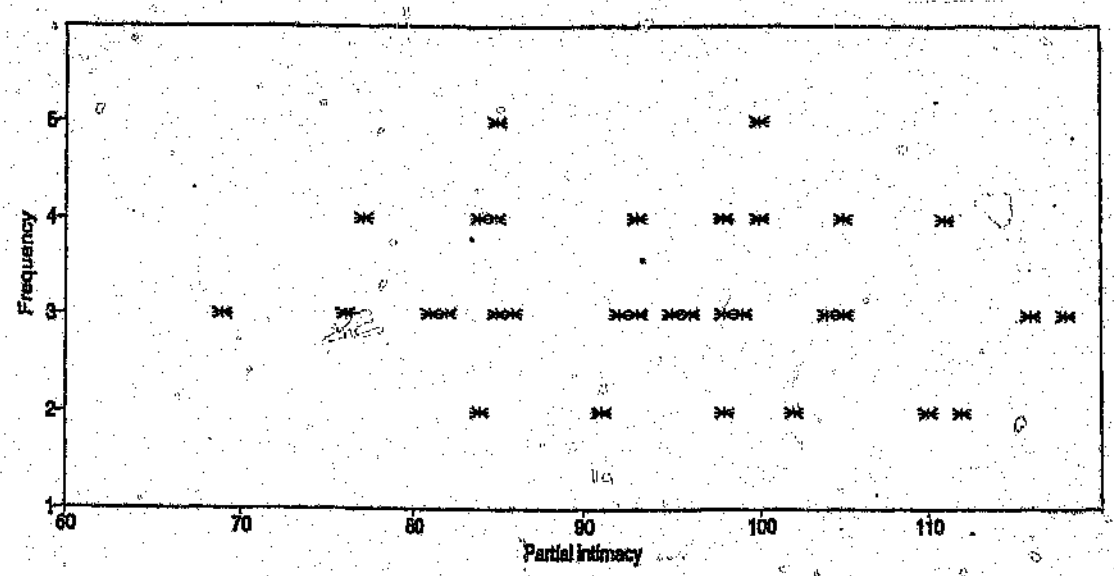
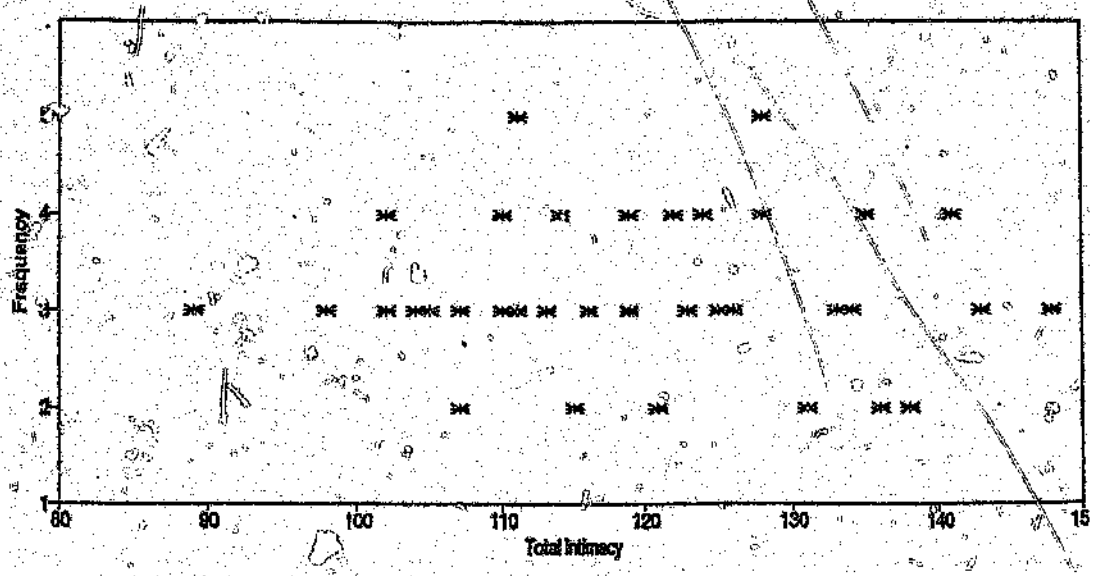


Figure B.7. Total Intimacy and Frequency of Sexual Activity



Author: Blyth Susan.
Name of thesis: The relationships between sexual desire, sexual frequency and fusion in lesbian relationships.

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