Negotiating Identities

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THE FOLLOWING PARTS OF THIS THESIS HAVE BEEN REDACTED FOR DATA PROTECTION / CONFIDENTIALITY REASONS:

pp. 244-246: **Appendix H** Descriptions of participants

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pp. 272-299: **Part D: Paper for Publication**

Part A: Preface to the Portfolio

This preface serves as an introduction to the portfolio by providing an overview of the sections contained within it. The theme of negotiating identities provides a link between the different sections of this portfolio. The term negotiating identities is used here to refer to the processes which people engage in when they try to make sense of and manage different aspects of themselves.

The subject of identity is highly relevant to us as counselling psychologists. The sense which we make of ourselves has an impact on us, the way we live our lives and our relationships with others. When stigmatised identities are involved, these identity processes can have an additional impact (Breakwell, 1986; Fingerhut, Peplau & Gable, 2010; Quinn & Earnshaw, 2011). The practice of counselling psychology is interested in people's subjective experiences and recognises the impact social contexts have on life experiences (British Psychological Society, 2015). I would argue that an understanding of identity and the interplay between self and society is therefore of key importance to counselling psychology.

What follows is an overview of each of the sections of this portfolio. I conclude this section with my personal reflections on my development as a trainee counselling psychologist.

Part B: Research

In this section I present qualitative research which explores what it is like to be a professionally successful gay woman. There is a tendency for research into gay people's lives to focus on difficult life experiences. Understanding the challenges people face is important but without research which more broadly researches the experiences of gay people our understanding of gay people's lives is limited. Work is an area of life which impacts on people in many different ways and research into gay people's professional lives is limited. My aim for this research is to increase knowledge of what it is like to be a professionally successful gay woman.

Using semi-structured interviews I interviewed eight participants who self-identify as being professionally successful gay women. I paid particular attention to how the experience of being a professionally successful gay woman impacts on psychological well-being, sense of self, relationships with others and experience at work. I also paid attention to how any challenges arising from being a professionally successful gay woman are managed. Using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009) to analyse the interview transcripts, four major themes emerged from the analysis; 'Aspects of Self as a Professionally Successful Gay Woman', 'Feeling Different to Other People as a Gay Person and as a Woman', 'Coping Strategies Used in Response to Difficulties Encountered as a Professionally Successful Gay Woman' and 'Connection to Other Gay People and Other Women'.

The participants describe actively managing their identity and in so doing, engage in a process of negotiating identities. I discuss how the issues to emerge from this research relate to existing literature and theory. This section concludes with implications for clinical practice and for work that counselling psychologists can do beyond therapy as well as recommendations for further research.

Personal Reflections

Despite the size of this portfolio it does not adequately represent the amount of work needed to complete my training nor the personal and professional development I have achieved during this time. Nor does it adequately represent the challenges and doubts I have encountered along the way. Whilst they may not be detailed here, these experiences have contributed to my identity as a trainee counselling psychologist. My trainee placements led me to work in the NHS in primary care where I believe it is important for psychologists to have a presence. My training has instilled in me a questioning stance which I think is important for counselling psychologists particularly as constructs of mental health can be problematic and unhelpful. My training represents a change in professional identity for me as I embark on a second career. This is perhaps another reason why in considering options for research my attention was drawn to professional identity.

During my training I have come to realise that I see myself as a pluralist, believing there are many different ways for us to make sense of the world and many different ways in which we can help our clients. My pluralist stance is reflected in my curiosity with clients about how they make sense of themselves, the difficulties they bring to therapy and which type of therapy is likely to be most helpful for them at this time. In line with this pluralist way of thinking is my belief that there is much for counselling psychologists to do beyond clinical work. This includes contributing to discussions on identity, challenging problematic ways of thinking about identity constructs and broadening our understanding of different identities.

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Part B: Research

The Experience of Being a

Professionally Successful Gay Woman

Abstract

Research is needed to explore the lives of gay people so that not only the challenges which people face can be understood, but also the positive aspects of their lives. There is a lack of breadth to the existing literature which addresses the professional lives of gay people and the experiences of gay women receive little focus in the literature on women and work. The lack of attention paid to professionally successful gay women is surprising. Work is significant to people's lives in many different ways and gender and sexual identity can be significant to people's professional lives. This research aims to explore what it is like to be a professionally successful gay woman. This topic is relevant to counselling psychologists given the profession's aim of understanding the impact social contexts have on people (British Psychological Society, 2005) and the Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC) stipulation that psychologists understand how gender and sexual identity may impact on people's behaviour and well-being (Health and Care Professions Council, 2015). Using semi-structured interviews and interpretative phenomenological analysis this research explores the experiences of eight participants who self-identify as being professionally successful gay women. Four main themes emerged from the analysis; 'Aspects of Self as a Professionally Successful Gay Woman', 'Feeling Different to Other People as a Gay Person and as a Woman', 'Coping Strategies Used in Response to Difficulties Encountered as a Professionally Successful Gay Woman' and 'Connection to Other Gay People and Other Women' . A surprising issue to emerge across all these themes is the apparent lack of connection many participants seem to have with being a woman. This research highlights how heteronormativity and binary ideas about gender can impact on people and considers how counselling psychologists may engage with these issues both in clinical practice and beyond.

Chapter 1 Introduction

Overview

A lot of attention within sexual minority research has been paid to stigma and prejudice (Frost, Lehavot & Meyer, 2015; Hatzenbuehler et al., 2014; Herek, Gillis & Cogan, 2009; Szymanski, Dunn & Ikizler, 2014). The trend for research into gay people's lives to focus on difficulties has been commented on by Riggle, Whitman, Olson, Rostosky and Strong (2008) who argue sexual minority research has centred on "psychopathologies and negative life experiences" (Riggle et al., 2008, p.210) with much less being said about what is positive in the lives of gay people. Likewise Savin-Williams (2008) comments that a lot of sexual minority research has focussed on problems. In fact the discipline of psychology has a history of concentrating on problems (Joseph, 2015).

Adams et al. (2010) point out there is more to lesbian, gay and bisexual (LGB) research than stigma and discrimination. Whilst it is important to understand the challenges facing gay people it is also important to understand how people not only manage these challenges but are able to thrive (Bringaze & White, 2001; Kwon, 2013; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). Understanding how people obtain well-being, satisfaction and happiness is central to positive psychology (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). Positive psychology research has made useful contributions to our knowledge of what helps psychological well-being (Baumann & Eiroa-Orosa, 2016; Dieser & Christenson, 2016; Dubreuil et al., 2016). The need for research into the positive aspects of gay people's lives has started to be addressed by work which focusses on resilience (Hill & Gunderson, 2015; Kwon, 2013).

There are still opportunities to expand the breadth of sexual minority research as there is a lack of knowledge about some aspects of life for gay people (Kim & Fredriksen-Goldsen, 2016). More research is needed in order to identify and address the issues facing gay people (Branstrom & Vander, 2016; Ritter, 2015). One of the areas of life that could benefit from further research is gay people's professional lives. This is because a lot of research in this field has focussed on sexual identity management and disclosure (Creed & Scully, 2011; Croteau, Anderson & Vanderwal, 2008; Rummell & Tokar, 2016; Tatum, Formica & Brown, 2016). There is a lack of research in the United Kingdom relating to LGB professionals' identity (Rumens & Kurfoot, 2009), LGB individuals' experiences of work (Colgan, Creegan, McKearney & Wright, 2008) and LGB issues in leadership (deLeon & Brunner, 2013; Fassinger, Shullman & Stevenson 2010).

The lack of breadth to the research in this field is surprising given the various ways in which work is significant for people. Work has been linked to self-esteem and identity (Hartke, Trierweiler & Bode, 2011; National Institute for Health and Care Excellence, 2009) and it is argued that work can be beneficial to psychological well-being (Black, 2012; Kinderman, 2016; Robertson & Cooper, 2011; Waddell & Burton, 2006). In addition professional lives are rich ground for psychologists to learn more about people as workplaces reflect wider social contexts with Millward (2005) describing the workplace as a “microcosm of society” (Millward, 2005, p.18). For example gender equality remains an issue at work (Atewologun & Doldor, 2013; Elwer, Harryson, Bolin & Hammarstrum, 2013; Moen, 2015) just as it does in wider society (Bericat & Shanchez, 2016; Ginn & MacIntyre, 2013; Treas & Tai, 2016). However very little of the literature about women and management or women and work addresses gay women (Gedro, 2010). It has been argued that work is a prominent feature in life for many gay women (Dunne, 1997) which makes it even more surprising that such an important part of life has not received greater attention.

It is particularly interesting to consider professional success because of the interplay between this identity and other social identities. For example Archer (2008) explains social class, age, ethnicity and gender can be a threat to professional identity and to feelings of authenticity regarding professional success. Likewise Wald (2010) argues a “male-orientated professional ideology” (Wald, 2010, p.2246) can threaten the professional lives of women in terms of gender equality and career progression. The ways in which gender norms can cause difficulties for professionally successful women are discussed within this chapter.

Given the interaction between these different identities there are opportunities to learn about identity processes from professionally successful gay women. Calls for further research into this population have been made by Bringaze and White (2001) who recommend further research into what we can learn from high achieving gay women. In addition Fassinger, Shullman and Stevenson (2010) stress the importance of knowing about the ways in which LGB leaders view and understand their experiences. They argue that LGB people’s experiences of social norms and stigma relate to leadership because ideas about self, the expectations of others and being able to relate to other people are key to leadership roles.

Limited attention has been paid to gay women’s professional success (Rostad & Long, 2008). One might wonder if the lack of research on this topic fits with the feminist argument that women’s experiences have been overlooked in research

(Bristor & Fischer, 1993; Leckenby, 2007; Rayaprol, 2016) and how gay women's voices are often not foregrounded in sexual minority research (Rose, 2008). In light of the known significance of work to people's lives, the apparent complicated relationship between professional success and other social identities and the gaps within the existing literature, this research aims to increase understanding and knowledge of what it is like to be a professionally successful gay woman.

Introduction

This chapter explores the literature which relates to professionally successful gay women. After an introduction to sexual minority research, the areas of literature considered are models of identity, constructs of gender, sexual identity and professional success and research pertaining to the experiences of professionals who are gay. This chapter ends with a further discussion about the rationale for this study. The complexity of sexual identity is discussed later in this chapter but by way of explanation to the reader I have chosen to use the term gay woman throughout this research. My reasons for this are documented in the 'Methodology'. The implications, limitations and critical reflection of this choice are included in the 'Discussion'. In this portfolio when other researchers' work is referred to I have used the same sexual minority terms, for example LGB (lesbian, gay and bisexual), which they have used.

Background to Sexual Minority Research

A great deal of research concerning the lives of lesbian, gay and bisexual (LGB) people is motivated by an equal rights agenda (Adams et al., 2010) and fits within the field of social justice. This is perhaps not surprising given the privilege afforded to heterosexuality and the extent of heteronormativity within society (Chevrette, 2013; Rossi, 2011; Rubin, 1997; Warner, 1991). The discrimination experienced by gay people is well documented and this includes treatment within the field of psychology. The psychological literature on homosexuality began by adopting a pathological stance (Bergler, 1956; Krafft-Ebing, 1965; Westphal, 1869). Until it was removed in 1973 by the American Psychiatric Association (APA) homosexuality was included in the first and second editions of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-I, DSM-II, American Psychiatric Association, 1952, 1958) as a sociopathic personality disorder. Two years later in 1975 the APA urged mental health professionals to stop associating homosexuality with mental illness (Conger, 1975). The move to stop pathologising homosexuality has been described as the “biggest mass cure of mental illness in modern history” (Herek, 2015, p. 29). After this conceptual ‘u turn’ the psychological literature then moved from a pathological stance to one of affirmation (Bieschke, Perez & Debord, 2007; Green & Herek, 1994; Isay, 1987; Israel, Ketz, Detrie, Burke & Shulman, 2003; Milton & Coyle, 1999). As Anderson and Croteau (2013) explain within this affirming approach there has been a focus on understanding the experiences of gay people and particular attention has been paid to the effects of homophobia and heterosexism.

Maher et al. (2009) explain that around the time homosexuality ceased to be pathologised in 1973 the term homophobia was introduced to describe negative attitudes towards gay people (Weinberg, 1972). Somewhat ironically the term homophobia sought to pathologise individuals who hold negative views about gay people and its use is criticised by Herek (2004) who argues it is more useful to focus on heterosexism. Herek argues that the term homophobia conceptualises negative attitudes towards gay people solely at an individual level and fails to take into account negative attitudes at a societal level. The term homophobia is also misleading as it is not actually referring to a phobia and its meaning is very general as it is used to describe institutional discrimination, prejudice from individuals and internal feelings of shame (Herek, 2015). One might argue that the biggest problem though in focusing on homophobia instead of heterosexism is the failure to recognise the power of social structures and policies in reproducing and reinforcing particular viewpoints. This recognition of needing to look beyond individuals and consider the power of social structures meant that whilst the literature continued to focus on affirmation, researchers began to pay more attention to institutions with a view to affecting social change within them (Maher et al., 2009).

Stigmatised Identity

It has been argued that psychological research into the lives of sexual minorities needs to consider the social influences on people’s lives (Meyer, 2003). By adopting a psychosocial approach the impact of social contexts and social inequalities on people can be recognised (Hollander & Howard, 2000). The role of social factors in identity processes are discussed later in this chapter. An important social factor to consider is how gay people are positioned in society and the stigma which can still be associated with sexual identities which are different to heterosexuality. Whilst the days of homosexuality being classified as a mental disorder in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-II, American Psychiatric Association, 1958) are in the past, the harm done by pathologising homosexuality is not simply eradicated with a policy change. In addition, a multitude of government legislation has disadvantaged gay people in the United Kingdom and this has only fairly recently begun to change. Until 2000 gay people were not officially allowed to serve in the armed forces (Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994), the age of consent for sex between men was only lowered to the same age of consent for sex between men and women in 2001 (Sexual Offences (Amendment) Act 2000) and only in 2002 were same sex couples allowed to adopt children (Adoption and Children Act 2002). In the United Kingdom sexual identity only became a protected characteristic for employment in 2003 (The Employment Equality (Sexual Orientation) (Amendment) Regulations 2003), civil partnership was only made available to same sex couples in 2004 (Civil Partnership Act 2004) and marriage in 2014 (Marriage (Same Sex Couples) Act 2013). These changes in legislation indicate positive changes in attitudes towards gay people. However many people alive today have an understanding of what it means to be gay which has been formed at a time when medical and legal policies discriminated against and disadvantaged gay people.

Despite the advancements in legal rights it is recognised that gay people continue to face prejudice and discrimination in this country. The British Psychological Society (2012) acknowledge there are health inequalities in the UK with regards to LGB populations in terms of access to health care and poor experiences when health care is provided. Reported homophobic crimes in London rose by 19 percent between 2015 and 2016 (Metropolitan Police, 2016). There can also be challenges for gay people in the workplace. A survey by Stonewall (2014) showed in the previous five years 2.4 million people have witnessed homophobic bullying at work. The latest figures for tribunal cases based on discrimination in the workplace on the grounds of sexual orientation show there were 640 cases in 2010-2011 (Ministry of Justice, 2012). As Casebourne, Regan, Neathey and Tuohy (2006) found only three percent of employees who report difficulties at work pursued an employment tribunal, one might hypothesise that the reported number of tribunal cases massively underrepresents the number of actual incidents.

In an effort to make workplaces more welcoming to gay employees some organisations have dedicated ‘straight allies’ who are heterosexual members of staff committed to equality for LGB staff (Stonewall, 2011). One might wonder whether this strategy suggests there can be an absence of acceptance, fairness and equality in workplaces, which are factors which benefit all staff, not just those who are LGB. The advancement of legal rights for gay people should therefore not be seen as an indicator that discrimination has been eradicated.

Psychological Well-being

The potential discrimination facing gay people is something which psychologists need to be aware of (British Psychological Society, 2017a; Hancock, 2000). The negative impact of stigma on mental health is well documented and one explanation for this is minority stress theory (Meyer, 2003). According to Meyer, the prejudice and negative social attitudes shown towards sexual minorities leads to them experiencing social stress. Research into minority stress theory supports the view that experiencing homophobia affects psychological well-being (Douglass, Conlin, Duffy & Allan, 2017; Newcomb & Mustanski, 2010; Smith & McCarthy, 2017; Van Bergen, Bos, Van Lisdonk, Keuzenkamp & Sandfort, 2012).

Interest in psychological well-being has been increasing (Malinauskas & Dumciene, 2017; Steptoe, Deaton & Stone, 2015) yet more work is needed to understand what helps people's psychological well-being (Kolar, von Treuer & Koh, 2017; Kozik, Hoppmann & Gerstorf, 2015; Kuykendall & Tay, 2015; Kuykendall, Tay & Ng, 2015). This knowledge is valuable because psychological well-being constitutes an important part of people's general sense of well-being and is connected to people's physical health (British Psychological Society, 2017b).

In the context of work, psychological well-being benefits employees' happiness (British Psychological Society, 2017b) and psychological well-being is linked to employees performing well in their roles as well as to lower rates of sickness absence and staff leaving (National Institute for Health and Care Excellence, 2009). The British Psychological Society (2017b) asserts there is a need to increase the psychological well-being of people at work. I would argue that the limited scope of research into the experiences of professional gay women (see later section on 'Professional Gay women') means there are opportunities as yet untaken in this field to find out what helps and hinders people's psychological well-being.

Theories of Identity

This research is concerned with identity and some of the literature on theories of identity are introduced here. Identity is a large subject area on which much has been written from both a psychological and sociological perspective. Within the broad range of literature on identity there is a lack of agreement on a definition of identity

(Michael, 1996). The confusion over identity terms adds to the complexity of identity theories. The use of different definitions can also make it hard to compare theories (Harre, 1998). Some theorists use the term identity whilst others use the term self and both terms can be describing the same concept (Breakwell, 1986). Self-concept is another term used and one which Markus and Wurf (1987) argue is similar to identity with both terms referring to roles, social status and personal characteristics. In an attempt to unpick some of the confusion there follows a discussion of the term 'self' and the work of Harre (1998) and Burkitt (2008). After an explanation of how identity is conceptualised in this research this section concludes with a discussion of the work of Tajfel (1981), Turner (1982), Giddens (1991) and Breakwell (1986) whose theories of identity all acknowledge the influence of social contexts.

Harre (1998) explains the term self has been used by psychologists in relation to what individuals know about themselves. An example of this is the term self-concept. Harre provides a framework for the self made up of three parts; the unique way individuals perceive the world, the collection of personal attributes an individual has and their beliefs about these attributes, and an individual's presentation of themselves to others and how this presentation is interpreted by others. Harre's work is useful for showing the complexity of the self and the different processes which need to be considered when thinking about someone's self-concept. However his work is open to criticism because of the notion of a 'real self'.

Harre's (1998) framework of self is one approach to understanding identity amongst many and different theories emphasise different aspects of the self. Burkitt (2008) stresses how we are social selves and how our sense of who we are is created largely through our relationships with others. Burkitt argues society is characterised by power structures with different groups forming a social hierarchy. Burkitt explains the position we hold in society including social class, gender, sexual identity, and family, to name but a few all impact on our sense of self. According to Burkitt people around us make judgements about us and respond to us in certain ways and this treatment of us affects our sense of self. This fits with Harre's concept of the self and echoes the work of Mead (1909) who viewed the self as a social construct.

For this research it is acknowledged that society and other people have an impact on people's identity. Theories of identity cover concepts of self, self-concept and self in relation to others. In this research the term identity is used to refer to an individual's view of themselves, their position in society and their relation to others. This view encompasses what other theorists have referred to as 'sense of self'. As this research acknowledges the influence society has on identity construction, presented next are theories of identity which concentrate on the influence of social contexts.

Discussions of psychosocial theories of identity sometimes begin with the work of Erikson (1969) as he recognised the relationship between social contexts and identity. A shortfall of Erikson's work is that he focussed on development into adolescence and so this discussion will move onto Tajfel's work on Social Identity Theory (Tajfel, 1981). Tajfel argued that people's self-concept or in other words their social identity, is based on their membership of social groups and the emotional connection and value associated with that membership. Aligning oneself with social groups, a process Tajfel referred to as social categorisation, is a means to place oneself in society. Tajfel argues perceived differences between groups and what these differences mean to people are an important part of social identity with distinctions being made between 'in groups' and 'out groups'. Tajfel argues that group membership aims to provide people with a positive social identity and one which is distinct from other social groups. Tajfel's work usefully highlights how group membership can effect individuals' sense of identity. However a major criticism of Tajfel's work is that despite it being based on the premise that social contexts influence relations between groups, Social Identity Theory was developed from experiments devoid of social context (Hornsey, 2008).

The work of Tajfel (1981) is commonly linked with Turner (1982) who was also concerned with membership of social groups. Turner argues that with regards to group membership it is important to first consider "who am I?" (Turner, 1982, p.16). The argument being that how individuals think about themselves and define themselves is more important than what individuals think about other people. However a criticism of Turner's work is that social categorisation theory is not geared to address the multitude of identities which people have and the interplay between these identities (Abrams & Hogg, 2004). Turner advocates a social identification model arguing that people place themselves and others in social categories in order to define themselves and others. Turner argues that social categories influence individuals' sense of themselves because people internalise social categories and these become part of individuals' self-concept. For both Tajfel (1981) and Turner (1982), social identity is the result of people aligning themselves with some social categories and excluding themselves from others.

An alternative take on identity is provided by Giddens (1991). Giddens also recognises the impact social contexts have on identity and states how understandings of what it means to be ‘a person’ differ between cultures. Giddens makes a useful contribution to our understanding of identity by arguing that the identity of the self or self-identity as he calls it, is not static or fixed but is subject to change as people continually reflect on the sense they make of themselves. This reflection centres on an individual’s personal life story. Giddens argues that to understand an individual’s identity we need to look at how they maintain their particular life story or ‘narrative’. This maintenance is ongoing as external events which happen need to be inserted into an individual’s ‘narrative’ about themselves. Giddens points out that there is a toughness and fragility to self-identity. The toughness is displayed when people maintain their self-identity when they face changes in their social contexts or face threats to their identity. The fragility is evident because the ‘narrative’ someone maintains about themselves is always going to be one out of many ways their life story could be thought about. According to Giddens people therefore choose how to construct their self-identity. Giddens’s acknowledgement that there are many ways in which we can think about things is appealing as it shares counselling psychology’s commitment to pluralism (McAteer, 2010).

Giddens’s (1991) work is also helpful to consider because he comments on shame and pride and their relation to people’s ‘narrative’. He argues that if someone is confident about the truthfulness and value of their ‘narrative’ they will feel a sense of pride and self-esteem. If on the other hand someone feels anxious about their ‘narrative’ this can lead to feelings of shame. Just as there is a fragility to self-identity, Giddens argues there is a fragility to pride because it can be impacted on by the reactions of other people. These reactions may constitute threats to identity and this links to the work of Breakwell (1986).

Breakwell (1986) formulated a model of identity in order to explore how people manage threats to their identity. In order to understand how identities are constructed, threatened and managed, Breakwell argues we need to consider the norms and beliefs within society. Breakwell therefore emphasises the social context of identity. For example to understand how being gay affects identity we need to explore the meanings which society ascribes to being gay. According to Breakwell to understand identity we need to consider both the structures and the processes which form the social context of identity. The structures within the social context of identity are relationships, networks and group memberships as well as social categories such as gender. Breakwell explains these structures form the background to our lives and provide norms, values and goals which contribute to our identity.

In order to understand identity Breakwell (1986) argues we also need to examine the social influence exerted by different structures such as teaching, persuasion and propaganda. Breakwell explains these social influences represent different ideas and values and compete for dominance which places individuals in the position of having to choose between different ideologies.

According to Breakwell (1986) identity is therefore a complex mixture of structures and processes which individuals navigate themselves between. To understand someone's identity Breakwell argues we need to look at their action because encased within identity are an individual's beliefs, attitudes and emotions all of which influence what someone says or does. An example of action which Breakwell pays particular attention to is how people behave when their identity is threatened. Breakwell argues that when people come under threat, for example by experiencing stigma, they employ coping strategies. Breakwell's work looks at three different types of coping strategies; intra-psychic, interpersonal and intergroup. Breakwell divides intra-psychic strategies into two categories; 'assimilation-accommodation' which includes a range of 'deflection' and 'acceptance' strategies, and 'evaluation' which includes strategies to reconsider either the present or future contents of identity (Breakwell, 1986). Much of Breakwell's work considers the ways in which people protect their sense of self-esteem and this links to the work of Griffiths (1995) who also focusses on how people's sense of identity links to self-esteem.

In trying to understand identity it makes sense to use a social-psychological approach such as Breakwell's (1986). The inclusion of social factors is crucial because we do not exist in isolation. We need to consider the influence social factors have on us and this is evident when we consider social change. Jaspal (2014) points out social change influences us in many ways from how we think about ourselves and other people, to how we lead our daily lives. Social change can affect the significance of certain social categories and this can lead to changes in how we make sense of people and how we act. To understand identity we therefore cannot ignore the social world. Jaspal also argues that psychological change, such as adapting to new circumstances, can affect how we think about ourselves, other people and how we choose to act. Jaspal's assertion is that both social and psychological change can affect people's identities and behaviours. From a social-psychological perspective, identity, as in how we think about ourselves, is not static. It can change and to understand these changes and why we think about ourselves in the way that we do, we need to consider social factors and the sense we make of them.

Gender

Gender is an aspect of identity which has also been theorised about greatly. In this discussion of gender it is important to acknowledge the historical subordination of women and the existence of patriarchy which is well documented in the literature (Chodorow, 1994; Connell, 2005; De Beauvoir, 1988; Iversen & Rosenbluth, 2010).

Klein (1989) explains from the nineteenth century scientists started to pay increasing attention to the subordinate position of women in society. The women's movement also started to gather momentum in the nineteenth century. As Smith (2006) comments the women's movement strived to make changes for women within a 'masculinist regime' and raise awareness of the ways in which women were oppressed. Klein (1989) explains gradually women started to be afforded increased legal rights such as being able to vote (Equal Franchise Act 1928) and as Connell (2005) comments, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (United Nations General Assembly, 1948) raised the importance of gender equality internationally. However Klein points out that despite changes in legislation in the nineteenth century, women continued to be regarded as subordinate to men, and feminists' arguments for democracy were opposed not only amongst men but by some women too. Klein argues that legislative changes alone do not lead to social change because it is the attitudes and beliefs within society which shape people's experiences. Writing much later than Klein, Connell (2005) also argues that improving equality for women in society does require change within social institutions but it also depends on changes being made in everyday interactions.

Mackinnon (2007) comments on the continued subordination and oppression of women across the world. To understand the subordination of women despite advancements in legal rights it is helpful to consider ideas about gender roles and how dominant ideas in society shape ideas about what it is to be a man or a woman. Although theoretical models of gender do include biological models (Wilson, 1975) which explain differences between men and women in terms of genetics, hormones and physicality, many other models recognise that gender is socially constructed (Butler, 1999). Ideas about masculinity and femininity differ between cultures and historical points in time. Different meanings for femininity for example can be found across different cultures (Mendoza-Denton, 2011). The social construction of gender means that ideas about gender are not neutral. Gender is linked to dominant ideas and power structures within society and as Mackinnon (1987) points out, it has long been argued by feminist theorists that gender is related to social status and power. The construction of gender and associated power dynamics links into the work of Breakwell (1986).

Arguments for gender being a social construct support criticisms of gender realism. As Stoljar (2011) explains the realist argument is there exists “one womanness” (Stoljar, 2011, p.27). The idea that all women possess a characteristic which defines them as women is criticised by many feminist theorists (Butler, 1999; Frye, 1996; Spelman, 1990). Furthermore Young (1997) argues it is problematic to assume that women form a homogenous group. To do so is to deny the influence of other factors such as sexual identity, race, class and age on gender (Mohanty, 1995; Spelman, 1990; Stoljar, 1995).

Zack (2005) explains that society’s ideas about gender are impressed upon individuals through gender roles and also the designation of a male or female gender. According to Zack “gender identity is culturally imposed” (Zack, 2005, p. 162). Zack argues this means that children have to negotiate their gender identity because as well as their own ideas about themselves they have to deal with other people’s ideas about them as boys or girls. Zack explains expectations are placed on girls for example to think and behave in certain ways simply because it has been decided they are girls. The imposition of ideas about gender can be problematic for people because it is limiting and restrictive. This imposition was commented on by De Beauvoir (1988) who argued that women were not at liberty to influence ideas about femininity.

In their commentary on gender roles, West and Zimmerman (1987) argue that behaviour is managed so that it conforms to the norms and values attached to each biological sex. These gender related behaviours are the focus of many theoretical models of gender and link to Bandura’s (1986) work on social learning theory. For example Kohlberg’s (1966) cognitive development theory asserts that children have an active part in gender development. Kohlberg argues that children’s behaviour is based on ideas they have about gender. This premise links to gender schema theory (Bem, 1981) which is based on the argument that children create gender knowledge structures, otherwise known as schemas, and use these to process information. Both cognitive development theory and gender schema theory have been used to argue that “children actively construct gender on the basis of both the nature of the social environment and how they think about the sexes” (Martin & Ruble, 2004, p.67).

This construction of gender is commented on by Mavin and Grandy (2012) who argue that gender is not held by individuals, it is “an ongoing accomplishment grounded in interaction with others” (Mavin & Grandy, 2012, p.220). Not only is gender seen as an active process it is something on which people are judged hence Mavin and Grandy’s use of the phrase ‘doing gender well’. In other words people are judged in terms of how their behaviour matches their biological sex (Mavin & Grandy, 2012).

Thinking about gender in terms of what is male or female can be problematic. In fact this binary way of thinking, the idea that something is either one thing or the other, can be unhelpful in many areas of life. When it is applied to gender it means that restrictive ideas about how men and women should look and behave are constructed and socially imposed. This view is asserted by Butler (1999) who argues gender theories have often been based on a narrow view of gender only seeing it in terms of masculinity and femininity and basing ideas about gender on heterosexist assumptions. Chodorow (1994) argues that ideas about what is male and female are so pervasive that they are even applied to same sex relationships. Chodorow gives examples of women in same sex relationships being understood in terms of being ‘butch’ or ‘femme’ and of arguments put forward that claim gay women love in a ‘masculine’ way and that gay men are ‘effeminate’.

Eckert (2014) explains the gender binary is a prevailing ideological construct which is maintained through gender socialisation. The inevitability of a gender binary was expressed by West and Zimmerman (1987) who argued the gender binary is inescapable; “we are always men or women” (West & Zimmerman, 1987, p139). However thinking about gender in this binary way is problematic because the use of both traditional gender norms and heterosexist assumptions restricts understanding of what it is to be a man or a woman. One of the consequences of this is that negative appraisals can be made of people who do not conform to gender norms with regards to appearance (Bem, 1976; De Baeuvoir, 1988; Simpson, 1973; Toomey, Card & Casper, 2014).

We therefore need to be critical of the ways in which ideas about gender are constructed. Binary ways of thinking are often replaced by thinking in terms of a continuum. However thinking about gender in this way can also be problematic as it still relies on the constructs of masculinity and femininity and a process of differentiating between the two.

This critique of gender is central to queer theory which seeks to challenge how gender and sexual orientation are understood in binary terms. Using a binary viewpoint, sex, gender and sexual orientation can only be understood in terms of male or female, masculine or feminine and heterosexual or homosexual. Queer theory also seeks to challenge the assumption that sex determines gender and together, sex and gender determine sexual orientation (Carrol, 2012). Queer theory argues gender roles, gender identity and sexual orientation are all socially constructed (Nagoshi, Terrell, Nagoshi & Brzuzy, 2014).

Some research has specifically looked at gender related traits and sexual orientation. Research by Lippa (2000) began with the argument that gay men are stereotyped as being more feminine than heterosexual men and gay women are stereotyped as being more masculine than heterosexual women. Lippa set out to find which gender related traits are related to sexual orientation in adults. On the basis of gender related indicators such as hobby and work preferences, Lippa concluded that gay men and women are positioned between heterosexual men and women. In other words Lippa's findings show that "gay men are more like women than heterosexual men, but are not 'like women' and lesbian women are more like men than heterosexual women, but they are not 'like men'" (Lippa, 2000, p. 923). The problem with this study is that it is based on a binary model of gender. Lippa's conclusion is problematic because of the unchallenged view of what it is to be 'like a man' or 'like a woman'.

Ideas about gender roles feature in a lot of sexual identity research. Goodman and Moradi (2008) argue that ideas about gender roles put gay women under stress to conform to conventional female behaviour norms. In addition Carr (2005) argues that people may avoid behaving in ways associated with the 'opposite' gender so that other people do not think they are gay. Research of this kind highlights the complicated relationship which exists between gender and sexual identity and the negotiation which some people engage in regarding these identity components. Nagoshi et al. (2014) argue gay men and women spend time establishing their gender roles and sexual identity. It is also argued that some gay women adopt a particular gender identity (for example butch, femme, gender queer etc.) in order to understand and explain how they view their gender (Hiestand & Levitt, 2005; Levitt, Gerrish & Hiestand, 2003; Walker 2012).

Nagoshi et al. (2014) looked at attitudes to gender roles amongst participants who were heterosexual, gay, lesbian and transgender. The descriptions given by participants of masculinity and femininity were all based on traditional ideas of behaviours associated with men and women. Masculinity was therefore defined in terms of dominance, aggression and an absence of emotion and femininity was defined in terms of emotion, communication and empathy. Many of the gay and lesbian participants applied a binary definition to gender roles, viewing themselves as either having masculine or feminine characteristics. However almost half of the lesbian participants held a different view of gender roles and recognised both masculine and feminine characteristics in their own gender roles. Whilst these participants demonstrated a different understanding of gender roles to many of the heterosexual participants they still understood gender roles in these binary terms whereas the transgender participants doubted the usefulness of these binary concepts.

What is interesting from the findings of Nagoshi et al. (2014) is that binary understandings of gender appear to remain prominent even amongst individuals who recognise that gender roles are socially constructed, as was the case in their study. What complicates our understanding of gender is the variation that is found in people's understanding of gender roles as well as the huge variation in how people see themselves. When we start to consider different sexual orientations the process of understanding gender becomes even more complex. Nagoshi et al. (2014) concluded there is a complicated relationship between gender roles and sexual orientation for both transgender and gay and lesbian individuals as a result of finding themselves not fitting into gender and heterosexist social norms.

Gay Identity Development

The confusion and lack of clarity over identity terms extends into theories about sexual identity. There are many theories about gay identity development yet there is not a consistent definition of what gay identity is. Cass (1984) commented that this lack of clarity meant "the study of homosexuality has been characterized by confusion, disarray and ambiguity" (Cass, 1984, p.105). Theories about sexual orientation have been approached in different ways. Some theoretical models are based on the idea that sexual orientation is fixed at a young age and remains stable (Bell, Weinberg & Hammersmith, 1981; Money, 1988; Whitam & Mathy, 1986). The opposing view is that sexual orientation is fluid and for some people it changes (Diamond, 2008). The pioneering work of Kinsey, Pomeroy and Martin (1948) into sexual behaviour introduced the idea that sexual orientation is best understood in terms of a continuum between homosexuality and heterosexuality. Kinsey et al.

(1948) argued that whilst some people's behaviour and thoughts are exclusively homosexual or heterosexual, many people by virtue of sexual experiences or attraction are positioned somewhere in-between.

A lot of sexual identity models take a developmental approach but they differ in their focus. Some sexual identity models include developmental processes in childhood, some focus on adulthood and some focus solely on the process of 'coming out' (Cass, 1984). Developmental theories recognise that identity development is an ongoing process which can be affected by life events such as oppression that can continue through adulthood. In recognising the continued influence of external events, developmental theories stress it is important to think about individuals as being in a social context (Gonsiorek & Rudolph, 1991). The developmental process of identifying as gay was first documented by Sengers (1969) who spoke about 'self-acceptance'. This process forms the basis of many models of sexual identity development including the work of Cass (1979). Cass's model of gay identity is intended to account for the developmental processes of both males and females. Cass's sample has been criticised for having a "middle-class bias" (Whitcomb & Walinsky, 2013, p.453). Cass's model is a stage model, suggesting that people move through six different stages sequentially; identity confusion, identity comparison, identity tolerance, identity acceptance, identity pride and lastly identity synthesis. Other stage models of gay identity (Chapman & Brannock, 1987; McCarn & Fassinger, 1996; Plummer, 1975) follow similar themes.

Eliason and Schope (2007) point out that many stage models of gay identity development share a number of assumptions; the start of identity development is characterised by a sense of feeling different to others, people move from an 'unhealthy' identity position to a 'healthier' one, disclosure of sexual identity is important for a 'healthy' identity development and people move through a stage of feeling proud of being gay. The last assumption is that the developmental process ends with gender and sexual identity integrated into a person's overall identity where sexual identity does not hold an elevated or diminished position amongst other identity components (Eliason & Schope, 2007).

Some of the assumptions found in stage models are problematic. The idea of moving from an 'unhealthy' identity to a 'healthy' one is heavily laden with assumptions that to be 'out and proud' is best. The sequential nature of stage models is a common criticism along with them being inflexible (Akerland & Cheong, 2000). Sophie (1986) looked at lesbian identity development and found stage modes did not adequately explain the experiences of her research participants. Particular stages did not always happen in the sequence laid out in the models and sometimes particular stages were not apparent at all.

A major issue with stage models is their binary approach to sexual identity. As Eliason and Schope (2007) state “most stage model authors assumed that one is or is not gay or lesbian; thus they embrace the argument through an Essentialist lens” (Eliason & Schope, 2007, p.6). Stage theories are also criticised for being so general that they cannot account well for individual differences and some models are criticised for failing to account for the experiences of gay women. Although Cass (1979) claimed her model was applicable to males and females her model was tested on a sample which predominately consisted of gay males. It has been argued this limits its application to understanding lesbian identity development (Hequembourg & Ferrell, 1999). However some stage models have specifically been developed for gay women (Chapman & Brannock, 1987; Ponse, 1978). Chapman and Brannock’s model includes five stages; a sense of connection to other females, feeling different to heterosexuals, having a strong emotional bond or sexual interest in females, identifying as a lesbian and finally deciding to pursue relationships with women or not. Their model may be centred on women but the same limitations apply as to other stage models. Lastly, stage models do not account for the different ways sexual identity is constructed across cultures nor do they adequately explain how race, ethnicity, religion or age may affect the development of a gay identity and most models do not address bisexuality (Eliason & Schope, 2007).

The limitations of stage models led D’Augelli (1994) to construct a ‘life-span’ model of sexual orientation development. His model pays attention to social contexts, recognises that sexual orientation may be fluid or fixed and is not ordered into stages. Instead of stages, D’Augelli’s model focuses on processes; leaving heterosexuality, developing a personal and a social LGB identity, becoming an LGB offspring, initiating LGB intimacy and joining an LGB community. D’Augelli argues some of these processes may be more significant than others for different people. Similar processes are found within other non-linear models of sexual identity (Fox, 1995; Klein, 1990; Rhoads, 1994).

These non-linear models are not without their critics and many of these models are based on small samples from either student populations or the general population and some are not based on empirical data at all (Renn & Bilodeau, 2005). Models of identity are inherently problematic due to all the difficulties discussed earlier. The major advantage of ‘life-span’ models for sexual identity development is their flexibility. People’s experiences differ and this is why identity research has begun to take more account of intersectionality which is discussed next.

Intersectionality

Dill (1983) and Crenshaw (1991) sought to draw attention to intersectionality. They both argued that the impact of race and class on women’s experiences was not being properly considered in feminist and identity literature. Phoenix (2006) comments on the lack of agreement in the literature on the meaning of intersectionality. Stewart and McDermott (2004) argue there are three ideas on which intersectionality is based; social groups are not homogenous, people are situated in social structures and therefore are caught in power relations with these structures and people identify with multiple social groups which leads to particular outcomes. The first point about there being differences between groups means that research on any social groups has to take into account the variability within these groups. For example women is a social group but the experiences of women are affected by many variables; age, ethnicity, social class, sexual identity etc. As Das Nair and Butler (2012) point out intersectionality questions the make-up of social categories. Consideration therefore needs to be given to how these differences affect what it is like to be a member of a particular social group (Crenshaw, 1991). Regarding the second point, Stewart and McDermott (2004) argue it is necessary to understand where individuals are placed in social structures in order to appreciate their social and economic situations and the power relations in which they are situated. The third idea is that belonging to more than one social group leads to experiences specific to that individual. So for example, two people who belong to the same social group will not share the same experiences and viewpoints because they will also both belong to social groups and be affected by social factors that the other does not (Stewart & McDermott, 2004).

Individuals who hold multiple minority identities are sometimes viewed as being subjected to double or triple discrimination. However some people’s view of intersectionality is that because there is such a complex relationship between identity components it is too simplistic to suggest that discrimination is cumulative. This is because discrimination towards one identity, such as race, is linked with other identities such as gender, sexual identity, class etc. (Yuval-Davies, 2006).

Within psychological research there may be many different intersections that it would be wise for researchers to consider and Stewart and McDermott (2004) recognise that this task may feel overly complicated and intimidating. Nevertheless they argue it is necessary for researchers to think about the different identities and social factors which may impact on the experience or behaviour of their research participants. This research is focused on the multiple identities the participants hold as professionally successful gay women and the significance of social contexts is held in mind throughout.

Professional Success

One of the constructs on which this research is based is professional success. Success can be achieved in different spheres of life and Punnett (2003) points out that some people who consider themselves to be professionally successful may not think of themselves as successful in other areas of their life or even as being generally successful. Career success has traditionally been defined in terms of individuals' hierarchical progression at work (Rasdi, Garavan & Ismali, 2011). This is an example of an objective measure of success. The majority of research into careers have distinguished between objective and subjective success (Grimland, Vigoda-Gadot & Baruch, 2012). Objective career success considers external criteria which have been identified by society or an individual's profession or peers as markers of success. Objective success is defined in terms of promotion or job title (Grimland, Vigoda-Gadot & Baruch, 2012). Subjective career success is defined by the individuals themselves and is therefore based on internal criteria. Psychological factors are examples of subjective measures including satisfaction, self-esteem and recognition (Grimland, Vigoda-Gadot & Baruch, 2012). For this research a subjective view of professional success is used because this fits with the use of interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) which seeks to understand the meanings which people make of their experiences (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009).

Gender and Professionally Successful Women

There is an interesting relationship between gender and professional success which has implications for both men and women but particularly for how successful women are viewed by others. Parks-Stamm, Heilman and Hearns (2008) explain that gender norms have negative implications for successful women. This is because women who have exceeded what is expected of women can be viewed by others as breaking 'prescriptive gender norms'. The term 'prescriptive gender norms' refers to ideas about how women and men should behave (Parks-Stamm et al., 2008). Studies into gender stereotypes have shown that people expect men and women to behave differently (Block, 1973; Broverman, Vogel, Broverman, Clarkson & Rosenkrantz, 1972; Castillo-Mayen & Montes-Berges, 2014; Eagly & Steffen, 1984; Ruble, 1983).

Commenting on gender stereotypes Eagly and Steffen (1984) explain that “according to stereotypic beliefs about the sexes, women are more communal (selfless and concerned with others) and less agentic (self-assertive and motivated to master) than men” (Eagly & Steffen, 1984, p.735). It is argued that men and women who behave in ways contrary to these expectations can be viewed negatively (Fiske, 1998) and discriminated against (York, Tyler, Tyler & Gugel, 2008).

Parks-Stamm et al. (2008) explain these negative reactions for contravening ‘prescriptive gender norms’ are especially harmful for professional women. This is because in order to be successful it is usually the case that people need to display behaviours which are typically associated with men (Schein, 2001). In displaying these characteristics women are at risk of being disliked which can have negative implications for career progression (Parks-Stamm et al., 2008). Furthermore, Heilman, Wallen, Fuchs and Tamkins (2004) found that even when women have not behaved in a way that goes against ‘prescriptive gender norms’ they can still be viewed negatively by others due to the assumption that successful women do not possess characteristics which are associated with being female. Heilman et al. found that successful women were viewed in particularly negative ways; they were thought of as being less likeable and more interpersonally hostile.

Parks-Stamm et al. (2008) suggest that professionally successful women who occupy job roles traditionally associated with men can threaten other women’s evaluations of themselves. Parks-Stamm et al. suggest that in order to cope with this threat, successful women may be deemed to be unlikeable and interpersonally hostile and therefore not actually like other women at all. In viewing successful women in this way they are no longer a threat to other women’s sense of self. An additional challenge identified by Vinkenburg, Van Engen, Eagly and Johannesen-Schmidt (2011) for successful women in leadership positions is that whilst male leaders are only expected to display ‘inspirational motivation’ to others, women are expected to provide this and what has been termed ‘individualised consideration’ or in other words mentoring and nurturing. Vinkenburg et al. argue this additional expectation on female leaders is to negate the negative impact of them going against gender norms.

All of this indicates there can be a complicated relationship between professional success and being a woman. This potentially includes some difficult interpersonal processes relating to threat, self-esteem and gender. These are processes which can impact on psychological well-being. Whilst some studies have focussed on women professionals (Hatmaker, 2013; Linnabery, Stuhlmacher & Towler, 2014; Whiston, Feldwisch, Evans, Blackman & Gilman, 2015) and women leaders (Bongiorno, Bain & David, 2014; Bosak & Sczesny, 2011; Mavin, Grandy & Williams, 2014) it is surprising that psychological researchers have not paid more attention to professionally successful women.

Gay People's Experiences of Work

Anderson and Croteau (2013) explain that towards the end of the 1980's researchers started to look at lesbian and gay people's experiences at work in order to give accounts of discrimination and the personal impact this discrimination caused (Friskopp & Silverstein, 1995; Hall, 1986; Levine & Leonard, 1984; Oslan, 1987; Woods, 1994; Woods & Harbeck, 1992). Croteau (1996) points out that studies in this period highlighted discrimination experienced in the workplace, fear of discrimination and also variability in the degree to which gay people were open at work about their sexual identity.

Chung (2001) created two conceptual frameworks to bring together the descriptions of discrimination and coping strategies provided by earlier research. Chung divided work place discrimination towards LGB people into three dimensions; formal and informal discrimination (such as organisational policies and interpersonal relationships), potential and encountered discrimination and lastly perceived and real discrimination. Chung argues that these dimensions help us to understand people's behaviour at work which then allows us to understand people's coping strategies. According to Chung people react differently to potential and encountered discrimination. Chung argues that decisions about how to behave are based on an individual's perceptions and so the coping strategies employed are largely influenced by perceived discrimination rather than real discrimination. To understand people's behaviour we therefore need to know what their perceptions are.

Chung (2001) did some useful work on coping strategies. He divided these strategies into two areas; vocational choice and work adjustment. Vocational choice includes decisions about which career to take or which employer to work for. Work adjustment covers the coping strategies used when applying for or at work and he divided these work adjustment strategies into identity management and discrimination management. Identity management had been covered in the existing literature by Griffin (1992) who identified five identity management strategies; acting, passing, covering, implicitly out and explicitly out. For discrimination management

Chung proposed four strategies were used; quitting, silence, social support and confrontation.

Although Chung's (2001) framework was devised to help career counsellors it has value beyond this. Chung highlighted how behaviour is linked to people's perception of discrimination and he drew attention to coping strategies employed when LGB people experience discrimination. The difficulty with Chung's model is that it is very broad and was intended to collectively account for the experiences of LGB people. In doing so this model does not allow for individual differences between different sexual identities or gender. Chung's model focuses on LGB people's experiences of discrimination at work. Whilst this furthers our understanding of this particular experience, we also need research about LGB people's experiences at work beyond this. Without research which looks beyond discrimination there is a risk that LGB people's experiences could be perceived only in these terms.

Sexual Identity Management

A lot of the literature on gay people's experiences at work has concentrated on sexual identity management (Baker & Lucas, 2017; Compton, 2016; Reed & Leuty, 2016; Rummell & Tokar, 2016; Tatum, Formica & Brown, 2017; Wessel, 2017). Early research into sexual identity management in the workplace identified that gay employees are engaged in an ongoing process of managing their sexual identity at work (Fassinger, 1995; Schneider, 1986; Zuckerman & Simons, 1996) and managing sexual identity at work is still an issue for LGB employees (King, Mohr, Peddie, Jones & Kendra, 2017; Kollen, 2015; Rummell & Tokar, 2016). Lidderdale, Croteau, Anderson, Tovar-Murray and Davis (2007) constructed a theoretical model of workplace sexual identity management (WSIM) and argued that understanding sexual identity management is crucial to understanding LGB employees' experience of work. They based their WSIM model on Bandura's (1986) social cognitive theory which explains that people's behaviour is the result of both environmental factors and individual's cognitions. The WSIM model of Lidderdale et al. is based on four stages; how individuals learn about sexual identity, how individuals start to choose identity management strategies, putting chosen strategies into action at work and evaluation of the consequences of these management strategies (Lidderdale et al., 2007).

The WSIM model of Lidderdale at al. (2007) demonstrates the complexity involved in sexual identity management. It usefully highlights the factors which influence the choices people make about identity management and how individuals assess and learn from the strategies they use. It could be argued that the WSIM model shows how over simplistic Griffin's (1992) model is as there is more to sexual identity management than deciding the degree to which individuals choose to disclose. The findings of Lidderdale et al. showed that in the workplace LGB individuals engage in ongoing processes of monitoring the reactions of others, making decisions about disclosure, evaluating the consequences of strategies used and how these strategies align with their values. A strength of the WSIM model of Lidderdale et al. is therefore the consideration of factors which may influence decisions about disclosure. A shortfall of the WSIM model is the assumption that greater levels of disclosure are always preferable and advantageous to the individual. Whilst the psychological cost of secrecy is well recognised (Griffin,1992), sexual identity management models based on progression towards an explicit gay identity are prioritising one strategy over all others.

Whilst the WSIM does consider social and environmental factors which affect sexual identity management it does not fully consider the implications for individuals who are managing multiple minority identities. As Croteau (2008) argues, models of sexual identity management need to pay greater attention to race and culture. These criticisms apply to many early sexual identity models including the stigma based models (Claire, Beatty & MacLean, 2005; Ragins, 2008) which are based on Goffman's (1963) stigma theory and the notion that when society stigmatises certain characteristics, individuals with those characteristics face discrimination.

Although there has been a growth in research into the working lives of LGB individuals in the past twenty years (Anderson & Croteau, 2013) a search for literature about gay people's professional lives shows that a lot of research focuses only on disclosure of sexual identity. As Ellis (2015) states over the last ten years psychological research on lesbian identity has moved away from identity development to identity management. As heterosexism is present in the workplace (Gates, 2015; Viehl, Dispenza, McCullough & Guvensel, 2017) the amount of research which focuses on sexual identity management is perhaps not surprising. Research of this kind is useful as knowledge about heterosexism for example can be used to make recommendations for organisations to address policies and practices which disadvantage gay people (McCalla, 2015).

However I would argue that we also need research with a broader lens which not only focuses on sexual identity management. This is needed in order to help identify the issues which are significant for gay people especially as Ng and Rumens (2017) state there is less research on lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) people's experiences of work than for other minority groups. Whilst there has been a concentrated focus on sexual identity management, other aspects of gay people's identity seem to not have received as much research interest. This matters because as the intersectionality literature asserts, identity is complex due to people having multiple identities, each of which may be associated with different degrees of social advantage and disadvantage (Carbado, Crenshaw, Mays & Tomlinson, 2013; Phoenix & Pattynama, 2006; Walby, Armstrong & Strid, 2012). Research which engages with intersectionality is able to consider the complexity of social privilege and how this impacts on people's lives (Bramesfield & Good, 2016; Clark, Matthew & Burns, 2018).

Professional Gay Women

Research relating to work has sometimes failed to explore the experiences of LGB people (Allan, Tebbe, Duffy & Autin, 2015). The literature about gay people and work is limited (Drydakis, 2015; Kollen, 2015; Marrs & Staton, 2016, Rumens, 2016) and has a somewhat narrow focus (Rostad & Long, 2008). There is a lack of knowledge about gay people and management roles (Liberman & Golom, 2015) and as Colgan, Creegan, Mckearney and Wright (2008) explain the experiences of lesbians have been hidden within a broader experience of all sexual minorities. This is evident in some studies which try and combine the experiences of LGB and transgender people (Eliason, DeJoseph, Dibble, Deevey & Chinn, 2011).

Search the literature for what has been written about professionals and gay women and the vast majority of results concern research about professionals, predominately health or social care providers, and their work with clients who are gay. There is far less literature on the professionals themselves. Sperling (2010) comments on this within the field of social work and argues that diversity is seen as something which concerns 'the other' and not the professional. Initially it seems surprising that even within sexual minority research concerning professionals, the experiences of professionals who are gay are often overlooked. Given the prevalence of heteronormativity in professional contexts though (Compton & Dougherty, 2017; Enson, 2015; Murphy, 2014; Robertson, 2017) perhaps this is not surprising.

A study by Heintz (2010) is an example of research which focuses solely on how disclosure of sexual identity is managed at work. Heinz's research responds to the lack of knowledge about lesbian executives and uncovers an interesting relationship between the participants' disclosure strategies and the hierarchal position they held at work. Nearly half the participants stated they were more confident about disclosing their sexual identity as they rose through the 'corporate ladder'. Heintz concluded the participants held privileged positions as leaders and that they associated holding powerful positions with security. The findings of Heintz show that many of the participants chose to address homophobia at work and become role models for others. It would have been helpful if this study had further explored the link participants made between their position at work and the security they felt. The suggestion is that the participants perceived they had more security when they held positions higher up the career hierarchy. Knowing why these positions felt more secure could be of help to other people and may be of help regardless of their hierarchal position at work. If security is what is needed to help people have confidence to express their identity this could be helpful information for many to have, regardless of their sexual identity. Heintz does attend to gender in so much that she acknowledges that gay women have different experiences to gay men due to society affording privilege to men. However gender is not explored in this research. As noted above the experiences of gay women are often investigated together with other sexual minorities. As all of the participants in Heintz's study are women this study could have been an opportunity to explore the particular experiences of these participants as women. Heintz meets her research aim by exploring the management of disclosure but we are left not knowing about the participants' experiences of gender.

Amongst the research which has focused on sexual identity management a study by King, Mohr, Peddie, Jones and Kendra (2014) stands out because of its research method. King et al. looked at strategies LGB employees used to manage their sexual identity during interactions with other people at work. Over a period of three weeks participants were asked to complete a survey every time they experienced a situation at work where they had to manage their sexual identity. Unsurprisingly the results showed that participants were more likely to disclose their sexual identity to people who they knew were also LGB and more likely to disclose when interacting with someone who indicated they would be accepting of LGB people. Overall the findings showed that decisions regarding disclosure were linked to how supportive the participants thought the other person would be. King et al. argue their results show that people do not simply decide whether to be out or not but instead make different decisions about disclosure in light of whom they are talking to.

A strength of the study by King et al. (2014) is the immediacy of how participants were able to report situations when they felt they had to manage their sexual identity. This helped capture the frequency of incidents and show the different strategies participants used in different situations. Unfortunately there was not further exploration of their main conclusion; that LGB employees' disclosure decisions are a result of the level of acceptance they expect to encounter. As a quantitative study they were able to look at the experiences of 61 people but we are left wondering what else could have been learnt if the detail of the individual experiences had been explored with a qualitative element. A limitation of this study is that the identities of lesbian, gay and bisexual were treated as if they represented one group identity. This means that the distinct experiences of biphobia were not acknowledged or explored (Dodge et al., 2016; Bowes-Catton & Hayfield, 2015) nor differences between discriminatory attitudes towards gay men and women (Morrison, Morrison & Franklin, 2009; Unlu, Beduk & Duyan, 2016).

Staying in the field of sexual identity management, deLeon and Brunner (2013) responded to the lack of knowledge about the experiences of gay and lesbian leaders by exploring how educational leaders manage their sexual identity and their professional lives. Their research produced a 'cycles of fear' model, reflecting the fear participants felt about their sexual identity being known at work. A strength of research of this kind is that it draws attention to the challenges facing some gay people in the workplace including the impact of heteronormativity. Interestingly deLeon and Brunner found that their participants experienced personal benefits as a result of overcoming oppression including a sense of strength, acceptance and knowledge of heteronormative privilege, which helped the participants to become powerful role models for others. A limitation of this study is that gender was not attended to and so we are not informed as to any differences between the experiences of male and female participants, or how the participants experienced the intersection between their sexual identity, their professional lives and their gender.

As explained in the 'Introduction' a lot of sexual identity research focuses on what is difficult for gay people. The lack of focus on other issues is problematic because without a broader exploration into the lives of gay people only a limited and negative portrayal is presented (Vaughan & Rodriguez, 2014). There is however value in exploring difficult life experiences as demonstrated by Einarsdottir, Hoel and Lewis (2015) who investigated experiences of bullying, harassment and discrimination at work amongst lesbians, gay men and bisexuals. They found that participants often minimised or excused heterosexist or homophobic comments. Einarsdottir et al. argue that whilst incidents of direct homophobic behaviour in the workplace may be low, other forms of discrimination are more prevalent. They argue that some employees struggle to make sense of these negative experiences because the only term they have available to them is homophobia which does not fit many of their experiences. Einarsdottir et al. also argue it is difficult for some people to label someone else as being homophobic and this is put forward as the reason why negative experiences were often minimised.

It is reported that some of the participants made complaints at work or sought advice from colleagues but it is unclear if they did anything else to manage these negative experiences and when their complaints were dismissed it is unclear how the participants dealt with this. However the findings of Einarsdottir et al. (2015) do add to knowledge about how challenging it can be for discriminatory behaviour in the workplace to be identified and dealt with. A limitation regarding sampling is that once again the experiences of LGB people are considered together. Gender is also not explored in this study. One of the reasons this matters is because gender is relevant to the experience of sexual identity oppression due to the fact that gay men also hold privilege as men (Riggs, 2015).

Some research into gay people's experiences at work has focused on particular professions such as the work of deLeon and Brunner (2013) mentioned earlier. The experiences of teachers, health care professionals and to a lesser extent police officers seem to have received particular attention although the reasons for this are unclear. Within this type of research Duffy's (2010) research on lesbian women's experiences as nurses stands out because of her focus on women. However in this study gender is not foregrounded as an issue to explore and so we are not informed about the participants' experiences as women. Instead Duffy focussed on the participants' experiences as lesbian nurses and conducted unstructured interviews with only one question to explore this.

What is useful about Duffy's (2010) study is it highlights the need to increase awareness of diversity in the workplace as well as change a culture of heteronormativity at work. Duffy found that participants felt different to other people as a result of their sexual identity and that 'heterosexual dialogue' at work and in particular 'break-time chatter' emphasised this difference. Duffy found that the participants dealt with this 'heterosexual dialogue' by managing conversations with the intention of hiding their sexual identity. Duffy's findings are echoed by Gray (2013) who looked at the disclosure decisions of LGB teachers. Gray found that "decisions are complicated by heteronormative discursive practices within schools that render LGB sexualities silent" (Gray, 2013, p.702). What is missing from Duffy's study is an understanding of the impact of this heteronormativity on the participants and the reasons they opted for secrecy as opposed to other strategies to manage this.

Another example of research which focuses on particular occupations is Colvin's (2014) survey of British lesbian and gay police officers' experiences at work. What is good about this study is the broad approach taken to explore workplace experiences and also that respondents were prompted to consider both negative and positive experiences. Although Colvin asked respondents about disclosure they were also asked about discrimination and benefits at work from being a gay / lesbian police officer, whether they had been treated differently to others and their reasons for joining the police service. Colvin acknowledges the significance of gender in his literature review noting the presence of gender stereotypes and perceived differences in the treatment of men and women in the workplace. A high number of respondents were female and as Colvin points out the police service is male dominated. However respondents were not explicitly asked about gender and so we are left wondering about the intersections of gender, sexual identity and workplace experiences. In addition the respondents report incidents of barriers to equal opportunities as well as incidents of being treated differently but what is missing is explanations of how these incidents were managed and the impact on the respondents.

What Colvin (2014) was able to do though is compare the reported experiences of male and female respondents. Colvin found that gay male police officers reported more obstacles to equal opportunities at work than lesbian police officers. The findings do not make clear why this is although Colvin suggests this may be because lesbian police officers benefit from stereotyping which depicts them as tough whilst gay male police officers may be perceived as feminine and weak. This resonates with the work of Charles and Rouse Arndt (2013). In their study of gay law enforcement officers in the United States participants reported that gay women were accepted more readily than gay men due to perceptions of gay women being tough. It has been suggested that lesbians have a 'lesbian advantage' in the workplace because lesbians might be less likely to take career breaks to have children and less likely to experience sexual harassment (Dunne, 1997; Wright, 2008).

Rationale for this Research

There is a tradition within counselling psychology of engaging with sexual identity research (Chung & Klann, 2016; Coyle & Rafalin, 2001; Milton, 2014; Moon, 2008) yet there are gaps in the research in this field. As noted earlier there is a lack of research into the lives of professional gay women and gay women's professional success. This matters because psychological research helps us to know how people can do well in life as research gives us knowledge for example about people's coping skills (Buchann, Settles, & Langhout, 2007; Umanodan, Shimazo, Minami & Kawakami, 2014), what motivates people (Green, 1999), and how psychological resources help people's psychological well-being and their ability to do well at work (Lin, Mutz, Clough & Papageorgiou, 2017). Given the tendency to have problem focussed research it is particularly surprising that there is a lack of research focussing on gay women as potentially they face double discrimination in the workplace. As Fassinger et al. (2010) explain, gay women in leadership roles potentially have to overcome traditional views of leaders being men and also of gay women not being viewed as 'real' women.

As explained in the 'Overview' there is a trend for sexual identity research to focus on what is problematic for gay people yet there is a lack of knowledge about gay women's coping strategies (Bjorkman & Malterud, 2012). Elizur and Zive (2004) point out the important task the LGB community has in providing role models and it could be argued that professionally successful gay women are potentially in a position to be role models for others. Research into people's lives can help challenge stereotypical views (Wolbrecht & Campbell, 2007) but a search for literature on gay role models indicates there is a lack of research on this topic.

This research fits well with counselling psychology as the profession aims "to help people live lives that are more fulfilled" (Strawbridge & Wolfe, 2003, p.11). In order to do this we need to know about people's lives and have research which engages with a broad range of experiences. In fact to have an understanding of social contexts is central to counselling psychology (British Psychological Society, 2005). Like community psychologists, counselling psychologists recognise the ways in which social contexts can impact on individuals (Moloney, 2016). With this in mind this research is in part responding to the inequalities which can affect gay people (Corcoran, 2017; O'brien & Ellis, 2016; Ollen & Goldberg, 2016; Westwood, 2016) and women (Klassen & Minasyan, 2017; Maddrell, Strauss, Thomas & Wyse, 2016; Perrons, 2017; Powell & Song, 2015). Recognition of these inequalities means this research adopts an intersectional approach (Windsong, 2018; Woodhams & Lupton, 2014) and has a social justice agenda (Mansfield, 2014; Tabak & Radinsky, 2014).

This research starts from a position of acknowledging a number of factors; gay people continue to face stigma, psychological well-being can be affected by stigma and identities are constructed by individuals. This research also starts from a position of wanting to explore positive experiences as well as challenges so that positive aspects of the participants' lives may be understood as well as difficulties. The research aims to answer the question what is it like to be a professionally successful gay woman?

Chapter 2 Methodology

Introduction

This chapter addresses the method and methodology used for this research. In order to explain the choices which were made with regards to research design, I begin with a discussion on the rationale for choosing a qualitative design before providing an overview of interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA). This leads onto a discussion of epistemology and my own epistemological position followed by my personal reflexivity. Further reflexivity is included in the 'Discussion' chapter. I then discuss how Yardley's (2000) guidelines to evaluate qualitative research can be applied to this research. Finally I discuss the procedures used in this research.

Research Design

A qualitative research design was used for this study. The data was collected from eight participants using semi structured interviews. IPA was used to analyse the data.

Rationale for Choice of Methodology

Within the history of psychology there is a strong tradition of the use of quantitative research methods (Ashworth, 2003; Haig, 2013). The use of quantitative research methods reflects the positivist or empiricist epistemologies held by researchers. Epistemology refers to the theory of knowledge and considers questions such as 'what can we find out' and 'how can we find out' (Willig, 2008). Positivism centres on the idea there is an objective knowledge to be discovered. Positivist researchers are therefore concerned with describing phenomena and believe the knowledge they uncover is correct and the only view to be had (Willig, 2008). Likewise empiricists believe facts about the world can be uncovered. Paley (2008) explains the belief most commonly associated with empiricists is "the only source of knowledge is experience" (Paley, 2008, p. 256). Empiricists therefore believe knowledge of the world needs to be generated through observations and the gathering of data through techniques such as experiments (Willig, 2008).

Looking at the history of psychology the dominance of positivist and empiricist epistemologies is evident. As Greenwood (1992) states "psychological science, for most of its recent history, has been based upon the traditional empiricist account of science" (Greenwood, 1992, p.131). When experimental psychology was developed in the latter part of the nineteenth century, it was referred to as the science of experience (Ashworth, 2003). The same research methods used by the natural sciences were applied to psychology. As a result, quantitative and experimental approaches were used to understand individuals' experiences (Ashworth, 2003).

However this quantitative approach to understanding experience was not without its critics (Ashworth, 2003). This critique included feminist arguments about the ways in which research either ignored women or positioned women as inferior to men (Oakley, 1974; Willig, 2008). Feminists also argued it was impossible for researchers to be objective due to the part they play in the research they are conducting (Willig, 2008). Some subjective interpretation will always be present when researchers are processing information (Westmarland, 2001). In addition to the feminist critique of research methods, positivism and empiricism were challenged by the rise of social constructionism. This particular epistemology is outlined later in this chapter when I discuss my epistemological position.

Critique of the shortfalls of positivism and empiricism allowed new ways of thinking about knowledge to be developed (Willig, 2008). This led to the introduction of qualitative research methods which are based on different epistemological positions to quantitative research. My own epistemological position is discussed later in this chapter but within this discussion it is appropriate to state that my epistemological position is informed by critical realism, social constructionism and phenomenology. These three epistemologies fit with the use of a qualitative research design for this study.

Qualitative research has been able to advance knowledge, identify concepts and develop theories (Morse, 2008). Duckett (2011) argues that the development of psychology has been aided by qualitative methods and that even when researchers are working with empirical data they will use qualitative methods to understand it. Health research has benefited from qualitative methods because they "have made a major contribution in the understanding of health, in developing definitions of health, in eliciting perspectives of various populations about health and in describing processes used for attaining health" (Morse, 2008, p. 380).

Whilst explaining here the contrast between quantitative and qualitative methods, it is worth pointing out how these two approaches also differ because of the importance of reflexivity within qualitative methods. Reflexivity concerns the role of the researcher within the research and the part they play in making sense of the participants' experiences (Willig, 2008). Reflexivity is a central part of qualitative research (Finlay, 2002). As researchers will exert some influence over the research process and their findings, it is important that readers assess how well the researcher has acknowledged this influence (Horsburgh, 2003). In the discussion of my own epistemological position and personal reflexivity I recognise the role I play in this research and the input my interpretation has on the findings. This is discussed in the 'Discussion' chapter.

Qualitative research methods are geared towards understanding the meaning people make of their experiences and are used to answer research questions about what certain experiences are like for people (Willig, 2008). As the research question for this study is 'What is it like to be a professionally successful gay woman?' a qualitative approach was needed.

Of the different qualitative approaches available, IPA was felt to be most suited to this research question and to meeting the aims of this research. The aims of this research were threefold:

1. To explore the experience of being a professionally successful gay woman.

2. To explore the impact of this experience on psychological well-being, sense of self, relationships with others and experience at work.

3. To explore how any challenges which arise from being a professionally successful gay woman are managed.

In order to meet the aims of this research an exploration of participants' experiences was needed. To understand the impact experiences have on participants, it was necessary to use a method which would allow for an exploration of the sense participants make of their experience. IPA is an ideal choice to meet these research aims because IPA is concerned with how people make sense of their experiences and the meanings people create from these experiences (Smith & Osborn, 2008). This is true of other qualitative approaches such as grounded theory but IPA was chosen because it looks in depth at participants' experiences and focuses on the participants' view of these experiences (Smith & Osborn, 2008). IPA does this because of its links to phenomenology, a discussion of which is provided later in this chapter.

Grounded theory is concerned with generating theory and is based on symbolic interactionism, an epistemological position which asserts meaning is created through social interactions (Annells, 1996). There is some similarity here with IPA and it has been noted that IPA has been influenced by symbolic interactionism (Smith & Osborn, 2008). Grounded theory was not chosen for this research though because the aim was not to generate a theory about the professional success of gay women. To do so would involve establishing fixed concepts and this was not the aim of this research. IPA was chosen because of its ability to focus on the details of the unique lived experience of the participants and the similarities and differences between these accounts (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009).

Although IPA is concerned with the language used by participants to describe their experiences, IPA has a different agenda to language based approaches such as discourse analysis. Discourse analysis is concerned with examining the use of language in order to understand what is created by language and how language is itself created by social processes (Pistrang & Barker, 2012). Discourse analysis was not chosen for this research because to answer the research question, a focus on participants' experience and the meanings they create for themselves was required.

In this discussion on the choice of IPA, it is worth noting how IPA fits with counselling psychology. IPA works with participants' accounts of their experiences and is interested in the participants' view of these experiences. This means IPA is an approach well suited to research by health care professionals (Pringle, Drummond, McLafferty & Hendry, 2011). Furthermore as IPA is fundamentally concerned with the sense people make of their world and emphasises the way in which people think, IPA has strong links with psychology (Smith & Osborn, 2008). IPA fits particularly well with counselling psychology. This is because counselling psychology is concerned with individuals' subjective beliefs and recognises the validity of individuals' accounts and the multiple ways in which the world can be viewed (British Psychological Society, 2005).

It has also been noted how well IPA fits with research into sexual identity (Smith et al., 2009). There are many examples of IPA being used in research which explores the lives of sexual minorities (Farmer & Byrd, 2015; Ingham et al., 2016; Porter, Hulbert-Williams & Chadwick, 2015; Rajan-Rankin, 2013).

A limitation levied at IPA research is that whilst it is concerned with the experiences of participants, IPA research does not provide explanations for why these experiences occur (Willig, 2008). However, explanations of this kind are not the aim of IPA and there is not one research method that can do everything. Whilst IPA may not aid our understanding of phenomena in this way, it does aid our knowledge in other ways (Clarke, 2009). IPA aims to understand the meanings which participants make of their experiences and how they understand their experiences (Smith, 2011).

Larkin, Watts and Clifton (2006) state that “IPA is easy to do badly and difficult to do well” (Larkin et al., 2006, p.103). They argue that many IPA studies aim to do nothing more than present participants’ accounts and that this can be seen to be enough particularly when the studies are ‘giving voice’ to groups of people whose experiences are not widely known. Whilst qualitative research does allow the participants’ life experiences to be heard (McLeod, 2001), IPA is concerned with more than simply reporting participants’ experiences. In order to understand the sense which people make of their experiences researchers using IPA adopt a curious stance towards the experiences of their participants, offering interpretations whilst accepting the accounts told to them (Pringle et al., 2011).

Overview of IPA

IPA is based on three theories of knowledge; phenomenology, hermeneutics and ideography (Smith et al., 2009). To understand why IPA focuses on individual experiences and why it is an interpretative approach, it is helpful to examine the theories which underpin IPA.

Regarded as the founder of phenomenology, Husserl (1931) was interested in understanding the world through experience. In order to achieve an understanding which is free from judgements Husserl argued we need to place our existing knowledge of the world “’out of action’, we ‘disconnect it’, ‘bracket it’” (Husserl, 1931, p57). The act of setting aside preconceived ideas and assumptions is part of the reflexive process within IPA (Smith at al., 2009) and helps researchers to understand how other people make sense of the world.

Heidegger (1962) developed the work of Husserl (1931). Throughout his work Heidegger refers to ‘Dasein’, meaning ‘being there’, and argues that people try to make sense of the world they find themselves immersed in; “Dasein is fascinated with its world. Dasein is thus absorbed in the world” (Heidegger, 1962, p.149). Heidegger was therefore concerned with hermeneutics, the name given to the theory of interpretation, and Heidegger explains interpretation is central to phenomenology.

Hermeneutics is the second theory on which IPA is based and is influenced by the work of Gadamer (1976), Schleirmacher (1998) as well as Heidegger (1962). IPA is an interpretative approach (Smith et al., 2009). The researcher is involved in the process of understanding the participants’ experiences and brings to this process their own understanding and views of the world. The researcher uses their own understanding to make sense of the participants' experiences which means a process referred to as a double hermeneutic is involved (Smith & Osborn, 2008). The double hermeneutic process refers to the double interpretation which occurs in IPA. An IPA study involves participants making sense of their experiences and the meanings they have created for themselves, whist at the same time, the researcher is working to understand this sense the participants are forming (Smith & Osborn, 2008).

At the heart of hermeneutics is the idea of the hermeneutic circle. Smith et al. (2009) explain this refers to the links between the parts of something and the complete entity. In order to fully understand the complete entity, it is necessary to examine the parts and likewise to understand the parts, the complete entity needs to be examined. This way of thinking is what happens when we engage in interpretation (Smith et al., 2009). Engaging with the hermeneutic circle is key to the analysis stage of IPA.

The third theory on which IPA is based is ideography which means to focus on the particular (Frost, 2011). IPA is therefore concerned with detail which means the analysis of data in IPA studies is very thorough (Smith et al., 2009). The importance placed on the particular means that IPA studies tend to involve small, homogenous sample groups (Smith & Shinebourne, 2012). The emphasis on the particular does not mean that generalisations cannot be made from IPA studies but they need to be made with the caveat that findings from IPA studies are based on specific populations and not intended to produce general findings applicable to wider groups of people (Smith et al., 2009).

A criticism that has been made of IPA is that in looking for links between the data and for similarities and differences across the participants' accounts, not enough attention is paid to individual accounts thereby losing out on the richness of the data in each interview (Collins & Nicolson, 2002). However the idiographic nature of IPA means that attention is paid to individuals' unique accounts (Smith, 2011).

Epistemological Standpoint

Epistemologies differ on the assumptions made about knowledge. As discussed earlier particular epistemologies lead to decisions about whether quantitative or qualitative research is needed. Quantitative research assumes knowledge exists in the form of facts which can be quantified and aims to look at these facts objectively, within a controlled context (Peters, 2010). This approach is clearly suitable for some research problems and not for others. When researchers want to understand the context surrounding a phenomena, and when controlling the context by the use of experimental conditions is not appropriate, a different approach is needed (Peters, 2010).

There are a wealth of different epistemological positions which could lead to a qualitative approach being taken and the epistemological position adopted by the researcher will inform the choice of methodology. Some qualitative studies have been criticised because the researchers have not explained how the method used is connected to the philosophical reasoning behind the researchers approach (Stubblefield & Murray, 2002). In this section I will discuss the epistemological position on which this research is based.

As discussed in the overview of IPA, one of the theoretical underpinnings of IPA is phenomenology. This research is certainly informed by phenomenology as participants' personal accounts are used to understand the ways in which participants create meaning from their experiences. Phenomenology can be descriptive or interpretative. Interpretative phenomenology adopts a hermeneutic position, asserting it is impossible to provide a description without the use of interpretation (Willig, 2008). IPA is an interpretative approach and my choice of IPA for this research reflects the influence of interpretative phenomenology on my epistemological position. This is discussed in greater detail later in the epistemological reflexivity section within the 'Discussion' chapter.

I have not adopted a full phenomenological standpoint for this research though because phenomenology is concerned with how people consciously experience things as opposed to how things are in reality (Gallagher, 2012). As stated in the 'Introduction' chapter this research starts from a position of acknowledging that gay people can face stigma. I am therefore acknowledging the social factors which influence experience, a central idea of social constructionism (Coyle, 2007). There is a lack of agreement on the definition of social constructionism (Burr, 2003; Lock & Strong, 2010). It can certainly be challenging to evaluate and align oneself with an epistemology on which there is a lack of clarity. However, it is clear there are aspects of social constructionism which align well with my epistemological position as well as with IPA and the aims of this research.

Social constructionism is based on the idea that we need to be critical of how we understand the world. Social constructionism challenges the view held by positivists and empiricists that we can understand the world through objective observation (Burr, 2003). Walker (2015) explains that social constructionists regard knowledge as something which is created rather than discovered. It is argued that the categories we use to make sense of the world are constructed through social processes (Burr, 2003). This argument fits well with my research which explores how participants make sense of categories and how they apply them to their own sense of identity.

Social constructionism asserts that social processes are a reflection of a specific time and place in history. These processes change through time and vary across cultures and therefore so does the knowledge we have about the world (Burr, 2003). I subscribe to this view and the participants' accounts of their experiences are acknowledged in this research as being situated in specific contexts.

Crucially social constructionism argues knowledge is created through the interaction which occurs between people (Gergen & Gergen, 2008). Social constructionism therefore has links with symbolic interactionism and the work of Mead (1934). As social interaction is viewed as the process whereby understanding of the world is created, social constructionists focus their attention on all types of social interaction (Burr, 2003). We see this recognition of sense making occurring through interaction within phenomenology as well. This is not surprising given that social constructionism has origins in phenomenology (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2009). This research is interested in participants' relationships with others and how these interactions impact on participants' views of themselves. With phenomenology and social constructionism both applying interest to this process of interaction, it makes sense for these two epistemological positions to have a bearing on this IPA research.

It is recognised that IPA has links with social constructionism. Social constructionism aims to understand personal experiences from the viewpoint of the individuals concerned (Walker, 2015). Although IPA is concerned with personal experience, these experiences and the meanings which are constructed through them, inevitably occur within cultural contexts (Smith et al., 2009). We do not live our lives in isolation from society and so to understand experiences we need to pay attention to the social and cultural world. IPA is therefore aligned with social constructionism albeit to a lesser degree than discourse analysis (Smith et al., 2009).

My epistemological position is not fully explained by phenomenology and social constructionism. There are aspects of critical realism which I align myself with. Critical realism accepts there are social constructions but also emphasises there is an objective reality to the world (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2009). Critical realists argue for the existence of reality and see evidence for reality as being the causal effect something has on individuals, whether this reality be an object, an idea or a social structure (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2009). To a certain extent, this position fits my research because as discussed in the 'Introduction' chapter, I recognise how ideas found in society, for example about gender and sexual identity, can result in discrimination and challenges for people.

I fall short however of adopting a full critical realist position because of the importance I place on individuals' personal accounts. Critical realists argue individuals' accounts are limited (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2009). Due to the emphasis this IPA research places on individuals' accounts, I would describe my overall epistemological position as being between critical realism and social constructionism, whilst also acknowledging an interpretative phenomenological influence.

With regards to ontology which is concerned with what we can know about the world (Willig, 2008) this research adopts a relativist position. Relativists stress the many different ways that the world can be viewed and argue there cannot be any universal truths (Smith, 2008). Relativism therefore adopts an opposing position to realism as realists claim the world has objective properties (Hammond & Wellington, 2012). This research is concerned with participants' interpretations of their experience and so fits with a relativist ontology.

Personal Reflexivity

Although IPA research involves attempts to bracket one's own opinions and assumptions (Smith et al., 2009) inevitably I have influenced this research substantially. The social and cultural position of researchers' cannot be removed from the research process (Frost, 2011) and researchers bring their experiences, meanings and agendas to their research (Maso, 2003). In addition the interpretations which researchers make are shaped by their assumptions and beliefs (Eatough & Smith, 2017). I am part of this research because of the many decisions I have made throughout and because the sense I have made of the participants' accounts is my interpretation. The influence I have had on this research is part of the interpretative process of IPA because IPA needs researchers to make sense of the participants' experiences (Shinebourne, 2011; Smith, 2004; Smith et al., 2009). Engaging with reflexivity has allowed me to be aware of the part I have played in shaping this research. Reflexivity is also a means to make this influence clear to others (Nolas, 2011).

My political position influences this research because I am drawn to social justice work and I have brought my interest in championing the needs of minority groups into my second career in counselling psychology. Heterosexuality holds a privileged position in society (Cole, Avery, Dodson & Goodman, 2012; Jackson, 2006; Monthomery & Stewart, 2012) and work is needed to challenge the heterosexism which maintains this privilege and disadvantages sexual minorities (McCalla, 2015; Perrin, Bhattacharyya, Snipes, Calton & Heesacker, 2014). Sexual minorities can experience homophobia or heterosexism from health care practitioners (Fingerhut & Abdou, 2017; McGeorge, Carlson & Maier, 2017, Paul, 2017). Therefore I would argue there is a need to increase practitioners' understanding of sexual minorities and heterosexism. Social justice arguments within counselling psychology stress the need to engage with oppressed groups to challenge inequalities within society (Crethar, Rivera & Nash, 2008). I am driven to challenge the heterosexist views which are prevalent in society and I therefore bring a social justice agenda to this research.

My research question reflects my appreciation of the wide range of areas that are applicable to counselling psychology. Gould and Brown (2013) argue counselling psychologists need not be limited by therapeutic spaces and are well placed to contribute to wider political discourse in order to facilitate social change. I would argue that counselling psychologists have a responsibility to look beyond clinical populations for both research and for sharing psychology with others. I believe having research which engages more broadly with society maximises the opportunities to learn from people and identify opportunities for genuine change.

I chose my research question in part because knowledge of the experiences of professionally successful gay women is lacking (Gedro, 2010). I feel dissatisfied with how previous research has approached this topic particularly as many studies only focus on negative life experiences which has been recognised as being problematic (Szymanski, Mikorski & Carretta, 2017). I believe there are opportunities to learn from this population beyond the management of struggle. At the start of this research I hoped that disadvantage was not going to be the prominent finding. I used supervision to air my frustrations with the existing literature and my hopes for this research. This highlighted how important it was for me to be curious about the participants' experiences and for me to not pay more attention to any experiences they describe as being positive.

My own social identities will impact on this research. This includes my identity as a gay woman. I declare my own sexual identity here in the spirit of transparency and as Ely (1990) states it is important for researchers to acknowledge their position in qualitative research. A belief in a sense of sameness undoubtedly influenced my decision to research the experiences of gay women. In addition I opted to use the term gay woman for this research because it is my personal preferred term and one that I regard as being inclusive of other terms such as lesbian. I recognise that people define their sexual identity in diverse ways (Ellis, 2015). However I did not include alternative terms on the recruitment materials as I thought the term gay woman would be also seen by others as an inclusive term. My choice of term was therefore driven by personal reasons and the term was viewed in a depoliticised manner. My reflections on the terms I have used for this research including the implications and limitations of these choices and my thoughts on what I would do differently are located in the 'Discussion'.

Quality of the Research

It is recognised that evaluating qualitative research in terms of validity can be problematic (Whittemore, Chase & Mandle, 2001). Validity refers to whether a piece of research has done what it intended to do. In other words has the research measured or explained what it set out to measure or explain (Willig, 2008). Validity is therefore an important area to address as it concerns the quality of the research. It is however a concept that applies to quantitative research and not qualitative (Thomas & Maglivy, 2011).

Establishing the quality of quantitative research is relatively straight forward as there are agreed standards to adhere to, such as using representative samples, limiting confounding variables and using reliable measures (Yardley, 2000). Yardley points out that qualitative research though has lacked its own set of quality assurance guidelines for a number of reasons. The variety of qualitative methods makes it hard to establish guidelines for quality control that would be applicable to different methods (Yardley, 2000). Underlying all qualitative methods is the assumption that knowledge about the world is not an objective truth but instead is created through social interaction (Yardley, 2000). Yardley argues it would therefore not make sense to apply a set criteria for judging the quality of this knowledge because this criteria would be a social construction of the truth, reflecting the power of one group in society and their view of what can be accepted as knowledge.

For qualitative research it is more appropriate to consider qualitative rigor (Thomas & Maglivy, 2011). A number of different frameworks have been developed in order to address the issue of quality in qualitative research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Tracy, 2010). For this research I have chosen to use the guidelines provided by Yardley (2000) because her framework provides a comprehensive means to judge qualitative research. It comprises of four aspects; sensitivity to context, commitment and rigour, transparency and coherence, and impact and importance. I will discuss each of these aspects next.

The first aspect, sensitivity to context, refers to the fact that qualitative research draws on many different contexts. These include the existing literature, past research and theory on the topic under investigation as well as the social and cultural influences in play (Yardley, 2000). I have addressed sensitivity to context by conducting a literature review and examining the concepts used in this research such as professional success, sense of self and identity (see 'Introduction' chapter). I paid attention to the influence of social and cultural processes on the meanings created by participants by exploring where their beliefs came from. Lastly, I addressed the social context of the interview itself during my reflexivity by considering the role and impact I had in the process (see 'Discussion' chapter).

In the second aspect, commitment and rigour, Yardley (2000) refers to commitment as "prolonged engagement with the topic" as well as acquiring skill in the research method (Yardley, 2000, p.221). I aimed to demonstrate this commitment with my discussion on the background to my topic (see 'Introduction' chapter) and my thorough analysis of the interview transcripts (see 'Analysis' chapter).

Yardley (2000) explains rigour can be demonstrated in two ways; by ensuring the participant sample provides sufficient data for a meaningful analysis to be completed and by conducting a thorough analysis. I aimed to provide a rigorous sample by ensuring I included participants from a variety of professions. Yardley's definition of rigour does not directly relate to sample size but part of the quality control for this research was to ensure I included sufficient participants. There is no clear consensus for what sample size is appropriate for qualitative research because there are so many different factors at play, including variations between subject disciplines, the methodology and epistemology and the length of time available for the research to be completed (Baker & Edwards, 2012). It has been argued that the research question and the methodology are the key determinants for sample size (Brannen, 2012). I believe the sample size for this research of eight participants is appropriate for the research question and it provided rich data from a relatively hard to access sample group. Sample sizes in IPA studies are often between five and ten participants (Smith, 2004). Eight participants is also an appropriate sample size for an IPA study given the time available to conduct the research.

In Yardley's (2000) third aspect, transparency and coherence, Yardley explains transparency relates to presenting work which is clear and well argued. I have tried throughout this thesis to explain my thinking clearly. Starting from the rationale for this research, through the theoretical literature, to the process of conducting this research and the findings it has produced, I have endeavoured to present the work in a logical and well-reasoned manner. Yardley's (2000) use of coherence, refers to the appropriateness of the epistemology, method and analysis, to the research question. My aim with this chapter was to address questions relating to epistemology, reflexivity, method and analysis and show how the choices made with this research are appropriate for my research question.

In the fourth aspect, impact and importance, Yardley (2000) argues the most important factor on which research should be judged is the impact it has on others. This impact occurs by creating new ways of understanding. My research question is aimed at a gap in current research and so the aim of my research from the start has been to find insight into the lives of professionally successful gay women. In the 'Discussion' chapter I have addressed the ways in which this research brings new understanding to the topic. Within this discussion I have aimed to set out how this new understanding has implications for counselling psychologists in clinical practice and for work beyond this.

Procedures

Sampling and Participants

This study is interested in the experiences of professionally successful gay women. Therefore participants were sought who identify as being a gay woman and who consider themselves to be professionally successful. As stated in the 'Introduction' as well as earlier in this chapter I chose to use the term gay woman for this research purely out of personal preference. A critical discussion of this choice is included in the 'Discussion'.

Participants needed to self-identify as professional successful. The use and meaning of this term is discussed in the 'Introduction' and critically reflected on in the 'Discussion'. In terms of eligibility for this study the only criteria to be met for being professionally successful was that participants self-identify as such.

A variety of recruitment strategies were used. It was hoped that by using different strategies the advertisement would reach more people. It was also hoped that by advertising in different geographical places and by using different means that I would access a broad sample of people. The recruitment advertisement was produced into a flyer and card (Appendix B) and distributed in areas of London (Covent Garden, the City of London and Soho) during the daytime and evening. I chose these areas because they have a large amount of pedestrian traffic and Soho in particular was chosen due to the concentration of gay venues. I handed out flyers in the street by offering a flyer to every woman who walked past. Due to financial constraints the distribution of recruitment materials was limited to London with the exception of a recruitment trip to Lincoln. I chose Lincoln as it was holding its Gay Pride during the time period that I was recruiting participants.

A number of LGB organisations in London, East of England and the South East were contacted and asked to advertise the flier either on their websites or through their mailing lists. These geographical areas were chosen due to their proximity to the researcher. The organisations contacted included social groups, networking groups, sports groups and health charities. One organisation agreed to advertise on their website and three agreed to advertise on their mailing lists.

Participants

The participants are eight self-identified professionally successful gay women living in the United Kingdom. Six of the participants are White British and two are White European. All are educated to postgraduate level. Three of the participants are within the age bracket of 55 to 64 years old and three are between 45 and 54 years old. One participant is between 35 and 44 years old and one is between 25 and 34 years old. The participants work as health service managers, a public relations professional, a business planning manager, an engineering professional, a health professional, a teaching professional and a management consultant. Their occupations have been classified using the International Standard Classification of Occupations (International Labour Organization, 2008). Outlines of the individual participants can be found in Appendix H.

Data Collection Method

IPA works with participants' descriptions of their experiences, be this in the form of texts such as diary entries or interview transcripts (Willig, 2008). Semi-structured interviews are the most common data collection method for IPA (Willig, 2008). The benefit being that semi-structured interviews allow participants to supply a detailed description of their experience and allow for an exploration of the meanings created by participants (Smith et al., 2009). Another benefit of semi-structured interviews is the ability to include questions which prompt participants to discuss issues relevant to the research question (Smith et al., 2009). This research used semi-structured interviews and a discussion of the interview schedule is provided next.

Interview Schedule

In order to construct the interview schedule I returned to my research question as themes to explore in interviews can be provided by the research question (Tracy, 2013). My research question provided me with three areas to explore; being gay, being a woman and being professionally successful. The aim of my interview schedule was to explore these areas and the experiences and meanings contained within them.

The interviews began with some broad questions in order to start participants thinking about the concepts addressed in the interview schedule. First participants were asked about the meaning of professional success. This was followed by questions about how they came to see themselves as being professionally successful and being gay. The purpose of these questions was to uncover more detail about these aspects of the participants' identity.

The interview schedule then focused on the three areas of being gay, being a woman and being professionally successful. These areas were addressed in turn, with participants being asked to focus on each aspect separately. For each of these areas participants were asked how they feel about themselves in order to explore the participants' view of themselves and the meanings they attribute to their identity. For each of these areas questions were asked about challenges and advantages with regards to each of these identities in order to explore how their identity links to their experiences. Whenever participants talked about challenges, the impact of these challenges on their self-esteem, confidence and well-being were explored along with how participants manage these challenges.

The questions were all designed to build an understanding of how participants experience being a professionally successful gay woman. The interview schedule contained nine questions and the participants were all asked these same questions. However the interviews all differed because additional prompts were asked of the participants in order to invite them to expand on their descriptions of their experiences and to explore further the meanings they attribute to these experiences. A copy of the interview schedule can be found in Appendix F.

Demographic Data Collection

I designed a demographic data collection form (Appendix E) for participants to complete at the start of the interview. The purpose of collecting this data was so that I could show readers of this research the types of people I had interviewed and their different backgrounds to help place the participants in context. Collecting this information also allows me to be transparent about the diversity amongst the participants. Descriptions of the participants can be found at Appendix H.

The demographic data collection form includes information about age, ethnicity, occupation, relationship status, and children. It also includes questions about the participants' sexual identity, including the extent they are out to others about their sexual identity and at what age they first identified as being gay. I used the Kinsey scale (1948) to ask participants to define themselves in terms of sexual activity and sexual feelings. The Kinsey scale ranges from exclusively heterosexual to exclusively homosexual. I decided to include the Kinsey scale because I thought that knowing how the participants define themselves in this way would aid my understanding of their experiences. Reflecting on the inclusion of this scale now I do not think it was necessary.

In the demographic data collection form participants were also asked about different aspects of their identity and how important their sense of being gay, being a woman and being professionally successful are to them. I used a six point Likert scale ranging from not at all important to extremely important. Participants were also asked if there are any other identities which are important to them. This information was collected because I thought it would help both me and readers of this research to understand how the participants think about their identity.

The last question on the form asked participants if they would like to receive a summary of the findings. The participants recorded their chosen contact details on a separate piece of paper so this could be kept separate from their completed form in order to protect their identity.

In compiling the data collection form, the demographic questions were chosen to illustrate the diversity of the participants and their different backgrounds. I chose the identity questions in order to help me better understand the participants when I came to start the interview, to help the participants start to think about the different aspects of themselves and how they feel about their different identities and also to inform readers of this research.

Pre-interview

Participants contacted me through email or text to express their initial interest in taking part in the research. I emailed everyone who contacted me an information sheet which described what taking part in the research would involve (Appendix C) and I then had a brief telephone conversation with participants. The purpose of the telephone call was to confirm they identify as both gay and professionally successful, to arrange a mutually convenient time and place for the interview and to answer any questions the participants had.

When arranging the location for the interviews, I explained we would need a private space so the interview could be recorded and so we would not be disturbed. I researched venues where I could rent a room in case this option was needed.

Interviews

Two participants opted to be interviewed at City University, two participants asked to be interviewed at home and four participants asked me to visit them at their place of work. The interviews all lasted between one hour and two and a half hours. Before the interviews started I asked the participants to sign two copies of a consent form (Appendix D), one copy of which they kept and one copy I kept. I then asked participants to complete the demographic data collection form (Appendix E). I explained they were not under any obligation to answer any questions they did not want to.

Transcription

The interviews were recorded on a digital audio recorder which I then transcribed verbatim. In order to produce an accurate record of the interview the transcripts also include details of vocal sounds which are not words (such as laughter).

Ethical Considerations

Ethical Approval and Guidance

The proposal for this research considered the ethical implications of this study and ethical approval was granted by the Psychology Department at City University (Appendix A). No additional ethical committee approval was needed for this research.

This research complies with the British Psychological Society's Code of Human Research Ethics (2010). The ethical considerations for research contained within this code, namely; risk, valid consent, confidentiality and giving advice and how they apply to this study are discussed in this section.

Risk

Within the context of research, risk refers to the harm or stress that those participating in research may experience (British Psychological Society, 2010). It can be argued that risk of harm is present in all research (Davison, 2004; Thompson & Chambers, 2012). Whilst the degree of risk to participants in medical research can be high, it has been noted that participation in humanities and social science research carries a much lower risk (Atkinson, 2009; Dingwell, 2008). Gabb (2010) argues there is an important distinction between the risk of harm and the risk of distress. It is possible that interviews may lead to some emotional distress (Dingwell, 2008; Peter, 2015). One of the reasons interviews may potentially cause participants distress is that qualitative interviews can highlight changes participants have made to their lives in order to manage difficult circumstances (Sinding & Aronson, 2003). The exploratory nature of qualitative research is potentially a source of risk given that participants may talk about negative life experiences (Hadjistavropoulos & Smythe, 2001). This may be unsettling for participants and therefore interviews have the potential to create vulnerability for participants (Sinding & Aronson, 2003).

However the issue of risk is complicated because there is another side to the question of interviews posing a risk to participants. Gabb (2010) argues that participants are not "put at risk through the recalling of events and experience" (Gabb, 2010, p.466). It can also be argued that qualitative research poses no more risk of psychological harm to participants than daily life does (Fisher, 2012). In fact there are some potential benefits for participants and these were explained in the information sheet given to participants (Appendix C). Interviews are an opportunity for participants to talk about their experiences and to have their accounts valued (Oliver, 2010; Ussher, 1999). In addition interviews require participants to reflect on their experiences which may help their own understanding of their experiences and help them to organise and verbalise their thoughts about them (Oliver, 2010).

There are other potential benefits too. Clark (2010) argues there are a number of reasons why people choose to participate in research including interest in the topic, curiosity about what it is like to take part, enjoyment in engaging with an activity and feeling empowered by having some control in the research. Although researchers are in a powerful role when conducting interviews (Cieurzo & Keitel, 1999) participants still hold power because they can decide what information to disclose and how to do this (Esin, 2011; Runswick-Cole, 2011). A final consideration is that knowledge obtained through research can be used to improve policies and practices (Fried, 2012). The benefits to the profession of counselling psychology of understanding people's lives and needs was explained to participants in the information sheet (Appendix C) as well as the potential benefit to the participants of being able to reflect on their experiences as a professionally successfully gay woman in a supportive setting. The number of potential benefits from taking part in research means that although there is a potential risk of harm it can still be worthwhile for people to participate.

The potential for distress means this research poses some risk particularly as the interviews ask participants to think about their identity, any challenges they have experienced because of it and the impact this has had on them. A distress protocol was established to manage this potential to cause emotional distress. The information sheet sent to participants explained this risk (Appendix C). It also explained that participants would not have to answer any questions they did not want to, that they could take a break or stop the interview at any time and that they would be supplied with a list of agencies who offer emotional support in case this was needed. Contact details for myself, my research supervisor and the university's research ethics committee were also supplied so that participants knew how to contact someone about this research.

Part of managing the risk was ensuring that interviews were conducted in a sensitive manner reflecting the British Psychological Society's Code of Ethics and Conduct (2009) and the Health and Care Professions Council Standards of Proficiency for Practitioner Psychologists (2010). At the start of the interviews participants were reminded that they were not obliged to answer any questions they did not want to.

A debrief was held at the end of the interviews. Debriefs are a means by which the risk of emotional distress to participants can be reduced (Hadjistavropoulos & Smythe, 2001). The debrief provided an opportunity to see if the interview had caused any emotional distress or raised any issues which needed to be addressed. Participants were asked how they had found the interview and how they were feeling. A list of organisations offering support was given to every participant (Appendix G).

Researchers also face risk themselves and so risks to myself needed to be considered. To manage the emotional risk posed to myself, I discussed any concerns I had with my research supervisor which provided me with both support and answers to procedural questions. McCosker, Barnard and Gerber (2001) point out that the physical safety of researchers needs to be considered and assessment made of whether participants could constitute a threat to the researcher. I assessed that given the nature of my research the risk of physical harm was minimal. Dickson-Swift, James, Kippon and Liamputtong (2008) state risk of this kind can be reduced by researchers meeting participants in public places and by the researcher carrying a mobile phone. I exerted my own judgment about the venues for the interviews and had a mobile phone with me.

Valid Consent

Valid consent was addressed by gaining informed consent from participants before their involvement in the study began. Smythe and Murray (2000) claim that the issue of informed consent in qualitative research can be problematic because of the uncertainty about the material which may be brought up during interviews. To address this issue, participants were supplied with an information sheet (Appendix C) which explained why the research was being done, what taking part would involve, the risks and benefits from taking part, data protection, confidentiality and contact details for myself and my research supervisor. Within this information participants were also informed they were not under any obligation to answer questions they did not wish to and of their right to withdraw from the research at any time before the research was completed. Participants were also told how the information they supplied would be used.

Time was given for participants to consider this information and ask any questions before participants were invited for interview. On meeting the participants and before the interview started, participants were asked to sign two copies of a consent form (Appendix D) so that both they and I retained a signed copy.

Confidentiality

Participants were informed their personal details would be treated as confidential information and their identity would be protected and not disclosed to any third parties. Safeguarding was addressed by explaining the circumstances in which confidentiality may need to be broken. The interview data, demographic data collection forms, consent forms and participants' contact details were securely stored in my home. The consent forms and participants' contact details were kept separate from the data. The interview recordings were transferred to CD ROM and digital files were password protected.

During transcription the participants' names and other identifying details were changed to ensure participants remained anonymous. The completed demographic data collection forms were identified by a number rather than by the participants' names.

Giving Advice

Where research is thought likely to identify psychological problems that participants are unaware of, researchers are responsible for drawing participant's attention to this if it is likely that to not do so would affect the participant's well-being (British Psychological Society, 2010). This situation was not expected to arise from my research as participants were not drawn from a clinical population and so a protocol for this event was not established in advance (British Psychological Society, 2010). This situation did not occur during the research and no advice was offered to participants.

Analytic Strategy

The aim of qualitative research is to reveal the understanding and meanings which people derive from their experiences (Willig, 2012). To achieve this aim, the analysis within this research involved a process of interpretation. It is acknowledged that analysis of research findings inevitably involves interpretation as the researcher clarifies and makes sense of the data (Willig, 2012). In addition, IPA makes clear it is an interpretative process.

I will explain here the steps I took in analysing the data but it needs to be borne in mind that IPA is not a linear process because of the engagement with the hermeneutic circle (Smith et al., 2009). There is inevitably a need to go back to parts of the data already examined in order to understand later parts and to make sense of the overall themes which emerge. The analysis within this research therefore involved repeatedly returning to the transcripts.

Before the analysis began, the interviews were transcribed and the transcripts were read and re read. IPA researchers are “required to become fully immersed in the data” (Oxley, p. 60, 2016). This re reading of the transcripts took me back to the time of the interviews when the material was fresh in my mind. This allowed me to reflect on the interviews and note down my initial thoughts both on what had been discussed and also the part I may have played in the interviews. Reflection is a key aspect of IPA research and is central to the hermeneutic process (Oxley, 2016).

The first stage of the analysis was the most detailed with thoughts and observations about the interview noted down in the right hand margin of the transcripts. Attention was paid to the phrases and sentences on each line of the transcript. These initial comments were of three types; descriptive, linguistic and conceptual and were distinguished by using different colour pens (Smith et al., 2009).

The descriptive notes referred to the participants’ accounts of their experiences and the meanings they attributed to them. Attention was paid to participants’ descriptions and assumptions as well as the emotions portrayed (Smith et al., 2009). Linguistic comments refer to the language used and so attention was paid to how participants expressed experiences, meanings and emotions (Smith et al., 2009). The conceptual comments contained more interpretation as they aimed to reflect the overall meaning contained within the participants’ description. Care was taken here to ensure the interpretation remained true to the data (Smith et al., 2009).

The second stage of analysis involved identifying emerging themes. I followed the process described by Smith and Osborn (2008). I used my initial comments in the right hand margin to form succinct phrases which represented the material in the transcript. This process produces lots of initial emergent themes and it is necessary to look for links between themes in order to form clusters of themes (Oxley, 2016). This was the third stage of the analysis. Working with one transcript at a time I listed all of the quotes with their corresponding initial emergent theme and printed out a copy. I cut out each quote with its theme from the list and then grouped similar themes together to form clusters. These clusters needed to be given an appropriate conceptual label (Smith & Shinebourne, 2012). Initially I stored the clusters for each interview in separate folders. This meant I had eight folders containing a variety of clusters.

The fourth stage of the analysis involved identifying clusters of themes across all eight transcripts. To do this I wrote all of the conceptual labels from the clusters on post it notes and began grouping them together in order to reduce the number of emergent themes. I stuck the post it notes on large pieces of paper and labelled each new group with an appropriate theme name. Throughout this process it was necessary to keep returning to the transcripts to ensure the groups of themes remained closely linked to the data (Smith & Shinebourne, 2012). I then wrote out the new themes on one large piece of paper and used this to make further links between themes in order to identify the final themes. As noted in the methodological reflexivity in the 'Discussion' chapter this process included revising the final major and minor themes (see Table 1 in the 'Analysis'). Throughout this stage I kept returning to the folders containing the quotes to regroup them as required.

I used the final themes to produce an illustration of the experience of being a professionally successful gay woman (see Figure 1 in the 'Analysis') which represents the overall findings from the research. A full description of the analysis is provided in chapter three. Interpretations made from the data have been clearly linked to direct quotes from the transcripts. This provides transparency for the reader so they can see how the interpretations have been made (Elliott, Fischer & Rennie, 1999). A discussion of the key issues to emerge from this research and how they link to the existing literature and theory is provided in the 'Discussion' chapter.

Chapter 3 Analysis

Introduction

The analysis is presented in two parts. The first part is the ‘Micro-findings’ which foregrounds the participants’ experiences of being a professionally successful gay woman. Quotes from the participants and interpretative comments on these are presented throughout. The second part of the analysis is the ‘Overarching Phenomenon’ which foregrounds the phenomenon of being a professionally successful gay woman for these participants. There are similarities between the ‘Micro-findings’ and the ‘Overarching Phenomenon’ as both are drawing from the same findings. However the ‘Overarching Phenomenon’ does not contain the same detail of the individuals’ accounts which is presented in the ‘Micro-findings and the ‘Overarching Phenomenon’ is presented in order to make the phenomenon of being a professionally successful gay woman clear to the reader.

Micro-findings

Introduction to the Micro-findings

The ‘Micro-findings’ are organised into major and minor themes which are shown in Table 1. Although the findings are presented as separate themes it is important to note that these themes are not unconnected. There is overlap between the themes and it is acknowledged that what follows is one of many ways that the findings could be presented. This chapter aims to present an interpretative account of the participants’ experiences and bring attention to issues which emerged during the analysis which seem worthy of further consideration. Theoretical discussion of the findings along with links to the existing literature are presented in the ‘Discussion’ chapter.

Quotations lifted from the transcripts are presented in bold with the participants’ pseudonym and the line numbers from the transcripts. Round brackets ( ) indicate that text which did not directly relate or add to the understanding of the issue being discussed, has been removed from the quote. Text inside square brackets [ ] has been inserted to replace material which would identify the participant.

Table 1

Major and Minor Themes

Major themes	Minor themes
Aspects of self as a professionally successful gay woman	Separation of the identities of professionally successful, gay, and woman Personal meaning of being professionally successful Personal meaning of being gay Personal meaning of being a woman
Feeling different to other people as a gay person and as a woman	Feeling different to other people as a gay person drives professional ambition Experiencing discrimination as a gay person or as a woman Having a sense of appearing different to other women Individual responses to feeling different to other people as a gay person
Coping strategies used in response to difficulties encountered as a professionally successful gay woman	Deciding whether to challenge others when encountering difficulties as a gay person or as a woman Solving and preventing problems encountered as a gay person or as a woman Being resilient to difficulties encountered as a gay person Dismissing the relevance of one's own gender or sexual identity Disclosure of sexual identity in the workplace
Connection to other gay people and other women	Connection with other gay people Valuing role models who are gay Connection with other women

An illustration of the experience of being a professionally successful gay woman is shown in Figure 1. Only the major themes are included. The visual clarity of the illustration would have been reduced if the minor themes were also included. Figure 1 therefore shows a simplified presentation of the experience of being a professionally successful gay woman.

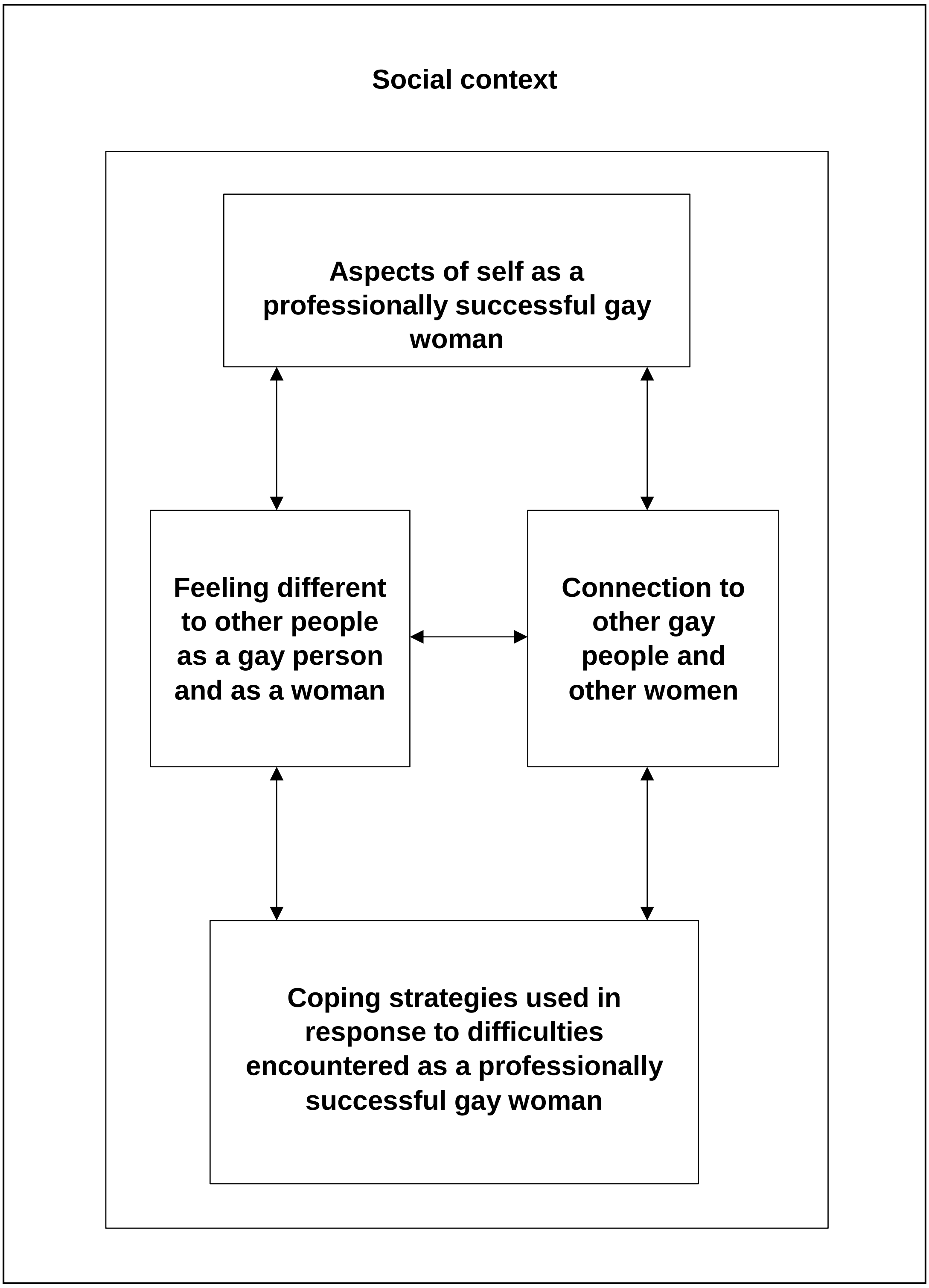

Figure 1. Illustration of the experience of being a professionally successful gay woman.

Aspects of Self as a Professionally Successful Gay Woman

The material in the first major theme is divided into four minor themes; 'Separation of the identities of professionally successful, gay, and woman', 'Personal meaning of being professionally successful', 'Personal meaning of being gay' and 'Personal meaning of being a woman'.

The material within this first theme is included here in order to present an introduction to how the participants think about themselves in relation to being a professionally successful gay woman.

Separation of the identities of professionally successful, gay, and woman.

In order to take part in this research the participants confirmed they identify as being professionally successful gay women. The analysis suggests that when the participants talk about themselves they tend to separate these different aspects of themselves and so they speak about themselves as being professionally successful, being gay, and being a woman as if these are three separate identities.

Pippa talks about the separation between these three aspects of herself;

They are separate but (…) I suppose you'd draw it like a Venn diagram (…) all these elements make up this and sometimes you (…) pay more attention here
(Pippa, 956-959)

Pippa states these different aspects of herself overlap and at times her attention is more focussed on one aspect of herself than the others. This raises the question of what happens in order for Pippa's attention to move in this way and why at times does she focus more on one particular aspect of herself.

Paying more attention at certain times to a particular aspect of oneself is commented on by Isobel who explains when other people make negative comments to her about being gay she feels that being gay is particularly significant to her;

I feel that's one of the occasions when I feel particularly (…) that my lesbianism is important because it has defined who I am
(Isobel, 442-443)

Isobel describes being gay as an important and defining feature of herself. From this quote we do not know what the other occasions are that draw Isobel's attention to this importance but it is interesting to note it happens at times of difficulty. From Isobel's comment it seems that the salience of an identity component is linked to particular contexts.

A similar point about the significance of certain aspects of oneself feeling greater at times of difficulty is made by Rosalie;

I think I am always most aware of being gay. I suppose because it is such a big thing that I feel I can't always share with people so I suppose it has assumed a bigger identity than maybe it should do
(Rosalie, 647-649)

Rosalie indicates that because she feels she sometimes has to hide from others that she is gay it means this aspect of herself is something she is particularly aware of. Given the effort involved in maintaining secrecy which is discussed in the 'Introduction' chapter, it is understandable that for Rosalie this leads to a heightened awareness of being gay.

Some of the participants talk about certain aspects of themselves as if they are separate to the rest of themselves;

I'm [Beccy] first and my sexual identity second
(Beccy, 538)

In this quote Beccy indicates she sees her sexual identity as being separate to whatever it is she sees as being 'Beccy'. It is as if Beccy thinks of herself as having a core self which sexual identity is not part of. Beccy refers to this when she talks about disclosing her sexual identity to others at work;

I did want people to know me first
(Beccy, 539)

Beccy's use of the word 'me' is interesting. As Beccy says she wants others *'to know me first'* before she discloses she is gay it suggests that Beccy sees being gay as something separate to what constitutes her sense of 'me'. Likewise Isobel talks about herself as 'me' and how this is separate from other parts of herself;

When I'm not in work roles well then it's just me isn't it
(Isobel, 1404-1405)

This differentiation between aspects of oneself is also commented on by Esther;

Professionally successful is something I do and being gay or being a woman is more something I am and so it feels very different
(Esther, 352-355)

Esther is the only participant who differentiates between being professionally successful, being gay, and being a woman in this particular way. However it resonates with the other participants' descriptions of seeing these identities as being separate.

Personal meaning of being professionally successful.

In the data collection form given to participants (Appendix E) Rosalie answers being professionally successful is extremely important to her and the rest of the participants say it is very important. During the interviews the participants talk about how work and their professional lives are important to them. This is summarised by Isobel;

I am very work identified (…) it has been an important part of life
(Isobel, 8-13)

It seems Isobel has a strong connection to work and that work is central to how Isobel views herself. This suggests that work provides meaning to Isobel's life. All of the participants talk about being professionally ambitious. This drive to succeed seems to be an important part of who the participants are. Pippa describes ambition as an ongoing process;

I don't think this is the end (…) there's lot of other things I want to do and be successful in
(Pippa, 23-24)

Pippa indicates she sees herself as being successful now and has a desire to go on and achieve further success perhaps in different fields to her current one. Pippa has worked for different organisations and when she talks about her professional life it seems as though Pippa enjoys taking on new ventures. Pippa's desire for success is echoed by Tess;

I have a need to succeed
(Tess, 47)

Some of the participants talk about their professional success providing meaning to their lives;

I've got proof that I haven't been wasting my time
(Zoey, 692)

What's the point of being here if you're not going to do something (…) I want to look back and go oh I did all these great things, I helped some people or I changed something
(Pippa, 936-942)

Pippa talks about wanting to accomplish something which feels worthwhile. This quote suggests achievement and success are very important to Pippa and are central to providing a sense of meaning to her life. Pippa explains she hopes to be able to reflect on her life in the future and be satisfied with what she has achieved and a similar point is made by Rosalie;

Even when I retire I shall still have my career to look back on and think (…) that was worth doing
(Rosalie, 795-796)

It seems that part of the value of being professionally successful for Pippa and Rosalie is being able to reminisce in the future on what they have achieved. It seems important to note that reminiscing about success may benefit well-being.

What stands out in the analysis is how professional success is described as benefiting the participants' well-being;

I feel a sense of esteem that I'm professionally successful
(Zoey, 822)

It makes me feel good so it is a big thing
(Esther, 274)

Many of the participants talk about feeling proud of being professionally successful;

I'm quite proud I have a qualification (…) I have a management position that gives me authority and responsibility, I do it very well, I'm well respected for it
(Zoey, 8-12)

It seems as though being professionally successful helps Zoey to think well of herself and it may be that having multiple sources of pride within her work is beneficial to Zoey's well-being. A sense of pride is echoed by some of the other participants;

There is a quiet sort of pride that I own the rights to everything that I do
(Tess, 420)

I'm really proud of what I do
(Kelsie, 344)

During the interviews the participants speak with enthusiasm about their professional lives and many talk about enjoying their work. Isobel links enjoying work with feeling important and being in charge;

I am quite a big fish in a small pond and I like that
(Isobel, 1350-1351)

I like being the [senior manager], I like to tell people what to do, and I like driving quality service
(Isobel, 28-29)

Part of Isobel's enjoyment seems to be about her status at work and the control and authority this affords her. This suggests that Isobel's enjoyment centres on a sense of power. Isobel also comments about '*driving quality service'* which could be interpreted as meaning her enjoyment goes beyond personal gain. Isobel indicates she enjoys delivering results and this could suggest Isobel cares about leading a team for the benefit of those who use her service. It is not known whether a sense of helping others positively impacts on Isobel in other ways. What is clear is that Isobel has multiple reasons for enjoying her professional role which together seem to provide a sense of self-esteem.

A lot of the participants define professional success in terms of progression through a career hierarchy but they all describe other markers of professional success;

Being credible, you know respected, knowledgeable (…) and an expert
(Beccy, 87)

Doing my job well
(Esther, 4)

Respected in the field that you have been working
(Rosalie, 4)

Fulfilling my potential
(Isobel, 4)

For me to be able to set up my own [business] and for me to be really busy earning good money from it
(Tess, 48)

Tess states it is important for her to be financially independent and explains she set up her businesses in such a way so that she is not dependent on others;

I do go out of my way not to be dependent
(Tess, 391-392)

This importance of not being dependent on others echoes Kelsie's view of her professional success;

I think I'm successful because I did it all by myself
(Kelsie, 332)

I started from nothing and I did it all by myself
(Keslie, 31-32)

Kelsie describes self-reliance as being important. Kelsie explains she started without any qualifications and worked hard to move into management. It seems significant to Kelsie that she achieved this progression without help from others.

Personal meaning of being gay.

The participants differ in the extent to which they are out to others about being gay. The participants therefore describe different experiences in relation to being gay. The participants also differ in the extent to which they view being gay as important to them. In the data collection form Zoey says being gay is slightly important to her, Kelsie, Pippa, Beccy and Esther say it is moderately important, Isobel says it is very important and Rosalie and Tess say it is extremely important. During the interviews some of the participants talk about this importance and this is discussed in this minor theme. The participants also describe having different thoughts and feelings about being gay. Some of the participants talk about feeling different to heterosexual people and they describe this experience of difference in ways which seem to be either positive or negative. Some of the participants link a sense of difference from others with feeling anxious.

Some of the participants report some negative feelings about being gay. Esther reports feelings of shame;

I still feel really ashamed about it
(Esther, 54-55)

It's difficult for me to see myself as a gay woman
(Esther, 122)

In this way Esther differs to the other participants who all seem to connect more easily with being gay. Rosalie also talks about having a negative view of herself being gay. Rosalie explains the discriminatory views she encountered in the past still hold meaning for her today;

I suppose the attitudes I encountered then are still deeply ingrained in me
(Rosalie, 203-204)

Younger society seems to see both sexualities as equally valid as any sexuality (…) I can see that but it hasn't quite permeated inside
(Rosalie, 339-340)

Rosalie indicates she internalised the negative views she experienced when she was younger. It seems that Rosalie is engaged in a process of changing her view of herself. However it is as if it is not easy for Rosalie to fully adopt for herself the more accepting attitudes which she now sees within society.

Like Rosalie, Esther describes internalising negative attitudes she encountered about being gay;

I don't think there is anything to be ashamed of but (…) because of stereotypes and education (…) it's something that really buried into me
(Esther, 57-60)

Rosalie and Esther describe dealing with some negative thoughts about being gay. There are echoes of this when Isobel questions the impact being gay has on her self-esteem;

If I hadn't been gay would I have been more confident in the world? Would I have been more at ease in the world?
(Isobel, 333-334)

Isobel's questions about how she may have felt had she not been gay seem to indicate she thinks being gay may have had a negative impact on how she feels about herself.

In contrast some of the participants describe very positive feelings about being gay;

I love being gay
(Kelsie, 705)

I see it as being quite a precious thing
(Pippa, 75)

It makes me feel good, it makes me feel comfortable (…) but I am not any more centred by it than anything else that I am
(Tess, 129-130)

Tess states that being gay has a positive impact on how she feels about herself but indicates it is not any more significant or meaningful than any other aspect of herself. Whilst Tess seems to hint that being gay is just one part of herself, Beccy reports it is a significant part;

It is important because it is a big part of who I am
(Beccy, 136)

Beccy indicates that being gay is a major aspect of herself. The importance of being gay is also reflected in Tess's comment about how she sees the world;

I'm comfortable with being a homosexual woman and that (…) doesn't necessarily define me but it does affect how I view the world
(Tess, 20-21)

Tess explains being gay is not necessarily a defining aspect of herself but says being gay influences how she makes sense of the world which seems to imply being gay is a significant part of who she is. Whilst is it unclear from this quote how Tess's view of the world is affected by being gay this quote implies being gay has a significant influence on Tess.

Personal meaning of being a woman.

The participants' responses in the data collection form indicate they differ in the extent to which they view being a woman as being important to them. Beccy says it is of low importance, Kelsie, Zoey and Esther say it is moderately important, Pippa and Isobel say it is very important and Tess and Rosalie say it is extremely important. During the interviews though many of the participants' descriptions of how they feel about being a woman suggest they do not have a strong connection to being a woman and this is discussed in this minor theme.

When the participants talk about being gay most of the women separate being gay from being a woman and do not make connections between these two aspects of themselves. However Rosalie and Kelsie say the two are connected;

I think the two things absolutely do go together (…) I am a gay woman (…) just thinking about myself as a woman just seems only half the thing
(Rosalie, 858-860)

It's hard to disconnect both for me that's really really difficult (…) because I define myself as gay therefore I'm a woman
(Kelsie, 268-270)

What is striking about these comments is firstly how much they differ to those of the other participants who seem to think about being gay in isolation to being a woman. Secondly, the connection to being a woman is striking because most of the participants seem to suggest they have less connection with being a woman than to being gay or being professionally successful. However there does seem to be a hint of this in Kelsie's quote when she says *'I define myself as gay therefore I'm a* woman'. This seems to imply the defining feature for Kelsie is being gay but because she is gay she sees herself as a woman. Kelsie goes on to report she does not describe herself as a woman;

I wouldn't define myself as a woman but I am
(Kelsie, 274)

There seems to be a contradiction here. Kelsie describes her awareness of being a woman but states it is not how she would define herself. This apparent contradiction fits with the majority of the other participants' descriptions of how they think about themselves as women. Their descriptions suggest they do not have a strong connection to being a woman;

Being a woman to me is not a very important part of my personality
(Esther, 471)

I don't have a strong sense of myself as a woman. It doesn't mean a lot to me that I'm a woman
(Zoey, 507-508)

Esther and Zoey indicate it is not particularly significant to them that they are women and this is echoed by Beccy and Isobel when they were asked how they feel about being a woman;

It's just a gender assignment
(Beccy, 621)

I feel kind of ambivalent
(Isobel, 1262)

It feels important to reflect on the fact that so many of the participants describe similar ways of thinking about themselves as women. It seems as though it is easier for the participants to think about themselves as being gay and connect to this part of themselves. It is as if being gay is more meaningful to the participants than being a woman. This is reflected throughout the following themes as the participants relate more of their experiences to being gay than to being a woman. The reasons for the participants not having a strong sense of themselves as women is unclear although some of the participants link this to appearance which is discussed in the later theme 'Having a sense of appearing different to other women'.

Although Rosalie seems to connect with being a woman she reports seeing herself in a negative way;

I think I see myself as an inferior sort of woman because women should be married with children
(Rosalie, 315-316)

It seems the view Rosalie holds of what it means to be a woman has a negative impact on her self-esteem as it leaves her feeling *'inferior'*.

Pippa sheds some light on the challenge of seeing herself as a woman. After talking about being gay Pippa is asked how she feels about being a woman. Pippa answers;

I struggle with this more
(Pippa, 485)

Since (…) being out as a gay person and coming to terms with that myself, I've actually become more comfortable with being a woman because I've understood it
(Pippa, 493-494)

It seems that Pippa went through a process of identifying with being a woman and that this was helped by her increased understanding of her identity as a gay person.

The ways in which the participants report to connecting with being a woman feels important to reflect on further and is discussed in the 'Discussion' chapter.

Feeling Different to Other People as a Gay Person and as a Woman

The material in this major theme is organised into four minor themes; 'Feeling different to other people as a gay person drives professional ambition', 'Experiencing discrimination as a gay person or as a woman', 'Having a sense of appearing different to other women' and 'Individual responses to feeling different to other people as a gay person'.

All of the participants talk about feeling different to other people. When they do so they link this sense of difference to different aspects of themselves; primarily it is linked to being gay and to a lesser extent being a woman.

Feeling different to other people as a gay person drives professional ambition.

Some of the participants explain how feeling different to others because they are gay contributes to their desire to be professionally successful. Pippa explains she wants to show that being gay is not going to prevent her from being successful;

I think part of me being driven and ambitious is because I want to prove that (…) this is not going to hold me back
(Pippa, 334-335)

Pippa explains this drive to succeed stems from the image of gay women she had when she was younger;

When I was growing up (…) lesbians were slightly downtrodden (…) in terms of societal hierarchy were quite low down the pecking order
(Pippa, 339-341)

Pippa indicates that when she was younger she was not presented with a positive image of gay women. Her description of gay women as being *'downtrodden*' and having low social status suggests gay women were portrayed as not achieving much in life, as if they were in some way less than other people. Pippa explains she knew this portrayal was inaccurate;

I always wanted to confront that because I thought it's nonsense and all of the women who I knew were gay were all highly intelligent and were all or about to be very successful people so I just wanted to sort of challenge the stereotype really
(Pippa, 341-344)

It seems as though Pippa was able to dismiss this negative description she grew up with because she knew it did not match the gay women she knew. It is almost as if Pippa was able to not take the negative description of gay women she was presented with personally because she knew gay women who were not like that. However it seems as though this negative image held some significance for Pippa because it motivated her to want to prove that gay women can be successful. The fact that this negative image motivated Pippa to succeed suggests it touched upon her sense of self-esteem and this is discussed further in the 'Discussion' chapter.

Rosalie also talks about being motivated to be professionally successful because of being gay;

It's always been a sort of taboo and I suppose to be honest it's always made me feel a bit inferior. I've always felt some need to prove myself in some other area
(Rosalie, 99-100)

I feel that being successful has compensated (…) for the fact that I am gay which I see as something that is not a good thing to be
(Rosalie, 480-482)

Rosalie's description of feeling *'inferior'* and of being gay as *'taboo'* and *'not a good thing to be'* suggests being gay negatively impacts on her self-esteem. Elsewhere in the interview Rosalie talks about experiencing negative reactions in the past from others when they found out she is gay and it is almost as if Rosalie has interpreted being gay as meaning there is something wrong with her. With this description of herself it seems as though Rosalie is positioning herself as being different to others and this experience of difference is viewed negatively. As a result of this Rosalie explains she has looked to another area of her life to compensate for the thoughts she has about being gay. This echoes a strategy used by Esther who explains she uses how she feels about being professionally successful to help with how she feels about being gay;

The fact I feel comfortable in one area of my life (…) I can pump some assurance and put it in the other side
(Esther, 548-549)

Rosalie and Esther's accounts are examples of a sense of difference from others and a coping strategy being closely linked.

As a strategy to help self-esteem it seems to have worked in some way for Rosalie as she reports her professional success makes up for the feelings of inadequacy she has about being gay. It seems as though Rosalie has found a way to reduce the psychological consequences of feeling inferior. However this strategy to help self-esteem is limited because it seems that Rosalie's self-concept is still negatively affected by being gay.

Experiencing discrimination as a gay person or as a woman.

All of the participants talk about occasions when they feel different from others in the workplace either because of their gender or sexual identity. Most of the time when the participants talk about feeling different from others at work they connect this to either unease with being gay or experiencing discrimination on the grounds of sexual identity. Some of the participants also talk about gender being a discriminatory issue at work. Gender and sexual identity discrimination are well documented in the literature and so were not the focus of the analysis for this research. Instead when the participants talk about discrimination the analysis focused on how the participants experience the incidents rather than the detail of the discrimination itself.

Becky describes feeling targeted at work because of being gay;

It was really obvious they were homophobic (…) they completely treated me differently (…) They were definitely trying to make more of an example of me than anyone else, make more of a point about everything (…) escalate issues that weren't escalated with anybody else. So they definitely were effectively out to get me
(Beccy, 228-233)

Beccy talks about being treated differently and says she was in no doubt this was because of her sexual identity. From Beccy's description of her colleagues being *'out to get me'* it seems as though Beccy felt singled out to receive harsher treatment than anyone else. This quote implies Beccy felt persecuted at work and indeed Beccy goes on to say she felt hounded by the treatment she received;

It was quite stressful at the time. I did feel quite hounded to the extent in the end I just walked away. I gave in my notice so I didn't have a job
(Beccy, 245-247)

Beccy explains the treatment she received impacted on her well-being to such a degree that she left her job. Beccy goes on to say that accommodation was provided with this job and so resigning also left her without a place to live. It seems as though there was potential for this treatment at work to have a considerable impact on Beccy emotionally, practically and financially. What is striking when Beccy talks about this experience is how she focusses on practical coping and the course of action she could take.

Some of the participants talk about being seen as women in the workplace and their experiences of being women at work. These accounts were striking because in the main the participants did not seem to link their experiences with being a woman.

Pippa talks about being the first woman to be appointed as a board member and how she feels ignored;

It didn't really matter what I said. I could have said the most ground breaking thing, most insightful thing and it still would have got dismissed
(Pippa, 616-618)

Pippa describes her male colleagues having a blatant disregard for the contributions she makes at board meetings. It seems Pippa thinks she is treated differently because she is a woman. Pippa's comment even *'ground-breaking'* or *'insightful'* contributions would not be considered seems to emphasise the extent to which Pippa feels dismissed. Pippa's account of being treated differently because she is a woman is echoed by Esther;

Professionally men and women are really not equal
(Esther, 384-385)

When Pippa talks some more about how she is treated at work she seems to describe some conflicting processes. Pippa says she is dismissed because she is a woman but she explains she is also sought out because she is a woman;

Sometimes you don't get heard, on the other side they do want to (…) hear from you because they want a woman's perspective. I am the voice of all women apparently
(Pippa, 633-637)

This quote indicates that in Pippa's experience there are occasions when others value her presence and want to hear from her because she is a woman. From Pippa's descriptions it seems that being a woman is both a reason her contributions can be ignored and sought out. It is interesting that Pippa describes others wanting a *'women's perspective'* and that she thinks her contributions on these occasions are seen by others as representing the views of *'all women'.*

It is important to note that some of the participants report they have not experienced gender or sexual identity discrimination;

No, never the slightest, no discrimination
(Zoey, 1105)

I've never suffered homophobia directly at me
(Pippa, 104)

Having a sense of appearing different to other women.

When some of the participants talk about difference they link this with appearance or demeanour. Kelsie talks about being different to other women and her colleagues;

I suppose I'm quite confident (…) and if you look at this stereotype of women you know the quiet one and heterosexual (…) I'm different, I am different of course I am (…) look at the people in this building, I'm here they are over there, I stick out
(Kelsie, 508-515)

The way I dress, the way I walk (…) the way I am I suppose I'm confident like men are
(Kelsie, 517-518)

Within these quotes there are some points which seem important to reflect on. Kelsie describes herself as being different because she is not *'quiet'* and *'heterosexual'* like a stereotypical woman. From Kelsie's comments about confidence it seems as though Kelsie thinks of this as being a characteristic of men and so to make sense of being confident Kelsie has to liken herself to men. It is as if Kelsie has certain expectations of what it is to be a woman.

Kelsie's quotes and the manner in which she speaks during the interview suggest she constructs appearing different to other women in a positive way. There are echoes of this when Tess talks about sometimes wearing men's clothes;

I've reached a point in my life now where when I am wearing men's clothes and dressed in a kind of dandyish way I can be the focus of the room so I don't have a problem with any of those edges
(Tess, 119-122)

Tess indicates that she is comfortable with the attention she gets wearing men's clothes. The 'edges' which Tess refers to seems to relate to an earlier comment Tess made;

There is a lot of things that fling me out into the outer edges of society
(Tess, 96)

Elsewhere in the interview Tess explains;

I don't have a desire to be in the middle of whatever and considered heteronormative sexuality and behaviours anyway
(Tess, 132-133)

It is as if Tess is at ease with appearing and thinking about herself as being different to heterosexual people.

Isobel describes experiencing a different feeling to Tess when other people think she resembles a man;

I get mistaken for a man which doesn't do much for your sense of being a woman
(Isobel, 1087-1089)

Isobel seems to be suggesting that her view of herself as a woman is dented when she is mistaken for a man. There is almost a hint here that appearing different to other women and being *'mistaken for a man'* causes Isobel some difficulty with relating to being a woman.

Zoey also talks about appearance as a woman;

If being a woman is being (…) feminine (…) dressing up a certain way (…) that's not me
(Zoey, 530-533)

Zoey implies she finds it hard to see herself as a woman because she does not see herself as being feminine or dressing in ways she associates with being a woman. Like Zoey, Isobel also mentions not relating to women's clothes;

I feel uncomfortable around clothing that is supposed to be for women
(Isobel, 1143-1144)

A detailed exploration of appearance is beyond the remit of this research but it is interesting to note that some participants express specific thoughts of what it is to look like a woman.

Individual responses to feeling different to other people as a gay person.

When the participants talk about feeling different to others they mostly connect this to being gay and some of the participants describe feeling anxious. Attention is given here to the participants' accounts of anxiety because they seem closely linked to how some of the participants experience professional success.

When Zoey is asked how she feels about being gay she reports feeling uncomfortable;

My main feeling is a bit uneasy because it's an uneasy piece of information
(Zoey, 139-140)

Zoey almost seems to suggest she feels burdened by the knowledge she is gay. Elsewhere in the interview Zoey talks about her unease with disclosing her sexual identity and it seems as though this difficulty strongly influences how Zoey feels about being gay. This is echoed by Rosalie who explains feeling different because she is gay makes her feel wary;

It's always been an enormous thing that I always felt that I was different and that it was a massive secret that one had to be terribly careful
(Rosalie, 92-94)

Zoey comments on a further impact of feeling uneasy about being gay;

There is an energy that's required to deal with it in the world
(Zoey, 142)

Zoey hints she is engaged in an ongoing process of managing sexual identity and it could be interpreted that Zoey finds this tiring. Her comment about dealing with it *'in the world'* almost suggests it is something to be dealt with everywhere and that there is no escape from it. Pippa also comments about experiencing persistent anxiety about disclosing her sexual identity at work;

You can't ever really escape the slightly nervousness feeling that you get when you (…) tell people even if you're really confident about it … have told lots of other people in the past
(Pippa, 82-86)

Pippa describes an inescapable anxiety as if it is inevitable and will always be there. It seems as though Pippa has come to this conclusion because even after repeated disclosures she feels some anxiety beforehand. Elsewhere in the interview Pippa states she prefers it when her colleagues know she is gay. It is interesting that Pippa's anxiety remains given her preference for being open about being gay. Pippa also explains she has never had a negative reaction from anyone when she has disclosed she is gay and Zoey makes a similar point;

I've never been subject to any negative reaction. I should settle into that idea
(Zoey, 211-215)

It is interesting that both Pippa and Zoey experience a continued sense of threat at work even though they have not experienced a negative reaction when they have disclosed their sexual identity. It seems that receiving exclusively positive reactions has not changed their negative evaluations of disclosure and they continue to see disclosures as risky.

Some of the participants link this continued sense of threat to a potential impact on their careers. Esther talks about her fears that people who know her professionally will not recommend her in the future if they know she is gay;

The day when you need them to say this person is a good person they might not
(Esther, 499-500)

This quote suggests Esther views being gay as a potential threat to her reputation. Elsewhere in the interview Esther talks about people at work speaking well of her. It seems as though being well thought of does not protect Esther from feeling anxious that she would lose this regard if she discloses her sexual identity. It is as if despite the success and recognition Esther has at work she is left with a sense of vulnerability for her career. Likewise Rosalie reports anxiety that some people will disprove of her if they know she is gay;

I'm pretty well out with my colleagues (…) I'm not out with parents of the children that I teach because I somehow feel that they would disapprove
(Rosalie, 127-129)

This anxiety is echoed by Pippa when she talks about her unease with disclosing to new clients she is gay;

Business rests on it so (…) it sort of makes me nervous from that point of view
(Pippa, 158-159)

It is important to note that not all the participants experience being different to other people because they are gay in a negative way. Although Pippa reports some anxiety with disclosures she also describes being different from others as a positive thing;

I quite like the fact that I'm a bit different to ordinary other people
(Pippa, 80-81)

There are echoes of this from Tess;

It's not my job to be normal
(Tess, 301)

Why does anyone want to be normal?
(Tess, 305)

Coping Strategies Used in Response to Difficulties Encountered as a Professionally Successful Gay Woman

This third major theme is divided into five minor themes; 'Deciding whether to challenge others when encountering difficulties as a gay person or as a woman', 'Solving and preventing problems encountered as a gay person or as a women', 'Being resilient to difficulties encountered as a gay person', 'Dismissing the relevance of one's own gender or sexual identity' and 'Disclosure of sexual identity in the workplace'.

The participants describe what they do when they encounter difficulties being a professionally successful gay woman. Some of the strategies presented here relate to dealing with incidents of gender or sexual identity discrimination.

Deciding whether to challenge others when encountering difficulties as a gay person or as a woman.

Some of the participants talk about going through a process of deciding whether to challenge others when they encounter difficulties. Kelsie talks about her reaction to receiving negative comments from colleagues about her being gay;

It is about whether I fight it or not
(Kelsie, 152)

The use of the word *'fight'* seems to suggest that challenging others involves conflict or disagreement. It is as if Kelsie has to decide whether to go into battle with others. If challenging is seen as something which involves considerable effort it is understandable there might be a period of first considering whether to take this course of action or not. Whilst it is unclear from this quote what influences Kelsie's decision it is noteworthy that challenging others is thought about in this way. Pippa describes a similar process of weighing up what to tackle;

You have to work out in your head you know the things you are prepared to sort of take on
(Pippa, 1206-1207)

Pippa acknowledges she will not challenge everything and this quote suggests Pippa prepares herself in advance by thinking about what she feels comfortable challenging. This consideration of what to challenge seems to indicate that for Pippa, like Kelsie, challenging is not easy in so much as it requires effort or mental preparation. It is as if it is not done so lightly without careful thought. An example Pippa gives is deciding how to react when she feels her contributions at meetings are dismissed because she is a woman;

It can go either two ways. I'll either just think you know sod it, I'm not going to bother (…) I'll extract myself from the situation or kick against it and (…) try and make my voice heard in whichever way I can, be a bit more defiant about it
(Pippa, 624-627)

Pippa's description of challenging; *'kick against it'*, *'be a bit more defiant'* resonates with the suggested effort involved in Kelsie's description of *'fighting'*. Pippa indicates there is an energy and effort required to challenge. It seems as though at times Pippa thinks this effort is not worthwhile and makes an active choice to not engage with it. This is echoed by Isobel when she talks about deciding how to respond to negative comments about being gay;

It depends on your mood (…) if I'm a bit tired I'm just oh fucking hell
(Isobel, 530-31)

Another factor which seems important to the participants in deciding whether to challenge or not is the desire to succeed. Kelsie talks about a previous job she had in a male dominated industry and how she wanted to prove that a woman could do the same job as the men;

I knew it could be challenging so I made the extra mile saying I'm doing it because if I didn't do it (…) they would have left me down there (…) I thought you're going to push me down because I'm a woman and I'm not having that
(Kelsie, 289-296)

Kelsie's comment of '*I'm not having that'* indicates she was not going to accept being held back because she is a woman and wanted to prove she was capable of doing the job. It is as if Kelsie was motivated by injustice. Kelsie's comment of *'I made the extra mile'* seems to suggest that Kelsie pushed herself to do more in order to succeed and that Kelsie thought this extra effort was needed in order to prevent her being *'left down there'*. This quote indicates Kelsie was determined to overcome difficulties and this raises the question of whether this mind-set has helped Kelsie succeed professionally.

Solving and preventing problems encountered as a gay person or as a woman.

Some of the participants describe creative ways in which they deal with difficulties. For example Tess talks about working as a teaching professional in a male dominated field;

I have to really think about how do I present myself? Who am I? How do I get my message across when I am not a man in a man's world?
(Tess, 345-346)

Tess describes a process of self-reflection that includes trying to find a way to be that helps her do her job. Elsewhere in the interview Tess goes on to describe finding a way to teach that works for her. It seems that a strategy Tess uses when faced with difficulties is to consider different ways to do things and ways which are a good fit for her personally. This is suggested when Tess talks about being self-employed and the control this affords her;

I created a model that (…) gave me the autonomy as a woman and then by default has also given me the autonomy as a lesbian
(Tess, 592-596)

Elsewhere in the interview Tess explains how not being dependent on others is important to her and how running her own business provides her with financial independence. Whilst some of the motivation for being self-employed may have been financial it seems there may be more to it than that. In the quote above Tess indicates that being self-employed positively impacts on two aspects of herself; being a woman and being gay.

Tess explains how she wishes to be viewed;

What I do have interest in is being seen to be an openly lesbian strong woman
(Tess, 224-225)

This hints at a determination to overcome challenges and Tess demonstrates this throughout the interview. For example Tess describes her response to difficulties she encountered through work because of being gay;

I am not interested in challenging the system I just think I really have no interest I'm just gonna make a new system
(Tess, 607-609)

When Tess talks about having her own business it seems to be a means for Tess to thrive and fulfil her ambition to be independent and have a sense of freedom. Finding different ways to do things which reflects her values seems important for Tess.

It is interesting to note Tess's use of the word lesbian in two of the quotes above as this could suggest a combination of two aspects of herself; being gay and being a woman. This stands out given that many of the participants seem to separate their experiences of being gay and being a woman.

Like Tess, Beccy describes looking for ways to overcome difficulties;

When you work you can meet people who are sexist like you can meet people who are homophobic (…) You just have to find a way round it
(Beccy, 718- 721)

Beccy acknowledges she will encounter people who are prejudiced towards women and gay people and her response is about how she can overcome this. It seems that Beccy's focus is on moving past the problem rather than how this makes her feel. It is as if Beccy is determined to not be impeded by discriminatory behaviour and in finding *'a way round it'* Beccy takes control. There is a suggestion that this strategy limits the psychological impact of encountering prejudice;

I guess I find it more irritating than very destructive because I (…) just find ways to manage the situation to still get your message across, to still get what you need to get done
(Beccy, 726-729)

Beccy's primary goal seems to be that her performance at work is not affected and it could be that this strategy works beyond serving as a distraction from the emotional impact of prejudice. One might wonder if by getting '*what you need to get done'* and focusing on what she can do to complete tasks, Beccy is able to have a sense of achievement.

Some of the participants talk about steps they take to try and prevent problems and primarily these are linked to being gay. Some of the participants talk about their choice of workplaces;

The organisations that I have chosen are organisations which have really good policies and have people that go to those organisations that are probably quite liberal and open minded types
(Pippa, 1028-1031)

The place I work now has got a high population and it's one of the big reasons why I want to keep working there because it increases my comfort level
(Zoey, 167-171)

Elsewhere in the interview Zoey describes feeling anxious about disclosing her sexual identity at work. In the above quote Zoey indicates that being in the presence of other gay people helps ease her anxiety at work. It seems that Zoey values relationships with other gay people at work. As well as choice of organisation, Pippa makes the point that the choice of country to work in is also a consideration;

We might be working in the Middle East and I was like I don't really want to go there I mean that's extreme but in [names Asian country] I wasn't out and wouldn't work in any of those places again
(Pippa, 1059-1061)

It is interesting when Pippa talks about this it does not seem as though she views it as a limitation. Instead it seems as though Pippa is making an active choice not to work in countries where she may feel restricted in being able to be open about her sexual identity. It is as if Pippa is taking control and rejecting places she feels would be less liberal. Some of the participants talk about choosing particular areas of the United Kingdom to live where they think people will be more accepting of gay people;

I deliberately chose accepting areas because I don't want the hassle
(Beccy, 489)

Our fear is (…) people living in the countryside will not be as broadminded
(Isobel, 747-748)

Another strategy some of the participants talk about in order to prevent problems is to opt out of spending time with other people;

Increasingly I choose not to mix with anybody very much at all (…) I'm never happier when I am by myself because then you haven't got to worry (…) shall I say this, shall I say that
(Rosalie, 628-631)

Rosalie indicates being by herself is a means to avoid the anxiety of keeping her sexual identity a secret. Likewise Zoey describes feeling uneasy attending social events such as work Christmas parties;

Women have this way of doing this thing where they suddenly turn up in different clothes, with makeup and hair and they've transformed the way they look (…) I have no idea how to do that, and no desire to do it
(Zoey, 560-563)

I would feel gauche if I put myself in the setting where the rest of them were doing that so I avoid social situations in which everyone else is dressed up
(Zoey, 565-568)

It seems Zoey's unease with appearing different to other women means she chooses to avoid situations where she is likely to encounter this.

It feels important to pay attention to these preventative strategies because they highlight the expectations of difficulty which some of the participants feel; that some organisations may not be safe places to work if you are gay and that it would be risky to work somewhere where there are not lots of other gay people. This links back to the anxiety which some of the participants express and the potential limitations imposed on their professional lives.

Being resilient to difficulties encountered as a gay person.

There are a number of different strategies that the participants use which seem as though they are direct attempts to reduce the psychological impact of negative events. Kelsie describes dismissing the significance of homophobic comments made to her by a colleague;

She came to me and said I hate lesbians (…) so I went to complain about it and nothing was done about it which was very frustrating but that's just little you know things that happen
(Kelsie, 181-183)

Although Kelsie describes feeling frustrated at the lack of action taken it seems she found a way to deal with what happened by devaluing the importance of the incident and dismissing it as a *'little thing'*. Kelsie elaborates on her dismissal of receiving negative comments about her being gay;

I've had a few comments big deal
(Kelsie, 203)

Kelsie implies she chooses not to dwell on negative comments made to her and it seems as though by viewing them as unimportant she is able to protect herself to a certain extent. Kelsie also describes trying to protect herself from someone else's problem becoming her problem;

Being gay is not a problem to me (…) and I try not to allow it to be a problem to me if it's a problem for them
(Kelsie, 255-258)

Kelsie's use of the word *'try'* suggests this strategy of distancing herself from other people's negative comments is not always successful and it is unclear why this is. Other participants describe using this strategy when they encounter negative comments about being gay;

I don't have a problem
(Isobel, 434)

You're just an idiot
(Beccy, 216)

I don’t give a shit about what you think
(Tess, 221)

These dismissals by the participants seem to be a means to position the problem with the other person and not themselves.

Isobel also describes using her sense of success to refute negative comments about being gay;

I know I am a good person (…) I am a successful person (…) I have done very well in the world. You can’t tell me that I’m crap because that’s not okay
(Isobel, 444-446)

It seems as though Isobel uses the knowledge that she is professionally successful and *‘a good person’* to maintain a positive self-concept in the face of negativity. It is as if Isobel’s achievements provide her with some protection from negative judgements because these comments clash so much with Isobel’s view of herself.

This resonates with a strategy Beccy used when she left a job where she was being treated differently because she is gay;

I am also quite a maverick so (…) I just took so much and then that was it I’ll just get a job, just find one, I’ll be fine somehow (…) I just thought it’ll be alright. It’s just not worth it
(Beccy, 250-253)

Beccy describes herself as a *‘maverick’* which implies she is comfortable with taking risks. It could be this helped Beccy deal with this situation along with her belief that she would be okay. In this incidence it seems that Beccy had confidence to make a change and perhaps saw having to leave this job as a temporary setback rather than as a threat to her career. In addition Beccy reports she felt psychologically strong from this experience;

It wasn’t a pleasant experience but I felt strong for it and I was like I just won’t be pushed around
(Beccy, 297-300)

There is a suggestion that by standing up for herself and not accepting the treatment she was being given Beccy was able to take something positive from the experience as she *'felt strong for it'*. What also seemed to help Beccy cope with this experience is changing her appraisal of the job;

I wouldn't want to work there after they had shown what they were like
(Beccy, 347-348)

It seems the meaning Beccy took from this experience is that her colleagues revealed what they were really like and instead of them rejecting her it is as if Beccy has rejected them.

Dismissing the relevance of one's own gender or sexual identity.

Some of the coping strategies the participants describe seem to centre on regarding gender or sexual identity as irrelevant. Kelsie states she thinks other people are not concerned with people being gay;

I think people don't care really to be honest with you
(Kelsie, 494)

Whilst it may be the case that most people do not care, elsewhere in the interview Kelsie explains some colleagues have made negative remarks about her being gay and so the above quote seems to be inconsistent with this earlier comment. This contradiction may suggest that dismissing sexual identity as irrelevant is a means to deal with the potential threat being gay presents.

Similarly some of the participants dismiss the relevance of gender;

I would have done what I've done professionally I can say whether I'd been a man (…) it's just me as a person, my personality what I've done
(Zoey, 1094-1096)

It may be that Zoey would have accomplished the same whether she had been male or female. In this quote Zoey attributes her professional achievements to *'me as a person'*, *'my personality'* as if gender did not feature in these parts of herself. This has echoes of the material discussed in 'Separation of the identities of professionally successful, gay, and woman' as it seems Zoey thinks of being a woman as separate to who she is as a person. This quote above also seems to link with Zoey's earlier statement that she does not have a '*strong sense'* of being a woman. When Esther talks about how men and women are treated at work she also seems to dismiss the relevance to her of being a woman;

If people don't care that I'm a woman, I don't care either
(Esther, 471-472)

There could also be a suggestion that Beccy dismisses the relevance of being a woman to her when she talks about men and women being treated differently;

There are some differences in terms of how we are treated in society but I don't perceive that as a limitation for me or I won't accept it as a limitation
(Beccy, 623-625)

Beccy acknowledges men and women can be treated differently but indicates she will either not be affected by this or she will not let herself be restricted by it. This seems to fit with Beccy's determination to overcome obstacles in her way and her view that she is able to do so.

Disclosure of sexual identity in the workplace.

Some of the participants talk about being cautious of what they say in conversations at work in order to avoid disclosing they are gay;

There are people at work who don't know, there is a stopping point of (…) mentioning the gender of my partner or mentioning my partner at all
(Zoey, 386-388)

I just naturally always censor everything before I have said it
(Rosalie, 95-96)

I don't say anything
(Esther, 116-117)

Conversation is going to go in a certain direction so either try to change the conversation or just extract myself from it
(Pippa, 398-399)

This careful management of conversations therefore includes a number of different strategies; censorship, silence, changing topics or withdrawal.

Rosalie comments on the impact these strategies have on her;

I am looking forward to when I retire (…) because then I won't have to worry about school and having to be secretive there
(Rosalie, 545-546)

There is a hint of Rosalie feeling burdened or tired by having to conceal her sexual identity at work. This resonates with Zoey's comments in the theme 'Individual responses to feeling different to other people as a gay person' where she talks about the '*energy'* needed to '*deal with it'.*

Pippa makes an interesting comment about concealment as she reports that talking in the interview about the disclosure of sexual identity at work has heightened her awareness of strategies she uses;

I came into it thinking oh yeah you know it's all good, I've had a good experience you know, all positive but actually you know when you start to unpick it a bit, you don't realise it, you're so conditioned to be a certain way and to accept certain things, you just don't realise that actually, hold on a minute, day to day I probably do, I have to change my behaviour and like filter things (…) I assume I'm not really doing but I am doing it all the time
(Pippa, 1194-1200)

It is not clear what has led Pippa to feel she is *'conditioned to be a certain way and accept things'* but this seems to suggest that Pippa has accepted her perceived need to sometimes hide her sexual identity. Pippa indicates that because she is so accustomed to hiding her sexual identity she had not realised the extent to which she alters her behaviour. As discussed in the 'Introduction' chapter, it is well documented there are psychological consequences for secrecy. Pippa comments on how she feels when she uses strategies to hide her sexual identity;

I'm not very happy about it, it makes me a bit disappointed in myself as well
(Pippa, 176-177)

As Pippa reports secrecy has negative consequences for her self-esteem it seems important to note that at times Pippa seems to use these strategies almost out of her awareness.

The participants who express anxiety about disclosing their sexual identity at work indicate they recognise the negative psychological consequences of keeping it a secret as well as their expectations there will be negative consequences if they disclose. It seems this has the potential to leave some participants thinking whatever they do their well-being will be compromised.

Some participants describe feeling confident and at ease with disclosure and with managing any difficulties which arise from their sexual identity being known. A number of different reasons were given for disclosing sexual identity at work including not wanting to hide an important aspect of themselves and realising it is too hard to maintain a secret life;

I prefer it when people know definitely because it's just a significant part of who I am
(Pippa, 375-377)

It's just so difficult, you're hiding part of your life. You end up talking in half sentences (…) and you just think I can't carry on with this, this is daft
(Isobel, 891-894)

Kelsie explains another reason for disclosing is that it provides an opportunity to portray being gay in a positive manner;

I think if you're very open about something people (…) tend to be (...) fine, they don't have to think about everything because you present it as such a positive thing
(Kelsie, 212-213)

I think if you're very withdrawn and secretive about it (…) people start gossiping and then people get nasty. I don't give them a chance to do that. I'm gay, move on
(Kelsie, 215-216)

These quotes suggest Kelsie prefers to take control and manage disclosure in a way that limits opportunities for people to talk negatively about her. Her comment of *'I'm gay, move on'* suggests that Kelsie thinks her sexual identity is not something that needs to be dwelled on by others. Kelsie explains she thinks if someone is secretive they are more likely to be talked about which then leads to difficulties. It is as if Kelsie chooses to be proactive in order to influence how others perceive her. This has echoes of how Kelsie managed being treated differently at work because she is a woman as discussed in the theme 'Deciding whether to challenge others when encountering difficulties as a gay person or as a woman'.

When the participants talk about disclosing their sexual identity at work they explain there needs to be a suitable opportunity to do so;

You think I'm going to have to tell you but it seems kind of odd (...) how do you raise it over a cup of tea by the way I just thought I'd mention that I'm a lesbian
(Isobel, 868-870)

Here Isobel makes the point that deciding to disclose is not the only dilemma, there is also the question of how and when to do it. Most of the participants who are out to others about being gay explain they wait to disclose until colleagues are talking about their personal lives. The strategies they use are summarised by Beccy;

There comes a point if you're working in a particular place for a certain amount of time when people start talking a little bit about their personal lives and it's not just a professional discussion (…) so someone says 'so what does he do' you know well 'she does' and stuff like that so you know I correct them but not make it a big deal and carry on talking or I'll mention my partner's name (...) which is quite clearly a girl so yeah I'll just drop in conversation
(Beccy 526-532)

Beccy describes quite subtle ways in which she chooses to disclose. This matches other participants' experiences as they say they have no desire to make a big announcement;

I was being out, not going to lie, I'm not going to scream it and put a big banner but you know I'm gay
(Kelsie, 77-78)

Some of the participants talk about appreciating help they receive from others and Zoey comments on valuing the approach her manager took;

My manager said who's at home and it was really nice, it was like really good he did because I said 'my partner, she'
(Zoey, 251-252)

Elsewhere Zoey talks about her discomfort with disclosing her sexual identity to others and it seems being able to respond in this way to her manager allowed Zoey to disclose in a manner that felt less threatening to her. This raises an interesting point about the role others can play in disclosures and this was mentioned by Isobel;

When the onus is on you (…) I've got to find the way of bringing it up or raising it, actually why don't you find a way of asking?
(Isobel, 934-936)

Connection to Other Gay People and Other Women

When the participants talk about their professional lives they comment on their relationships with others and describe a sense of connection. This fourth major theme is divided into three minor themes; 'Connection with other gay people', 'Valuing role models who are gay' and 'Connection with other women'. The analysis suggests the connection participants feel to other people is linked to separate aspects of themselves and primarily it is an issue of being gay.

Connection with other gay people.

Many of the participants talk about a sense of connection with other gay people at work. Zoey comments on this when she talks about interactions with some of her colleagues;

I know you're gay, you know I'm gay and that adds a bit of connection
(Zoey, 1116)

It seems that the knowledge alone of a shared sexual identity is enough to create something of a connection for Zoey. This is echoed by Beccy;

Someone else is gay you can (…) clock them and then you have something in common
(Beccy, 513-515)

It is unclear from Zoey's quote what the impact of this connection is on Zoey's relationships. In a previous theme Zoey talks about her decision to work somewhere where there are other gay people as this helps her feel more comfortable. It could be that a sense of connection with someone else who is gay helps Zoey to not feel isolated at work. A similar point is made by Pippa;

I've always been surrounded by other people who are out at work all the way through which I think helps. I don't ever feel isolated
(Pippa, 1184-1185)

Pippa indicates that she values the presence of other gay people at work.

Tess also comments on how she feels being in the presence of other gay people;

I'm more comfortable with queers much more comfortable in a queer environment
(Tess, 138)

The participants' descriptions of finding a connection to other gay people helpful fits with a comment made by Isobel;

We do *gravitate towards each other*
(Isobel, 1487)

Isobel also reports that a shared sexual identity can add something to working relationships;

We deliberately spent some time together to try and work out some joint working thing and I'm sure what was the added thing that we brought to that was the knowledge that we were both lesbians (…) so there was a layer that kind of cemented a professional working relationship
(Isobel, 1489-1491)

What is interesting about this quote is that for Isobel it seems that the knowledge alone of a shared sexual identity had a positive impact on a professional relationship. Isobel's use of the word '*cemented'* suggests that this knowledge had a binding effect on their relationship. It is as if there was a solidity to the connection between them. It seems as though Isobel is suggesting this connection aided their joint venture. What makes this even more interesting is that this connection was not spoken about;

It was a sort of an unacknowledged recognition of something and wanting to build on that
(Isobel, 1495-1496)

It is as if this sense of connection felt like the foundation to their working relationship. It seems as though this connection was thought of as being important and contributed to a desire for the working relationship to be developed. It is unclear why this unspoken connection aided the working relationship in this way but the value it added seems important to reflect on.

Valuing role models who are gay.

One way in which the connection with other gay people is described as being valuable is through role models. Isobel describes being a role model to other members of staff who are gay;

I have a lot of junior staff (…) they will probably all know that I am a lesbian (…) it is about being a role model (…) It is about saying you too can be the [senior manager]. Your sexuality shouldn't in any way stop that from happening because it shouldn't play a part
(Isobel, 1433-1444)

It seems as though being a role model is important to Isobel so that she can demonstrate that being gay is not going to prohibit someone from reaching a senior management position. Isobel seems keen to stress that sexual identity is irrelevant to career progression. This quote suggests that Isobel is aware she is in a position to send a positive message of encouragement to her staff and it almost seems as if Isobel feels she has a responsibility to deliver this message. Kelsie also comments on the value of role models who are gay;

There's been a few role models (…) there's a few women who are on television and in the public eye, I think helps (…) against discrimination (…) for younger generation
(Kelsie, 746-750)

Pippa also reports the benefit of having mentors who are gay;

I think what has helped me a huge amount is having some really good mentors that are gay and not gay but mostly the gay ones
(Pippa, 1160-1162)

In mentoring sometimes it's obviously a lot about where you are going (…) but (…) you've got to reflect on where you have been and so that helps, being able to have someone who has empathy with that
(Pippa, 1173-1176)

Pippa indicates that mentors who are gay have been able to add something extra to the mentoring experience. It is unclear exactly what Pippa means by *'where you have been'* but this quote seems to suggest that Pippa thinks another gay person is more likely to understand her experiences. It is interesting that a shared sexual identity is linked with empathy in this context. It raises the question of how Pippa experiences this sense of empathy from mentors who are gay and what she feels is lacking from other mentors. Esther also talks about the value of role models as she reports seeing how a colleague who is gay deals with disclosures;

I could observe him and see how he was managing disclosures (…) he would talk about his husband (…) it kind of inspired me the way he would manage that
(Esther, 506-511)

The presence of an openly gay colleague seems to have been helpful to Esther. There is a suggestion that Esther felt encouraged by the actions of her colleague almost as if knowing that he could be openly gay at work means there is a possibility she could be too. It seems important to note how valuable the presence of other gay people at work is expressed as being.

Connection with other women.

It is interesting to note that the participants say very little about a connection with other women. An exception to this is a comment made by Esther who works as an engineer in a male dominated work environment. Esther reports a sense of solidarity between women at work;

I have seen a lot of solidarity and most of the time I really don't feel competitive with other women especially when there is not many of them around. I appreciate that
(Esther, 225-228)

It seems there is a suggestion that in Esther's experience women support each other at work and Esther indicates she values this positive connection with other women. Elsewhere in the interview Esther talks about feeling uncomfortable when she is the only woman present at work and in light of this it is understandable that Esther values the presence of other women. One might wonder if Esther's experience of being in a minority at work as a woman brings her attention to *'solidarity'* between women.

Zoey also comments on her interactions with other women;

I love the way that women you hardly know you can have emotionally articulate conversations with
(Zoey, 1034-1036)

It seems that Zoey experiences being able to relate to other women on an emotional level even when she does not know them well. There is a suggestion in Zoey's comment that she experiences conversations with other women in a different way than she may with men.

Pippa comments on the other women around her;

I'm surrounded by lots of other successful women
(Pippa, 815)

Pippa later reports competition amongst peers;

There is fierce competition amongst peer groups even though it might not be said
(Pippa, 835-836)

Elsewhere Pippa talks about the importance of status amongst her peer groups and it seems that part of Pippa's connection to her peers, including other professionally successful women, involves a sense of competition over status. This contrasts with Esther's comment about not being competitive with other women and appreciating support between women. It is not clear whether the prevalence of other women which differs in Esther's and Pippa's work environments is relevant here. However it is striking that overall the participants say very little about relationships with other women at work and female role models are not mentioned at all. One might wonder if this lack of commentary is linked to the suggested notion that overall being a woman does not seem to be a focus of attention in many of the participants' experiences.

Overarching Phenomenon

This second part of the analysis foregrounds the phenomenon of being a professionally successful gay woman as experienced by these participants.

The participants' accounts of being a professionally successful gay woman suggest they experience these three identities separately. Overall the experiences of being professionally successful, being gay, and being a woman are described as being separate. The participants tend to link experiences to either being professionally successful, being gay or being a woman rather than to a sense of self that reflects these aspects in an integrated way. This is significant to our understanding of how the participants experience being a professionally successful gay woman. What seems most significant about this is that overall gender does not seem central to this experience, as detailed later in this section.

The participants indicate that work and professional success are an important part of their lives. They link professional success to progression through a career hierarchy but they also describe other markers of success including; being knowledgeable, being an expert, being respected, fulfilling their potential and being able to set up their own business. Amongst these different markers there is a recurring suggestion that achieving something which feels meaningful or provides a sense of pride contributes to their understanding of professional success. It seems as though the participants create their own meaning of professional success based on what is important to them such as having proof they have not been wasting their time, helping others, affecting changes and being financially independent.

Ambition and success seem to provide a sense of meaning to the participants' lives and some participants value knowing they will be able to reminisce in the future on their achievements. The participants' accounts indicate that professional success is a source of enjoyment as well as a means to be financially independent. There is a suggestion that professional success aids a sense of well-being and self-esteem and it seems this occurs in a number of different ways. Some participants indicate they use their professional success to help them feel good about themselves at times of difficulty such as when they receive negative comments from others about being gay or when they do not feel good about themselves being gay. It seems that for some of the participants a sense of being professionally successful is used to refute negative comments from others or to improve negative views they hold of themselves.

Having a desire to succeed professionally is linked by some to their feeling of being different to other people because they are gay. The sense of difference to others which some of the participants talk about seems to stem from experiences where they have encountered negative attitudes towards gay women. Some participants indicate it is their desire to challenge these negative views or to compensate for the way these negative views make them feel, which has driven them to be professionally successful. Professional success is therefore used in a number of ways to bolster self-esteem.

Overall the ways that the participants talk about professional success suggests they experience a close connection to this aspect of themselves. It is important to note that many participants describe particular experiences of difficulty and stress in their professional lives such as maintaining a work-life balance. As these experiences are not related to a sense of self they are not included within the analysis and so do not form part of the experience presented here. However the presence of these experiences is noted here because they are part of the participants' professional lives and could be an avenue for further research.

The phenomenon of being a professionally successful gay woman includes the experience of identifying as being gay. It seems that the majority of participants experience a close connection to this aspect of themselves. Many of the participants describe experiences where being gay is a central part of that experience such as; feeling different to other people, experiencing discrimination or receiving negative comments from others; choosing to live and work in places where they think being gay will not lead to difficulties, managing the disclosure or concealment of their sexual identity at work, and feeling a sense of connection to other gay people. The participants differ in the degree to which they are out to others about being gay and they differ in their thoughts and feelings about being gay. Some describe it as an important and valued aspect of themselves whilst others report some negative feelings about being gay.

Some participants link being gay with feeling anxious because of anxiety about disclosure and they use a variety of strategies to conceal and disclose sexual identity at work. What is interesting about the accounts of participants who disclose their sexual identity at work is that they have a number of reasons why they want to disclose such as; it being too difficult to hide part of their life, wanting others to know because it is a significant part of who they are, and thinking that being open about being gay means other people are less likely to gossip about them. Many participants describe always receiving positive reactions to disclosing their sexual identity at work and yet it seems they are still left anticipating negative reactions and negative consequences for their careers.

Some of the participants highlight the dilemmas they face in deciding how and when to disclose and they talk about needing to find an appropriate opportunity to do so. The participants indicate there can be an assumption from others that people are heterosexual and that because of this they have to challenge assumptions about the gender of their partner. It seems that a heterosexual culture can be problematic because it can leave the participants needing to challenge other people's assumptions about their sexual identity and leave them with the responsibility to find ways to do this. Overall the participants' experiences indicate that for them, heterosexism is more prevalent than incidents of direct discriminatory behaviour which could be classified as homophobia. Some of the participants talk about how helpful it is when other people take the initiative and create opportunities for people to disclose. It seems as though the effort made by others to not presume heterosexuality is welcomed.

What is interesting about the participants' attitudes and experience of being gay and disclosing their sexual identity is how this seems to relate to their perception of experiencing difference. The participants describe feeling different from others and primarily this is linked to being gay. There is a suggestion that some of the participants view the experience of being different to other people in a negative way and as a threat to their self-esteem. There are indications of this when they talk about being gay but it is also apparent when some of the participants talk about their experience of being a woman. In contrast some participants indicate they view being different to other people in a positive way and it seems that experiencing this difference is prized and thought of as special.

From the participants' accounts there is an indication that they feel a sense of connection to other gay people. The participants describe gay people as being drawn to one another and having something in common because they are gay. In addition the presence of other gay people at work is described as being valuable. It seems as though the participants who express some unease about other people knowing they are gay particularly welcome the presence of other gay people. There is an indication from the participants' accounts that being in environments where there are other gay people helps reduce anxiety about receiving negative reactions from others and also reduces feelings of isolation.

Having role models who are gay is viewed as being important. Some of the participants indicate that it is helpful to learn from other gay people at work. This includes learning about how other people manage disclosure. There is a suggestion that learning from other gay people is not just confined to disclosure because some of the other participants talk about the value of mentors who are gay. Given the apparent value placed on the presence of other gay people at work and on mentors who are gay, it is interesting that in the participants' accounts only one person talks about being a role model for other gay people. It seems perhaps surprising that there is less emphasis or apparent recognition on the value the participants could themselves hold for other gay people.

The overriding notion from the participants' accounts is that they experience being a woman as separate from being gay and separate from being professionally successful. What is really interesting about how the participants talk about being a woman is the suggestion they have a lack of connection to their sense of being a woman. The majority of participants indicate that being a woman plays less of a role in how they view themselves and in their experiences at work than being professionally successful or being gay. This lack of connection to being a woman is suggested across the participants' experiences. Sometimes it is only hinted at and sometimes it is more explicit. Examples include not defining oneself as a woman, dismissing the importance of gender, and feeling different to other women. Some of the participants indicate they are not able to relate to other people's ideas of what it is to look and behave as a woman. It seems that for some of the participants it is difficult to have a comfortable sense of being a woman because they see themselves as being different to ideas they hold about what it means to be a woman.

This apparent lack of connection to being a woman expressed through the participants' experiences is also a surprise because it contrasts with many of the participants' initial statement about how important being a woman is to them. In the data collection form only one participant says being a woman is of low importance to her. However in the interviews the participants' accounts do not indicate that being a woman is of high importance to them.

Interestingly there is a noticeable absence of commentary from the participants about a sense of connection and support between women and no mention of female role models. This seems striking because it contrasts with the strong sense of connection with other gay people. However overall the participants' accounts of being a professionally successful gay woman do not include as many experiences which they link to being a woman as they do to being gay. This absence of commentary on relationships with other women therefore fits in with the wider picture presented. It seems that being a woman is not central to many of the experiences the participants talk about nor central to how they view themselves in the workplace.

The participants describe using a variety of strategies to deal with challenges they encounter at work as a gay person or as a woman. What stands out is the emphasis the participants place on these strategies rather than the emotional consequences associated with difficulties. It seems that in response to challenges there is a tendency for the participants to focus on what they can do to manage the situation rather than focus on the negative impact which difficulties can have on themselves. In many cases the strategies they use seem to be intended to protect their self-esteem by limiting the impact of any negative emotional consequences.

The participants describe a process of considering how they could do things differently in order to get around problems and it seems they choose actions which fit with their values and priorities. These strategies include looking forward to a time in the future which seems less threatening, concentrating on achievements and seeking support from others. The participants also describe a process of deciding whether to challenge others when they experience difficulties relating to gender or sexual identity and their decisions seem to be partly linked to the perceived effort involved in doing so.

There are occasions when the relevance of gender and sexual identity in their professional lives seems to be dismissed by some participants. This is suggested by comments that they would have had the same professional achievements had they been a man, that being a woman is not going to limit them despite men and women being treated differently, not caring about being a woman if other people do not care and thinking that people do not care if others are gay. There is some question whether some of these dismissals are coping strategies.

Overall though it seems that identifying as being gay is a consideration for many participants in their professional lives. This consideration of sexual identity is suggested not only by their management of disclosure but also by their descriptions of some preventative strategies they use in order to try and avoid encountering problems at work due to being gay. These strategies include choosing workplaces where there are other gay people or people they think will be open minded. This suggests that some participants could experience some limitations in their professional lives due to the risks they perceive they may encounter at work as a gay person.

Chapter 4 Discussion

Introduction

This chapter begins by considering the extent to which the findings of this research can be transferred beyond the participants in this study. The limitations of this research are also addressed. Reflections on the research are provided through methodological, procedural, personal and epistemological reflexivity. There follows a discussion of how the key issues from this research relate to existing literature and theory. The ways in which this study has implications for therapeutic work with clients and for work beyond clinical practice are discussed. This chapter concludes with suggestions for further research and a conclusion for the research.

Transferability and Limitations

With eight participants this study is representative of the sample sizes found in IPA studies (Collins & Nicolson, 2002; Hefferon & Gil-Rodriguez, 2011; Smith & Osborn, 2008). I recognise that with a sample of eight there are limits to how much the findings can be transferred beyond the participant group. However IPA studies do not set out to make generalisations (Clarke, 2009).

Throughout this research I have tried to be transparent about my thinking and the actions I have taken. In the 'Reflexivity' in this chapter I reflect on decisions I have made and the influence I have had on this research. My thinking has developed over the course of completing this research and when we engage with reflexivity our thoughts and views will change (Mckay, Ryan & Sumsion, 2003). I have also reflected on the limitations of this research. Readers need to be aware of these limitations so they understand the context and scope of the research. I have reflected on who may have been excluded from taking part because of terms I have used for this research or how I recruited. For example I chose to use the term gay woman for this research. This may have excluded some women because they choose not to use this term and may not think the term gay woman is inclusive. The use of terminology is therefore a potential limitation of this research. My reflections on the decisions I have made including use of the term gay woman and the implications these decisions have for the research are included in 'Procedural reflexivity' later in this chapter.

A limitation with my sample is the breadth of diversity. A criticism levied at psychological researchers is their tendency to investigate the lives of white, well-educated, middle class people (Anderson & Croteau, 2013). Inadvertently my research has continued this trend and as a result this research has not considered ethnicity and class. All the participants are white and educated to postgraduate level. I did not set out to have a homogenous group in terms of ethnicity and education. Smith and Osborn (2003) point out that samples in IPA studies tend to be homogenous but this was not my intention in terms of socio-economic variables or ethnicity. Efforts were made to recruit participants from a range of backgrounds. Recruitment materials were distributed in different geographical areas and in areas with a business and social focus. I may have been able to increase the diversity of my sample if I had distributed recruitment materials in more ethnically diverse areas.

The lack of ethnic diversity in my sample group and the implications this has for the research needs to be considered from a social justice point of view. Social justice work involves knowing how society advantages and disadvantages particular groups of people as well as taking action to empower those who are being disadvantaged (Goodman et al., 2004). There is an overlap here with intersectionality. Intersectionality involves looking at how forms of oppression and privilege within society impact on people (Moradi, 2017) as well as challenging forms of social inequality (Grzanka, Santos & Moradi, 2017). Therefore an intersectional approach to research needs to consider the inequality and power found within social categories (Else-Quest & Hyde, 2016). Readers of this research need to be aware that this study does not address social advantage and disadvantage with regards to race and ethnicity.

White privilege, that is the advantages afforded to white people (Davis & Gentlewarrior, 2015; Dottolo & Kaschak, 2015; Nkomo & Al Ariss, 2014) was not explored in this research. Participants were asked to state their ethnicity and nationality but this was not raised explicitly during the interviews and did not emerge by itself and so did not feature in the analysis. How white privilege may impact the participants' identity and their experiences as professionally successful gay women is therefore unknown.

Social disadvantage occurs through racism which exists within society (Pieterse & Powell, 2016; Quraishe & Philburn, 2016) including the LGBTQ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Queer) communities (Ghabrial, 2016). The sample group is exclusively white and experiences of racism do not feature in this research. The experience of these participants as professionally successfully gay women is therefore presented here in a limited context. Other researchers in the LGB field have commented on how their research is limited by a lack of ethnic diversity (Calzo, Masyn, Austin, Jun & Corliss, 2017; Higgins, Sharek & Glacken, 2016; Thomeer, Reczek & Umberson, 2015). One may wonder if the lack of ethnic diversity in the sample group is not surprising as racial inequality in employment is present in the United Kingdom (Ashe & Nazroo, 2015; House of Commons, 2017) and black and ethnic minority staff are underrepresented in senior positions (Cabinet Office, 2017; NHS Equality and Diversity Council, 2016; Pendleton, 2017). Further research is needed to explore how ethnicity impacts and intersects the lives of professionally successful gay women.

Despite my efforts to recruit in a variety of locations and using different means my sample is not diverse in terms of socio-economic status. There is a degree of sameness to the participants' occupations. They are all employed in 'professional' occupations according to the Standard Occupational Classification (Office for National Statistics, 2010) and they are all highly educated. This sameness fits with IPA which looks for homogenous samples (Smith & Osborn, 2003). However the research question is applicable to a broader socio-economic range than is sampled here. Diversity in terms of socio-economic status may have been improved had there been greater explanation of the term professionally successful. I intended the term to be inclusive and for participation in the research to be open to anybody who thinks of themselves in this way. On the recruitment advertisement I included the question 'Do you consider yourself to be professionally successful?' A more diverse sample in terms of occupations may have been achieved if I had made explicit that there was no other criteria for professional success than the participant's opinion.

The lack of diversity in terms of socio-economic status is important to consider because it could be argued that the participants hold socially privileged positions in terms of their educational attainments and occupational status (Kirby, 2016). This type of social privilege did not arise during the interviews and was therefore not explored in relation to identity negotiation. Readers of this research are therefore not informed as to how social advantage of this kind may affect these participants' experiences as professionally successful gay women. This is something for further research into the lives of professionally successful gay women to address. Further critical reflection on the terms used within this research and the limited socio-economic and ethnic diversity in this study are included in the 'Reflexivity' which follows.

Convenience sampling (Battaglia, 2011) was included in the participant recruitment strategy as flyers were handed out near to LGB venues and adverts placed through LGB organisations. Kuyper, Fernee and Keuzenkamp (2015) argue that recruiting at LGB venues introduces a bias into the research because of the implication that participants are part of the LGB community. It could be argued that a limitation of the research is the participant group is partially made up of a convenience sample rather than being a sample of the general population (Kuyper, Fernee & Keuzenkamp, 2015). However it is recognised that recruiting LGB people for research can be challenging due to the stigma experienced by these populations (Averett & Jenkins, 2012; McCormack, 2014; Wood et al., 2016). In light of this challenge I think it was important that I maximised opportunities to reach potential participants particularly as I did not have a research budget to pay for recruitment advertisements. I therefore think that advertising through LGB organisations and handing out flyers near to LGB venues were useful additions to my recruitment strategy.

Reflexivity

Methodological and Epistemological Reflexivity

Reflecting on the demographics of the sample group and how power and privilege relate to different identities has led me to further consider intersectionality. The participants' relation to power and privilege is complex. Issues of power and privilege are evident in relation to heteronormativity and gender (Case, Hensley & Anderson, 2014) and arguably the participants are disadvantaged as gay women by heteronormativity and to some extent by constructs of gender. However they may be advantaged in some respects by their socio-economic status and their ethnicity (Roysicar, 2008; Stone & Black, 2005).

The complexity of intersectionality has not been fully addressed by this research. This research has focussed on the multiple co-existing identities of 'professionally successful', 'gay', and 'woman'. However the participants' experiences as professionally successfully gay women may be shaped by their membership of other social groups. Each of these multiple identities could be subject to different degrees of privilege and power which may have an impact on the individual's experiences. The decision to focus on the identities of 'professionally successful', 'gay', and 'woman' has implications for the research. It means that these identities are foregrounded. The reader is therefore offered a particular perspective of intersectionality. However the fact that this research focuses on the particular experiences of the participants as professionally successful gay women is in keeping with IPA. This is because IPA is idiographic (Eatough & Smith, 2017) and focuses on particular experiences (Larkin & Thompson, 2012; Smith et al., 2009).

I do recognise though that a different research question could have foregrounded other identities and offered a different perspective on intersectionality. The size and therefore scope of this research was limited. This meant it was not possible to explore how the identities of ‘professionally successful’, ‘gay’, and ‘woman’ interact with other identities or how this interaction impacts on the participants’ experiences as professionally successful gay women. Further research is needed to understand this.

Intersectionality is recognised as being important in this research but intersectionality is not without its problems (Ludvig, 2006). Identity is complex due to the number of different social groups that people belong to (Roccas & Brewer, 2002) and intersectionality is problematic because the differences people have are endless (Ludvig, 2006). Understanding intersectionality is therefore difficult because “it is impossible to take into account all the differences that are significant at any given moment” (Ludvig, 2006, p. 246). In addition Sanchez-Hucles and Davis (2010) explain that although people have multiple identities other people may respond to a limited number of these. Some identities are not visible and some may be seen by others as being more significant in particular circumstances (Sanchez-Hucles & Davis, 2010). The limitations of addressing intersectionality are therefore recognised in this research.

This research has a social justice agenda and it can be argued that the complexity of identity and intersectionality poses challenges for social justice work. Whitcomb and Loewy (2006) acknowledge it can be difficult for social justice advocates to make sure they fully represent the groups they are working for. This is because the diversity within these groups needs to be acknowledged so that all members of the group regardless of race, ethnicity, economic status etc. may benefit from the advocacy work (Whitcomb & Loewy, 2006). This research set out to provide knowledge about the experiences of professionally successful gay women but as explained in ‘Transferability and Limitations’ the diversity present in this research is limited. This means that the social justice implications for this research are limited as this research has not addressed sources of social advantage and disadvantage such as ethnicity and economic status.

The difficulty of fully representing particular groups as stated by Whitcomb and Loewy (2006) is compounded when conducting LGB research because sexual identity is complex (Callis, 2014; Galupo, Mitchell & Davis, 2015; Preciado & Johnson, 2014; Savin-Williams, 2014) and the LGB population is difficult to define

(Ginder & Byun, 2015; Meyer & Wilson, 2009; Zea, 2010). These difficulties mean the use of terminology for sexual minority research is a complex issue. A critical discussion of the terminology used in this research is provided in 'Procedural Reflexivity'.

The process of presenting the participants' experiences in a manner which felt fair and meaningful was far more difficult than I imagined. As I engaged with interpretation during the analysis I felt a sense of responsibility to stay true to the participants' accounts and also to make some overall meaning from their accounts. I repeated the process of analysing the participants' transcripts in order to ensure my analysis stayed close to the participants' accounts and that my interpretations were suitably tentative. Presenting the findings in a comprehensive manner was not easy and was complicated by seeing there were a multitude of ways in which the findings could be presented. Initially the way I organised the themes was guided by the structure of my interview questions. I then revised the structure of the themes in order to try and present the findings in a way which I felt more closely represented the participants' accounts.

It has been pointed out that when using IPA, researchers need to be careful when choosing analytic themes so that researcher bias is kept to a minimum (Collins & Nicholson, 2002; Smith et al., 1999). Inevitably my questions and my analysis have shaped the findings. As Salmon (2003) states "results of psychological research reflect the researcher as much as the researched" (Salmon, 2003, p.26). IPA is a subjective method and it is recognised that if the research were to be duplicated by another researcher they are very likely to conclude with different findings (Brocki & Wearden, 2006). I am sure another researcher would not produce exactly the same findings as me but I am confident that my diligence to the process of IPA has produced an understanding of the participants' experiences which is meaningful and worth knowing. This is discussed later when the implications for this research are considered.

When I reflected on the process of completing the analysis my attention was drawn to the fact that the participants differ in the degree to which they disclose their sexual identity to others. This means that they describe very different experiences. At times I felt this caused the analysis to be particularly complex. However I think it would have been a mistake to have limited my sample to people who manage their sexual identity in a similar way. As noted in the 'Introduction' chapter there is more to the experiences of gay people than how they manage disclosure and to have chosen the degree to which people disclose to others as a criterion for taking part would have felt unnecessarily restrictive.

As I reflected on my role in this research and how I may be influencing the process I thought about my interview questions. This was particularly on my mind during the analysis stage when I queried whether I had asked the participants enough about professional success and whether different questions would have provided greater depth. As discussed in the 'Methodology' chapter, the interview questions were chosen to prompt the participants to talk about experiences which would help me answer my research question. On reviewing my interviews I concluded that the participants had ample opportunities to comment on professional success and so I decided it was not necessary to re-interview the participants.

A concern I had throughout the analysis was whether I was doing it 'right'. Did the way I organised the findings into themes make sense? Did the findings answer my research question in a way that was meaningful? Was I doing justice to the participants' accounts? These and a multitude of related concerns were in my thoughts right up to writing the 'Discussion' chapter. I had to remind myself throughout the process that ultimately there is no one 'right' way in which the analysis could have been completed. There are many ways for analysis to be done poorly but my preoccupation with getting the analysis 'right' was not helpful. I have tried to do justice to the social context of the participants' experiences and explain why they think and feel the way that they do. The limitations of both a word count and of needing to be selective about what to present meant it was only ever going to be possible to present a much edited version of the analysis of the participants' accounts.

From interviewing the participants through to writing this 'Discussion' chapter I have continued to try to make sense of the participants' accounts and I hope this commitment to understanding and portraying their experiences in a meaningful way is evident to the reader. In my research diary and in supervision I have been honest about my hopes, concerns and thoughts. These reflections have helped me to consider my role in this study and how I have influenced the research process. Throughout the write up of the research I have tried to show my thinking, acknowledge the different ways in which this research could have been done and explain the reasons for the many decisions I have taken along the way.

Procedural Reflexivity

The research question for this study is ‘what is it like to be a professionally successfully gay woman?’ I advertised for participants on the basis that these are not contentious terms and I thought that the wording used on my recruitment materials was sufficiently explanatory. The fact that the participants responded to the recruitment advertisement which asked ‘are you a gay woman’ and ‘do you consider yourself to be professionally successful’ shows that they self-identify with these descriptions. However having completed the research it now seems worth reflecting on these terms because they seem less clear and not as inclusive as they did at the start.

I recruited participants on the basis that they consider themselves to be professionally successful and I set no other criteria for this. This was intentional because as explained in the ‘Introduction’ chapter this research uses a subjective view of professional success. As the research progressed however I noticed that I had a somewhat uneasy relationship with the term. I wondered whether my choice of research topic led other people to think that I viewed myself as professionally successful and I felt uncomfortable with this. I am at the start of a second career and would not consider myself to be professionally successful. My reaction to the term made me consider whether some other people could also feel uneasy associating themselves with this description. I wondered if using this term could have unintentionally excluded some people from the research. I now think the term could have benefited from further explanation.

Reflecting on my choice of the term gay woman for this research I have given further thought to the use of sexual identity terminology and the political implications of particular labels. The deconstructive approach to gender and sexual identities as used in Queer Theory is critical of identity categories (Ward & Jones, 2010). Defining and labelling sexual identity can be problematic for a number of reasons. Labels can be useful but they can also be simplistic and not do justice to how complex the matter is (Duxbury, 2014). One of the reasons why categories are complex is because for some people sexual identity is not stable (Diamond, 2005) and can involve changing identities multiple times (Rust, 1993). This fluidity can include changing ones sexual identity label or changes in sexual attraction or behaviour (Diamond, 2000).

Understanding sexual identity labels can also be confusing because labels do not have universal meanings. Different people can have different meanings for the same label (Gray & Desmarais, 2014). For example women who identify as lesbian may or may not have exclusive attraction or sexual behaviour with other women (Diamond, 2000; Kitzinger & Wilkinson, 1995). In addition some people do not label their sexual identity (Debord, Fischer, Bieschke & Perez, 2017; Westwood, 2016).

For research there are practical reasons why the sample and the phenomenon under investigation needs to be defined (Flick, 2007; Tracy, 2013) and IPA involves the use of homogenous samples (Heffron & Gil-Rodriquez, 2011; Smith & Osborn, 2003). Therefore this research needed to use terminology to define the participants that were sought but to do so is difficult given the complexity of sexual identity labels. Meyer and Wilson (2009) argue there is not one right way to define the LGB population and state because of this researchers need to justify the way they have chosen to define their research sample.

As stated in 'Personal Reflexivity' earlier in this chapter I chose to use the term gay woman for this research because it is my personal preferred term and I see it as being inclusive of other identity labels such as lesbian. There are reasons to use this term beyond it being my personal preference. The term gay is used by some women (Eliason, 2014), some people identify as a gay woman (King & Stoneman, 2017) and other researchers have used the term gay woman (Bergan-Gander & von Kurthy, 2006; Cartier & Grossman, 2013; Erlandsson, Linder & Haggstrom-Nordin, 2010; Sharples, 2016; Smalley, Warren & Barefoot, 2015; Wolfe, 1992). The term gay can refer to women as well as men (Marinucci, 2010; Richards & Barker, 2016) and is used by lots of young women (Richards & Barker, 2016). Preference for the term gay instead of lesbian was also found by Traies (2016) amongst older women.

However the term lesbian is used by some women and "for some lesbian is an important identity" (Richards & Barker, 2016, p. 124). Lesbian is a gendered term used to differentiate between male and female homosexuality (Marinucci, 2010) and there is a political history to this term (Zita, 1981). The establishment of lesbian identity was linked to the growth in women's rights which led to the emergence of lesbian feminism (Marinucci, 2010). The term lesbian is a political choice for lesbian feminists who see it as a rejection of heteropatriarchy and as an allegiance to other women (Wilkinson & Kitzinger, 1994). Terminology is therefore important and Young and Meyer (2005) make the point that oppressed groups including sexual minorities have campaigned over terminology.

Many different terms can be found within the literature. As noted above whilst some researchers use the term gay woman other researchers use the term lesbian (Bariola, Lyons & Leonard, 2016; Sagie, 2016; Wood, 2016; Van Parys et al., 2016) or lesbian women (Chonody, Woodford, Brennan, Newman & Wang, 2014; Hendy, Joseph & Can, 2016; Mize, 2016; Sabin, Riskind & Nosek, 2015). Other researchers have used the term lesbian in conjunction with other sexual identities. For example some researchers have focused their studies on lesbian and bisexual women (Morandini, Blaszczynski, Costa, Godwin & Dar-Minrod, 2017; Munson & Cook, 2016; Polek & Hardie, 2017; Simoni, Smith, Oost, Lehavot & Fredriksen-Goldsen, 2017) or lesbian, bisexual and queer women (Deacon & Mooney, 2017; Logie & Earnshaw, 2015; McClelland, Rubin & Bauermeister, 2016; Ruppel. Karpman, Delk & Merryman, 2017) or lesbian, bisexual, queer and pansexual women (Baldwin et al., 2017).

Using appropriate terminology in relation to sexual identity is complicated (Debord, Fisher, Bieschke & Perez, 2017) and researchers use a variety of terms and these can be poorly defined (Eliason, 2004). The issue is further complicated by the fact that researchers adopt different definitions. For example some researchers have used the term sexual minority women which they have defined in different ways. It has been defined as female identified lesbians, bisexuals and transgender women (Barnett, Bowers & Bowers, 2016), lesbians, bisexual women and women who partner with women (Niles, Valenstein, Bedard-Gilligan & Kaysen, 2017), lesbian, bisexual, mostly heterosexual (Everett, McCabe & Hughes, 2016) and lesbian, bisexual and other queer-identified women (Johns, Zimerman. Harper & Bauermeister, 2017).

In order to address the complications surrounding sexual identity terminology some researchers use one term but they state the reasons why labels are problematic and explain how their chosen term is intended to include people who may use another term (Ellis, 2015). This practice of explaining the difficulties and limitations of the terminology used in research is seen in some studies where the acronym LGBT is used (Parent, Deblaere & Moradi, 2013; Rossi & Lopez, 2017; Shipherd, 2015; Willis, 2017) as these categories are recognised as being problematic and inadequate (Fassinger & Arseneau, 2007).

Given the diverse ways in which people describe their sexual identity, researchers' chosen sexual identity categories will not capture how everybody sees themselves (Vrangalova & Savin-Williams, 2012). Examples of the range of sexual identities can be found in the research of Galupo, Mitchell and Davis (2015) who identified eight primary sexual identities and 27 secondary identities, and Greaves et al. (2017) who identified 49 sexual orientation categories. No matter what terminology is used or what definitions are given for the terminology, some people who researchers may wish to recruit for their studies may not identity with the sexual minority terms used (Meyer & Wilson, 2009).

A further difficulty regarding the use of terminology is that literature searches for LGB research are complicated by the number of different terms used (Lee, Ylioja & Lackey, 2016). I noticed this when I was conducting my literature review. I had to search using a variety of terms in order to look for research pertaining to gay women. I have considered this in relation to my own research and the search terms which will enable it to be found in the future.

For the title of my research I stand by the use of the term gay woman as it is my preferred term. However on reflection I think I could have been more explicit about the sample I sought to recruit and more mindful about how identity terms can exclude people. In needing to define my sample I will be excluding people who do not label their sexual identity, people who are perhaps questioning their sexual identity and unsure of identity labels and people who use a different term to the ones I have used. For the recruitment materials it may have been helpful for me to include the term lesbian to ensure that I was not excluding people who use this term instead of gay. Other researchers have used the terms lesbian and gay women (Lacome-Duncan & Logie, 2016; Puckett, Horne, Herbitter, Maroney & Levitt, 2017; Westwood, 2017).

I have also reflected on my use of language in relation to the category ‘woman’. I started this research thinking that this term was unproblematic and did not need explanation. I have referred throughout this research to ‘being a woman’ without commenting on how this may relate to the experience of transgender women or to people who identify as non-binary. None of the participants identified as such and so these identities were not considered in the analysis. In the context of this research ‘being a woman’ refers to the participants’ experiences as cisgender women. It is therefore a limited portrayal of ‘being a woman’. I do not assume there is only one way to be or experience being a woman and I do not assume that ‘woman’ refers only to cisgender women.

Reflecting on my use of language I have also given thought to how I have ordered identities in the term professionally successful gay woman. I chose this order because I felt it flowed the best. It was not meant to be a hierarchical order and so the position of professionally successful at the beginning was not meant to emphasise this identity above the others. I have wondered about what the order meant to other people. I do not have an answer for this but I think it may have been interesting to ask the participants about this to find out if the order of identities meant anything to them.

It was not my intention for this research to focus on disclosure. As stated in the 'Introduction' chapter a lot of the existing literature focusses on disclosure and in so doing does not address other areas of life for gay people. However I included questions about disclosure in the interview because it would have seemed amiss to not ask about this as disclosure is documented in the literature as being part of gay people's experiences (Sabat, Trump & King, 2014; Schneider, 2016; Stenger & Roulet, 2017).

Personal Reflexivity

One aspect of reflexivity is for researchers to consider their relationship with the participants (Esin, 2011; Jones & Forshaw, 2012) and this is something I have thought about. As a gay woman I initially thought interviewing women who were also gay would give me a sense of sameness to my participants. Certainly I could identify with some of the issues they raised in relation to being a gay woman. However I think the notion of a sense of sameness is complicated. On the one hand researchers may identify as insiders in relation to their participants due to a shared group identity (Burns, Fenwick, Schmied & Sheehan, 2012; Gair, 2012). On the other hand the insider-outsider binary is problematic (Breen, 2007; McNess, Arthur & Crossley, 2015). There could be a number of reasons why researchers and participants are both alike and different and the researcher and participants have different roles in the research process (Hayfield & Huxley, 2015). So whilst there was a degree of sameness with the participants I recognise that this sameness is limited.

My identity as a gay woman may have played a part in the researcher-participant relationship. In the information I sent to participants before they agreed to take part I declared my interest in this research topic. From this I think it is possible the participants may have made an inference about my sexual identity. An assumed sameness with me could have affected their decision to take part or affected how they chose to respond in the interview. If participants felt I could personally relate to certain experiences they may have opened up more or they could have limited their answers because of an assumption about an unspoken shared understanding. I was particularly aware of this when participants were discussing how they manage disclosure of their sexual identity at work. I wondered if participants were thinking that I had personal experience of making disclosure decisions. This was because I could relate to the topic and I wondered if my familiarity with disclosure came across to the participants. I was careful to not assume that I knew what the participants were talking about when they discussed experiences I could personally relate to. I tried to remain neutral and not let my own views become apparent. When the participants spoke about experiences or aspects of themselves which resonated with me I found these were the snippets of dialogue that stayed with me. This highlighted to me the need to ensure that during the analysis, interview data did not get assigned particular significance because it had resonated with me personally.

I think that my identity as a trainee counselling psychologist impacts on this research. Building a rapport and connection with someone you have just met is an important first step in research interviews (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). This is something which I felt comfortable with as there was a feeling of familiarity with meeting someone new and asking them questions about themselves. I think from my point of view this helped the interviews feel relaxed. Likewise being used to encouraging people to talk about themselves and being curious about the meanings people make from their experiences also brought some familiarity to the interviews from my clinical work. I use a collaborative approach as a clinician and I adopted this same approach in the interviews as both the participants and I worked to understand their experiences. At times I was aware though that I started to bring my clinical thinking to mind during the interviews. This happened for example when participants talked about styles of thinking which seemed to impact on their well-being. I managed this by reminding myself of the interview schedule which helped me to concentrate on how the participants were responding to the question I had asked.

My thoughts on the impact and importance of this study have changed throughout the research process. I started out feeling strong in my convictions that research was needed to explore the lives of professionally successful gay women for the reasons I have outlined in the 'Introduction' chapter. I then had something of a crisis of confidence when I had analysed the transcripts and was trying to identify the major themes. I felt unsure of what I had found out, queried whether I had discovered anything new and questioned how my findings relate to the practice of counselling psychology. On writing the 'Discussion' I feel I have come full circle. I am back to feeling strong about the worthiness of this research and I can see this study highlights issues which can arise in therapy and in contexts beyond this.

I think that being able to personally identify with the topic under exploration has helped maintain my interest and enthusiasm for this piece of work. LaSala, Jenkins, Wheeler and Fredriksen-Goldsen (2008) state that LGBT researchers completing research in this field may feel a personal connection to their work and I think this connection has formed part of my commitment to this research. Conducting research on a topic that fits with your interests and motivation can aid the commitment and sense of achievement with the work (Doherty & Chen, 2016; LaSala, Jenkins, Wheeler & Fredriksen-Goldsen, 2008) and this has been the case for me. I also think being interested in this work myself is important beyond helping me to complete it. I believe that my interest will help me to make other people interested in this research (Phillips & Pugh, 2005).

Significant Findings and Contributions

This study provides some support for the existing literature on the sense of difference to others and identity threats which can be felt by gay people, on the management of identity threats and the problematic nature of both heteronormative environments and a binary way of thinking about gender. This study presents some differences to the existing literature on gender as the majority of participants indicate that gender is not a source of discrimination at work nor a basis on which they form relationships with others at work. A surprising notion to emerge from this research is that the participants seem to be less connected to being a woman than to being gay or being professionally successful.

The following discussion about how the participants' experiences relate to theory and research is structured in three main parts; 'Professional success', 'Being a gay woman in the workplace' and 'Identity as a woman'. Many of the pertinent points to arise from this research relate to one of these areas which is why the discussion is structured in this way. It should be noted that there are overlaps between these sections such as the participants' use of coping strategies and a discussion of these strategies features in all three sections. Reference is made throughout to Identity Process Theory (IPT). As IPT is a socio-psychological model of identity and identity threat (Breakwell, 1986, 2014; Jaspel & Cinnirella, 2011) it serves as a useful guide to understand how the participants' identities as professionally successful gay women may be constructed and negotiated. This is because IPT recognises the salience of social contexts and pays particular attention to how threats to identity are managed (Breakwell, 2014).

Theory and Literature

Professional success.

The personal meaning of professional success.

Participants in this research define professional success in different ways. These different markers of professional success seem to revolve around doing something which provides meaning to their lives or a sense of pride. This fits with the existing literature on success and the move from an objective definition based on status to a subjective definition based on personal meaning (Grimland, Vigoda-Gadot & Baruch, 2012; Hall & Mirvis, 2013).

The use of professional success to enhance self-esteem.

Some of the participants indicate they use their professional success to help them manage a sense of threat that they experience to their gay identity. It seems useful here to consider Identity Process Theory (IPT) the origins of which lie in the premise that in order to understand identity it is necessary to understand how people react when they feel their identity is being threatened (Breakwell, 1986, 2014). One of the features of identity which IPT draws attention to is self-esteem (Breakwell, 1986). The participants' use of their professional success to help them feel better about themselves links into Breakwell's work on self-esteem. Breakwell argues that when people experience a threat to their self-esteem one way to deal with this is to "refocus attention upon some other element of identity and inflate its value" (Breakwell, 1986, p.101). Whilst this process does not have a direct effect on the aspect of identity that was under threat, it works as a coping strategy because the threatened aspect of identity does not stay as the main focus of attention. Using this strategy therefore protects an individual's self-esteem (Breakwell, 1986). There are examples of this refocussing strategy in some of the participants' accounts. The participants who indicate they feel uneasy about being gay explain they use the good feeling they have about being professionally successful to help them feel better about themselves.

A desire to protect self-esteem also seems to feature in some of the participants' accounts of being ambitious. It is suggested that feeling different to other people can drive ambition to be professionally successful. The participants describe being professionally ambitious which is not in itself a surprising notion and supports the findings of Ball (2015) who found women to be ambitious and aspirational towards their careers. However what is interesting about some of the participants' accounts of being ambitious in their professional lives is that this seems to be linked to a feeling of being different to other people because they are gay. This seems to form part of the wider picture that professional success is used to improve and protect self-esteem.

Initially the apparent success of this strategy to use achievements to improve self-esteem does not seem in keeping with Griffiths's (1995) work on self-identity and self-esteem. Griffiths dismisses the notion that working on achievements is the best way to improve self-esteem. Griffiths argues social relationships are very important to self-identity and explains that people have to interact with many different groups, some of which they will be readily accepted by and some they will not. According to Griffiths, the groups which people find accept them, do so because the person is valued and as a result that persons achievements are valued. Griffiths explains that "people who believe themselves loveable regardless of any particular achievements will be able to value whatever it is that they can do" (Griffiths, 1995, p.116).

However Griffiths's (1995) argument that it is unsound to solely rely on achievements to improve self-esteem does resonate to an extent with the findings of the current study. There is an indication that professional achievements help increase self-esteem to a certain extent but for some participants, negative evaluations of self remain. It seems that professional success can only do so much to improve self-esteem which resonates with Griffiths's argument that achievements alone cannot form self-esteem.

The value of being able to reminisce on professional success.

There is a suggestion from the participants' accounts that professional success will be of value to their well-being in the future. This is because some participants explain their professional success gives them something they will be able to look back on in the future and which will make them feel good about themselves when they are older. This is an example of reminiscence being linked to well-being. There is some overlap here with the existing literature because in therapeutic work it is acknowledged that positive reminiscence can be an effective intervention for depression in older adults (Cappeliez & Robitaille, 2010; Latha, Tejaswini, Sahana & Bhandary, 2014). There is a suggestion from the participants' accounts that some of them find it beneficial to know they have created positive life events which not only help them to feel good now but which they think will also help them in the future. The different ways in which professional success is used in relation to self-esteem seems important to take note of. This is discussed at the end of this chapter in 'Implications for Counselling Psychologists'.

Being a gay woman in the workplace.

Heteronormativity is problematic.

Within the participants' experiences there are a number of different ways in which heteronormativity seems to be problematic particularly with regards to disclosure which is discussed in the following section. A common thread between these different problems is the sense of unease or anxiety felt by many of the participants either because of feeling different to others or expecting disclosure of sexual identity to be problematic. Anxiety about being gay and feeling different to other people is well documented in the literature. It features in the developmental process of identifying as gay (Sengers, 1969), gay identity developmental models (Cass, 1979; Chapman & Brannock, 1987), minority stress theory (Meyer, 2003) and literature on threats to identity (Breakwell, 1986). The participants' experience of anxiety also supports the existing literature on managing sexual identity at work and disclosure (Croteau, 1996; Chung, 2001; Griffin, 1992; Lidderdale et al., 2007).

Disclosure of sexual identity.

In the literature, disclosure is portrayed as an issue for gay employees (Baker & Lucas, 2017; Schneider, 2016; Van Laer, 2018). Some of the participants' descriptions of managing their sexual identity at work support the complex procedure outlined in the theoretical model of workplace sexual identity management of Lidderdale et al. (2007) as some participants describe repeatedly making decisions about disclosure, using different strategies to disclose and reflecting on how well these strategies work for them. However this research shows that participants evaluate the outcome of disclosure at work in diverse ways. Some participants think disclosure will lead to negative reactions from others whilst some participants indicate they feel more comfortable being open about their sexual identity, and also that they think being open can prevent people gossiping about them. The differences in evaluation that underpin disclosure are discussed later on when implications for practice are considered.

It is interesting that some of the participants talk about feeling anxious when they disclose their sexual identity at work even though they have never experienced any negative reactions from other people. As noted in the analysis it seems the absence of previous negative experiences is not enough for them to feel comfortable when they disclose they are gay. The expectation remains that other people will react negatively. This seems to support Griffiths's (1995) work on stereotypes and how easy it is for beliefs to remain in place. Griffiths argues that "people tend to hold on to beliefs, even if they have been given good reason to discard them" (Griffiths, 1995, p.96). Griffiths's reasoning for this is that people pay more attention to incidents which confirm their beliefs than they do to incidents which disprove them. However this explanation does not fully explain the expectation by some of the participants that other people will react negatively because some of them have never experienced a negative reaction.

This continued anxiety may start to make sense though if we consider that the absence of direct discrimination may not in itself make for environments where people can flourish. Milton (2016) points out that it is not helpful to only think about negative reactions to sexual identity as a phobia. There is more to consider than homophobia. As Milton neatly states "the idea that all we need to do is not hate people and not beat them up is simplistic" (Milton, 2016, p.93). Some participants express there are times at work when they do not feel comfortable being themselves because they are concerned how others will react if they know they are gay. This fits with Milton's assertion that "people only thrive when they are understood and the space is safe for them to be who they want to be" (Milton, 2016, p.93). The participants' experiences suggest that an absence of homophobia in the workplace is not enough for some participants to feel at ease about their sexual identity at work and that heteronormativity can cause unease. The problematic nature of heteronormative environments has been highlighted by research into discrimination which found that gay people may be subject to subtle forms of discrimination, referred to as 'microagressions'. This type of discrimination encompasses the use of heteronormative language and behaviours (Duffy, 2010; Gray, 2103; Nadal et al., 2011). The participants' accounts raise the question of what can be done to challenge heteronormativity but also how well known is it within workplaces that this exists and that it can be problematic for people. These questions are addressed at the end of this chapter when the implications for this research are discussed.

The participants describe using a number of different strategies to manage their sexual identity at work; covering (which involves secrecy), being implicitly out and being explicitly out. These match the strategies documented in the literature (Griffin, 1992). The participants who use the strategy of covering indicate that one motivation for secrecy is being fearful of negative consequences for their career if they disclose they are gay. There is a suggestion that for some of the participants, professional success comes with a cost of sacrificing authenticity. This links to the work of Griffiths (1995) who explains if acceptance is viewed as being conditional and people have to act as though parts of themselves do not exist this produces feelings of being inauthentic. Griffiths argues that authenticity and self-esteem are linked and this is supported by minority stress theory (Meyer, 2003) which documents the psychological costs of dealing with negative social attitudes. The fear experienced by some of the participants in relation to disclosure at work suggests there is a need for organisations to ensure not only that sexual orientation is not a barrier to career progression but that employees have confidence in this. This raises the question of what helps people to believe that aspects of themselves such as sexual identity are not a threat to their career.

Perceptions of difference.

This research shows that participants perceive experiencing difference to other people in diverse ways. Some participants indicate they are uncomfortable being different to other people because they are gay or because they think their appearance is different to other women whilst others explain they are comfortable with these differences. The positive view of experiencing difference links into Breakwell's (1986) work on distinctiveness and her argument that people like being different to other people as long as this difference is "positively valued" (Breakwell, 1986, p.72). It could be suggested that construing the experience of difference in a positive way helps self-esteem particularly as this way of thinking means difference is not acting as a catalyst for anxiety. The impact which views on experiencing difference seem to have on feelings of well-being is worth noting and is discussed at the end of this chapter within 'Implications for Counselling Psychologists'.

Managing current difficulties by looking to the future.

Negative social attitudes about an identity component such as sexual identity constitute a threat to identity (Breakwell, 1986). The participants' accounts indicate they use a range of strategies to deal with these threats to identity and self-esteem. Some of the participants indicate they find it helpful to look forward to a time when they perceive the threat to themselves will be less. It seems this helps them to manage the anxiety or difficulty they are currently experiencing.

This supports the work of Markus and Nurius (1984) on 'possible selves' which is a strategy to help protect self-esteem. 'Possible selves' are descriptions of how we may be in the future. Markus and Nurius argue that ideas about 'possible selves' are important because they provide motivations for behaviour in the future as well as a means to understand how people currently think about themselves. The participants' use of strategies which involve positively thinking about the future also resonates with research which links hope and optimism with resilience (Carver, Scheier & Segerstrom, 2010) as imagining life being better in the future helps people deal with current stress (Kwon, 2013).

Using intra-psychic strategies to manage threats to identity.

The participants' accounts indicate they use a variety of intra-psychic strategies to manage threats to themselves. This is evident when the participants talk about how they deal with receiving negative comments from others because they are gay. One strategy used is to dismiss the importance of negative comments about being gay. It could be suggested this has echoes of denial which Breakwell (1986) categorises as a deflection strategy and involves denying facts as well as the emotions which are elicited. Breakwell (1986) explains some intra-psychic strategies involve a process of re-evaluating identities as a means to protect self-esteem. There are hints in some of the participants' accounts that they devalue aspects of themselves, particularly in relation to being a woman. This is discussed later in the section 'Dismissing the relevance of gender'.

According to Breakwell (1986) self-efficacy can also be used as an intra-psychic coping strategy to protect self-esteem. Self-efficacy refers to an individual's belief in their ability to manage particular situations (Benight & Bandura, 2004) and is recognised within IPT as an important aspect of identity to consider when thinking about identity construction and threats (Breakwell, 1986). It could be argued that the participants in the current study are well placed to use self-efficacy as a means to protect self-esteem. This is because successful use of self-efficacy as a coping strategy relies on it being able to be used in contexts which hold social value, such as employment, and for the individuals using it to have some autonomy, control and resources (Breakwell, 1986). There are examples in the participants' accounts where they seem to demonstrate their use of autonomy and control such as the practical ways in which they solve problems. Also many of the participants talk about challenging others when they are treated differently to other people because they are gay or a woman. A recurring notion through the participants' accounts is that they often seem to focus on what they can practically do in response to difficulties rather than the emotional impact of the difficulty. The participants' emphasis on how they can manage difficulties seems to highlight the importance of their self-efficacy.

However it seems there are some differences in the participants' belief in their self-efficacy. For example the participants differ in how they evaluate future threats. A fear of rejection or difficulties is cited by some as a cause of anxiety in relation to disclosing their sexual identity at work and is described as part of their reasoning for favouring secrecy at times. In contrast, other participants indicate they hold positive views about their ability to deal with such difficulties and in so doing it seems they experience less anxiety. This belief in their ability to deal with difficulties links into the literature on resilience which shows that self-efficacy is a protective factor for psychological well-being (Tusaie & Dyer, 2004). Not knowing how disclosures will be received seems to be a cause of anxiety for some participants which fits with models of anxiety that see unease with uncertainty as one of the causes of anxiety (Dugas & Robichaud, 2012). Expectations of rejection because of one's sexual identity have been linked to lower degrees of self-efficacy for a range of coping strategies (Denton, Rostosky & Danner, 2014).

Benefits of social support.

The participants' experiences highlight how much the presence and support of other gay people at work is valued. For some participants this is because the presence of other gay people eases their anxiety about disclosure. This fits with Breakwell's (1986) work on intragroup coping strategies where group support is used to manage a sense of threat. The participants' experiences suggest there can be a sense of connection with other gay people due to a shared sexual identity. Some of their experiences suggest that recognition of a shared sexual identity aids friendship or can lead to an empowering sense of support from knowing that other gay people are present. In addition it seems that having role models or mentors who are gay is viewed as being valuable. The value which the participants place on relationships with other gay people is in keeping with the literature on social support which asserts that relationships aid psychological health by providing a sense of connection to others and reducing stress (Cohen, 2004). Amongst the LGB population, affirming relationships and social support have been linked with well-being (Graham & Barnow, 2013; Snapp, Watson, Russel, Diaz & Ryan, 2015).

Identity as a woman.

Gender binary can be problematic.

This research indicates the participants have a lack of connection to the sense of themselves as women. There are incidents in the participants' accounts where it seems that certain ideas about gender make it difficult for them to connect to being a woman and these are discussed in the following sections. I would argue this lack of connection to being a woman stems from the problematic ways in which gender is constructed through ideas about masculinity and femininity. As outlined in the 'Introduction' chapter, gender is a social construct (Berkowitz, Manohar & Tinkler, 2010; Lorber, 2006; Popescu Ljungholm, 2016) and so reflects the dominant ideas in society about what it means to be a man or a woman (Holmes, 2007; Ridgeway & Correll, 2004; West & Zimmerman, 1987). Looking back at ways in which gender has been thought about at different times, this lack of connection to being a woman could be said to reflect the liberal, reformist feminist argument that the self is not gendered (Griffiths, 1995). However, this idea along with the opposing idea of the radical, separatist feminists that the self is gendered were superseded in the 1990's by ideas about identity which did not centre on a core self (Griffiths, 1995). So instead of thinking about whether the self is gendered or not it is more helpful to think about the self being constructed. This construction takes place under particular conditions which means that identity, including gender, is influenced by political structures found within societies (Griffiths, 1995). Therefore in order to make sense of the participants' lack of connection to being a woman it is helpful to think about the social processes which may have had some influence. This is where it is useful to think about how gender is constructed and also how gender is often thought about in binary terms (Goffman, 1977; Gal & Irvine, 1995).

As discussed in the 'Introduction' chapter, concepts within identity can be somewhat problematic as they lack a common definition and are used to describe different things. This confusion extends to gender. As Butler (1999) points out, the word 'woman' has been used as if it represents a single identity when in fact it does not. Gender intersects with numerous other identities and is constructed differently in different social and historical contexts. Therefore there is no one way to be a woman (Butler, 1999; Crenshaw 1991). Yet gender can be discussed as if it were not a problematic concept and a binary way of thinking about gender can be taken for granted and not challenged. As noted in the 'Reflexivity' section of this chapter I have reflected on my use of the term woman in this research. The difficulty with thinking about gender in terms of a male-female binary is that it centres on rigid ideas about what it is to be a man or a woman or in other words what constitutes masculinity or femininity. This raises the question of how ideas about gender affect people's ability to connect to being men or women.

Feeling different to other women.

When some of the participants talk about appearing different to other women they seem to be drawing on ideas about gender which centre on a male-female binary. There are examples where the participants seem to have difficulty in relating to a particular idea of what it is to be a woman. When ideas about what it is to be a woman are based on this binary way of thinking, when people can only be one thing or another, the category 'woman' is limited (Butler, 1999) and it seems from the participants' experiences that it can exclude some people. This seems important to reflect on. It seems that binary ideas about gender can pose a threat to some people's identity and as Breakwell (1986) argues threats to identity can be damaging to self-esteem. The problematic nature of how gender is often thought about is commented on by Milton (2016) who states "the construction of gender in our society sets men and women up for all kinds of mental health problems" (Milton, 2016, p.93). The participants' accounts suggest that thinking about gender in a binary way and being subjected to other people's expectations of a gender binary is linked to having difficulty with connecting to being a woman. This in turn seems to be a reason why some participants feel different from other women. This is important to note because there is an indication that for some participants this sense of difference impacts on self-esteem.

Dismissing the relevance of gender.

There are some significant differences between the participants' experiences and the literature on women and work. Most of the participants state they have not experienced gender as a source of difficulty for them at work. It seems as though for many of the participants their gender is not an issue at work. Overall the participants' experiences of being a woman at work seem contrary to much of the literature which highlights the prevalence of gender as a discriminatory issue in the workplace (Unison, 2016; Yong Kim, Longacre & Werner, 2016) and the fact that women are underrepresented in senior positions at work (Thornley & Coffey, 2011). It is interesting to reflect on whether the lack of connection the participants seem to have to being a woman is in any way relevant here and whether this could play a part in their perception of the relevance of being a woman at work.

Within the participants' accounts there are occasions when the participants seem to actively dismiss the relevance of being a woman to their professional lives. Some participants seem to do this when they talk about how men and women can be treated differently at work. Dismissing the relevance of their gender could be viewed as a strategy to protect self-esteem if it helps to dismiss the threat posed by women being treated differently to men. This is in keeping with Breakwell's (1986) work on intra-psychic coping strategies. Breakwell argues that when a threat to identity requires an identity component to change, the identity principles of self-esteem, distinctiveness and continuity can be protected by reducing the value attached to this particular identity component.

According to Breakwell (1986) coping strategies are acts or thoughts which aim to remove or change threats to identity. Breakwell argues that even if someone is not aware of their intention to deal with the threat, their thoughts or actions can still be regarded as a coping strategy. If being distinct from other people is viewed negatively or not valued, it can be a threat to an individual's self-esteem and so distinctiveness can be a threat to identity (Breakwell, 1986; Jaspal & Cinnirella, 2010). When some of the participants dismiss the relevance of being a woman it is as if they are dismissing their distinctiveness and it therefore does not have the chance to become a threat to them.

The lack of connection to being a woman which is suggested by many of the participants' experiences initially seems contrary to the literature on the relevance of gender. There is the argument that sex is a 'master status' and is always present in social interactions (Ridgeway & Correll, 2004) which means people will be focused on gender. However Deutsch (2007) argues that gender is not relevant in every social interaction and so there will be situations where people do not think about gender. The participants' accounts suggest they go one step further than this and actively dismiss the importance of gender at times.

Gender roles.

Another area where the participants' experiences differ to the existing literature concerns gender roles. Overall there is an absence of commentary from the participants about gender roles. An exception to this is when Kelsie talks about being different to other women. It seems that in order to make sense of being a confident woman Kelsie likens herself to men. This is in keeping with the work of Koenig, Eagly, Mitchell and Ristikari (2011) who found that people link characteristics such as assertiveness and independence with men rather than women.

Associating characteristics with either men or women is one of the ways in which a gender binary can be problematic because it can undermine how women are thought about. As Deutsch (2007) explains, the problem with thinking about gender in a binary way is that it maintains gender inequalities because the categories of men and women are valued differently. Eckert (2014) also argues that ideas about femininity and masculinity are linked to power hierarchies. It seems important to pay attention to characteristics being associated with a particular gender because of the potential for assumptions to be made about people. Koenig et al. (2011) found that as well as assertiveness and independence being linked by people to men these characteristics are seen as being linked to leaders. If leadership qualities such as self-confidence (Hart et al., 2014; Kirkpatrick & Locke, 1991) are linked to men and not women one might wonder about the potential impact this has on women aspiring to be leaders.

The existing literature on women and work indicates that gender is a significant issue and yet overall the participants' accounts do not support this. In the literature, women are consistently reported to be underrepresented in senior management roles (Ibarra & Petriglieri, 2015; Mavin, 2006) and due to ideas that women do not have the characteristics necessary to be leaders, people can be prejudiced against women (Bosak & Sczesny, 2011) and towards women who hold leadership roles (Eagly & Karau, 2002). One of the participants, Pippa, talks about being the first female board member and so there is a suggestion here that women are underrepresented in senior roles. However overall the participants do not talk about gender being a barrier to career progression. It seems striking that they do not talk about this. The reasons for this absence are not clear although as suggested earlier, one might wonder if it relates to the fact that being a woman does not seem to be central to many of the participants' experiences of work.

It is surprising that the participants' experiences differ so much to the existing literature on gender roles. Across the participants' accounts overall there was a lack of commentary about how the participants thought they were perceived at work as women. Some research into women and management has identified that successful women can be disliked by other women (Mavin, 2006). The reasoning here is that in order to be successful and compete with men, women have to behave in a ruthless manner and are not supportive of other women (Gini, 2001). Overall there is a lack of commentary from the participants on relationships between other women at work and no sense that being professionally successful leads to difficult relationships at work with other women.

With the participants' lack of commentary on other women at work there is very little said in their accounts about support from other women and no mention of female role models and mentors. This seems surprising given the richness of the participants' accounts of relating to other gay people. It also seems surprising because it has been noted that a lot of research into women's experiences of management talks about solidarity behaviour between women and there is an assumption that women will support other women and seek out female role models (Mavin, 2006). Only one participant, Esther, comments on women at work supporting each other. The reasons for this lack of commentary on other women at work from the participants are not clear but it feels important to reflect on. Feeling a sense of belonging to a group or not belonging, is an important identity process (Griffiths, 1995) and so the absence in the participants' accounts of relating to other women seems striking. One might wonder if this lack of commentary on relationships with other women is linked to the lack of connection the participants seem to have with being a woman themselves. Given that many of the participants seem to dismiss the importance of gender in their experiences perhaps this lack of commentary on relationships with other women is not so surprising.

Implications for Counselling Psychologists

This research raises a number of issues which have implications for counselling psychologists in clinical practice. It also raises issues which are relevant beyond the confines of therapeutic work. The participants' apparent lack of connection to the sense of themselves as women which is suggested throughout this research draws attention to how restrictive ideas about gender can be. From the participants' experiences it seems that notions of masculinity or femininity, of what it means to be a man or a woman, and ideas about gendered appearance or behaviour can be unhelpful. The fact that the majority of participants seem to find it difficult to connect to being a woman highlights how potentially problematic a concept that of 'woman' can be. It is important that counselling psychologists are aware of this because of the potential impact on psychological well-being. The participants' experiences suggest that restrictive ideas and expectations about gender can have negative consequences for self-esteem. It may therefore be helpful for counselling psychologists to be mindful about ideas of gender if this seems pertinent to a client's current difficulties.

The participants' experiences suggest that difficulty relating to particular ideas about women can result in them seeming to create distance from this aspect of themselves. It seems that this distance can for some invoke feelings of difference to others which again can impact on self-esteem. I would argue there is a role for counselling psychologists to help people challenge restrictive ideas about gender and to explore alternative understandings of gender. There is also scope for counselling psychologists to raise awareness beyond therapeutic spaces of how problematic ideas about gender can be. Unless restrictive ideas about gender are challenged they remain as a source of potential threat to some people's identity and self-esteem.

The negative consequences of binary ideas about gender also highlight the problematic ways in which difference can be thought about. Feeling different to other women and also feeling different to other people because of being gay are experiences which crop up throughout this research. Some participants indicate they view the experience of difference in negative ways and this seems to impact on their self-esteem. As previously stated in connection with ideas about gender, there is an opportunity for counselling psychologists to enter into a discussion with people about difference. When helping people who are uneasy with feeling different to other people it may be helpful to explore their thoughts about difference. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, Breakwell's (1986) work on positive distinctiveness shows how the meaning ascribed to being different to others can impact on self-esteem. By exploring new meanings of difference, including positive aspects of difference, negative appraisals of difference may be re-evaluated which may help with self-esteem.

This research draws attention to how problematic heteronormativity can be and how it can lead to anxiety. The participants' experiences highlight the different strategies they use to deal with heteronormative assumptions. This is helpful knowledge for counselling psychologists to have in therapeutic work but it has implications beyond this. Some of the participants state how discussing the strategies they use made them realise how much they have to actively manage disclosure of their sexual identity at work. The suggestion here is that some participants had previously been unaware of the extent of what they do to manage disclosure. This seems important to note. If the participants themselves are unaware of the extent of their identity management it raises the question of how aware other people who do not need to manage their identity in this way will be. I would argue there is an opportunity for counselling psychologists to raise awareness of how heteronormative cultures can impact on people and be a threat to their self-esteem. This is an example of work that counselling psychologists can do beyond therapeutic spaces.

Social justice is embedded within counselling psychology (Kennedy & Arthur, 2014) and counselling psychologists are well placed to comment on how social factors impact on people (Goodman et al., 2004; Minieri, Reese, Miserocchi &

Pascale-Hague, 2015). Counselling psychologists have the skills and knowledge to influence change in society and a strategic goal of the British Psychological Society is to “maximise the impact of psychology on public policy” (British Psychological Society, 2015, p.3). I would argue that counselling psychologists can make an important contribution to the ways in which identity components such as gender and sexual identity are thought and talked about.

Counselling psychologists engaged with social justice work recognise the ways in which society oppresses marginalised groups and they work to support and advocate for these groups in order to challenge inequality (Israel, 2006; McIntosh, 2015). In addition, counselling psychologists challenge the policies and practices within society which unfairly disadvantage people (Fouad, Gersten & Tuporek, 2006). Working with this social justice agenda I believe there is scope for counselling psychologists to inform organisations about the ways heteronormative language and practices can impact on self-esteem, anxiety, and interpersonal relationships. For example some of the participants explain they are secretive about being gay because they fear that disclosing their sexual identity will have negative consequences for their careers or prompt negative reactions from colleagues. As noted earlier this suggests that changes could be made within organisations so that being gay is not experienced as a threatening experience.

This reported anxiety about disclosing sexual identity has implications for therapeutic practice too. Within therapy people can be helped to be curious about their negative thoughts and anxious predictions. By exploring what has led to these particular evaluations people can start to question their assumptions and identify if there is any unfair bias within them. This can help with people’s perceptions of risk and the likelihood of negative consequences to be evaluated in a considered manner.

It is well documented that gay people access psychological support more than heterosexual people (Cochran, Mays & Sullivan, 2003). There is therefore a need to know about the lives of gay people. As there is a lack of literature on the lives of professionally successful gay women this research can be a resource for people seeking insight into some of the issues which may arise for this population. In particular given the challenges associated with heteronormativity there are opportunities to learn how people manage these difficulties. This research highlights the different coping strategies which the participants use to manage incidents of discrimination and threats to their identity. The participants indicate they use a variety of intra-psychic and intergroup strategies to manage these challenges and it seems that in doing so they work hard to help protect their self-esteem. Knowledge of these coping strategies may help practitioners who are working with clients facing similar challenges. In addition some of the participants emphasise the use of practical coping strategies and it may be useful for practitioners to explore with clients these means of practical coping.

It is also important to note there is more to the participants' experiences than incidents of disadvantage. The participants' accounts also highlight aspects of individual strength and resilience. If attention is focussed on the challenges people face to the detriment of the ways in which people cope, there is a risk that gay people are solely portrayed as a population who struggle. Kwon (2013) states "the psychological helping professions would benefit by being more captivated by the flourishing and strength evident in the LGB population" (Kwon, 2013, p. 379). How gay people succeed is surely worth knowing about particularly when they do so in a society where heteronormativity prevails.

The value which many of the participants place on having other gay people present at work seems worthy of note. The participants describe how a sense of connection to other gay people is beneficial to their well-being by reducing anxiety and preventing feelings of isolation. The participants' experiences seem to reinforce the positive benefits of having role models and mentors available who are gay. Clients who express feelings of isolation may be helped by being aware of the positive benefits of social support and of having a supportive mentor at work. It is interesting that only one participant, Isobel, talks about being a role model and mentor for other people. The value the participants may be holding themselves for other people was either left unsaid or maybe it was not recognised. In therapeutic work it may be helpful to explore with people the value they hold for others as a means to improve self-esteem.

The participants' experiences indicate that their professional identity and their sense of being professionally successful are important to them. This research draws attention to the ways in which professional success is used by some people to bolster and protect self-esteem. It also highlights the inadequacies of relying on achievements alone to feel good about oneself. In therapeutic work it may be useful for counselling psychologists to be mindful of the relevance of professional identity for some people and the different ways in which professional identity can interact with self-esteem.

This research reinforces how complex people's identities can be. Given the potential for identity processes to impact on well-being it is important this is not overlooked in therapeutic work particularly in services driven by diagnostic frameworks and treatment protocols. This research highlights diversity issues regarding both gender and sexual identity and shows how people make sense of their identity in their own way and through experiences they have had. In therapeutic work there will be times when it may be helpful to explore how different identity components came to hold particular meaning for people and to understand the influence of their personal and social contexts. It can be helpful to be curious about people's experiences in order to understand how clients make sense of their experiences and what impact these experiences may have had on their sense of who they are.

In the interview debriefs the participants report they enjoyed the interviews. Many comment there are not usually opportunities for them to talk about their identity. As noted earlier, identity processes can impact on psychological well-being and so it is potentially beneficial for people to be able to engage with this topic and therapy is one place this can be explored.

Whilst this research concerns the experiences of gay women, it is worth remembering that social processes, ideas and behaviours which negatively impact on one population can also negatively impact on another population. So whilst this research highlights the particular experiences of these participants as gay women and the participants talk about incidents salient to their particular identity components, there will inevitably be some overlap with the experiences of other people who have different identities. Therefore this research is not limited to being a resource for people interested in the lives of gay women.

Future Research

There is a dearth of research into the lives of professional gay women and on professional success. There remains a need for further research into these areas to give voice to the experiences of gay women, raise awareness of challenges and issues as well as exploring what we can learn from this population.

This research highlights some particular identity issues which would benefit from further research. Professional success is both a motivator and protector of self-esteem for some of the participants. At the same time, the management of professional identity and sexual identity is an ongoing issue for participants. The interaction between these two identity components is complex. This research has shown they come together in ways which both benefit and threaten the participants' sense of well-being. This research shows that some participants make choices between openness and professional success and make career decisions in light of perceived safety at work as a gay person. What this research is unable to say is how prevalent these issues are. Larger scale studies with a quantitative element would be beneficial to draw further attention to the numbers of people who experience challenges of this kind, how they are dealt with and what would help people in these situations.

This research highlights that many participants have an ambivalent or dismissive attitude towards being a woman. It seems easier for the majority of participants to relate to being gay or to being professionally successful than to being a woman. There is a suggestion this is partly due to ideas and expectations of how women should look and behave. However further exploration of this topic would help clarify the reasons for this. Whilst a study of this size is not in a position to make generalisations to the wider population it does raise the question of how many other women feel like this. Given the reported impact on well-being, it would be helpful to have further research to explore if other women feel this way, what ideas about gender are they using to make sense of their own identity and what would make gender a more accessible and less problematic identity.

Conclusion

The research question for this study is 'what is it like to be a professionally successful gay woman?' In order to answer this question this research had three aims; to explore the experience of being a professionally successful gay woman, to explore the impact of this experience on psychological well-being, sense of self, relationships with others and experience of work and lastly to explore how any challenges which arise from being a professionally successful gay woman are managed.

In summary this research draws attention to the impact heteronormativity can have on gay people. Some of the participants describe feeling anxious in the workplace because of their sexual identity, fearing negative consequences for themselves or their careers if and when they disclose they are gay. However feelings of anxiety are not universal amongst the participants. The participants differ in the sense they make of being different to other people and this seems to affect their choice of strategies to manage the challenges associated with heteronormative environments.

A surprising outcome of this research is the suggested lack of connection to being a woman. The participants' experiences highlight the problematic ways in which ideas about gender can be constructed. It seems that a binary way of thinking about gender may contribute to the suggested difficulty which many participants experience in relating to being a woman.

The participants use a variety of coping strategies to manage threats to their self-esteem in relation to both gender and sexual identity. Some of these coping strategies involve drawing on their sense of being professionally successful. The participants state that professional success is important to them. In addition many of the participants indicate that professional success provides a sense of meaning in their lives and is a source of pride for them. Overall it seems that professional success is beneficial to the participants' well-being.

It is evident that the contexts the participants find themselves in, along with their relationships with others contribute to the sense they make of their different identity components. Overall the participants indicate they have to actively manage their identity as professionally successful gay women on an intra-psychic level. This management reflects the experience and impact of challenge which the participants face by encountering restrictive views of gender and sexual identity from others and from society around them.

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Appendix A Ethics form

Appendix 1.

Ethics Release Form for Student Research Projects

All students planning to undertake any research activity in the School of Arts and Social Sciences are required to complete this Ethics Release Form and to submit it to their Research Supervisor, **together with their research proposal clearly stating aims and methodology**, prior to commencing their research work. If you are proposing multiple studies within your research project, you are required to submit a separate ethical release form for each study.

This form should be completed in the context of the following information:

- An understanding of ethical considerations is central to planning and conducting research.
- Approval to carry out research by the Department or the Schools does not exempt you from Ethics Committee approval from institutions within which you may be planning to conduct the research, e.g.: Hospitals, NHS Trusts, HM Prisons Service, etc.
- The published ethical guidelines of the British Psychological Society (2009) Guidelines for minimum standards of ethical approval in psychological research (BPS: Leicester) should be referred to when planning your research.
- **Students are not permitted to begin their research work until approval has been received and this form has been signed by Research Supervisor and the Department's Ethics Representative.**

Lucy Wilman Research Proposal April 2014

Section A: To be completed by the student

Please indicate the degree that the proposed research project pertains to:

D.Psych

Please answer all of the following questions, circling yes or no where appropriate:

1. Title of project

Negotiating professional identity and sexual identity: The experience of professionally successful gay women

2. Name of student researcher (please include contact address and telephone number)

Lucy Wilman [redacted]

3. Name of research supervisor

Dr Deborah Rafalin

4. Is a research proposal appended to this ethics release form?

Yes ✓ No

5. Does the research involve the use of human subjects/participants?

Yes ✓ No

If yes,

a. Approximately how many are planned to be involved?

1 for pilot and 6 for main study

b. How will you recruit them?

I will ask existing contacts to identify potential participants. Participants will be asked to identify further potential participants (snowballing technique). I will advertise on online forums and through LGB community groups. I will distribute adverts for participants outside gay venues and I will explore the possibility of advertising in the gay press such as DIVA magazine.

c. What are your recruitment criteria?

(Please append your recruitment material/advertisement/flyer)

Participants need to be female and identify as gay. No stipulation will be made as to the extent to which participants disclose their sexuality to others.
Participants need to self-identity as being professionally successful. No external criteria will be applied to being professionally successful. A subjective definition of professionally successful applies and is based on participants own view of their career experience.
Participants need to be at least 18 years of age.

d. Will the research involve the participation of minors (under 18 years of age) or vulnerable adults or those unable to give informed consent?

Yes No ✓

d1. If yes, will signed parental/carer consent be obtained?

N/A

d2. If yes, has a CRB check been obtained?

N/A

(Please append a copy of your CRB check)

6. What will be required of each subject/participant (e.g. time commitment, task/activity)? *(If psychometric instruments are to be employed, please state who will be supervising their use and their relevant qualification).*

Participants will be asked to engage in an interview which will last approximately 60 minutes. A second follow up interview will then be conducted at a later stage.

7. Is there any risk of physical or psychological harm to the subjects/participants?

Yes ✓ No

If yes,

a. Please detail the possible harm?

Emotional distress

b. How can this be justified?

The proposed research will ask participants how they have negotiated their professional and sexual identity and the impact this negotiation has on their psychological well-being, sense of self and relations with others. The process of considering these issues may raise some discomfort for participants. Sinding and Aronson (2003) stress that neither interviewer nor interviewee can foresee the effect questions may have on them. However, the researcher will be aware of the potential impact interviews may have on both parties and will take steps to mediate this risk.

c. What precautions are you taking to address the risks posed?

To manage the risk involved, interviews will be conducted in a sensitive manner, reflecting the researcher's professional code of conduct. The researcher will pace the interviews by taking into account the participant's answers to questions and by checking in with participants about how they are feeling. The emotional state of participants will be monitored throughout the interviews, which will be suspended if necessary. Participants will be told they are under no obligation to answer questions they feel uncomfortable about. Participants will not be pressed to answer questions they do not wish to answer.

Sinding and Aronson (2003) found that the failures which participants talk about in interviews can be given purpose by the researcher. This can be done by explaining to participants that their experiences provide a valuable opportunity for social processes to be better understood. Participants for the proposed research will be provided with information before the interviews, which will fully explain the purpose of the research. The benefits of the research to the gay community and psychologists will also be explained. For example, the proposed research is an opportunity to reach a better understanding of how gay women negotiate their professional and sexual identity and the impact this negotiation has on their psychological well-being and sense of self. Knowledge and understanding of these processes is essential for psychologists to be able to help individuals who are affected by these issues.

Participants will be debriefed after the interviews and asked to reflect on how they found the process. This will be an opportunity to gauge the impact the interview has had on participants. As part of the debrief, participants will be given details of local organisations who offer emotional support. In the event of participants being strongly affected by the interviews, the researcher will allow sufficient time at the end of the interview to allow the participant to become settled before they have to leave.

8. Will all subjects/participants and/or their parents/carers receive an information sheet describing the aims, procedure and possible risks of the research, as well as providing researcher and supervisor contact details? **Yes ✓** No

(*Please append the information sheet which should be written in terms which are accessible to your subjects/participants and/or their parents/carers)*

9. Will any person's treatment/care be in any way be compromised if they choose not to participate in the research?

Yes **No ✓**

10. Will all subjects/participants be required to sign a consent form, stating that they fully understand the purpose, procedure and possible risks of the research?

Yes ✓ No

If no, please justify

N/A

If yes please append the informed consent form which should be written in terms which are accessible to your subjects/participants and/or their parents/carers)

11. What records will you be keeping of your subjects/participants? (e.g. research notes, computer records, tape/video recordings)?

Contact details of participants will be kept in order to arrange interviews. Audio recordings of the interviews, interview notes and transcripts of the interviews will also be kept.

12. What provision will there be for the safe-keeping of these records?

Contact details of participants will be kept separate from all other research material. Audio recordings will be transferred from a recorder to the researcher's computer. Interview notes and transcripts will be held in a lockable cabinet when not in use.

13. What will happen to the records at the end of the project?

Contact details for participants will no longer be kept and interview notes and transcripts will be shredded. Audio recordings of the interviews will be erased. Extracts of the transcripts will be included in the thesis produced from the research. Participants will be informed of this before their interviews.

14. How will you protect the anonymity of the subjects/participants?

At the start of interviews, participants will be asked not to identify individuals or organisations in order to ensure participants and third parties remain anonymous. All names will be changed in the transcripts.

15. What provision for post research de-brief or psychological support will be available should subjects/participants require?

A de-brief will be conducted after each interview and the well being of the participants will be established. Participants will be given the details of local organisations who offer emotional support.

Lucy Wilman Research Proposal April 2014

(Please append any de-brief information sheets or resource lists detailing possible support options)

If you have circled an item in **underlined bold** print or wish to provide additional details of the research please provide further explanation here:

The researcher will monitor participants well being throughout the interview and will check in with participants about how they are feeling if they start to become emotional. In these circumstances, the researcher will ask if the participants would like to take a break or reschedule or suspend the interview.

Signature of student researcher [redacted]

Date 3-4-2014

CHECKLIST: the following forms should be appended unless justified otherwise

Research Proposal	Yes
Recruitment Material	Yes
Information Sheet	Yes
Consent Form	Yes
De-brief Information	Yes

Section B: Risks to the Researcher

1. Is there any risk of physical or psychological harm to yourself?

Yes ✓ No

If yes,

a. Please detail possible harm?

Regarding the risk of emotional distress, the interviews may also impact on the researcher.

There is a potential health and safety risk associated with meeting participants for interviews.

b. How can this be justified?

There is always a risk that the content of interviews may affect the researcher. However, in order for research to take place, this risk is unavoidable. The risk can also be minimised.

c. What precautions are to be taken to address the risks posed?

The researcher will consider in advance how the interview questions may impact on them in order to prepare for topics that may be raised. After each interview, the researcher will reflect on the impact on them and any issues that have been raised for them will be taken to therapy.
The researcher will meet with the participants in public venues where other people are present in the building. The researcher will ensure that a third party at the venue is aware of the researchers and participants presence.

Lucy Wilman

Section C: To be completed by the research supervisor

(Please pay particular attention to any suggested research activity involving minors or vulnerable adults. Approval requires a currently valid CRB check to be appended to this form. If in any doubt, please refer to the Research Committee.)

Please mark the appropriate box below:

Ethical approval granted ✓

Refer to the Department's Research and Ethics Committee

Refer to the School's Research and Ethics Committee

Signature [redacted]

Date 03.04.14.

Section D: To be completed by the 2nd Departmental staff member

*(Please read this ethics release form fully and pay particular attention to any answers on the form where **underlined bold** items have been circled and any relevant appendices.)*

I agree with the decision of the research supervisor as indicated above

Signatur [redacted]

Date 08/04/2014

Appendix B Recruitment advertisement

Are you a gay woman?

Do you consider yourself to be professionally successful?

I am conducting research to find out what it is like to be a professionally successful gay woman

Would you be willing to tell me about your experiences?

I really want your voice to be heard

Your identity will be protected and you will not be named in this research

If you are interested in taking part or would like to find out more please contact:

Lucy Wilman, Counselling Psychologist in Training
City University, London
Email: [redacted]
Tel: [redacted]

This research is being supervised by:
Dr Deborah Rafalin, Senior Lecturer & HCPC Registered Psychologist City University, London Email: [redacted]

This study has been reviewed by, and received ethics clearance through the Psychology Department Research Ethics Committee, City University London.

If you would like to complain about any aspect of the study, please contact the Secretary to the University's Senate Research Ethics Committee on [redacted] or via email: [redacted]

Appendix C Information sheet for participants

Research Information

Thank you for your interest in my research. In order to help you decide whether you would like to take part, I have included here some information about my research and what taking part would involve. I am excited about doing this research and I hope it will capture your interest too. If you have any questions which are not answered here, please let me know.

Lucy Wilman

Counselling Psychologist in Training

Why is this research being done?

I am carrying out this research as part of my Doctorate in Counselling Psychology at City University, London.

When I was choosing the subject for my research, I was struck by how there are many aspects of gay people's lives which have not been researched and how the experiences of gay women in particular have sometimes been overlooked. It is important we know about the lives of gay women, their strengths, the challenges they face and the impact these challenges have on them. It is knowledge such as this which helps to inform others and promote the rights and needs of gay women.

I have chosen to research the experience of being a professionally successful gay woman as little is known about this. I am interested in the ways in which these experiences impact on the individual themselves, their professional lives, their relationships with others and how these experiences are managed.

Who can take part?

For this research I am looking for gay women who consider themselves to be professionally successful and who are over 18 years of age

What will I have to do?

Taking part involves one interview with me which will last for approximately 90 minutes. I will need to do the interviews in person rather than by telephone and we'll arrange a mutually agreed time and place. The interviews will be audio recorded.

Before the interview starts I will ask you to complete a short questionnaire. The answers you give will help me in the interview to better understand your experiences. The questionnaire will also help me demonstrate this research has included the experiences of people from different backgrounds.

Who will I meet?

You will only meet with me. I will be holding the interviews individually so you will not meet anyone else who is taking part in this research.

Are there any benefits to me in taking part?

I hope that talking to me will be a helpful opportunity for you to reflect on your experiences as a professionally successfully gay woman. I am interested to hear about your experience and I hope that talking in a supportive setting will be beneficial to you.

Research such as this has the potential to benefit others by improving the knowledge we have about the lives of gay women. Professions such as mine benefit by having insight and understanding into people's lives. The academic community and wider society benefit by having knowledge into people's lives so that we can be informed about other people's rights and needs. Taking part in this research is an opportunity to help this process.

Are there any risks to me in taking part?

Although I have some set questions to ask you which makes it sound quite a formal process, this won't be like a job interview. I am keen to ensure you are comfortable with the process and you do not have to answer any questions you do not want to. Any interview which is asking people to talk about their lives brings with it the potential to invoke some emotional distress or be unsettling. If you want to take a break or stop the interview, you can do so at any time. I will give everyone who takes part a list of agencies who offer emotional support, in case reflecting on your experiences leaves you feeling in need of some support.

Will I be paid?

I cannot offer any payment for taking part but I will cover travel expenses to attend the interview.

Will I be named in the research?

I will protect your identity so that no one reading the research will be able to identify you. Your name will not appear anywhere in the research.

What if I change my mind about taking part?

If you choose to take part, you can withdraw from the research any time until the research is completed.

What happens to the information I give you?

I will transfer the digital recording of your interview to a CD-ROM which will be kept securely. This recording will only be used for the purposes of this research and will be destroyed once the research process has been completed. The recording will not include your name and will be kept separate from any information which will identify you. I will use the recording to transcribe your interview and I will change any names or details which could identify you.

I will use the transcripts to identify findings from the research which will be written into a thesis and submitted to City University, London. I may include verbatim extracts from the interviews in the thesis. The thesis will also contain anonymized information gathered from your questionnaire.

A copy of the thesis may be held by the library at City University, London.

This may be a printed copy or an electronic version. The thesis may be made available to users of City University library or to the general public who have access to academic material through membership of online databases.

I may use the findings from this research to write articles for academic journals. In this event, the articles would be available to the general public. The same rules of anonymity apply to articles as to the thesis.

Who do I contact if I have any questions about this research?

You can contact me, Lucy Wilman, Counselling Psychologist in Training.
Email: [redacted]
Tel: [redacted]

Who else can I contact?

My research is being supervised by Dr Deborah Rafalin, Senior Lecturer and HCPC Registered Psychologist. City University, London. Email: [redacted]

If you would like to complain about any aspect of the study, please contact the Secretary to the University's Senate Research Ethics Committee on [redacted] or via email: [redacted]

Thank you for taking the time to read about my research. If you would like to take part or have any questions, please let me know.

Appendix D Consent form

Consent Form

This form relates to research being undertaken by Lucy Wilman, Counselling Psychologist in Training, from City University London. The aim of the research is to explore the experience of being a professionally successful gay woman.

Thank you for your interest in this research. This form explains your involvement in the research and asks for your confirmation that you agree to take part. Before signing this form please ensure you have read the sheet entitled 'Research Information' provided by the researcher.
If anything is not clear or if you have any questions, please ask before signing this form.
Taking part in this research involves completing a short questionnaire before being interviewed. The interview will last approximately one and half to two hours. You are not under any obligation to answer any questions in the questionnaire or interview that you do not wish to.

The interview will be audio recorded. The digital recording will be transferred to CD-ROM and kept securely in the researcher's home. The recording will only be used for the purposes of this research and will be destroyed once the research has been completed. The recording of the interview will be transcribed by the researcher and all names and details which may identify you will be changed.

Your identity will be protected and will only be known to the researcher. The exception to this is if you disclose to the researcher any information which leads the researcher to believe that you or someone else is at risk of harm or involved in serious crime. In this event, your details and the relevant disclosure may need to be reported to the appropriate authorities.

This consent form will be stored securely at the researcher's home and will not be included in the written record of the research.

The research will be written into a thesis and submitted to City University London. The thesis may contain verbatim extracts from your interview. The thesis will also contain anonymised information gathered from your questionnaire.

A copy of the thesis may be held by the library at City University London. This may be a printed copy or an electronic version. The thesis may be made available to users of City University library or to the general public who have access to academic material through membership of online databases.

The findings of this research may be used to write articles for academic journals. In this event, the articles would be available to the general public.

The same rules of anonymity apply to articles as to the thesis.

Participation in this research is voluntary and without payment. You are free to withdraw from the research at any time until the research is completed. In this event, the recording of your interview will be destroyed.

Participant's Declaration

Name of participant:

I confirm I have read and understood this form and the information sheet entitled 'Research Information'. I have been given copies of both. I confirm I am at least 18 years of age.

I agree to take part in this research. I understand I can withdraw from this research at any time before the research is completed by contacting the researcher, Lucy Wilman. I confirm I have been given contact details for the researcher and the research supervisor.

Signature of participant:

Date:

Researcher's Declaration

Name of researcher: Lucy Wilman

I confirm I have explained to the participant named above, the purpose of this research and the procedures involved. I have explained the potential risks and benefits of taking part.

I confirm this research will be conducted in accordance with the British Psychological Societies ethical principles for conducting research. I will protect the identity of participants so that they do not become known to third parties. I have explained the exception to this as detailed above.

Signature of researcher:

Date:

Appendix E Demographic data collection form

Dear Participant
Before the start of your interview, I would like to ask you to complete this questionnaire. The purpose of this is to gain some background information about you. This will help me to better understand your experiences when we start the interview. In addition, the information you provide here will help me demonstrate that this research has included the experiences of people from different backgrounds.
The information you provide here will not be used in such a way that will allow you to be identified to others. You are not under any obligation to answer any questions you do not wish to.
Thank you for your assistance.

1. What is your age?

2. What is your ethnicity?

3. What is your nationality?

4. What is your highest educational qualification? (please tick)

GCSE / O Level / CSE	[ ]
A Level	[ ]
Diploma	[ ]
Degree	[ ]
Postgraduate Degree / Diploma	[ ]

5. Are you currently working? (please tick) Yes [ ] No [ ]

If Yes, what is your occupation?

If No, what was your last occupation?

6. What is your legal marital status? (please tick)

Single	[ ]
Civil Partnership / Married	[ ]
Divorced / Separated	[ ]
Widowed	[ ]

7. Do you have any children? (please tick) Yes [ ] No [ ]
If Yes, how many and how old are they?
Number of children
Ages

8. Are you currently in a relationship? (please tick) Yes [ ] No [ ]

9. Please state how you currently define your sexual orientation.

According to the Kinsey scale (1948), in terms of sexual feelings and activity, some people are completely heterosexual, some are completely homosexual and some are between the two. In order to explore the question of sexual orientation further, I would like to ask you to consider activity and feelings separately.

10.(a) Thinking about what you do now, how would you define yourself in terms of sexual activity? (please tick)

Exclusively heterosexual	[ ]
Predominantly heterosexual with a small degree of homosexuality	[ ]
Predominantly heterosexual with a large degree of homosexuality	[ ]
Equally heterosexual and homosexual	[ ]
Predominantly homosexual with a small degree of heterosexuality	[ ]
Predominantly homosexual with a large degree of heterosexuality	[ ]
Exclusively homosexual	[ ]

10.(b) Again considering the present time, how would you define yourself in terms of your sexual feelings? (please tick)

Exclusively heterosexual	[ ]
Predominantly heterosexual with a small degree of homosexuality	[ ]
Predominantly heterosexual with a large degree of homosexuality	[ ]
Equally heterosexual and homosexual	[ ]
Predominantly homosexual with a small degree of heterosexuality	[ ]
Predominantly homosexual with a large degree of heterosexuality	[ ]
Exclusively homosexual	[ ]

11. Please state approximately how old you were when you came to define yourself as gay.

12.(a) To what extent are you ‘out’ to others about your sexuality? (please tick)
I am out to everyone [ ]
I am not out to anyone [ ]
I am selectively out [ ]

12.(b) If you chose selectively out, please state what contexts you are not out in. For example, I’m not out at work.

12.(c). If you are out to some people, how long have you been out for?

13. In general, how important is your sense of being gay to you? (please tick)

Not at all important [ ]
Low importance [ ]
Slightly important [ ]
Moderately important [ ]
Very important [ ]
Extremely important [ ]

14. In general, how important is your sense of being a woman to you? (please tick)

Not at all important [ ]
Low importance [ ]
Slightly important [ ]
Moderately important [ ]
Very important [ ]
Extremely important [ ]

15. In general, how important is your sense of being professionally successful to you? (please tick)

Not at all important [ ]
Low importance [ ]
Slightly important [ ]
Moderately important [ ]
Very important [ ]
Extremely important [ ]

16. Are there any other identities which are important to you? (please tick)
Yes [ ]   No [ ]

If Yes, please state what these are:

17. Would you like to receive a summary of the findings of this research? (please tick)
Yes [ ]   No [ ]

If Yes, please indicate how you would like to receive the summary:
By email [ ]
By post [ ]
If applicable your contact details will be recorded separately.

Thank you for completing this questionnaire

This page will be kept separately from your questionnaire, interview recording and interview transcript.

If you have indicated you would like to receive a summary of the research, please complete your contact details:

Name:

Postal or email address:

Appendix F Interview schedule

As part of the recruitment process for this research, you have confirmed you see yourself as a professionally successful gay woman.

1. What does professionally successful mean to you?

2a. How did you come to see yourself as being professionally successful?
Reasons?
Changes over time?

2b. How did you come to see yourself as being gay?

3. I would like to ask you about three different aspects of yourself; being gay, being a woman and being professionally successful. I am interested in how these aspects impact on your view of yourself and your relationships with others. I would like you to think about these aspects separately and I will first ask you about being gay.

3a. How does being gay make you feel about yourself?
Challenges / Advantages
Impact – Self-esteem / Confidence / Well-being / Relationships / Work
How managed difficulties
Disclosure
Role of disclosure in how you feel about yourself: how feel when out or not?
Effect of different settings on how you feel about yourself as a gay woman? (work / outside of work)

3b. How does being gay affect your relationships with other people?
Challenges / Advantages
Impact – Self-esteem / Confidence / Well-being / Relationships / Work
How managed difficulties

You have told me how you feel about yourself as someone who is gay. I am interested in whether you can add anything if you solely focus on your identity as a woman.

4a. As a woman how do you feel about yourself?
Challenges / Advantages
Impact – Self-esteem / Confidence / Well-being / Relationships / Work
How managed difficulties
Effect of different settings on how you feel about yourself as a woman (work / outside of work)

You have spoken about how being gay affects your relationships. I am interested in whether you can add anything if you solely focus on your identity as a woman.

4b. How does being a woman affect your relationships with other people?
Challenges / Advantages
Impact – Self-esteem / Confidence / Well-being / Relationships / Work
How managed difficulties

I am interested in how being professionally successful impacts on your view of yourself and your relationships with others.

5a. How does being professionally successful make you feel about yourself?
Challenges / Advantages
Impact – Self-esteem / Confidence / Well-being / Relationships / Work
How managed difficulties
Influence of being gay on how you feel about yourself as someone who is professionally successful?
Influence of being a woman on how you feel about yourself as someone who is professionally successful?

5b. How does being professionally successful affect your relationships with other people?
Challenges / Advantages
Impact – Self-esteem / Confidence / Well-being / Relationships / Work
How managed difficulties
Impact on different types of relationships (family/personal/work)
How do these relationships affect how you feel about yourself as being professionally successful?
You've spoken about disclosure. Is there anything you would like to add about how being professionally successful affects disclosure?
(work / outside of work)

6. Thinking about these three identities (being gay, a woman and professionally successful) which impacts the most on how you feel about yourself?

Which is strongest/ most important?
Which impacts the most on relationships? Why is this?
How are these identities linked or separated?

It is documented that some gay women face challenges at work because of their sexuality.

7a.Have you had any difficulties being a professionally successful gay woman?
Impact - How feel about self / Self-esteem, Confidence / Well-being / Relationships / Work
How managed difficulties
You have spoken about disclosure earlier. Can you add anything about difficulties you've experienced from disclosing sexuality at work?
Difficulties from not disclosing sexuality at work?
Are you aware of managing sexual identity and professional identity?
If applicable – How does this management feel?

Just as it is documented that some gay women face challenges in their workplace because of their sexual identity, it has also been documented that some experience advantages.

7b.Can you tell me about any advantages there are to being a professionally successful gay woman at work?
Impact - How feel about self / Self-esteem, Confidence / Well-being / Relationships / Work
Is there anything you add about advantages to disclosing sexuality at work?
Advantages from not disclosing sexuality at work?

8. You have told me about some challenges (and some advantages) you have experienced as a professionally successful gay woman. What role did being gay and being a woman play in these difficulties (and advantages)?
Do you separate or link the two?
Did being gay or being a woman cause more difficulty / advantage?

9. Is there anything else you wish to share about being a professionally successful gay woman?

De-Brief Questions

How has this interview felt?
Do you have any questions or concerns having completed this interview?
How are you feeling now?

Resources

Listed below are the contact details of some organisations who offer support.

ACAS
www.acas.org.uk
Services offered include information and advice to help prevent or resolve workplace problems. Helpline available Mon - Fri 8am – 8pm, Sat 9am – 1pm
Tel: 0300 123 1100

Action for Children
www.actionforchildren.org.uk
Services offered include family support. Tel: 0300 123 2112

British Association for Behavioural & Cognitive Psychotherapists
www.babcp.com
Online directory for BABCP therapists

The British Psychological Society
www.bps.org.uk
Online directory of psychologists offering psychotherapy

The British Association for Counselling & Psychotherapy
www.bacp.co.uk
Online directory of BACP registered counsellors and psychotherapists

Cruse Bereavement Care
www.cruse.org.uk
Helpline 0844 477 9400

London Lesbian & Gay Switchboard
www.llgs.org.uk Helpline available daily 10am - 11pm Tel: 0300 330 0630

London Friend. LGB&T Health & Wellbeing
www.londonfriend.og.uk
Services offered include counselling Tel: 020 7833 1674 and a Helpline on Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday evenings 7.30 pm - 9.30 pm
Tel: 020 7837 3337

PACE
www.pacehealth.org.uk   Services offered include counselling
Tel: 020 7700 1323

Relate
www.relate.org.uk   Tel: 0300 100 1234

Samaritans
www.samaritans.org   Tel: 08457 90 90 90

Stonewall. The Lesbian, Gay & Bisexual Charity
www.stonewall.org.uk   Tel: 08000 502020

Women's Aid
www.womensaid.org.uk   Tel: 0808 2000 247