

# **NARRATIVES OF SEXUAL ORIENTATION:**

TOWARDS AN UNDERSTANDING OF HOW INDIVIDUAL WOMEN COME TO KNOW THEMSELVES AS LESBIAN, HETEROSEXUAL, BISEXUAL, ASEXUAL AND/OR IN OTHER WAYS.

**A qualitative research study  
by  
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# Research Aim

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**To explore the factors that participants believe influence the process by which they come to describe their sexual orientation.**

# Research questions

- **What experiences did the participants say they had gone through that they considered influenced the development of their sexual orientation?**
- **In particular, what role did they think broader biological, socio economic, political and religious influences played in this process?**
- **Who in their view were some of the influential people in this process of sexual development and how were they influential?**

# Semi structured interview schedule

1. **When would you say you first became consciously aware of your own sexual orientation development?**
2. **Which are some of the events/experiences that influenced this development?**
3. **How do you define yourself as a sexual being?**
4. **Have you ever thought about why you are heterosexual/bisexual/lesbian or why you are any other sexual being you define yourself as?**
5. **How did you get to that decision?**
6. **What else or who else would you say was influential in this process?**

# Themes common to all sexual orientation groups.

- **Sexual attraction (gut, instinct) desire, attachment and self definition**
- **Dominant stories in sexual orientation development - heterosexuality and homophobia**
- **Resistance to sexual orientation categorisation**
- **Fluidity of sexual orientation – possibility of change with the passage of time, life experiences, social and political context**
- **Silence on sexuality - the influence of parents and carers**
- **The role of friendships, peers and the media**
- **Experience of sexual abuse (not defining factor for sexual orientation)**
- **Constructing meaning and understanding through memories and life experiences**

# The construction of sexual orientation

- Sexual orientation is experienced and created from within the individual, is affected by attitude and messages from family and friends, and its expression dependent upon political, economic, cultural, religious and spiritual factors

# **Implication for clinical practice:**

## **key issues to take into account**

- **Relevant personal experiences such as attraction and desire and experiences of coming out**
- **Personal qualities and opportunities that impact on the path one takes**
- **Self identification and degree of self acceptance of one's sexual orientation identity**
- **Current life style or relational status and ones idealised sexual orientation**
- **Physical sexual identity, gender identity, sex role identity**
- **Current sexual behaviour, fantasies and emotional attachment**
- **Broader systemic considerations such as socio political and religious contexts**

# Final thoughts quotes

## On the fluidity of sexual orientation

*“I would say most people’s sexuality evolves and changes. Its fluid, ... I find that I am changing so much as I go through life. I think my sexuality is bound to change with the rest of me. Nancy (bisexual)*

*“I would probably define myself as lesbian, I don’t want to be total...I would say 75 – 80% lesbian and sort of unresolved about the other” Sue (lesbian)*

*“I would say that I was heterosexual but there is also part of me that would say....I wouldn’t say that was set necessarily, because I think that... its something that um...in a way as I grow up as a person, as I develop, the way my life is going, I don’t know where that might take me, I don’t know how that might open other possibilities in my life”*

*Tammy (heterosexual)*

**Thank you**

