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A COMMUNICATIVE STUDY OF HUMOR IN A LESBIAN SPEECH COMMUNITY: BECOMING A MEMBER.
THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY, PH.D. 1978

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To my mother, Dorothy I. Painter,
whose unconditional love and support allows me to be all that I can be.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank Professor Leonard C. Hawes for the trust, support, and strength he provided during the doing of this dissertation. Without his guidance, critiques, and at times naive sounding questions, the study would not exist in its present form, if at all. I am particularly grateful inasmuch as for the last year and a half we have been working long distance. One becomes to understand the meaning of commitment from such a relationship.

Professor John J. Makay provided an on-campus support base critical during the months of writing. Professor Makay's candid interpretation of reality and probing questions about whether one does or has sex helped me to clarify my interpretation of what this work is about. Professor Thomas A. McCain trusted all of us enough to serve on a committee of abnormal constitution.

Carolyn Browning not only proofread the dissertation but also allowed me to appropriate the upstairs study and the electric typewriter for over two months. Carolyn taught me that a good friend is a person who will let you talk about something of which she knows little and probably cares less and then tell you it sounds...
terrific.

Extra doses of sanity were provided by my neighbors: Dr. Joseph Kersey, Faith Kersey, and especially, Thomas Carter Kersey. It is rare when one comes to share a sense of family such as we have known.

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To all of the women who helped or emotionally supported me during this work, thanks. I'd like to name and thank each of you but it would take pages and you probably would not like me doing so anyway.

This work is dedicated to my mother, Dorothy I. Painter, who shares with me not only her name but also the constant faith that I can do and be whatever I am capable of doing and being. Thanks for understanding all of those days you wished I would come home and visit but knew that I was dissertationing instead. My father, the late Russell F. Painter, always told me that someday I would go to college. I think he would be surprised that I have done college for this long, but I'm sure he would be pleased. Finally, I would like to acknowledge the late Dorothy B. Thomas who taught me at an early age that living with dignity means being who you are without regret.
PREFACE

All of the names used in this work are fictitious except Meg Christian. (The names used in Meg's account may or may not be fictitious. I do not know.) Names are provided to facilitate reading and not as a means of identification. Since individual personalities are not developed in the study, utterances spoken by the same individual displayed in different parts of the work have been assigned to different names. Informant names are held consistent throughout the work only to provide the reader with a sense of the helpfulness of specific informants. In an attempt not to identify any individual with whom I spoke during the course of the study, I attempted to select popular names believing that they could not be read as identifying any specific individual. I wish that I could name and thank all of the women who have helped me, but I can't because of the problems of being identified as a lesbian. But then, you know who you are.
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INTRODUCTION

The focus of the dissertation is talk which occurs within groups of lesbians when all women present are assumed to be lesbian. Field work was engaged in during 1976-1978 with most of the talk recorded in fieldnotes during 1976-1977. Most of the talk was collected in a lesbian bar, although during 1978 data were also collected in lesbians' homes. In addition, talk and information was generated by informants.

When the study began, the primary focus was one of traditional participant observation. Questions were asked such as:

"What do women say to one another in a lesbian bar?"
"What topics are openly discussed?"
"What does a woman say to successfully pick-up another woman?"

The initial study answered questions concerning what is discussed in a lesbian bar. Feeling that the initial study was inadequate for explaining how and why communicative work functions within a lesbian bar, an ethnomethodological study is undertaken. Questions evolve from the data such as:
"How does one talk like a lesbian?"

"How does lesbian talk work?"

"How does one communicatively accomplish being a lesbian?"

Lesbian talk is interrogated for a number of reasons. First, as naturally occurring talk, lesbian talk, as well as most other common everyday talk, is not usually the subject of investigation. By studying the talk, a contribution can be made to the general knowledge of social science, and more specifically, to ethnomethodological understanding.

Second, lesbians, as members of a counter-culture, are seldom studied within their own settings. Much has been published about lesbians in experimental situations from a psychological perspective. The aim of my work was to investigate lesbians and lesbian talk when the women are interacting in natural (lesbian) settings. Data were collected while lesbians were being lesbians, not psychological clients or sociological subjects.

The lesbian bar and lesbians' homes are settings which are foreign to most readers. The dissertation works to show the reader what, how, and why communicative events occur among lesbians in an attempt to disclose and sustain knowledge and understanding. As researcher and author, I work as a translator for readers by displaying the discourse and explicating taken-for-granted community knowledge.
The order in which different communicative features are displayed is important insofar as each subsequent display is at least partially dependent upon the one which precedes it. The order in which information is presented also is important for the reader to gain a sense of what it is like to become a lesbian; the sequential development of the dissertation is similar to the way in which knowledge and conversation skills are acquired by women becoming lesbians.

Following is a set of definitions which are used throughout. The two accounts after the definitions are provided to give the reader a context in which to read the displayed talk. The accounts are also placed at the end of the dissertation so the reader can use the displayed talk as a context for reading the accounts. Section 2 examines becoming a member of a lesbian community and discusses information necessary for understanding and doing the most complex form of lesbian talk: lesbian humor. Section 3 displays lesbian humor as a means of gaining valid insight about lesbians and as a test of competent lesbian conversational ability.

Definitions

The following terms will be used throughout the text.

Speech Community: A group of individuals who share rules for the conduct and interpretation of speech and
rules for the interpretation of at least one linguistic variety. The existence of a speech community must be viewed as an ongoing accomplishment, not a place.

Member: An individual (usually a lesbian) assumed to have the social knowledge and verbal skills necessary to pass as competent within the lesbian speech community.

Non-Member: An individual (either straight or lesbian) not assumed to have lesbian social knowledge.

Lesbian: A woman who claims or is perceived to have an emotional and/or physical preference for other women.

Straight: An individual who claims or is perceived to have an emotional and/or physical preference for individuals of the opposite sex.

Informant: A member of the lesbian speech community who knows of the study and actively helps by answering questions, providing information, and/or evaluating my work.

Wise: An individual who is perceived to be straight but is verbally treated as a member.

Potential: A woman who is perceived as a possible lesbian-in-the future (or member). The woman is usually unaware of such member perceptions.

Awareness: The first, necessary, instance of lesbian knowledge needed to view oneself as a lesbian or
potential lesbian.

Coming Out: The process through which one "becomes" a lesbian. (A fuller explication is provided in Section 2.)

Talk: Naturally occurring speaking.

Humor: Talk followed by laughter, when the intention of the speaker is to evoke laughter, is the primary form of lesbian humor examined.

Lesbian Humor: Humor shared among lesbians dependent upon shared lesbian social knowledge for its meaning.

Social Knowledge: Conceptions of symbolic relationships among problems, persons, interests, and actions, which imply (when accepted) certain notions of preferable public behavior.³

Lesbian Social Knowledge: Knowledge existing only for and among members. Knowledge, is used throughout to mean shared lesbian social knowledge.

Deviant: A person or group departing from accepted norms or standards of a majority population. From within a specific speech community, one who behaves in a way inconsistent with community social knowledge.

Deviant Talk: Talk which is heard by members as inconsistent with lesbian social knowledge; especially when the topical talk is lesbianism.
Two Accounts

"Tonight is ladies' night. Men - $5.00 cover charge."
The sign was wooden, somewhat weather beaten, and nailed securely to the door. As Sharon reached for the door, she paused. It was early evening and the spring sun could not strengthen her sagging courage or stop the queasy feeling lodged in her stomach. She opened the door and took what she hoped looked like a confident step inside. Blinded! Her eyes, unaccustomed to the darkness, saw only blackness. You can't stand here, her mind screamed. Move! After a couple of hesitant steps, a long wooden bar came into view. "Yeah?" came a soft, slightly southern voice from behind the bar.

"I, ah, I'd like a beer, ah, um, Busch." She accepted the beer and handed the bartender a five dollar bill so she wouldn't have to admit she didn't know the price of a beer. The change was returned. "Thank you." The soft voice was pleasant, but not friendly.

She's only a couple of years older than me, thought Sharon as she watched the bartender walk to her seat at the other end of the bar. Well, I can't stand here. Turning, she noticed that the bar was long and narrow. It was still rather dark with the only light coming from various beer signs and a light hung over a pool table near the front. Four other women besides the bartender were in the bar. Two were shooting pool and laughing with one another, and two were sitting in a booth near
the back of the bar.

Unsure of herself, Sharon moved to a table near the center of the bar and sat facing the bar. Counting her change, she discovered that her beer cost 55¢. Not bad, she thought, at least now I know how much to pay without having to ask. She sat feeling alone and scared, but also excited, and glanced nervously around the room.

She looked at the mirror behind the bar and at the small deserted dance floor. Whenever she looked at the other women, she felt that they averted her eyes. She also had the distinct impression that they were all watching her. I need to be doing something instead of just sitting here. She was drinking the beer much too fast hoping it would calm her nerves. The words, "Gay Bar" kept repeating themselves in her mind. Calm down and be cool, she told herself as she picked up her empty beer can and walked toward the bar. "Another one?"

"Um," she nodded. This time she paid for the beer with exact change and smiled at the bartender. She did not return the smile. She hesitated as she turned back toward her table. Slowly, she approached the pool table. She stood watching the game. Both of the players ignored her. One of the players made a difficult shot, and Sharon said, "Nice shot."

The player glanced at her and then mumbled, "Thanks."

She abruptly turned her back to Sharon and said something softly to her opponent. Suddenly, they both
laughed. Shaken, Sharon suddenly blurted, "I, ah, I'm supposed to be meeting a couple of friends of mine here. Do you know where I could call them? I mean, is there a phone outside close?"

"There's a phone in the back," one of the players said staring directly at her.

"Yeah, but I mean a phone booth, you know, I, ah well, you know . . ." she stammered, letting her voice trail off.

"Down the street by the market." The stare was replaced by a turned back.

"Yeah, well, ok. Thanks. Ought to go call. Ok, thanks."

She turned and moved quickly toward the door forgetting, or not caring about, the nearly full pack of cigarettes she had left lying on the table. Through the door and into the unrelenting sunshine. She hurried down the street in the opposite direction from the phone booths and around the corner to her car.

I made it. I did it and I made it and I've been in a gay bar, a voice sang in her head. Slipping behind the steering wheel, she sat motionless for a few moments as the tension began to drain from her body.

As she started the car, she reached for a cigarette. "Damn," she said aloud.

Inside the bar, the two players, Ann and Betty, looked at each other in amusement. "Looked new to me," said Betty.
"Yeah," Ann answered, "Wonder if she's even out yet."

They both laughed. Calling to the bartender Ann said, "Hey, how about two more." As she paid her friend for the beer, she said, "I think we ran another one out of here."

"Maybe," came the reply, "but I bet that one will be back."

Night Two

The night air was cool for an early autumn evening as Sharon and her three friends approached the door with its wooden sign. Sharon always smiled to herself when she looked at the sign because it kept the interior of the bar safe from outsiders. A place to relax, to be oneself, confident with the marvelous feeling which comes only from being part of a majority.

They entered and paid the 50¢ cover charge they had learned to expect on weekends. Sharon walked to the bar. "A Busch with no glass?" Sharon still liked the sound of that voice although they had never become friends.

"Yeah," she nodded as she looked for familiar faces in the crowd of women which filled the bar.

"Sharon, Sharon," "Man, I haven't seen you for a while."

"Hey, good to see you too," Sharon replied giving her friend an affectionate hug.
"Who are you with? You want to sit with us? We can get some more chairs."

"Ah, Wendy and Carol and Marge. Marge, who used to go with Pat."

"God, I haven't seen her for a long time. Thought they were still going together."

"Well, you know how it goes," Sharon said laughing lightly. "Just a minute and I'll see what they want to do," she added.

Sharon nudged Wendy who was paying for her usual gin and tonic. "Connie's here with some people and wants us to sit with them, ok?"

"Sure," Wendy answered as Carol and Marge nodded. They carried extra chairs over to the table which had been pushed against a booth. Four women including Connie sat in the booth. Sharon crowded into the booth beside her friend, and the others sat around the table.

Connie was introducing her friends, but Sharon wasn't paying attention. She was feeling good inside and comfortable crowded beside her friend in the dark, soft booth. She gazed across the bar to the dance floor and watched eight couples dancing slowly. "And he was killing me softly with his words, killing me softly . . ." sang the jukebox. Such a lazy night for being out, thought Sharon, feeling mellow.

"Hey, Sharon." The words jolted Sharon back into the conversation. "I haven't seen you around school lately.
I looked for you in the journalism building, but I couldn't find you. You still in school?"

"Yeah, but I got closed out of all my major courses so I'm just taking a math course and a history course I need. That and working keeps me pretty busy."

"Yeah, well I hope to see you next term. I have two classes in that building next quarter."

"I should be there. They promised me I could get the classes I need next quarter because I got closed out this time."

"Want to bet on that?" asked Carol, laughing.

"Well, they better let me in something, or I'm going to raise hell."

Sharon looked around the table with what she hoped was a fierce expression. The two women sitting opposite her were whispering to one another about the recent break-up of two close friends. No one was going to challenge Sharon's ability to raise hell with the university.

As the women sat watching six women dance to "Do It Anyway You Want It," the door swung open and members of a local softball team entered.

"Hey, we lost again," shouted one of them as the others laughed. They proceeded to the bar and bought beers.

Moving to a large round table near Sharon and her friends, one of the ball players nodded in Sharon's direction. "How ya doin', J.D.?" Sharon asked.
"Ok, um, yeah."

Another slow song began, and Sharon noticed that the dance floor was beginning to get crowded. I should ask Wendy to dance before too long, thought Sharon.

"Have you seen Pat and Kelly lately?" Connie suddenly asked. "I need to move some stuff and I'd like to use their truck."

"Huuuunnnn?" Sharon asked.

"Have you seen Pat and Kelly?" Connie repeated. Everyone shook their heads "no," as Sharon answered, "Not in a couple of weeks. They're really busy on the farm this time of year." Back into the music, Sharon sang, "And so I fooled around and fell in love . . . ." Wendy looked at Sharon, reached over and playfully poked at her ribs. She hesitated for a moment watching for retaliation, and when none came, kissed Sharon gently on the cheek.

"Such a fine woman," Sharon said to no one in particular, and then she and Wendy grinned at one another as the other laughed softly.

It was close to midnight and the bar had become crowded and noisy. A woman at the table of ballplayers was shouting, "But she was out anyway. I don't know where they get that shit."

"I'm glad we got here when we did," Connie said.

"Yeah, it was real nice of you to come early so we'd have someone to sit with. It's hard to find a seat after eleven," Wendy said smiling at Connie and her friends
in the booth.

"Bullshit," mumbled one of Connie's friends, whose name Sharon had forgotten.

The woman who owned the bar was walking among the tables carrying a tray of drinks. She delivered them to the booth in front of Connie's. "Everything alright here?" she paused by them for a moment and emptied their ashtray.

"Ah, we'll have a couple more," said Sharon nodding toward Wendy.

"Bring me one too."

"Ummm, yeah."

"Ok, that'll be two Lite, one Busch, a Stroh's, and a gin and tonic," she said as Wendy set her empty glass on the tray.

She returned quickly and set each woman's drink in front of her. Sharon paid for her beer and Wendy's drink and Connie paid for her beer and the beer of one of the other women sitting in the booth. The "bullshit" friend paid for her own beer after fumbling through a handful of loose change. She's kind of high, thought Sharon.

"You could always put some of that in the juke box," teased the owner gesturing toward the coins.

"Hell, it ain't worth it on weekends. By the time your songs come up, you've already been gone for an hour." The owner laughed in agreement as one of her friends asked her to dance.
"Just let me put this on the bar," she said waving the tray as she walked away. Sharon looked at Connie's friend. Well, she thought, she may be a little drunk but she's not dumb. Sharon nudged Wendy as she slid out of the booth. "I have to go to the restroom."

"Have a good time," Wendy cheerfully replied.

Walking toward the back of the bar, Sharon noticed a number of women she had not seen before. There sure are a lot of new kids in here, she thought. Up the stairs and around the corner, and "Damn;" there's a line. The two women in front of her were talking.

"Want to come over to my place after the bar closes?"

"I don't know. It's pretty late."

"Well, I'm having a small party."

"Oh? Who's gonna be there?"

"I've asked a few people, ah, ah like Sue and Becky, and ah, I don't really know for sure, heheheh. I've got beer in the frig and plenty of smoke."

"Oh, ok, sure."

"It's pretty crowded around my place. Why don't you just leave your car here and ride with me. I can always bring you back for it later."

"Um, ok. "Hey it's your turn."

As the woman walked into the stall, Sharon looked at the back of the other woman's head. Do people still fall for those kinds of lines?
Returning to her booth, she noticed that two of Connie's friends had left. "We were beginning to give up on you," said Connie.

"Yeah," Marge added. "We were beginning to think you had run off with some young thing you met in the can." They all laughed loudly as Sharon put her arm around Wendy.

"Ain't no way cause I already got the best." Wendy turned and looked at Sharon.

She asked, "Is that why you haven't asked me to dance all night?"

"Ah, sorry. Well?"

"Well what?"

"Well do you want to dance?"

"Sure."

As they walked toward the dance floor, Marge yelled, "She thought you'd never ask."

"I love you," Sharon whispered to Wendy as they began to dance slowly together.

"I know."

At the end of the dance, Sharon saw the owner bring two more drinks to their table. "I ordered for us. You were gone so long I drank mine and yours was almost empty." After Wendy paid for the drinks and they were seated again, Sharon noticed that Connie was gazing around the bar.

"You sure don't see many of the old regulars anymore, do you?" Connie said.
"No," Sharon agreed. "A new bar opened on Cleary Street and a lot of the women are going up there. We went there once and saw Ann and Betty and that whole crowd they run with."

"I've never been there but I hear it's kind of rough," Marge added.

"It is," said Wendy looking at Sharon who nodded. The crowd was beginning to thin out. It was about two in the morning when Connie suddenly asked if anyone wanted to go out for breakfast.

"The old out for breakfast trick, huh."

"No, I mean I'm hungry."

"I could stand to grab a bite to eat," said Wendy.

"Sharon leaned over and whispered to Wendy, "I could stand to grab a bite," in what she hoped was a suggestive tone.

"Watch yourself, pervert, or I won't let you take me home with you," Wendy said loud enough for the group to hear. They all laughed, including Sharon.

Sharon finished her beer and they stood to leave.

"Well, we almost closed it up again tonight," said Marge nodding toward the few women who remained. They walked as a group toward the door. As they passed the bar, the bartender leaned on the counter.

"Goodnight," she said softly and smiled.

Sharon smiled back and stepped out into the now chilled early morning air. Turning to say something to Connie, her eye caught the door and she laughed softly.

"What's so funny?" asked Wendy.

"Nothing," said Sharon, "nothing at all."

"Tonight is ladies' night. Men - $5.00 cover charge."
THEORY AND METHODOLOGY

Overview

The theoretical groundwork comes from the perspective of ethnomethodology. Although the ideas of numerous ethnomethodologists and ethnographers have added to this work, the primary emphasis is that of Harold Garfinkel. Differing perspectives and criticisms are examined. An ethnomethodological study of talk is useful to communication theory because it can execute a different level of analysis than traditional social science. Instead of using talk to make sense of other phenomenon, talk itself is the phenomenon of study. From an ethnomethodological perspective, talk is an ongoing process which constitutes social reality. Social reality exists only through communicative work. Meaning is discussed based upon the indexicality of language and rules are viewed as constitutive.

The method used is participant observation. Participant observation was necessary inasmuch as naturally occurring talk, and particularly humor unflattering to straights, would have been impossible to collect in a laboratory setting. Particular methods and problems of
data collection are discussed as well as validity as it relates to theory and methodology.

**Ethnomethodology.** Garfinkel's definition of ethnomethodology is used. Garfinkel states that ethnomethodology is "the investigation of the rational properties of indexical expressions and other practical actions as contingent ongoing accomplishments of organized artful practices of everyday life." The concept, ongoing, constitutes social reality as a process. Social reality is evidenced only in its analysis. The analysis discloses the artful practices constituting social reality. The term, artful, suggests the learned nature of organizing practices; few individuals can be adept at an activity without practicing it; to perform it "smoothly."?

Indexical statements cannot be made sense of without contextual knowledge about them. Necessary social knowledge may include (1) the specific social setting, (2) the past experiences of the speaker including past social interactions with the other interactants, and (3) the relationship between these and other factors in the speech situation. Highly indexical utterances can be viewed as speech community specific in the sense-making process.

A non-member of the speech community may know the lexicon and grammar, but only members share a sense of social meaning based upon the indexical features. An
example, although simplistic, can be found in idioms. Literal translations seldom provide member meaning for non-members. Further, non-members embedded in the speech community cannot depend on the indexical features for a socially valid understanding. (The valid sense of meaning is interpreted by the speech community member based upon his/her social reality.)

Social interaction constitutes something members recognize. The shared sense of meaning comes primarily from how whatever is going on is going on, not what is going on. How and what can never be entirely independent of one another. How the process of social reality occurs is always a reflexive sense-of-meaning. Consequently, what occurs is constituted in how it is occurring.

Perspectives in Ethnomethodology. Garfinkel's work is primarily a study of methods used by members to make sense of the world. Discussing Garfinkel's ethnomethodology, Filmer states, "Ethnomethodology seeks to ascertain what can definitely be known about the accomplishment of sense in the presentation of accounts of everyday activities in everyday life, by an examination of what is problematic about this accomplishment, and by developing methods for studying the process by which it is achieved." Members make sense by building accounts of social action. Garfinkel uses talk as interpretive methods inasmuch as talk indexes meaningful features of situations. Because of his emphasis upon the indexicality
of talk, Garfinkel shows less interest in examining situations for invariant features than a number of other ethnomethodologists.\textsuperscript{10}

Zimmerman and Pollner are two ethnomethodologists who look for underlying invariance of understanding.\textsuperscript{11} For Zimmerman and Pollner, meaning is newly created in every unique situation. Their seemingly chaotic view of meaning does not imply random, inconsistent interpretation by members. For Zimmerman and Pollner, invariance exists in members' practices. What members perceive in each situation may depend upon individual perception, but the practices used to interpret the perceptions are invariant.\textsuperscript{12}

Other ethnomethodologists investigate situations to find invariance. Sacks states that invariance exists in linguistic structures. Because Sacks studies talk outside of contexts, indexicality was not problematic for him. Cicourel views invariance as existing in basic cognitive procedures. By viewing invariance as existing in cognitive, interpretive procedures, Cicourel can divide sense making practices into the invariant procedures and variant surface rules. Interpretive procedures can be used to perceive unique situations and organize the perceptions into meaningful sense. For Cicourel, cognitive procedures work in contexts but are not context determined.\textsuperscript{13}
A fourth, and less widely held view of ethnomethodology is that of Blum and McHugh. Blum and McHugh see language as an expression of the mind which is not systematically related to external reality. When one examines an individual's talk, one is viewing an expression of a conscious, internal world. Indexicality is not discussed as problematic by Blum and McHugh because they do not claim to provide valid renderings of external situations.

Criticisms of Ethnomethodology. Gleeson and Erben criticize ethnomethodology from a Marxist perspective. Their primary criticisms are

1. Ethnomethodology ignores social features of social changes,
2. Ethnomethodology ignores relationships between meaningful contexts and political processes,
3. Ethnomethodology ignores alternative realities to those features under "analysis."^14

The primary weakness in Gleeson and Erben's piece is their insistence that ethnomethodology should address itself to political questions instead of remaining as an apolitical epistemology. The role of ethnomethodology is not to free individuals from fascist political ideology, no matter how idealistic or pure the idea may sound. When Gleeson and Erben criticize ethnomethodology for totally separating science and capitalism, their argument tells much more about Gleeson and Erben than it does about
The argument that ethnomethodology does not take into account the larger society and works at "reductionistic" activities can be answered by Psathas. Psathas states that if ethnomethodology is criticized for "failing" to understand the larger society, it may be due to the areas ethnomethodologists choose to study, not ethnomethodology itself. Criticizing the interests of investigators can reflect as much on the critic as on the ones criticized.

Gordon also criticizes ethnomethodology from a Marxist position. He states that ethnomethodology assumes that common assumptions produce knowledge. He argues, from a Marxist position, that conflict and contradiction produce knowledge. First, he does not see the similarity between his Marxist conflict and contradiction and Garfinkel's conflict and contradiction existing through breaching experiments. Second, conflict and contradiction do not produce knowledge, they make the knowledge problematic, and therefore, observable.

Gordon states that the mistake of ethnomethodology is linking meaning with contexts and therefore making meaning dependent on context. Regretfully, Gordon does not provide an alternative explanation of meaning. A concept as central to ethnomethodology as indexicality cannot be dismissed by simply labeling it as a mistake.
Particularly intriguing is Gordon's criticism of abstracted theory because it is not useful for "explaining, predicting or controlling human behavior." Through the criticism, Gordon tells his readers that ethnomethodology is not concerned with predicting and controlling. When ethnomethodology is done well, it does not explain, it displays.

The criticisms of Bauman and Ricoeur complement one another. Bauman suggests that ethnomethodology is more consistent with positivism than phenomenology. Ricoeur states that the task of phenomenology is to reestablish objective knowledge based on a pre-objective relation to the objects of scientific investigation. Bauman's argument is based upon comparisons of ethnomethodology with early existentialism. He is not arguing that ethnomethodology should be similar to positivism, but that he interprets it as such. The claim is made based upon the historical comparison with existentialism and his belief that ethnomethodology deals with observable phenomena. Bauman criticizes ethnomethodology for not pursuing concepts of motive.

Ricoeur claims that phenomenology should do what Bauman claims ethnomethodology is doing: focusing on observable phenomena and striving toward objectivity. Ricoeur also talks about motives. Instead of criticizing ethnomethodology for not focusing on motives, he states
that a major contribution of phenomenology is construing the motivational framework on which social entities are based.

Bauman's and Ricoeur's articles should be read together for a full appreciation of the critique of ethnomethodology and phenomenology. The assumptions Bauman criticizes, Ricoeur praises; the points which Ricoeur criticizes, Bauman praises or suggests need to be done. The degree to which the two criticisms complement and, at the same time, contradict one another provides an ironic display of critic interpretive work.

Levels of Analysis. Ethnomethodology studies cut into the chosen area of study at a different level of analysis than traditional studies. Traditional communication studies are defined as most, if not all, quantitative works, and those qualitative works which focus on characteristics, profiles, traits, and variables. Variables often used in traditional communication research include demographic data (age, sex, educational level), psychological constructs (attitudes, beliefs, needs and gratifications), and countable occurrences (time, amount of talk, number of types of utterances). Methods used are primarily empirical and/or experimental. Data are coded and statistically manipulated to discover correlations among variables. Specific methods include the use of questionnaires, interviews, laboratory experiments, and discourse analysis. Most traditional questions
are predictive. Scientists gain knowledge concerning how to make predictions about effective communication and how to identify effective communicators. Overall, the results indicate effective ways of manipulating talk.²⁰

Traditional Social Science. Formal logic and quantitative research are a social reality themselves. Observing any social reality from the perspective of another creates a non-member view of reality.²¹ The difference occurs because the non-member possesses the social knowledge of his/her own social reality, not the social knowledge of the observed reality. When the social scientist ignores the difference, the social reality of the scientist is viewed by the scientist as being superior to the one studied. The sense of superiority occurs implicitly in most traditional social science research and explicitly in certain areas of it.²² Explicit one-up-man-ship is particularly evident in the study of "deviant" speech communities.²³ An implicit sense of superiority can be observed in social scientists' claims that they can know more about a community than members. Traditional social scientists do see things differently than speech community members. The scientific view, however, is from a scientific perspective, not a member perspective. Traditional social scientists see no better or worse than others, only differently. The basic problem is social scientists' claim of having achieved a more valid truth than members.
Social scientists and members view different characteristics of the social world. Social reality makes sense and is interpreted as valid by both social scientists and members. Traditional social scientists look at a dimension of indicators which can be statistically manipulated and interpreted using the logic of probability theory. Ethnomethodologists look at a member dimension and make sense of the talk using speech community logic.

Another major criticism is the use of and construction of operational definitions. Operational definitions are at least one step removed from the actual data or phenomenon to be studied and can be viewed as indicators. Hence, the phenomenon is not studied directly, but is instead measured and discussed in terms of indicators. Ethnomethodology analyzes observable (experienceable) phenomenon directly. Communication scholars interested in ethnomethodology use talk as the primary phenomenon for analysis.

Language and Knowing. Ethnomethodology strives for success, not truth. Success can be defined as displaying the phenomenon such that non-members can interpret the talk and social knowledge similar to members. A success oriented goal seems particularly useful for those engaged in communicative work. Although many persons (including some within the field of communication) view everyday talk as a common-sense activity (and therefore
unworthy of study), the common-sense-ness becomes problematic when one is placed in an unfamiliar situation (speech community). When talk becomes problematic, sense making practices become observable. Consequently, only through the ability to make talk problematic is ethnomet hodological analysis possible.30

Talk becomes problematic when an individual does not possess the taken-for-granted-ness used in everyday encounters.31 Making talk problematic can be accomplished in two ways. One can either attempt to doubt or disregard the taken-for-granted aspects of one’s own speech community, or one can place oneself into a “foreign” speech community.32 The evaluation of this dissertation is based upon whether the careful reader can come to know lesbian sense-making practices. The reader’s gained knowledge should be similar to that of members. Social knowledge can only be constituted through the talk of members. Through talk, one knows speech community. Conversely, through knowing, one can have the ability to do the talk (be a member). Language and knowing cannot be separated on this dimension.33

Meaning. To discuss language and knowing, one must clarify the concept of meaning. To examine how ethnomethodology views meaning, one must discuss the indexicality of language. Indexicality is the extent to which collective and personal histories influence the meaning of a given utterance. All utterances are indexical.
However, some utterances may be so deeply embedded within member's knowledge that indexical properties may not be apparent to members. To view dependent utterances as indexical is to question some aspect of social reality. Furthermore, "when more than one reality is taken into account, when any one statement is examined from the perspective of another, then the universal indexicality of all symbols becomes apparent."35

Examining the indexical features of member talk, and displaying the reflexive use of the talk, makes visible incorrigible propositions. Incorrigible propositions are those member beliefs assumed to be unquestioned and unquestionable.36

In Section 3, incorrigible propositions are displayed through an examination of lesbian humor. Humor is a complex form of talk. To do and understand humor within a community, one must know the language, rules for its use, incorrigible propositions, and sociolinguistic conventions. Social knowledge exists in it's taken-for-granted nature. Other instances of lesbian knowledge will be presented in Section 2. Much of the social knowledge displayed in Section 2 can be displayed in and through humor. However, the reader needs lesbian knowledge to hear lesbian humor as members hear it. How talk is made sense of reflexively as humor is tied to the social knowledge of the speech community.
Rules. One way of examining how humor is accomplished is through the use of rules. Rules are not the rules-of-use linguists or discourse analysts propose. The constitutive nature of rules is emphasized. Constitutive rules are tied closely to the underlying knowledge of a community. The rules become observable ("real") when they are made problematic. One way members can make rules problematic is by breaking them. Rules also become problematic for members when the rules are "broken" by non-members who are unaware of the rule's social existence.

Non-members interested in rules are usually social scientists. For social scientists, rules may not exist except through analysis. Analysis is the only means available to non-members for making the rules problematic. Once analysis is accomplished, however, rules become real for the social scientist. The rules may then be used as conceptual useful tools. The non-member who uses the rules must always remember the rules are products of the analysis and are not "out there" waiting to be discovered. In this way, rules remain tools for use in analysis.

An analogous situation exists between rules and meaning. The rules come to exist or become real through the analysis, but then affect subsequent analysis of social reality. The rules are part of, and at the same time given realness by, the analysis. Talk and meaning
function in much the same way with context. Talk gains a sense of meaning from context. At the same time, talk is a part of the context shaping other meanings.

Rules can be viewed as reflexively constituted in and through the analysis just as meaning is reflexively constituted in and through the talk; rules become real just as social reality becomes real. To question the reality of rules is to question the existence of social reality. Just as there is more than one reality, there is more than one set of rules. Social realities exist in the ways social realities are constituted in and through talk. Rules exist in the ways rules are constituted in and through analysis. Consequently, analysis can be viewed not only as scientific work, but also as members' methods. Members make sense of a situation using rules once the rules have been made problematic. Members analyze the situation when engaging in sense making practices which have been made problematic. Analysis occurs when the normal, smooth flow of social interaction is disrupted, and the socially constituted rules are called into account.

Cicourel's claim that individuals carry around and use learned rules is not much different from claiming that individuals carry around and use a sense of social reality. Claiming that the rules are learned is similar to claiming that individuals learn to constitute social reality in terms of the constituted reality. In
this way, social reality continues to exist because members talk as if it exists. Rules exist because members talk as if rules exist (although members may not be able to state the rules).  

Rules appear in analysis to the extent analysis makes rules problematic. Other elements of social reality become observable when they are made problematic. Rules and knowledge can be made observable by removing the taken-for-granted-ness. Loss of taken-for-granted-ness can occur through analysis or a naturally occurring or planned breach of the members sense of social reality. If rules are analogous to social knowledge, rules also do not exist as "entities out there." Rules are forever changing and shifting much in the same way that social reality is an emerging process. More precisely, social reality exists in and through members' talk and the social knowledge thereby indexed.  

Participant Observation

The primary method used for the collection of data was participant observation. Bruyn states that participant observation can be used as a data collection method for either traditional or non-traditional studies. Non-traditional participant observation studies require the researcher to enter the field without preconceptions about the investigated phenomenon. Traditionally, participant observers have remained separate from the
experience seeking objectivity. Observers looked for particular features of the social setting. Ethnomethodologists use participant observation techniques for entering a community and collecting data but must not engage in surface descriptions and propositional analysis which are often used by participant observers. Ethnomethodologists must respect and often learn to do the reality as members. 46

In the Methods section, a full explication of the techniques are provided. Since the Methods section provides information specific to the study (where and how it was accomplished, problems, solutions), a more general, theoretical stance shall be presented here. Before explaining why participant observation is important for the collection of data, a discussion of some of the important aspects of participant observation are presented. Participant observation is also discussed concerning its usefulness for ethnomethodological studies.

Bruyn states that participant observation can be used to broaden the base of empiricism through the inclusion of a wider range of data and the use of techniques deviating from a more traditional stance. 47 Through participant observation, the observer can experience the ongoing social process in a manner similar to members. 48 An observer spends numerous hours in the field. How long one interacts with members to share member-knowledge can depend upon how different the
community is to one's own, how readily one is accepted by members, and a number of other factors.) By expanding the concepts which may be examined, participant observation can be used to generate data useful for grounding social theory.\(^4\)

Discussing the importance of field work, Glaser and Strauss state, "The evolving systematic analysis permits a field worker quite literally to write prescriptions so that other outsiders could get along in the observed sphere of life and action."\(^5\) Ethnomethodologists are not usually interested in prescriptive rules. One of the goals of ethnomethodology, however, is to display the community such that non-members know the community from a member perspective. In this way, a non-member might gain enough insight into a particular community to be able to "pass" in it.

Participant observation is a way of gaining access to an unfamiliar community to study how members talk naturally. Assumptions of the meanings of words and the ways words are used cannot be made without direct contact with members. The observer must engage in ethnomethodology within the community. Because of the indexicality of language, how one does construction of social reality is dependent upon contextual features. When the ethnomethodologist enters a "foreign" community, she becomes a part of the context. Since social reality is a process, "entering into" the context does not "damage" the data
because the observer (and/or participant) becomes a part of the reality.

Techniques participant observers use heuristics for conceptually defining are a community ethnomethodologically. Participant observation allows for systematic collection of talk vis-a-vis field notes and tape recordings. In this way, participant observation differs from member observations. The observer is aware of more and/or different information than that needed to pass in a community. An observer is also aware of the information on a level difference from members. Observers reflect upon the knowledge; members live it. Consequently, an observer explicates how a community is accomplished through talk differently than members. The ethnomethodologist explicates the emergence and maintenance of the community. Members explicate "what" is happening, but now "how" it is happening.

If ethnomethodologists did not view reality differently from members, self reports could be taken from members, either in the form of interviews or written reports. Informants are, however, important to the observer. Informants (members who will tell the observer about the community) are one important element for the participant observer (and/or ethnomethodologist). With or without informants, the observer must enter the community to observe directly. Ethnomethodological interpretations can be applied to both the information
gathered from informants and from direct observation and interaction.

Necessity of Participant Observation. For this study, participant observation is a necessary gathering data technique. First, the study's emphasis is to explicate how members constitute social reality through humor. Because of the indexicality of talk, lesbian talk and humor constituting the social reality of the community must occur (by definition) within the social context of the culture. Asking members to do lesbian talk in a different setting, such as a laboratory (instead of a lesbian bar or a friend's home), would be non-natural.

Second, for members to participate in the study outside of lesbian settings identifies members as lesbians. Straights can hear much of lesbian humor as "insulting." Lesbians may not be willing to share the humor with majority (straight) members. Finally, humor is not the same as structured jokes, repeatable upon request. Much lesbian humor exists primarily in the form of stories concerning assumed to be heard as real past events. Stories occur throughout conversation when the topic shifts to the story's content. Much nonhumorous talk occurs before, between, and after instances of lesbian humor. To have simulated naturally occurring discourse outside the community is difficult, if not impossible.
Validity

Traditional social scientists are concerned with validity inasmuch as it impacts prediction, explanation and control.\(^{57}\) Prediction is used not only as a test of validity, but also as one of the key goals of traditional work. Articles written to guide social scientists concerning validity implicitly assume the inherent goal of prediction.\(^{58}\) Systematic observations and replication are interdependent inasmuch as systematic observations are necessary for replication. Similarly, replication can be used to test systematic observations and systematic reporting of the observations.

Phillipson states "the validity of most sociological explanation is assessed in terms of: first, the internal logic of the explanation and method; and second, the availability of sociological data from the same or other studies which confirms or supports the explanation."\(^{59}\) Social science constitutes its own social reality through talk, studies, and reports of its members.\(^{60}\) Traditional social scientists lack professional concern for the social realities they describe. Social scientists do not try to ascertain validity within the studied community. Members' reality is not used to test validity. Instead, validity is defined and tested within the community of social scientists using social science knowledge.

"Verification can take place only within a defined perspective (a theoretical framework) which sets down
conditions for knowing those types of reality it is designed to explain. Traditional social scientists cannot measure validity against member reality because social scientists do not claim to know member reality. Validity which applies to the traditional social sciences cannot be used for accessing non-traditional studies. Different conditions for knowing exist between traditional and non-traditional perspectives.

Participant observers assess validity by comparing different analysis levels of the data. The most basic descriptive level can be compared with the collected data. Themes found in the data can be compared with the descriptive work. Each level which gets more abstract and further removed from the community can be compared with the level of analysis which precedes it. In this way, fairly abstract, conceptual findings can be compared with data from direct observations.

Ethnomethodological Validity. Ethnomethodologists need a system of validity different from traditional social science because of the different levels of reality being examined. For validity, ethnomethodologists ask two questions. First, how can I devise a check for validity which is consistent with the tradition of my theoretical framework? Second, how can I attempt to make my reflexive constitution of the community valid?

The first question can be rephrased as, "How can I give an account of my personal experience in a
community such that others, members and colleagues, can read the account as an ethnomethodological display? How can I make my reflexive account of others' reflexive accounts plausible? The second question can read, “how do I know if I 'see' reflexively as members see?”

Either question can lead to infinite regress. Searching for validity, the ethnomethodologist can give accounts of how s/he did the initial reflexive work, reflexive work concerning how the later accounts are done, accounts of the accounts of the original account, and so on in an unending process. The work of science is an unending endeavor. For one specific study, however, the process stops at a point due to the non-practical nature of an infinite task.

Answering question two is difficult in much the way of question one. Instead of doing accounts, the researcher does experiences. The researcher may decide to "become the phenomenon" and "do a reality as its members do." Doing a member reality to accomplish social science may well limit the communities researchers study. Schneebaum suggests that researchers cannot know a community until the moral facts of the community become the moral facts of the researcher. Moral facts are derived implications of incorrigible propositions. All realities are fragile, including the reality of the social scientist. "Every reality is equally capable of dissolution." If one leaves one's own reality and
enters another, no guarantee exists that the old reality may be re-entered. 70

Method

The primary method of data collection is participant observation of a lesbian speech community. I began by visiting one lesbian bar several nights each week and observing members' activities. Entering the bar and passing as a member was easy; most of the women inside the bar looked like college students (they were young, about 20-25; wore jeans and casual shirts; and wore their hair in easy to take care of styles, long straight or relatively short). Collecting data once I was inside the bar, however, was more difficult. Tape recordings were not possible because of the noise in the bar (loud music, loud talking, and laughing) and the suspicious way members viewed the use of tape recordings. Members' fear of tape recordings existed because of a wish to remain unidentified. (I could have always played a tape for straight listeners. A listener might recognize one of the voices or hear someone shout a name and identify a friend as gay.) A name in my notes could always be denied as belonging to any one specific person. I avoided writing names, however, and used either initials or one word descriptions.

I relied heavily upon field notes. I began with a 3" by 5" note pad. Before going to the bar, I put the
pad into one of my back jeans pockets. In the other back jeans pocket, I carried a pen. After entering the bar and buying a beer, I would sit at a table near members in an attempt to hear their conversations. I set the beer on the table, lit a cigarette, and (trying to look casual) slipped the note pad out of my pocket. Reaching for the pen, I flipped open the pad under the table and was ready to take field notes. Many of the women in the bar carried wallets in their back pockets. I tried to look as if I was returning my wallet after buying the beer when I was removing the note pad.

Taking Notes. With pad and pen under the table, I was able to write utterances without members being aware of my activities. Note taking problems occurred. I was writing under the table and often could not see what (or how) I was writing. I wrote sloping lines. Writing also occurred on top of other writing. Occasionally, I would go to the restroom or pretend to be tying my shoe so I could look at the notes. After I had observed in the bar for several months, I sometimes wrote on top of the table if I thought no one was paying attention. In addition to the problem of seldom being able to see what I was writing, I do not know shorthand. In an attempt to write as much talk as possible, I used abbreviations. At times I was forced to devise abbreviations while writing and learned that the words needed to be written in full as soon as possible after the note taking session. A few places in
the notes make no sense to me now because I failed to work with the notes soon enough.58

Taking and interpreting field notes was compounded by alcohol. To pass in the bar, I had to drink. One can sit with the same beer for about an hour before feeling conspicuous. During an hour, the bartender or the woman who owns the bar would ask about three times if I wanted another beer. I learned to always leave a little beer in the can I was drinking because the owner would walk among the tables picking up and shaking beer cans to see if they were empty. If the can was empty, the owner took it and stood looking at you waiting for you to order more beer. At times I thought about giving up the notes and hiding a small tape recorder. I decided, given the sensitive nature of the study and the cooperation I began receiving from informants and other members, I could not do it.

When I started observing, problems occurred; new individuals in the bar are watched. It is difficult to observe others when they are observing you. (See Appendix for fieldnotes from my first two evenings in the bar for a description of the problem.) Later, I asked an informant,

"What was your biggest problem in the bar when you were first going in? She answered: "The more I approached people I did not know, the more I was offended. (pause) There's definitely a sex thing. (pause) The minute you go up to them there is an approach." (I asked, 'Why?')"
a lesbian relationship, women tend to be aggressive. (pause) If they see their lover talking to someone in the bar, it's like attack."

Not only was I watched by members, but the protectiveness of one's lover stopped me from talking to members. The loud music in the bar further complicated my problem because I could not write talk if I could not hear it. To record talk, I knew I had to get closer to members without being watched. One evening I asked a friend to accompany me to the bar. Members looked at us and then ignored us. After this experience, I always tried to take a friend to the bar when I went to observe or meet an informant. When I asked an informant about being watched and then ignored, she told me that women alone in the bar (unless they are known) are often perceived as a threat to members' relationships. When I took my friend to the bar, the members perceived us as "a couple" and therefore, non-threatening.

Informants. Soon after I began observing, I found my first informant. One night I saw a woman in the bar and recognized her as an acquaintance from school. Mary appeared surprised to see me, and I was glad to see her. I asked Mary to come to my office and she agreed. In my office I told her I was interested in doing a study of how women talk in lesbian bars. She said, "Will you have to use names and all that?" I said "no" and promised to keep her identity, and that of the other women in the bar, a secret. She said, "Sure, I'll help."
Mary provided not only much useful information, but social introductions to other members. Once one is introduced by a member as being "ok," one is not seen as a threat. Two other members became regular informants. Susan answered many questions, made up talk, and helped in evaluation of the analysis. Jane did not help much in the initial data collection, but was extremely helpful later providing information where I felt I had blanks.

Approximately twenty other members answered questions or provided information, although not on a regular basis. Of these twenty members, ten of them knew of the study. The others answered questions for me as if I were a new member. I met most members through introductions from my informants. Only after I knew a lot of members--after eight or nine months--would members who did not know me introduce me to other members or invite me to their homes for parties. I could always go to parties at informants' homes, occasionally at the homes of other members, and spent in addition to 600-700 hours in the bar--approximately 200-300 hours at these gatherings. Most of the party time occurred during the last year of observation when I knew many members. Many hours were spent with informants or members I had not asked to inform. Some of the information from these conversations is included in the study.

During the past two and a half years, I have spoken to approximately 200 members in Columbus, Ohio.
In addition, I have talked with lesbians from about half of the United States as well as Canadian lesbians. Although I cannot generalize, all members sounded, to me, to speak the same lesbian language.

Within the lesbian bar in Columbus, Ohio, I became able to sit at members' tables and collect talk as it occurred. The first time I was able to sit at such a table occurred after I had been collecting data only about one month. The table, however, was occupied by informants and friends who knew of the study. After about four months, I was able to meet members unaware of the study who would let me sit at their table. Occasionally, a member at the table would see me taking notes and ask what I was doing. I would answer, "I just thought of something I want to remember and better write down before I forget." I would then have to put my pad away unless I changed tables or went to the restroom to write down something I had just heard, repeating it to myself on the journey so I would not forget the exact phrasing.

Validity of Perceptions. After spending about four months observing in the bar and talking to members, I took a straight friend to the bar with me. The purpose was for my friend to act as a cultural stranger. I acted as an informant for her. Before entering the bar, I told her (1) it was a lesbian bar, and (2) I would not allow anything "bad" to happen to her. She said she was nervous.
We entered the bar; I ordered two beers, and we sat at a table. Most of her questions centered on her own behavior. Examples:

"Do I look dumb?" (Answer: "No.")

"What'll I do if someone asks me to dance?" ("Either dance or say, 'Not right now.'")

"What if I have to go to the bathroom?" ("I'll tell you where it is or go with me if you want.")

Questions concerning my behavior began when I ordered and paid for our second round of beers.

Al: "How come you're paying for the beer?"

Me: "So people will think we're together."

Al: "What?"

Me: "Look, everyone in here is a woman, right? Now some of them are together, you know, a couple. Some are just friends out for a beer. You can't tell unless you know them. If one of us pays for both beers, it looks like we're more together than if we pay for our own."

Al: "Does that mean you're going to buy me beer all night? (laughing)."

Me: "Hell, no. You can buy the next round. I'm not trying to play dyke, I'm just trying to keep women from asking you to dance."
In the above conversation, my behavior may be interpreted as doing togetherness. Paying for both beers did not prove we were together as a couple, but paying did indicate we were interested in one another's company. Members who observed my behavior would be hesitant to approach my friend because of the buying cue and the otherwise ambiguous nature of our relationship. By stating I was not attempting to "play dyke," I meant I was not doing a dominant or "masculine" role. Lesbians "playing dyke" would pay for all beers similar to men's paying on straights dates. Acting as an informant, I became aware of knowledge I had gained and regained the perspective of the cultural stranger.

Made-up Talk. Mary and Susan agreed to make-up talk they would expect to hear in various situations within the community. I provided situations and asked them to construct "appropriate" talk. Examples included asking a woman to dance and discovering if a woman was "going with" someone. Later, when I was primarily interested in lesbian humor, I asked Mary and Susan, "tell me something humorous which has occurred because of your lesbianism and indicate if you have (would) tell others about it." The made-up talk which they considered "normal" was compared with recorded talk to discover how my perceptions of talk compared to member interpretations. The made-up talk was also valuable inasmuch as it was produced by members who had to
reflexively make sense of community conversation. Making-up appropriate talk for given situations is similar to writing dialogue for a play. Conscious constitutive work must be accomplished to make the talk real. Examining the made-up talk, I gained a sense of the constitutive work necessary for the doing of lesbian social reality.

Three informants agreed to help interpret examples of lesbian humor I had collected. I gave them copies of humorous written talk and asked them to tell why the stories were funny from a lesbian perspective. Informants responded separately so they could not be influenced by one another. Member explanations of the humor were recorded and examined to determine necessary social knowledge for understanding humor. Explanations or stories behind the humor were similar to accounts given by individuals telling jokes not "gotten" by a listener. Examining stories provided insight into the types and amount of knowledge needed to understand lesbian humor.

Examples of field notes are provided on pages 207-210. In addition, examples of talk which occurred in the bar and examples of made-up talk are provided directly following the sample field notes. Explanations of lesbian humor will be included in the section which displays the humor.
Summary

This section discussed the theoretical and methodological background for the study. The theoretical perspective is ethnomethodological with specific emphasis upon the work of Harold Garfinkel. Meaning is created during interaction and is not determined by external factors. Of interest are the methods members use to interpret social action. Differing perspectives and criticisms of ethnomethodology were examined. The perspectives, including the work of Garfinkel, Cicourel, Zimmerman and Pollner, McHugh, and Sacks, were compared for emphasis on variant and invariant features.

Validity is discussed for both ethnomethodology and participant observation. The validity demonstrated is primarily internal validity. Questions arose such as "how do I know if I see as others see?" Infinite regression was not a problem inasmuch as stopping to analyze and accepting existing assumptions was interpreted as a practical activity.

Participant observation was necessary for collecting naturally occurring talk. The data were lesbian conversations when members were talking as lesbians, not experimental subjects. Problems occurred during data collection in the lesbian bar.

1. Tape recordings could not be used because of the noise in the bar (loud music, laughing, talking).
2. Notes were written under the table so as to conceal my activity. Notes were often incomplete, and abbreviations were sometimes impossible to interpret.

3. New women in the bar are watched by members.

Methods other than observation and note taking were used in an attempt to gain more complete data. The methods include

1. Gathering information from informants,
2. Comparing talk made-up by members with collected talk,
3. Asking informants for stories underlying the humor,
4. Acting as an informant for a cultural stranger to the community.
FOOTNOTES TO SECTION 1

1 An excellent summary and discussion of studies concerning lesbians from a psychological perspective is provided by Mannion. See Kristiann Mannion, "Female Homosexuality: A Comprehensive Review of Theory and Research," Abstracted in the JSAS Catalog of Selected Documents in Psychology, 1976, 6 (2), 44.


5 Both Ethnomethodology and Ethnography of Speaking share a methodological stance of working to explicate the knowledge or competence of members. Ethnomethodology, however, emphasizes the interpretation of experience which underlies communicative acts. Garfinkel's ethnomethodology goes beyond the ethnographic approach by examining the open-ended process of artful accomplishments and practical reasoning used by both members and researchers. The basis of culture is shared rules of interpretation and common sense knowledge of what can count as reasonable. Ethnomethodology is more concerned with the relationship between particular studies and universal properties. Ethnomethodology, stimulated by phenomenology (Schutz, Wittgenstein), looks for a general theory of speaking and interpreting.

Ethnography of Speaking investigated rules and norms for the use of speech. One writes formal rules for the occurrence and characteristics of speech events. Instead of interpretive practices, Ethnography of Speaking is
interested in message form and content, scenes, purposes (outcomes and goals), channels, forms, and norms. The philosophical perspective comes from psycho-linguists and socio-linguists (Chomsky).

Ethnography of Speaking allows one to learn more about how speech is done, but not about interpretive practices (how the speech does what it does). For the dissertation, the difference in perspectives is the difference between investigating structural rules for doing lesbian humor and investigating how humor works to provide an interpreted sense of reality. For well conceived Ethnography of Speaking work, see William Labov, "Rules for Ritual Insults," in Studies in Social Interaction, ed. David Sudnow, (New York: The Free Press, 1972) pp. 120-169. See John J. Gumperz and Dell Hymes, Directions in Sociolinguists (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., 1972) pp. 301-309 and 54-66.


Ibid., pp. 186-187.

Ibid., pp. 193-197.


Ibid., p. 198.


Implicit in all traditional social science is the proposition that social scientists are capable of producing a view of the world superior to that produced by individuals who merely live in the world. If the superiority proposition did not exist, how could social scientists justify time spent learning scientific techniques? How could they predict things about the world? If one interprets a view as different, and not superior, prediction is not possible above the level of everyday prediction made by non-scientific individuals such as "The boss saw me come in late. I think (predict) he will yell at me."


Most communication researchers use talk as an indicator of some other phenomenon they wish to study. The importance of the talk itself is minimized, and talk is ranked as second class data. Instead of focusing on the primary observable data, the talk, the researchers use and code talk in an attempt to discover something about an assumed-to-occur unobservable phenomenon. The results often bear little resemblance to the social realities of individuals who produced the original data. Further, the choice of the statistical methods and the model used to explain the resulting numbers not only can, but will, determine the findings. (For humorous examples, one need only turn to the bulk of communication literature published in journals such as The Quarterly Journal of Speech or Communication Monographs. Phenomena such as conflict, decisioning, leadership, attitudes, and beliefs are discussed with little or no importance given to the talk which existed in the experimental situation.) See Michael Phillipson, "Theory, Methodology and Conceptualization," in New Directions in Sociological Theory, eds. Filmer, et. al., 1972, pp. 97-101.

Menan and Wood, 1975, p. 44.


By displaying talk, the communication researcher can let the talk "speak for itself." Instead (or in addition to) of talking about the talk, the talk itself does the talking.


A well known example of taking away the taken-for-grantedness is Garfinkel's work with breaching experiments.


Mehan and Wood, 1975, p. 95.


This is not to mean that I do not find value in rules-of-use studies. I do. I simply am not interested in pursuing linguistic questions within the scope of this study.

The idea of breaking rules is similar to Garfinkel's breach techniques. Rules broken by non-members can be viewed as a form of breaching the social reality of the participants. The phenomenon operates for lesbians in their social interaction with straights.


Uncomfortableness with the questioning of reality can be clearly seen through the reactions of the "victims" of the breaching experiments carried on by Garfinkel's students. Victims became angry, confused, or attempted to treat the occurrence as a joke.


Wieder points out that although the convicts were able to state specific parts of the code when a situation called that portion of the code into account, the convicts were not able to tell the code as a code. See D. L. Wieder, Language and Social Reality: The Case of Telling the Convict Code (Paris: Mouton & Co., 1974).

A breach of one's social reality may be defined as a disruption of the individual's ceaseless reflexive use of a body of knowledge in interaction. The disruption interrupts the taken-for-granted nature of social reality


45 Bruyn states that one can use participant observation to investigate particular phenomenon without preconceptions about the phenomenon. See Bruyn, p. 277.

45 Traditional participant observation looks for particular features. For ethnomethodological work, participant observation can be used as a method without the traditional propositional analysis. The observer learns to respect the reality and to do it. See Mehan and Wood, pp. 107, 117, 227-229.


49 By allowing a broader concept of what counts as data, it is possible to generate theory. "Verification of theory is the keynote of current sociology." See Barney G. Glaser and Anselm L. Strauss, *The Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Research* (Chicago: Aldine, 1967) p. 10.

50 Ibid., pp. 226-227.

51 Bruyn gives a number of suggestions for specific techniques. See Bruyn, 1966, pp. 255-281.

52 A number of different examples of field notes, interviews, and self-reports can be found in a collection of field studies by Jacobs. See Jerry Jacobs, *Deviance: Field Studies and Self-Disclosures* (Palo Alto, California: National Press Books, 1974).

53 Speier lays out some basic ways for beginning observation. Basically, one must come to view reality as an orderly flow of activity. The purpose of observation
is to make sense of reality as speech community members do. See Matthew, How to Observe Face-to-Face Communication: A Sociological Introduction (Pacific Palisades, California: Goodyear, 1973).

57 My thanks to David Sirota for his insightful questions which led me to see the special importance of humor in situations. Lesbian humor is the most discernible factor when separating the speech acts of lesbians and other women in the larger culture.

A number of lesbians shared this feeling with me at different times, claiming they only do lesbian humor in "safe" situations. More will be said concerning "safe" situations in Chapter 2.


59 For an example, see Cronbach and Meehl who lay out four types of validity: predictive, concurrent, content, and construct.


For a further explanation of how reports and studies do constitutive work, see Leonard C. Hawes, "How Writing is Used in Talk: A Study of Communicative Logic-In-use," in The Quarterly Journal of Speech, 62 (1976), 350-360.


52 Bruyn, 1966, p. 257.


Phillipson gives a good account of how infinite regress affects validity in "Phenomenological Philosophy and Sociology," in New Directions in Sociological Theory,
Stopping a study at a particular point is a practical accomplishment. Stopping as a practical accomplishment exists for traditional social scientists as well as ethnomethodologists. Similarly, coming out is a practical accomplishment. At some point one must stop and work under the existing assumptions.


Schneebaum left the tribe to reenter his "old" reality because he feared that if he did not, there would be no old reality to return to. See Schneebaum, 1969.
SECTION 2

BECOMING A MEMBER

Overview

Before one can become a competent member of the lesbian speech community, one must proceed through a number of verbal and interpretive levels. Each level, beginning with one's awareness of one's own lesbianism, provides a necessary context for interpreting the next level. The communicative progression is presented in the order of acquisition for members and includes knowledge necessary for doing and interpreting lesbian humor. Before the necessary knowledge is displayed, an overview of women within the community is presented. Through examining member perceptions of others in the community, a context exists for interpreting the social knowledge.

Necessary knowledge and interpretive procedures within the community include

1. interpreting and verbally constituting the process of coming out;
2. being able to shift to a lesbian register;
3. making sense of status and membership reflexively using degree of out-ness as a primary
criterion.
Members experience problems outside the community inasmuch as they have lesbian knowledge and sense-making skills.
Problems include

1. passing as straight;
2. identifying other members;
3. managing the additional level of reflexivity which exists inasmuch as the member must be capable of speaking and interpreting two registers interchangably.

One does not gain lesbian social knowledge or lesbian conversational skills merely by going to a lesbian bar or deciding to be a lesbian. Acquiring social knowledge and artful conversational practices are inter-related; the talk constitutes the social knowledge and the knowledge is used to indexically make sense of the talk. Neither the talk, the knowledge, nor lesbian social reality become socially real for the individual until conversational skills and interpretive procedures are assumed. Given minimal verbal skills, a member learns reflexively to make sense of talk inside and outside her community.¹

Individuals shift easily from one speech community to another but cannot simultaneously exist in more than one social reality. The easier interpretation becomes, the more difficult it becomes outside of the community.
Members have a lesbian sense of social reality which differs from other social realities. The sense of lesbian social reality cannot be left behind in the lesbian bar.

Individuals outside of lesbian settings (such as the bar) see members as straight unless they are known to the member as a member. Women within lesbian settings are viewed by members as lesbians unless they are known to be straight by members. Perceptions of women within the community are important insofar as much member talk would not occur if women were seen as non-lesbians.

Member Perceptions of Women Within the Speech Community

Lesbian social knowledge is assumed to be shared among members; an AB event. An A-event is one known to be known only to A (in A's biography) and a B-event is one known to be known only to B, whereas an AB-event is one known to be known to both. Interpreting utterances is facilitated because the speaker and the listeners share knowledge concerning the topic; both "know" the other(s) share the knowledge. The speaker can only assume the shared nature of the knowledge if she assumes that the listeners are lesbian and/or members. Listeners assume similarly if they are to interpret her utterances.

Listeners and speaker are assumed to be lesbians because they are in a lesbian bar and because none of them, or anyone else, have indicated they are not lesbians.
Indicating one is not a lesbian within the boundaries of the community is problematic; one is assumed to be lesbian. Members view other women within the "safe" boundaries as lesbians. A very different sense of social reality would exist in safe lesbian locations if women were assumed to be straight until proven lesbian. The talk would be different, and the interpretive process would become similar to members' interpreting practices outside the community. Without the lesbian assumption, safe locations would cease to be safe. If a woman states she is not a lesbian, or others state this concerning her, she is still usually assumed to be lesbian; her voluntary presence in a lesbian setting is the evidence. Members assume voluntary presence in a lesbian bar is proof of interest in lesbianism. Interest in lesbianism is usually equated with being a lesbian.

When a member was asked why members assume women in the bar to be lesbians, she answered, "Well, if they're interested enough to come in here (laughter)." A woman in the bar who asks a number of stupid questions or does not react normally to others' lesbian talk, shows she does not share necessary knowledge for the bar setting. She is considered inept. Members may question the amount of community experience or how long she has been aware of her lesbianism; "how long has she been out?". They never question the assumed identity of the lesbian.
Non-Lesbians. Relatively strong testimony is needed before a woman in the bar is considered straight. On three occasions I observed women in the bar who were considered straight.

1. One evening four women entered the bar, moved to a table, and sat drinking for about an hour. When I asked a member about the women—others kept looking at them and laughing—I was told they were straight and members of a women's group which occasionally gave money to a lesbian organization. "They show up in here about once a year. Just want to see what we're doing, make a show." Another member added, "They wouldn't really be caught dead in here. (pause) They think they're cool."

The above two utterances provide insight into lesbian social knowledge concerning straight women. Member knowledge can be heard in "They wouldn't really be caught dead in here." Member knowledge holds that straight women, including "feminists" and other liberals, are afraid of being suspected of being lesbians. Liberals associate with lesbians within feminist movements and sometimes call them "sister," but do not wish contact with them. The statement, "They think they're cool," illustrates the member knowledge concerning the growing chicness among liberals of acting supportive toward homosexuals. This may be analogous to liberal Whites in the middle to late 1960's having one Black friend and/or claiming to support and/or understand Black people.
2. For a number of months a woman came into the lesbian bar. She talked to herself loudly in a foreign language, danced by herself waving her hands over her head, and sat making contorted faces while ignoring other individuals. The bartender (a member) said she was schizophrenic; she "just wanders in when she wants to." At no time did I observe members initiating conversation with the strange woman. She was not considered lesbian; she was, as one member stated, "the neighborhood crazy."

3. After observing in the bar for several months, I took a straight friend, also a graduate student, to the bar one evening. A number of women in the bar asked me about my friend, and I stated she was straight and "helping me do social science." (She was acting as a speech community stranger for me. She asked me the naive questions an outsider to the community might ask to help me check my interpretations.) Once her reason for being in the bar was explained, members did not consider her lesbian.

To be perceived as a non-lesbian in the bar, one must not only claim or show oneself to be straight, but also produce an acceptable reason or account for being in the speech community. One must produce an interest other than lesbianism, and the interest must be perceived as acceptable by members. Acceptable means acceptable to members based upon their knowledge concerning why an individual might enter the community without being,
potentially or actually, a member. A potential member is a woman who is not presently a member but is assumed to be a possible member-in-the-future.

Lesbians. Members' assumptions of others' lesbianism in the bar does not lessen the importance of lesbian talk, and specifically, lesbian humor. Lesbian talk and humor are important for doing speech community membership; the speech community is done through talk and lesbians who are not skilled in lesbian talk and humor are not members. Members' talk does the reality work of the community and is of primary importance for the continued constitution and reflexivity of the community. Although women may be perceived as lesbians, they are not automatically perceived as community members. Many lesbians exist within and outside lesbian settings who cannot do lesbian talk and humor.

Since lesbian knowledge and conversational practices are not necessary for one to become or be a lesbian, a member was asked how women in the bar knew one another were lesbians. The member stated, "Well, (laughter), we don't give lesbian tests at the door." Tests are not necessary. Doing funny comments on lesbian sex and humorous stories from a lesbian perspective are good indicators that one can "talk lesbian." One who can talk lesbian is presumed knowledgeable enough to be at least lesbian and to reflect on the communicative consequences of doing lesbian talk. Before one is a member,
one is a potential member; before one is a potential member, one is usually a lesbian; before one is a lesbian, one is a potential lesbian. Consequently, one who can do lesbian talk and humor, which presupposes community knowledge, is considered not only a lesbian, but a lesbian member-in-good-standing.

Being able to talk lesbian, including lesbian humor, displays social knowledge necessary for group membership by presupposing that very knowledge. Within the bar, women are assumed to have different amounts of lesbian social knowledge. According to Goffman, two groups can share lesbian social knowledge: homosexuals (lesbians), and the "wise." Goffman defines the wise as those straights who are trusted by homosexuals (lesbians) and treated (non-sexually) as if they were lesbians. With straight, wise individuals, a lesbian can do lesbian talk because wise individuals are expected to understand from a lesbian perspective, although they are never perceived as being lesbian or potentially lesbian.

The problem with Goffman's two category scheme for describing who can possess lesbian social knowledge is that Goffman is not a member of the lesbian speech community (nor could he be a member or pass as a member). From a member perspective, a number of other groups share social knowledge. The categories, from the perspective of members, provide a wider and more precise set of
categories for characterizing members. If one ceases to think of sexuality as having only two extremes (lesbian and straight), and ceases assuming social knowledge as all or none, sexuality and social knowledge can be placed on a continuum. Beginning with the group who are full members and the most socially knowledgeable within the community, the following categories exist:

1. Speech community members who are lesbian, know they are members, and are viewed by other members as members.

2. Lesbians who are in the process of becoming members, know they are becoming members, and are viewed by members as lesbians who are becoming members.

3. Lesbians who are becoming members but are not aware of it and are viewed by members as potential members.

4. Women who claim to be non-lesbians, know they are becoming members, and are perceived by members as potential members and/or potential lesbians or wise.

5. Women who claim to be non-lesbians, are not aware of speech community membership or gaining it, and are perceived by members as potential members and/or potential lesbians or wise.

6. Wise (straight) women who are members, know they are members, and are perceived by members as wise and as members.

How a woman is seen by members is of primary importance; self-perception is secondary. Categories
4 and 5 present lesbianism as it is seldom discussed. One's sexuality is not questioned unless acceptable reasons are provided. Members see women claiming to be non-lesbian, without providing proof, as potential lesbians. The reality of one's lesbianism exists in and through the assumptions of members. Self-perception as a lesbian is not necessary for members to view one as a potential lesbian. The difference between being a potential lesbian and a lesbian, is self-awareness.

**Awareness**

Awareness can be seen as the most crucial and first bit of necessary knowledge for a woman to switch from being a potential lesbian to becoming a lesbian. It is the natural starting point for becoming because one cannot become that of which one is not aware. A potential lesbian cannot become a lesbian until she becomes aware of possible self-lesbianism.

Awareness may be viewed as an example of Garfinkel's consistency proposition. Garfinkel states, A is always A although it can be mistaken for B. When a lesbian (A) mistakes herself for a non-lesbian (B), the mistake occurs because she is unaware of her "A-ness." Awareness is crucial for viewing oneself as a lesbian; members view a lesbian as having always been a lesbian, although some time may have existed when she was not aware of her lesbianism.
TABLE 1
WOMEN WITHIN THE LESBIAN COMMUNITY

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>categories</th>
<th>perceived self</th>
<th>members' perception</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Member</td>
<td>Non-Member</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>X*</td>
<td>X</td>
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<td>4</td>
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<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* - X on a line is used to show, in "perceived self" category, potential membership or unknown to self. In members' perception area, X on a line represents the inability of members to tell if the woman is a member or potential member.

** - In categories 4 and 5, the wise distinction would not apply unless the woman had "proven" herself to be so within the acceptable limits of the speech community.
Examples which conversationally display the importance of awareness can be found in much lesbian talk. One woman describing a friend stated:

"She's gay, but she doesn't know it yet."

A lack of awareness concerning one's true sexual orientation is applied not only to others, but also to aware lesbians to explain the time before they "came out." The following example is representative of such talk.

A member is speaking.

"I went to Middle State University for four years. It was ok, I guess, but I sure wish I would of known that I liked women then. (pause) What a waste of four years."

Of primary interest is the way events are talked about reflexively. A speaker does not say, nor have I heard any lesbian say, "I wish I would have been a lesbian then." In every instance, the speaker refers to the time before she knew she was gay. Turning back to Garfinkel's consistency proposition, a lesbian is viewed reflexively as having always been a lesbian.

Awareness explains how one can be viewed as a potential lesbian and/or member. Lacking awareness explains why some lesbians come out relatively late in their lives, often after having a straight marriage and children. Straight women do not become lesbians, lesbians who are living straight lifestyles realize they are lesbians and come out.
The concept of awareness allows members to give accounts different from straight accounts of specific events. Straights think members recruit straight women and persuade them to become lesbians. Members know that straight women are, and have always been straight; lesbians are, and have always been lesbians. When one appears to change, one has become aware. Since all awareness is accomplished reflexively, what happened in a woman's past is of secondary importance to how it is talked about. Through the interpretive process, talk constitutes a sense of shared past experience among members and reinforces lesbian knowledge.

Awareness is necessary to support the lesbian knowledge that members can recognize other lesbians outside the community. Although members claim almost 100% accuracy, when asked "how" recognition is done, the most common answer was, "I don't know." When confronted with the idea that a woman the member sees as lesbian may not view herself as lesbian, one member stated, "Just because she doesn't know it, doesn't mean I don't know it." The member who views a woman outside the community as lesbian can believe the view correct because of the importance of awareness. Awareness is viewed as complex; and consequently, failures may be viewed by members as reinforcements of the complexity. Identifying lesbians outside of the community seldom results in failure because the identified women cannot usually be asked
about their sexuality. One member explained:

"Can you imagine walking up to someone and saying, 'Ah, pardon me, but I just noticed you're a lesbian?' People would flip out, so many of them are in the closet. I mean, the worst that could happen is that I find out they're married or somethin.' Then I know they just don't know. You know, most of 'em gotta be gay."

Awareness works as a self-fulfilling prophecy. If the identified woman is later seen within the community, the member can claim she "knew all along." If the woman is later seen living what is perceived to be a straight life style, the woman is not aware. The member is always correct and this gives her a sense of superiority over straights and potential lesbians. Both successes and failures can be interpreted as evidence of the importance of awareness; even potential lesbians cannot see their own lesbianism until they become aware. All lesbians by definition are aware and can talk about a period of time before they come out. Through talk, members assume similar knowledge of experience. Members believe-in awareness because they can all give accounts of the time before they came out in terms of awareness and its importance. A member clarified the importance of awareness by stating, "Sure the (sic) hell I was gay; I was just too dumb to know it."

Coming Out

Awareness is important for the explication of the social process of coming out. Coming out cannot be
accurately or singularly defined in terms of shared lesbian social knowledge because the phrase, coming out, is used in a variety of ways and has a variety of definitions for members. Previously discussed is the idea that members regard other women in lesbian settings, including other members, as lesbians. Since members are assumed to be lesbians, I asked questions concerning how one does "becoming a lesbian." During informal conversations in the bar, I asked one or more of the following questions.

"What do you have to do to become a lesbian?"

"How do you know for sure that you are a lesbian?"

"How do you become a lesbian?"

Answers are listed below.

1. "Come out."

2. "After you come out, ah, if you don't know by then, you're either fucked up or playin' games."

3. "Well, first you gotta know it, sort of, or, someone brings you out."

4. "You gotta be out."

5. "Ok, (pause) if you're out then you are, or if you're trying to be, (pause) you know, if you want and know to come out but don't know anyone. (pause) God, I spent a whole quarter trying to find a lesbian (laughter), you know, who was I supposed to do it with? (laughter)."
Essential for being a lesbian is being "out."
Although members sometimes talk about other women in the future or present tense, talk concerning one's own out state is usually in past tense; members must be lesbians, by definition, and lesbians must be out, also by definition. In answer 3, the phrase "brings you out" is used. In answer 4, the words "be out" are employed. If a woman is out, she is a lesbian. "Coming" out connotes some sort of social process. "Bringing" someone out also suggests a process. The difference lies in the focus of the action. Coming out is a process in which a lesbian (or before coming out, a potential lesbian) is the focus of the action. Bringing someone out focuses upon the actions of another woman. To "be out" is the state after the process of coming or bringing is accomplished. Coming, bringing, or being out are important for members of the community; all members must be out to be members.?

Definitions. The highly indexical nature of talk is evidenced in answers received to questions concerning coming or bringing someone out.
"How does someone come out?"
Following are representative answers.
1. "You come out when you admit to yourself you're gay."
2. "When a woman sleeps with another woman for the first time. That's it. Sex."
3. "It's when a woman feels comfortable with herself about being gay."

4. "A woman's out when she tells other people she's gay."

I asked ten other members:

"How do you bring someone out?"

The following three answers are representative.

1. "You sleep with 'em. (light laughter)."

   (I asked, "Sleep?")
   "You know, I make love to 'em."

2. "You get them thinkin' about it so they can see they are."

3. "You bring them to the bar. Let them meet other lesbians so they're not alone, ah, so they can be part of it."

Talking and Doing. Coming out is a process of telling, and/or feeling, and/or sleeping with (doing sex). Bringing someone out is a process of telling, and/or doing social introducing, and/or doing sex. The two common features appear to be sexual action and conversation. Therefore, being out can be viewed as having accomplished a process of sexual action and/or talk. Of interest, from a communicative perspective, is that the complex phenomenon of becoming a lesbian can be accomplished, at least in part, in and through talk.

Coming out is talked about in all four of the ways mentioned above. Bringing someone out is usually talked
about in terms of the sex act. A common question is:

"Who brought you out?"
The "who" question is answered with the name of a woman regardless of whether she is known in the local community. If the woman is not known by local members, additional information, such as where they met, her occupation, or how they met, is often provided. The named woman is almost always the lesbian's first female lover.³

An exception was recorded one evening in the bar. I asked the questions and, to the best of my knowledge, the lesbian answering the questions did not know about the study.

Me: "Been out long?" (The woman looked young, about 16-17).
Kim: "Fur about a year." (I later learned she was 19).
Me: "Who brought you out, anyway?"
Kim: "Amy really brought me out. She kept talkin' to me and was open about her relationship with Linda. I thought I was, but then I was sure. Too bad I never got to sleep with her; I always wanted to but she was going with Linda and she was really jealous, you know, of me and all. Anyway, they moved to Dallas so I came out with Cindy a couple of weeks after that. (Laughter) We just hit it off and knew we could make it. I wrote and told Amy, and she said she was really glad for me. (Laughter) Hey, things
FIGURE 1

THE PROCESSES OF COMING OUT AND BRINGING SOMEONE OUT
are really good for me, man."

In the example, the woman claims to have been "brought out" by the first lesbian she talked to, but also claims to have "come out" with another woman. For most members, being brought out and coming out are accomplished with the same woman, but it is not a necessary condition.

Because of different member definitions of coming out and considerable talk in the community concerning the phenomenon. I was surprised that I never heard talk which functioned correctively for meaning. Corrective is defined as talk which clarifies or asks for clarification concerning meaning. Members did not engage in corrective talk during conversations about coming out.

Not only are member definitions of coming out not corrected, the amount of time necessary for the process varies. During five naturally occurring conversations about coming out, I asked:

"How long does it take to come out?"

The answers received were:

1. "Before you're really out? Oh, I guess a few months."
2. "(Laughter) Five minutes!" (more laughter)
3. "It took me years."
4. "The way things are now, a whole life time. Some never make it."
5. "One good night with a good woman ought to do it."

"How long" answers correspond to "how one comes out"
definitions. Answers 2 and 5 correspond to a "sex-act"
definition. Answers 1, 3, and 4 correspond to a "talk
oriented" coming out.

Without corrective or clarifying talk, how do
members interpret coming out talk? The multiple defini­
tions of coming, bringing, and being out are especially
problematic because of the diversity of talk in the
community about being out. The problematic nature of
multiple definitions is simplified by members talking
as if they are discussing the same phenomenon when doing
"coming out" talk. When questioned, members claimed
"knowing about" definitions for coming out other than the
one they used when discussing their own coming out.
Consequently, when a member does coming out talk in terms
of her first female lover, members who use a different
definition for their own coming out do a shift in register
to "first female lover" (sex-act) talk and interpre­
tation. The shift does not mean they start to talk about
their own coming out in sex-act terms (although occasion­
ally a personal shift occurs in conversation). A member
can and will discuss a woman's coming out in her own terms
for it. No one says,
"That's not coming out. I'll tell you what it is
to come out."

Shifting Register. The ability to shift register
rapidly can be observed in the following conversation
which occurred in a group of about ten members. In the conversation, Helen is an older lesbian (about 45) who is known to the group and who had been living with a female lover, who is also known to the group (although she was not present), for a number of years. Becky is a young (18 year old) lesbian.

Helen: "I'm still having so much trouble trying to come out. I want to tell the people at work (pause) and I told my mother. I'm just afraid, that's all. Afraid they'll reject me."

(Mumbled comments from the others, pause, Helen turns to Becky)

Helen: "So how's it goin' for you, Becky, since you came out?"

Becky: "Ok, yeah, ok, well, yeah, I, I, Its really good. 
"Good with Sherrie. We're livin' together now, you know."

In the above talk, Helen is talking about coming out in terms of telling others. She states this directly ("I want to tell the people at work and I told my mother."). Even if she had not done so, her audience would know that she could not be talking about sex-act coming out because it was known that she had been living with her female lover for a number of years. After a pause, Helen switches registers for coming out, and asks how Becky is getting along after her first physical love
The shift is heard because of Becky's young age and the known fact to the group that she had just recently started the sexual relationship. In addition, the members (including Helen) knew that Becky had recently told her parents about her relationship with Sherrie. Since that time, her parents had refused to talk to her or help her financially. It would have been extremely unkind for Helen to ask Becky about the painful situation in a large group of people unless Becky mentioned her parents first (which she did not). Becky hears the shift in Helen's coming out registers and responds to the sex-act question of coming out. That Becky read the shift and knew the talk was no longer concerning "telling others" coming out is shown in and through her comment, "Its really good." The members of the group knew that Becky's telling others coming out was not "really good" because of the reaction of her parents.

**Status and Membership**

An indication of status in the lesbian speech community is how long one has been out. When asked, "When did you come out," members respond with an age, such as, "Oh, when I was 20," or with a clause referring to a period of time, such as, "When I was in college." A member's present age is important for achieving status only as it relates to the age at which the woman came out.
The number of years one has been out is crucial for determining time related status. In this way, a 25 year old woman who claims to have come out at 18 can possess more status than a 35 year old woman who claims to have come out at 32.

One evening I asked a 60 year old woman how long she had been out. She answered loudly:

"Honey, I been out for-ev-er."

Other women, sitting where they could hear her answer, smiled and nodded. A much younger woman (about 25) who was sitting at a nearby table quickly bought the older woman a drink. Aside from a nod when the drink arrived, the two women never spoke to one another during the evening.

Another member (about 45 years old) often "pulls rank" on younger lesbians by inserting her own first name with the word "old" in front of it during conversations. Calling herself "old Peg" is a particularly artful way to win arguments because the name implies her superior experience and status. The following two examples occurred during arguments.

Example 1

Peg: "You ain't gonna hassle ol' Peg, are ya?"
Deb: "No, no, course not. I was just talkin'."
Example 2
Peg: "You're makin' old Peg tired."
Ruth: "Oh, sorry, Peg.

Although women who claim not to have been out long have low status, they can receive advice and understanding from members if they ask dumb questions or say or do things considered inappropriate in the lesbian community. For example, if a new lesbian said she really "digs a guy at work," the comment would probably be ignored or gently corrected by a comment such as, "He's ok for a dude, huh."

Degrees of Out-ness

One's degree of out-ness or how out one claims to be also is used to determine status. All members claim to have come out because being out is necessary and sufficient for being a lesbian, but necessary and not sufficient for being a member of the community. Because being out is critical for group membership, one is not questioned or doubted when one claims to be out. The necessity of being out may help to explain the tolerance for a number of different definitions of coming out. Different individuals have done different activities.10 A number of different activities (sex-act and/or talk) can be labeled "coming out" if one needs to claim group membership.
To question another's type of coming out would be the same as to question one's lesbianism and/or membership in the community. Consequently, every member presents proof of membership through talk of coming out and refrains from questioning, correcting, or slighting anyone else's proof. By shifting the register to validate different definitions of coming out as coming outs, a member is saying indirectly, "I recognize you as a lesbian and will talk to you about it in your terms." Sexuality is not threatened, nor is group membership. One member privately told me, concerning a young, new member:

"She's out enough right now. When she's as out as I am, she'll know more, but she'll have more hassles, too. She's a good kid."

Just as awareness is a determining factor for whether a woman views herself as a lesbian, awareness also is important for being out and for how out one is. As discussed previously, awareness can be viewed as the first instance of lesbian social knowledge. In the process of gaining artful verbal practices and social knowledge, the lesbian shifts from being a potential member to a member. Members assume a sense of lesbian social reality. As one gains more of a sense of lesbian social reality, one loses more of one's sense of straight
social reality. Possessing a sense of lesbian reality makes interpretive work outside the community problematic; most individuals outside the community share a straight sense of social reality.

Interpreting becomes more problematic for members outside the community because of the highly indexical nature of language. Reflexive work is more complex outside the community because most members try to pass as straight. Just as the preceding pages display artful conversational practices and reflexive work of members inside the lesbian community, the final pages of this section will display artful verbal practices and reflexive work of members when outside the community.

Interpreting Outside of the Community

It has been shown that members must learn to act and talk as members within the lesbian community. Few, if any, female children are taught how to act and talk as lesbians. Member-relevant activities must be learned, practiced, and performed within the community while the candidate for membership tries to display casualness. At the same time, however, women acquiring membership in the lesbian community must also display, with equal casualness, actions and talk passable for membership in the normal, straight community.

Passing Problems. Two classes of conversation in the straight community make passing problematic for
First, conversations concerning relationships, boyfriends, and dates present the lesbian with three conversational options: she can change pronouns from "she" to "he" and discuss her relationship, she can "make-up" information, or she can take no turns. Regardless of her choice, she must act and appear casual and unconcerned.

Second, during conversations concerning the lesbian community itself (or the broader gay community), a member must react as a straight non-member. When in the straight community, a lesbian cannot react to talk about lesbians as if she is a lesbian. Her comments concerning the lesbian community may be perceived as careless and unrehearsed. Acting unconcerned can be particularly problematic when a lesbian hears talk of others as malicious. At the two extremes, when a lesbian community is mentioned, a lesbian can remain silent or engage in talk she perceives as deviant to and critical of her own speech community. Consequently, a lesbian must learn to do talk which she perceives as deviant in an attempt to appear normal and thereby pass in the straight community.

Traditional sociology usually approaches deviance as defined from the majority point of view. From a lesbian's point of view, the doing of deviance is often seen as doing and talking as a normal individual.

It is assumed usually that individuals who interact within the same speech community share social knowledge,
including concepts of deviance and normality. One cannot assume shared social knowledge and a shared perception of a phenomenon among individuals when a member of one community can pass in another. Passing allows an individual to interact in a non-member speech community. Socially shared information can be viewed, therefore, as being highly indexical and can cause specific problems for a lesbian as she switches from the lesbian to the straight speech community. "A is always A" may be true within a specific community, but may not be true for others. Lesbianism may be good in the lesbian community, but it is perverted in the straight community. Consequently, to accomplish the smooth doing of dual speech communities, the lesbian must be bi-cultural and bi-dialectal.

**Typifications of Others Outside the Community**

Lesbianism is not visually apparent to observers, like being Black or female. Lesbians must engage in identifying work to identify other lesbians. Identifying work may be accomplished by reading other women's prolonged eye contact, or hearing a key word used in conversation to identify lesbians. One key word is the name of the bar where the fieldwork was conducted. The informal name of the bar is also a man's name. Consequently, a member can use the name conversationally as if it is the name of a person. If a woman present is a
member and wants another woman to know she is a member, she can respond to the name by smiling, saying, "Yeah, I've been there" or "We have a friend in common." These phrases are not the only ones which can be used; anything is appropriate so long as the message is: "I know what you are talking about, and I want you to know that I know."

Identifying Members. Members use the words, "the bar," during conversation as a way of identifying members. "The bar" is heard as "Harry's," the lesbian bar. "The bar" frequently is offered by members as an answer to the question, "Where do I know you from?" If the woman who asked the question is a member, the question can be heard as, "Are you a member?" The answer, "the bar," is a "yes" answer. If a non-member hears the answer, "the bar," and asks for clarification, the member can easily provide a plausible sounding answer, such as,

"I met some new people in a bar the other night, and I really thought she was one of them."

Consequently, the identifying question/answer pair can be used with minimal risk of being identified as lesbians by non-members. Social knowledge necessary for identification is member knowledge and is lesbian speech community specific.15

Lesbians must constantly engage in identifying work concerning others' membership status to help them interpret talk outside the community. Members can identify
individuals as belonging to one of six categories.
1. Individuals who are straight and unaware of the lesbian speech community.
2. Individuals who are straight and aware of the speech community.
3. Individuals who are straight and wise.
4. Lesbians who are non-members of the speech community.
5. Lesbians who are aware of the community and are potential members.
6. Lesbians who are members of the community.

Individuals in category 3 share lesbian social knowledge, are conversationally treated as if they were lesbian, and are trusted by members. Individuals in category 2 do not share lesbian social knowledge, are not treated conversationally as lesbian, and are not trusted by members.)

**Types of Talk and Interpretation**

For any given conversation outside the lesbian community, the member must decide:
1. Who is engaging in the conversation based upon the six membership categories,
2. What topic is being discussed,
3. How to talk and make sense of the talk in the situation; which speech community to "re-member" oneself.

It is necessary for a member to be correct about who is talking and what is being discussed for her to interpret
her talk and that of others'. Knowing who is talking is not sufficient for determining the topic. Knowing the topic is not sufficient for determining who is talking.

Knowing the topic and who is talking are necessary but not sufficient for determining how to talk and interpret talk. How one interprets the talk, however, determines how one identifies topic and speaker.

The topic, or what is being talked about, consists of six types which are important to lesbians. Since lesbians differ from straights because of sexual preference, lesbians need to be aware of the specific sexual nature of talk outside the community. From a lesbian perspective, six types of talk can occur. (See Table 2)

**Meaning.** Most utterances easily fit into more than one talk category based upon the meaning a listener attributes. By attributing different meanings to utterances, a listener is interpreting talk using different membership categories in devices. When one hears an utterance as a category of a device, the meaning is interpreted based upon the relationships between different member-categories in the specific device. If an utterance can be heard as belonging to another device, talk can be interpreted using the knowledge one has of the categories of that device. When an utterance can be heard as belonging to more than one device, indexical figures of talk must be interrogated to determine the
### TABLE 2

**TYPES OF TALK OUTSIDE THE COMMUNITY**

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Straight, non-sexual talk. (<em>I'm sure it will rain.</em>)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Straight, sexual talk about straights. (<em>&quot;Susan's going to the party with Roger.&quot;</em>)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Straight, sexual talk about gays. (<em>&quot;I wouldn't want a pervert teaching in my child's school.&quot;</em>)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Lesbian, non-sexual talk. (<em>&quot;There's going to be live music in 'the bar' Friday night.&quot;</em>)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Lesbian, sexual talk about straights. (<em>&quot;They just don't know what they're missing.&quot;</em>)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>Lesbian, sexual talk about gays. (<em>&quot;Are Sandy and Marge still together?&quot;</em>)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
device, hence, the interpretation. For example, the utterance, "I'm going to be out tonight," can be heard differently depending upon how the listener identifies the who and what of the conversation. (See Table 3.

TABLE 3

INTERPRETATIONS OF "I'M GOING TO BE OUT TONIGHT"

"I'm going to be out tonight" can mean:
1. "I won't be home." (Straight non-sexual)
2. "I will be on a date." (Straight sexual about straights)
3. "I'm making fun of the way I think gays talk." (Straight sexual about gays)
4. "I'm going to the bar." (Lesbian non-sexual)
5. "I'm making fun of the way straights mimic gays." (Lesbian sexual about straights)
6. "I'm going to have sex." (Lesbian sexual about gays)

The meaning a member heard determines speaker and topic. Straight would never mean any of the lesbian meanings. Interpreting an utterance becomes more complex when one considers contextual features other than speaker and topic. Where the conversation occurs, who else is present, and how well others are known to the member can all influence the interpretation. For example, only if all individuals are assumed to be lesbians, they are known well, the location is safe and the topic is lesbian sexual
talk about straights, can "I'm going to be out tonight" mean "I'm making fun of the way straights mimic gays."

Because of a number of factors influencing interpretation of talk, interpretive guidelines for talk and interpretation outside the community are not possible. Generally, however, members use the following talk and interpretive practices outside the community.

1. With individuals who are straight and unaware of the lesbian speech community, members engage in only straight talk not relying upon lesbian knowledge and interpret conversation without presuming lesbian knowledge.

2. With individuals who are straight and aware of the lesbian speech community, members engage in talk and interpretation the same as in number 1.

3. With individuals who are straight and wise, members engage in straight and/or lesbian talk and interpret conversation using lesbian social knowledge.

4. With lesbians who are non-members of the speech community, member practices are similar to number 1 although lesbian, but not member, social knowledge may be assumed. Members may engage in a small amount of lesbian talk with the women in an attempt to offer support and/or membership to category 5.

5. With lesbians who are aware of the community and are potential members, member practices are the same as in number 3 although more lesbian knowledge is assumed.
6. With lesbians who are members, member practices are the same as in number 3.

An Additional Level of Reflexivity

Members not only reflexively interpret talk based upon its normal features, but also decide the type of talk being done. As can be seen from, "I'm going to be out tonight," one utterance can be interpreted at least six different ways. The different interpretations available through the additional level of lesbian reflexivity are in addition to the normal, everyday reflexive work to be done if meaning is to be accomplished. Reflexivity is a necessary sense making activity, and members must reflect upon utterances based upon lesbian social knowledge as well as straight social knowledge. Lesbian knowledge of who talks about what topics under what circumstances outside the community adds the reflexive level.

The additional level of lesbian reflexivity is particularly problematic because a member often receives minimal cues from other members. Members conversationally work at passing in the straight community. Consequently, members engage in straight talk during conversations with others assumed to be straight. The lesbian talking-as-straight can not only make it possible for members to do talk which they hear as deviant, but also can hinder a member's ability to identify other members.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Types of Talk</th>
<th>Strt. unaware</th>
<th>Strt. aware</th>
<th>Wise</th>
<th>Lesb. non-memb.</th>
<th>Lesb. poten. memb.</th>
<th>Lesb. mem-ber</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strt. non-sex</td>
<td>X</td>
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<td>Strt. sex strt.</td>
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<td>Lesb. non-sex</td>
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<td>Lesb. sex strt.</td>
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</table>

* - Highly problematic because of the perceived "deviant" nature of the talk based upon lesbian social knowledge.

** - Some of the talk perceived as deviant.
Although only members can do lesbian talk, a member must reflexively make decisions concerning the lesbian or straight nature of the talk because of its indexicality. Lesbian talk sounds the same as straight talk to non-members. Lesbian talk sounds the same as straight talk to members if the speaker is assumed to be a non-member.

Returning to the utterance, "I'm going to be out tonight," no discernible cues exist for attributing meaning to the utterance other than knowledge of the speaker and the topic. The words and intonation are the same regardless of the used device. Straights only have to choose among three devices for ascertaining meaning. Straights cannot hear the three lesbian meanings because they do not have access to lesbian knowledge. Lesbians only have to choose among three devices if the indexical features indicate that the utterance is either lesbian or straight. If the topic can be interpreted based upon contextual features, only two devices can be heard. How the utterance sounds, however, is determined by the listener's interpretation, not external verbal or non-verbal cues.

Two Registers. Outside the community, a member must be able to make sense of two registers: straight and lesbian. Differentiating between straight and lesbian talk is highly problematic insofar as:

1. speakers may switch rapidly from one register to the other,
2. words are the same phonetically and syntactically, 
   but are different semantically and pragmatically, 
3. a high level of indexicality is involved, 
4. great care must be taken to speak the correct 
   register in a given situation to given individuals, 
5. members are always aware of the two registers, 
6. members know that some other individuals are aware 
   of the two registers, although aware individuals 
   cannot always be identified. 

To illustrate shifts in register and its impor­

tance, consider the following situation. It is the day 
before a new school year begins, and the teachers' lounge 
at Blue Elementary School is crowded with teachers. All 
of the teachers were at the same school last year except 
for two, new young women who remains quiet as the other 
teachers greet one another. Joan and Sue have both 
taught in the school for five years. They are both 
members of the lesbian speech community and have shared 
this information with one another. Bob has taught in the 
school for three years and is straight. He does not know 
Joan and Sue are lesbians. The teachers have just been 
handed their class rosters and are talking. 

Joan: "The first day of school is always exciting."
Sue: "Yeah, well, having 40 kids in my class this year 
    should certainly be exciting." (She looks at Joan.)
Bob: "Hey, cheer up, Sue. Forty isn't too bad and some of 'em are sure to move. I bet you have a decent class size by Christmas."

Sue: "I know." (She sighs and then looks at Joan and grins.)

As Bob walks away, both Joan and Sue begin laughing. Joan abruptly stops laughing and looks at the two new teachers. One of the new women steps toward Joan and Sue, and they notice that she is laughing softly.

Ellen: "Hi, I'm Ellen." (She begins to laugh again while maintaining eye contact with Joan.)

Soon, all three members are laughing together.

In the account, Sue shifts the register for "exciting" in her utterance. Joan interprets a sexual sense for the word although they both know she is kidding. Bob does not understand a lesbian interpretation and reacts as if Sue is being sarcastic (from a straight perspective). Sue answers in Bob's register verbally, but her sigh can be heard as a cue to Joan that the lesbian register is still operating. That is, sigh, some of those "exciting" children might move and get away from me. Joan "correctly" reads Sue's sigh and look and begins to laugh. Steps 1-5 have been performed correctly, but suddenly Joan remembers the two new women. Joan and Sue know that none of the other returning
teachers are aware of the lesbian register. Joan looks at the women in an attempt to determine if either of them is aware of the register which Joan and Sue have used. Ellen is aware and lets Joan and Sue know that she is aware by laughing and immediately introducing herself to them. Although all three of them will continue to pass as straight with the other teachers, they can use lesbian talk and lesbian interpretive practices with one another.

**Deviant Talk.** Members report expending a great deal of energy outside the community passing and interpreting. The additional level of reflexivity encourages a member to question who is talking and the topic on a lesbian level which is non-problematic to non-members. Second, members and lesbian non-members are aware of deviant talk concerning lesbians outside the community. Deviant talk may be interpreted on two levels: straight and lesbian.

Members' sense of normal is disrupted and becomes problematic because of the added level of lesbian reflexivity necessary and the necessity of interpreting, and at times engaging in, deviant talk. Deviant talk about lesbianism can disrupt much of the members' sense of reality; the entire speech community and its members are labeled "non-normal." Non-normal labeling might be relatively unimportant for a minority community far removed from the majority. Most lesbians, however, spend most of their time in a straight community. During the time
members are in the straight community, regardless of the talk in which they or others engage, they are aware they are members of the lesbian speech community. Lesbians are also always aware that they would be perceived as deviant by straights if their lesbianism became known.

When a member interprets deviant talk about lesbianism, a member possesses a number of alternative ways of dealing with the situation. She can become angry at others; she can become angry at herself; she can disregard the message; or she can think of it as a joke. If she becomes angry at others, she is risking the loss of her ability to pass. If she becomes angry at herself, she can get drunk, go crazy, or kill herself. Disregarding the message and/or treating the message as a joke cannot be accomplished outside the community because the member may have to respond to the message in a way which allows her to pass. The member can disregard the message or treat it as a joke only within the lesbian community.

**Normalization of Deviant Messages**

The management of deviant messages as humorous is discussed in section 3. Treating messages as humorous or disregarding them can be accomplished by adhering to the lesbian knowledge that lesbians are normal and straights are ignorant concerning lesbianism. How social knowledge is done through lesbian humor is also
discussed in section 3. Construing themselves as normal and straights as ignorant allows members to disregard much of what is said about them if the source is perceived as straight.

**Disregarding Messages.** Members can disregard deviant messages if the source is perceived as ignorant. Consequently, members within the lesbian community must do complex normalization work not only constituting themselves as normal, but also reflexively making sense of deviant messages, and/or the individuals who uttered the messages as ignorant about lesbianism.

The following talk illustrates a member's ability to disregard messages from outside the community concerning lesbianism and conversationally present herself as normal. I asked a member within the community if she felt "normal" or "perverted."

Me: "Are you perverted?"
Jan: "Sure I am." (much laughter)
Me: "I mean, do you feel that you are perverted, really?"
Jan: "Hell, no. I'm as normal as you or anyone else."
Me: "Then you don't think lesbianism is perverted"
You think its ok?"
Jan: "Well, yeah, I mean, I don't feel guilty or messed up or anything."
Me: "Would you say you think lesbianism is normal?"

Jan: "For me it is."

Me: "But how do you feel when everyone says you're perverted?"

Jan: "Everyone doesn't say it (laughter). There's lots of us. (pause) you mean the ones who say it? I don't pay any attention to 'em. They're stupid."

In section 3, answers such as "Sure I am," followed by laughter, are discussed. The talk functions as a "reverse normalization" by overstatement, much the same as satire and sarcasm are accomplished. Lesbian humor can only be done within the community. Consequently, normalization of a deviant message cannot occur at the time of the message, but must wait until the lesbian is within her community.

Within the community, members can disregard straight messages about lesbians because members believe they share a special inside perspective straights do not share (except the wise). Disregarding outside messages is a phenomenon which is not unique to lesbians. Blacks can disregard messages about them when the source is White. During slavery, slave owners may have viewed slaves as property, but slaves viewed themselves as people. Within Nazi Germany, the government viewed Jews as a dangerous group to be destroyed. Jews did not share the view, or they would have killed themselves. An
American in a foreign country may hear many anti-American messages, but disregards them. An individual can disregard a message about his/her group if the source of the message can be heard as naive, uninformed, prejudiced, or stupid.

Examples of talk abound in the lesbian community characterizing straights as ignorant and showing disregard for straight messages. Following are examples recorded in fieldnotes during naturally occurring conversations.

"If all of us woke up tomorrow with little green spots, (laughter) and they had to see how many of us there are (pause), well, ah, then they'd have to accept us."

"She tries, she really tries to understand, but just when I think, 'Yeah, yeah, maybe she does,' she turns around and says something really dumb."

"Them! I'm so God-damn tired of hearing her talk about 'them.' I wanta scream, 'Its not them, damn it; its me. I am Them.'"

"Anita, heheheh, yeah, well, I think I can see where she's comin' from, but man, is she fucked-up. I mean, I can see it but ain't no way she'll ever know where I'm at. She couldn't know if she wanted to. Ain't no way."

In all of the above instances of talk, a speaker states a dissimilarity of views. Straight views are constituted as ignorant through interpretation using lesbian social knowledge. Lesbian knowledge enables members to disregard straight messages concerning lesbians, or treat the messages as humorous.
Summary

Before one can verbally do and interpret lesbian humor, one must possess sophisticated lesbian knowledge, conversational skills, and interpretive procedures. Lesbian talk constitutes social knowledge and members use the knowledge to make sense of other talk. Women within the community are perceived by members as lesbians inasmuch as they are talked about as lesbians. After awareness, the process of becoming a member focuses on coming out. Talk is used to accomplish coming out within the community; one talks about the time before one was out as the time before one was aware. Any woman in the community who is not perceived as a lesbian can be viewed as a potential lesbian who is not aware of her own lesbianism.

A woman who is aware of her own lesbianism does a process of coming out. Coming out can be accomplished through sexual activity and/or talk. To be perceived as really out one must engage in sexual activity; however, the activity is seldom observed by members of the community except one's lover. Consequently, being out is done primarily through talk. One is out when one can talk as one who is out. The talk which does being out includes conversation about coming out, being out, and being brought out. All of the talk about being out works to constitute the member as a lesbian and a member.
By shifting to a lesbian register through their talk, members constitute the community as a **lesbian speech community**. Becoming a lesbian can be viewed as learning to talk as a lesbian. By reflexively interpreting talk and events from a lesbian perspective, members reinforce lesbian social knowledge and provide a context for the further interpretation of talk.

Status and membership are done through talk concerning how long one has been out in relation to one's age and how out one claims to be. Status, age, and membership are part of members' context and influence how talk is interpreted. Knowing one's status and membership influences how one's talk about coming out is interpreted. Knowing how one is talking about coming out influences one's interpretation of status and membership.

Being a member of the lesbian community is problematic outside the community. Lesbians outside the community must talk so as to pass as straight. Members also identify other lesbians outside the community. Identifying other lesbians is complex because other lesbians are also passing as straight. Interpreting talk outside the community is complicated by the additional level of lesbian reflexivity which exists for members. Members must be capable of talking and interpreting talk as straight, and at the same time, must be capable of interpreting talk from a lesbian perspective. Much lesbian humor exists because of the problematic nature of passing
and interpreting outside the community. Members respond to anti-lesbian talk outside the community as if they are straight. Within the community, however, the talk is repeated and responded to from a lesbian perspective. The lesbian interpretation of anti-lesbian talk within the community constitutes the talk as lesbian humor.
1 Basic communicative skills for lesbians becoming members means talk which can be heard as consistent with lesbian social knowledge. Learning basic verbal skills is learning how to talk like a lesbian. Skills include how to talk about the time before one was a lesbian, how one became a lesbian, and how one interacts with straights.

2 The AB event can be discussed in terms of social knowledge when both the speaker (A) and listener (B) share underlying information for sense making of a particular utterance and realize the shared element of the knowledge. See William Labov, "Rules for Ritual Insults," Studies in Social Interaction, ed. David Sudnow (New York: The Free Press, 1972), p. 156.

3 Recently, at an outside music festival, the announcer said from the stage that she enjoyed talking to an all lesbian audience. Later, a group of women confronted the announcer and stated that they were straight. She offered no apology. Their presence in a lesbian setting indicated they should have been lesbians.


5 The purpose of career counseling in many high schools and colleges is to make students aware of possible occupations. Regardless of ability, aptitude, and potential, a student cannot become an ichthyologist or a herpetologist if s/he is unaware of the possible reality for her/him.


7 Coming out is necessary for membership but is not sufficient. Being out can be viewed as a first step or "Initiation" for becoming a member. Through coming out one becomes a lesbian instead of a potential lesbian. After becoming a lesbian, one can be a potential member.
Membership is achieved through gaining and using lesbian social knowledge.

Providing the name and/or other identifying information concerning the woman who brought one out provides validity to the claim of being out. One could always "check out" the claim by asking the other woman (although I have only known of this happening on one occasion).

Register is defined as "a way of speaking that stands in a one-to-one relationship to a situation. By definition, if the register is different, then so is the situation, and conversely." See Susan Ervin-Tripp, "On Sociolinguistic Rules: Alternation and Co-occurrence," in Directions in Sociolinguistics, ed. John J. Gumperz and Dell Hymes (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., 1972), p. 216.

Being out can be done entirely through talk without engaging in a sex-act, but this is rare. The one exception might be a "political lesbian" who does not possess sexual feelings toward women but who has refused to sleep with men for political reasons. Political lesbians are often not trusted by members because without a sexual commitment they might slip back to men. Real lesbians are out sexually and verbally.

Learning and practicing activities in a casual manner is particularly problematic for individuals who engage in voluntary grouping. Members are not born into voluntary groups (as opposed to race, national origin), and therefore must learn appropriate behavior for voluntary group membership. See Alfred Schutz, On Phenomenology and Social Relations, ed. Helmut R. Wagner (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1970), p. 83.

Garfinkel, in his study of Agnes, discusses the importance of "practiced casualness." Agnes, a transsexual, possesses the body of a man although he considered himself to be, and passed as, a woman. To pass, Agnes has to talk and behave as a "normal, natural female." Agnes had to practice and observe himself concerning female behavior during interactions and at the same time appear to others as if his (her) female behavior was natural and non-problematic. See Harold Garfinkel, Studies in Ethnomethodology (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1967), 167-172.

Cicourel discusses doing a reciprocity of perspectives. Individuals assume that they would have the same experiences if they changed places with one
another. They can disregard any differences which exist because of their personally different ways of ascribing meaning. See Aaron V. Cicourel, *Cognitive Sociology* (New York: The Free Press, 1974), pp. 85-86.

Identifying work can be defined as the careful watching and listening lesbians do outside the community in an attempt to discover who of the other women they meet are also lesbians. I cannot tell you what non-verbal cues beyond prolonged eye contact work to signal that one is a lesbian. I have asked approximately 50 members about identifying cues, and they claim not to be able to explicate them.

How identifying work is accomplished is difficult to describe because it depends upon a sense of the familiar. By sense of the familiar, I mean a feeling one gets when meeting another woman that she (or something about her) is known, although one knows (intellectually) that the woman is a stranger. The lesbian can ask herself a series of mental questions but usually the process is not consciously considered.

Q: "Where do I know her from?"
A: "I don't."
Q: "Who does she remind me of?"
A: "No one, specifically."
Q: "What is it about this woman that is so terribly familiar?"
A: "I don't know (and it's driving me crazy)."
Q: "Her voice, looks, posture?"
A: "No, no, no."
Q: "What do I know about her?"
A: "Only the information (if any) I've been told about before I entered the situation—and—she's a lesbian!"

The sense of the familiar does not operate on an identifiable set of cues, but rather, a combination of impressions. The woman is perceived as having qualities as lesbian-ness just as religious sisters and priests have qualities of religious-ness. (A friend of mine who is a religious sister once told me that when she presents a paper on a religious topic at a convention, she always "scans" the audience for other religious. When I asked her how she identifies them, she said, "I don't know. I just can. My last audience had two sisters, a priest, and a possible priest.")

The informal name for the bar is used so commonly that members who wish to telephone the bar often look up the informal name in the phone book. When they realize it is not listed, they "remember" that the bar has a "real" name but often cannot remember what it is.
To investigate the meaning relationship between words, Sacks suggests the construct of a "membership categorization device." A membership categorization device is a collection of categories used to classify a population. To interpret meaning, one searches for devices which contain the first category of the utterance. Comparing the devices found for the second (third, fourth) category with the devices found for the first, allows one to interpret the utterance based upon the relationship of the device. A category can exist in different devices. The relationship of categories within a device is not stable. The context in which the descriptive category occurs influences the relationship between the category and the device. Although Sacks discusses the descriptive categories within utterances, I feel that it is possible to use entire utterances as categories. Utterances are heard as having relationships to one another, and the construct of the device can be expanded to accommodate the relationships. Instead of devices such as "family" or "stage of life," one would have devices such as "what teachers say in classrooms" or "'come on' lines for picking up a sexual partner." See Harvey Sacks, "On the Analyzability of Stories by Children," in Directions in Sociolinguistics, eds. John J. Gumperz and Dell Hymes (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., 1972) pp. 332-338.

Straight social knowledge, however, is not real for lesbians in devices dealing with sexuality (either straight or lesbian). Lesbians can do the talk and pass as straight. However, lesbian interpretation using straight knowledge is an interpretation of how a lesbian thinks straights perceive the talk, not the lesbian perception. The lesbian perception uses lesbian knowledge. An analogy exists in adults' intellectual understanding of children's fears of monsters in the dark. An adult can interpret the fear as real for the child, but the monsters do not become real for the adult. Understanding exists, but not belief.

Ervin-Tripp, 1972, p. 216.

Garfinkel discusses a number of techniques for regaining one's sense of normal form when it is disrupted. Members can verbally achieve normalization only within the community because normalizing talk would threaten one's ability to pass outside the community. See Harold Garfinkel, Studies in Ethnomethodology (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1967), pp. 59-67.
SECTION 3

Humor is emotional chaos remembered in tranquility.

James Thurber

Overview

Humor is an understanding test of speech community knowledge and interpretive procedures. Three forms of lesbian humor are discussed; interpretation is explic­ated and propositions of lesbian social knowledge are constituted. The three forms of lesbian humor are

1. breaching humor which normalizes specific breaches of lesbian social reality,
2. stereotyping humor which normalizes anti­lesbian stereotypes,
3. secret knowledge humor which constitutes lesbian knowledge as exclusive.

Following an examination of the three forms of humor is an analysis of Meg Christian's Introduction to "Ode to a Gym Teacher" inasmuch as lesbian humor is evidenced.

Humor

Humor can be defined from a communicative perspective as talk eliciting an intended response of laughter. Intention is important because other forms of
talk can unintentionally evoke laughter. Unintentional laughter-producing talk can be observed in the response to verbal faux pas. More specifically, humor is difficult to define because of the variations in form and function. One reason humor is viewed as a highly complex verbal skill is the level of reflexivity necessary for making sense of an utterance as humorous.

The indexical nature of language allows for utterances to be heard as humorous. For an utterance to be humorous, a listener must know the social context of the utterance, other possible interpretations of the utterance, the intention of the speaker, and the social knowledge of the speaker concerning the subject of the utterance. To "do" and "get" humor, both speaker and listener must share the social knowledge of the same similar speech community.

Humor is speech community specific. Through the study of humor, one acquires not only knowledge about the community, but also knowledge about how talk constitutes a community. Humor is particularly useful for examining how interpretation is accomplished within the community because humor's complexity makes interpretation problematic, and therefore, observable. Members' use of humor is directly tied to the community knowledge. How members' knowledge is used reflexively to interpret talk and constitute the community can be viewed through speech community specific humor.
Speech community specific humor can only be engaged in and interpreted (as humor) by members of the same community. Since members of the same community share speech community specific social knowledge, hearing the talk as humor must be accomplished through the use of this knowledge. That is, specific social knowledge is a necessary presupposition for talk to be heard as humor.

Discussing jokes as a form of humor, Sacks states,

"Jokes, and dirty jokes in particular, are constructed as 'understanding tests.' Not everyone supposably 'gets' each joke, the getting involving achievement of its understanding, a failure to get being supposable as involving a failure to understand."\(^1\)

In this way, the talk becomes an AB-event which members can hear as an instance of humor, as opposed to an insult or a factual utterance.\(^2\) For an utterance to be heard as humorous, both A and B must hear the talk as an AB-event in which the shared knowledge allows the utterance to be heard as humorous. An utterance is heard as humor inasmuch as the shared knowledge concerns the talk's membership categorization within a device. Devices such as "Derogatory Terms for Lesbians" and "expected reactions to lesbianism by straights" exist for members. Members can recognize talk as membership categories of lesbian devices and use the devices for interpretive work. Talk which is heard as humorous by members is interpreted as lesbian humor because of the use of lesbian devices. Straights do not hear the talk as humorous.
because straights do not use lesbian devices for interpretation. Members use lesbian devices to interpret talk as humor when in a lesbian setting among members, and the talk fits within a device.

**Lesbian Humor**

Lesbian humor may be defined as talk performed by lesbians, among lesbians, and topically concerns features of lesbian life and lesbian social knowledge. Lesbian humor is talk through which lesbian social knowledge is presented in an unexpected way, eliciting surprise or laughter from member listeners using lesbian devices.

The humor can be either in the form of personal stories which convey a past experience, or shorter, often one line utterances which comment upon some aspect of lesbianism or the lesbians’ interpretations of straights’ typifications of lesbianism. The underlying assumption of lesbian humor is that lesbians and straights do not share the same social knowledge. Because of the community specific nature of lesbian knowledge, a lesbian perspective can be applied to events through the use of lesbian devices. The lesbian perspective affects how the talk constitutes the social reality of the event such that talk which would not be interpreted as humorous by non-members is perceived as funny by members. The artful use of the indexicality of language to formulate humor is
particularly observable in talk which accomplishes lesbian humor.

In Section 1, the idea was advanced that one's reality work is accomplished through the use of artful conversational practices which constitute one's speech community's social knowledge. Lesbian humor is a highly complex conversational practice closely tied to the underlying knowledge of the lesbian community; additional reflexivity is necessitated by the use of lesbian devices for interpretation. Besides searching through all of the devices shared with non-members in which a membership category may fit, members must consider the lesbian devices. If the talk can be interpreted using a lesbian device, the member must decide if the situation is safe for a lesbian interpretation. Through the doing of lesbian humor, members display lesbian social knowledge as well as their perceptions of social knowledge of the straight community. Lesbian humor is funny because utterances spoken outside the community are heard from a lesbian perspective.

How lesbian humor constitutes member social reality is displayed three ways: (1) breaching humor normalizes breaches of lesbians' social reality when the breaches are specific and personal; (2) stereotyping humor normalizes breaches when generalizing of lesbians by the straight majority occurs; and (3) secret knowledge humor plays upon the exclusive nature of lesbian social
knowledge. By examining humor from these perspectives, lesbian knowledge, devices, and interpretive procedures become observable.

Humor, generated by specific breaching incidents, usually occurs in the form of personal stories. A breach is defined as a disruption of one's ceaseless reflexive use of a body of knowledge in interaction. A breach can occur when the taken-for-granted nature of one's social knowledge is called into question. The taken-for-granted measure of one's social knowledge is also called into question in general stereotyping humor. General stereotyping humor can be defined as talk concerning members' interpretations of straights' lesbian stereotypes. Instead of providing accounts of past events, as does breaching humor, derogatory utterances about lesbianism are provided in secret humor. Such utterances could be described as being "tongue-in-cheek." Since members think many straights believe the derogatory utterances as true, and they are false from a member perspective, the utterances work to put-down straights and are therefore interpreted as humorous.

Secret knowledge humor puts-down straights insofar as straights fail to understand the humor as humor. Asserting understanding failures can then reveal, e.g., recipients' lack of sophistication, a matter that an appropriately placed laugh can otherwise conceal. Straights are not present in safe settings to laugh and
conceal their understanding failures. Consequently, members can view straights as unsophisticated about lesbianism. Verbally demonstrating straights' lack of sophistication constitutes a put-down. The exclusive nature of lesbian knowledge makes humor possible because it is not shared with straights and is viewed by members as superior to straight knowledge of lesbianism. Breaching and stereotyping humor normalize breaches. All three forms of humorous talk constitute lesbian social knowledge as well as put down straights and allow members to constitute themselves conversationally as superior.

**Breaching Humor**

An artful use of talk's indexicality is observable in talk which humorously accounts for breaches of lesbians' social realities. Members of the lesbian community can pass in the straight community, but retain their sense of lesbian social reality. Consequently, although members look, act, and talk as straights outside the community, they continue to make sense of talk reflexively--particularly talk concerning lesbianism--using lesbian knowledge. If lesbians had a straight sense of reality ("forget" they are lesbians, become straight) when outside the community, lesbian breaching humor would not exist; members would not have a sense of reality different from others outside the community. Breaching occurs for members outside the community when straight
utterances are so inconsistent with lesbian social reality that reflexive use of lesbian knowledge momentarily loses its taken-for-granted-ness. The member must account for the momentary "break" in her sense of reality.

Individuals account for breaches in their social reality. Once one's sense of reality is breached, the individual may become angry, confused, or treat the incident as a joke or game. Garfinkel asked his students to perform a number of breaching experiments. In one experiment, students were asked to talk as strangers while in their own homes. Subject response was anger, confusion, or an attempt to interpret the interaction as a joke or an experiment. Many students could not carry out the assignment; they felt extremely uncomfortable breaching another's social reality. In some cases, students reported an inability to even begin the experiment; thinking about the task upset them to the point of inaction.

Although individuals appear to have some difficulty purposefully breaching one another's social reality, breaching can occur unintentionally. Breaching can also be tolerated from the perspective of the breacher when those being breached are less than equal. Two types of individuals exist: normals and those with a stigma. "By definition, of course, we believe the person with a stigma is not quite human." Included in Goffman's list
of those with "blemishes of individual character perceived as . . . unnatural passions" are homosexuals.\textsuperscript{8}

Events Outside the Community. When a lesbian is at work and another worker says something heard as anti-lesbian, "I sure wouldn't want any of those queers around me," the lesbian must try to make sense of this utterance in terms of her lesbian knowledge. The lesbian is being told, although unknowingly, that members of her speech community, including herself, are less than human, but she knows from her own knowledge that she is equally human. Anger and confusion exist for the member. Instead of jumping up and proclaiming she is a lesbian and is not perverted, the lesbian is likely to continue to act and talk as if she is friends with the offending person.

The lesbian remembers the comment when she returns to her community. Talking to her member friends, the lesbian will tell them what the offending person said. They will all laugh. They are not laughing at what the person said. They are laughing about how they can make sense of the utterance. Within the community, when repeated by a member, the utterance, "I sure wouldn't want any of those queers around me," can be heard as belonging to a membership category device entitled, "Dumb Things Straights Say." By labelling the utterance as "dumb," it can be heard as humorous; the straight speaker and straight social knowledge can be viewed as
inferior. Normalizing the breach occurs within the community because the use of the membership category device, "Dumb Things Straights Say," allows the member to accomplish reflexive interpretation using lesbian social knowledge. The membership category device itself can be viewed as lesbian social knowledge.

Why do breaches occur if a member can use the above membership category device for reflexive interpretation? First, a member outside the community may hear both the lesbian and straight interpretation of the utterance. She may have to respond as a straight to continue passing. Hearing the straight interpretation allows the lesbian to hear the utterance as anti-lesbian instead of dumb.

Second, anti-lesbian utterances often are stated by friends and family members. The member immediately feels angry, hurt or confused; the utterance does not fit into either the membership category device "Utterances Expected from Friends" or "Utterances Expected from Family Members." The emotional feelings are compounded; no matter how well the lesbian thinks she is passing, she can never be entirely sure if she is successful. She can never be sure if the straight speaker knows she is a member of the deviant group.

Examining lesbian humor one can identify features of lesbian social knowledge. Features of social knowledge are stated as propositions. Each proposition is a fact above question and taken-for-granted. Facts are a part of
the context used for the interpretation of talk. For example, "Being heterosexual is correct," is a proposition of straight social knowledge. Straights do not question their heterosexuality and take it for granted. The utterance, "Bob and Cathy are going to the movies," is interpreted as "Bob and Cathy have a date." The utterance, "Sue and Cathy are going to the movies," is interpreted as "Neither of them could get a date."

Instances of lesbian social knowledge are numbered according to the example number of the talk which displays them. Sub-letters are used when more than one proposition exists for a given sample. Lesbian knowledge displayed by example 2, is labelled 2a, 2b, and 2c.

Examples and Explications of Breaching Humor

Example 1.

A lesbian teacher is speaking: "So I'm sitting at my desk after school and Janie's mother comes in and tells me she is picking up her kid after school everyday because she has heard that homosexuals live in the neighborhood. I say, 'Oh, really?' And she says, 'Well, you know what could happen if one of them got near the children.'"

In example 1, the teacher hears the mother's talk as anti-lesbian; as talk which does not fit in the membership category device, "Mothers' Talk to Teachers."
The device, "Mothers' Talk to Teachers," can be categorized by utterances such as "How is my child's behavior?" and "Why did Bobby receive an E in arithmetic?"

"Mothers' Talk to Teachers" can be typified as utterances about school: grades, homework, behavior of child, field trips, a bond levy, the P.T.A.. Therefore, the mother's anti-lesbian talk does not fit for the teacher in mother/teacher device. The teacher does little talk, saying only, "Oh, really?" One of the lesbian's options when anti-lesbian talk occurs outside the community is to take no turns. If one must take a turn, it is usually best to make it short.

The teacher's sense of social reality is breached; she can not make conventional sense of the mother's talk using either mother/teacher social knowledge or lesbian social knowledge. When I asked the teacher later how she felt during the conversation, she said,

I just panicked. Why was she telling me this? Did it (her lesbianism) show?

Consider the mother's talk in example 1. She tells the teacher that she is afraid of her little girl being "come near" by homosexuals. Homosexual is a term usually used for males. The mother's use of the word, homosexuals, since she has a little girl, can be viewed as ignorant concerning correct terminology. The mother's mistake would only be viewed as humorous by the teacher after the incident when she was in her speech community.
She would never have found it funny while she was talking with the mother.

For an utterance to fit in the membership category device, "Dumb Things Straights Say," the utterance must be interpreted as incorrect in such terms. If members interpret knowledge constituted in and through the utterance as incorrect, lesbian knowledge reflexively constitutes the utterance's incorrectness. Because members hear the mother's concern, "if any of them got near the children," as humorous, the following proposition is advanced.

1. Lesbians do not have an interest in molesting children. A few sick individuals may be interested in children, but homosexuality is not a factor. The number of lesbians who might have this interest is equal proportionally to the number of straight women who want to molest children.

The mother's incorrect interpretation is displayed through her talk. The mother's fear that homosexuals might molest her child, and the lesbian teacher's knowledge that lesbians do not molest children, are inconsistent. The story is also funny because the mother does not appear to recognize the teacher as a lesbian. The mother states that her child is safe if she drives her to and from school; in this way, no individual who is homosexual can get near her child. The lesbian teacher, as well as her lesbian member audience, know that despite the
actions of the mother, her child will be in contact with a homosexual—the teacher—for many hours each day.

An alternative action for the lesbian teacher would be for her to tell the mother not to worry, because the teacher is homosexual and knows that the mother's fears are unreasonable. If the teacher had taken this action, the mother might become upset, tell the principal, and have the teacher fired. If the teacher wishes to remain a teacher, the most prudent action open to her is to pretend she agrees with the mother and later normalize the situation by giving a subsequent account of the incident within her community.

Example 2.

A lesbian who has told her "best" friend that she is gay ends her account by stating: "And so I'm telling her I've been gay for as long as she's known me, and she's acting like I'm some stranger who wants to rape her."

The lesbian's social reality is breached when her friend reacts not as a friend but as a threat. The lesbian is not a rapist and therefore interprets the talk humorously. The lesbian cannot reflexively interpret the talk using knowledge from her past friendship; her friend is acting strange. Best friends and strangers are never the same individuals. Consequently, the friend is talking to the lesbian as if the latter is
a stranger. Through her talk, the friend changes the lesbian from her friend to a stranger who is a rapist. Such a situation is painful as well as confusing. When the account is presented within the community, however, the listeners laugh. Their laughter is not unsympathetic; rather, it supports a reflexive view of the friend as incorrect. The laughter normalizes the breach of the lesbian's social reality by placing the friend's talk as out of "it" ("it," here, indexes lesbian social knowledge). For the talk to be interpreted as incorrect, specific knowledge exists which members use to constitute the account as humorous.

The straight friend acted as if her friend had changed strangely. If the change is heard as humorous, the following can be heard as an instance of shared lesbian knowledge.

2a. Being a lesbian does not change a woman other than her sexual preference for women.

If lesbian social knowledge can be used reflexively to interpret lesbians rapaciously, the lesbian's account could not be heard as humorous. Instead of laughing, responses might include, "Well, of course, that's what we do," or "So why didn't you rape her?" Had pro-rape utterances occurred, "lesbians rape other women," could be heard as lesbian knowledge. Pro-rape utterances did not occur; the members' laughter worked to constitute the
following lesbian knowledge.

2b. Lesbians do not rape other women.

A third proposition is not as directly observable as are 2a and 2b. Both 2a and 2b treat topics articulated in the account—changing and rape. Knowledge labelled 2c can be used to reflexively view the account as humorous because of an implication of the talk. Consequently, 2c is presented before it is explicated such that the reader can use 2c to interpret the discussion.

2c. Lesbians see other lesbians as their primary sexual partners and do not engage in sexual behavior with straight women, unless they are viewed as unaware, potential lesbians.

Proposition 2c is more complex because it encompasses the lesbian concepts of awareness and potential lesbians. Lesbian social knowledge holds that all lesbians were once unaware of their lesbian and/or potential membership in the lesbian speech community.

According to lesbian social knowledge, for the lesbian's friend to have a legitimate belief that sexual contact might occur, she would have to see herself as unaware or potentially lesbian. It is difficult to imagine a straight woman saying, "I only think I am a straight woman; I am really a lesbian, but I am unaware of it."
If the woman sees herself as potentially lesbian, her fear should be of the problems which lesbians face in passing in the straight community, not of sexual contact with her friend. The woman is assumed straight inasmuch as the lesbian speaker does not identify her as a potential. Section 2 discusses members' claims of being capable of identifying lesbians and potential lesbians with almost 100% accuracy, and how this claim is reflexively accomplished within the lesbian speech community.

If the friend has been identified as potentially lesbian, she would not make sense of her friend as a stranger and a rapist. The lesbian speaker would become for her friend the "who" in the utterance, "Who brought you out?" After becoming a member, the friend would talk about the experience as the beginning of her coming out. The account can be heard as humorous insofar as stating that the lesbian might want to engage in sex with her, the friend is implying that she is potentially lesbian. If the friend has lesbian social knowledge, she would be labelling herself a potential lesbian through her talk and a potential stranger and rapist as well.

Example 3.
A lesbian whose mother has discovered her daughter is gay is speaking: "So she asked me, and I said, 'Well, yeah,' and she started yelling and
screaming. I didn't know what to do. I was really pretty upset so I went into the other room. Then my dad comes in, puts his arm around my mother and says, 'It'll be alright, honey. Just pretend like she's dead.' I didn't know what to do so I grabbed my stuff and came back to Columbus. I didn't hear from them for six months. Now they want to come and see me, but my mother said, "Get that girl out of the house, or I'll kill her.' (pause, smile) I guess they're coming to view the body."

The breach of the lesbian's social reality occurs when her father says, "Just pretend like she's dead." A lesbian might expect one's parents to be upset discovering their daughter is a lesbian. The utterances the lesbian expects to hear can be interpreted from a lesbian perspective. Expected utterances include, "Where did we go wrong,? "What can we tell the family,?" and "No, you aren't." "Just pretend like she's dead" does not fit in the same membership categorization device with the three possible utterances mentioned above. The lesbian cannot interpret her father's utterance using either daughter or lesbian social knowledge. Hurt, angry, and confused, she flees the non-sense.

At the point in the story when the lesbian reported what her father said, the responses from the listeners
were "Oh, no," and "Jeeez." If the father were perceived as being correct in his assessment, one might expect a response such as "Right," or "Super idea." Although members understand and hold as a part of their social knowledge that non-members often have difficulty accepting a family member's lesbianism, death or it's pretense is outside of, and inconsistent with, the difficulty they are expected to experience.\textsuperscript{12}

Laughter allows the lesbian to hear her father's utterance as belonging to the "dumb" device and reflexively to interpret the utterance as a mistake instead of cruel disregard. Telling the account and members' laughter not only normalize the member's sense of reality as a lesbian, but also as a daughter. Although the father is heard as over-reacting to the situation, his utterance can be heard humorously given proposition 3a.

3a. There is nothing unacceptable about having a family member who is a lesbian.

When the mother states, "Get that girl out of the house, or I'll kill her," she is implying that the lesbian's lover is responsible for her daughter's lesbianism. The mother's blame of her daughter's lover is incorrect. Formally stated, the mother's threat to kill the lover is humorous because;

3b. A woman either is a lesbian, or she is not. A particular lover does not cause a woman to be a
lesbian and cannot be blamed for that woman's lesbianism.

Non-members who learn of another's lesbianism often attribute the phenomenon to something or someone other than the lesbian herself. Parents do this, typically, when their children "get into trouble." Juvenile delinquency is accounted for in similar ways. "Where did we (parents) go wrong?" can be heard as such an example. Non-members look for a cause; the friend or family member discovered to be a lesbian has been previously perceived as too good to voluntarily be bad. Another coping technique can be seen in example 2; the friend constitutes the lesbian as a stranger and a rapist.

Refusing to admit one's daughter is really a lesbian by free choice (although lesbian knowledge claims that no choice is involved; one is what one is) normalizes a breach of family social reality. Parents may not have necessary knowledge for accepting their daughters as lesbians. Blaming another person for the actions of one's children is often seen when teenagers get into trouble. It is as if parents say, "I don't care whose fault it is as long as it's not my child's." Members' social knowledge holds that one is a lesbian simply because one is a lesbian and has become aware of it. Blaming another woman and/or wanting to kill are heard as funny.
Example 4.

A lesbian who has just come to a dance after an argument with her father is speaking: "He's known about me and Susan (her lover) for a long time. I mean, they treat her like one of the family. Now, just because I've really come out, and I talked to the press, he's upset. He said, 'But what will our friends and the rest of the family say? If you want to do it, change your name.' I was so pissed, and I told him, 'If you don't like it, you change your name!'" (Everyone laughs except the woman telling the account.) "Look, it's not funny, it's not! I'm really pissed, and I'm hurt, too." (Pause, everyone is still laughing.) "Oh, ok, I can see it, yea, you're right, but it's still not funny now." (Note: two weeks later when I saw this member at a street fair and asked her about her father, she stated she was still angry, but kept laughing throughout her conversation about it.)

The father's utterance, "But what will our friends and the rest of the family say?" is heard as humorous because it fits in the device "What Parents Say Upon Discovering Their Daughter is a Lesbian." The father, however, is not discovering his daughter is a lesbian ("He's known about me and Susan for a long time.") and
is reacting to others learning of her lesbianism. Similarly, the father's utterance can be heard as incorrect in light of proposition 3a.

The breach of the lesbian's social reality occurs when her father tells her to change her name. Asking a family member to change her name implies she is neither to be identified with nor considered a member of the family. In this way, the father is telling his daughter to change who she is (a member of the family, his daughter). In example 2, the idea that lesbianism does not change a woman except for her sexual preference was discussed and shown to be incorrect when interpreted using proposition 2a. The breach occurs because the father's utterance cannot be interpreted appropriately using the device "How Parents Talk to Their Children." Changing one's name can be viewed as similar to having one's parents pretend one is dead; both actions deny family membership status.

The laughter following the request to change her name formulates the utterance as humorous instead of serious. If the father's request can be heard as legitimate using lesbian knowledge, the response would have been supportive comments for the father instead of laughter. Since the father already knows his daughter is lesbian, the request for a name change cannot be interpreted entirely through proposition 3a. The father may not object to his daughter being a lesbian but he does not
want others to know. Consequently, the following proposition, similar to 3a, can be heard as lesbian social knowledge.

4. There is nothing wrong with being a lesbian. One should not have to hide one's sexual preference, although lesbians often do hide it for a variety of practical reasons. Being lesbian is not a disgrace to one's name (or family name).

The lesbian's statement to her father, "If you don't like it, you change your name!" can be heard as the woman making proposition 4. She does not perceive anything wrong with openly declaring herself lesbian. By telling her father to change his name, she is stating explicitly lesbian social knowledge. By doing so, she is attempting to normalize the breach of her sense of social reality. She is interpreting the situation using lesbian social knowledge.

On another level, she is claiming the right to use the name she received from her father. One's last name is gained from one's father and is usually viewed as belonging to him. By suggesting that her father change his name, she claims the name as equally hers, and herself as equally human. "You change your name" was followed not only with laughter, but also with cheers and utterances such as "Yeah, right," and "You tell him what he can do with it."
By reinforcing the member's challenging statement to her father, members not only reinforce the statement and the lesbian, but also the lesbian social knowledge the statement presupposes. Laughter, in response to breaching humor stories and reinforcing comments, normalizes initial breaches, and also reflexively continues constituting lesbian social knowledge. Through members' reinforcement of lesbian knowledge, the community continues to be constituted as a lesbian speech community.

Example 5
I asked my informant Mary to write about a humorous experience regarding her lesbianism. She wrote: "My lover and I have a one bedroom apartment with one double bed. It's obvious that we sleep together! But when my parents come to visit me, its their usual habit of taking a look around at everything (the walls, the floors, the windows) except the bed. They pretend as though its not even there, but then at Christmas time they give me all sorts of sheets and pillowcases. My lover and I sort of snicker after my parents leave. They don't want to acknowledge the fact that two women could be sleeping together, but yet they stand motionless, for the longest time, at the bedroom door, looking at everything but the bed."
In example 5, the parents act as if a physical object, the bed, does not exist although the lesbian and her lover can see that it does exist during the parents' visits. The breach occurs because a taken-for-granted part of the lesbian's reality, the bed, can no longer be taken-for-granted. Her parents want to see her apartment, but they do not want to look at the double bed. By not looking at the bed, they can deny its existence during their visit. Similarly, they can deny the existence of their daughter's lesbianism inasmuch as the bed can be seen as an indicator of her lesbianism. The parents do, however, acknowledge the existence of a bed when they are not at the apartment— at Christmas time— by sending sheets and pillowcases. In most Western cultures, it is difficult to make sense of situations in which physical objects are treated as if they do not exist when they are present and observable. The bed situation is even more complex because the parents act as if it does not exist when it is observable to them and act as if it does exist when it is not observable.

If the lesbian can not use lesbian knowledge to account for her parents' behavior, one possible explanation might be that the bed has the ability to be selectively visible. The selected visibility of physical objects is not a proposition of Western culture and, therefore, cannot be used to interpret her parent's behavior.
Inasmuch as the lesbian sees the bed, and believes her parents see the bed, as an indicator of her lesbianism, she can use lesbian knowledge to interpret their behavior. By not acknowledging the bed, the parents behavior reinforces a proposition of lesbian social knowledge.

5. Parents do not wish to acknowledge their child's lesbianism.

Proposition 5 also can be used to interpret the parents behavior in examples 3 and 4. In those examples, instead of denying an inanimate object, the parents deny the existence of their daughter as their daughter, by pretending she is dead or at least no longer a family member.

Proposition 5 ties directly to the idea that non-lesbians view lesbianism pejoratively. Many members believe their parents really know but never ask. In some cases, members report trying to talk to their parents about lesbianism only to have the parent abruptly change the subject and pretend s/he does not know what the child is talking about. One member states,

I know they know. They have to. They don't want to talk about it. I mean, they don't really want to know. (pause) Well, they don't want to admit that they know." I asked, "admit to whom?" She answered, "To themselves, I guess, This way they can keep on playing the game.

Through an investigation of breaching humor, one can examine not only lesbian knowledge, but also how
members communicatively normalize breaches. By treating an account as humorous, shared laughter allows members to constitute lesbian social knowledge and at the same time interpret the account using such knowledge.

**Stereotyping Humor**

Stereotyping humor is defined as talk constituting a member perspective concerning straights' stereotypes of lesbians. Instead of denying the stereotypes, members state them as if they are true. Stereotyping utterances are treated as humorous, and laughter does the reflexive work allowing the utterances to be heard as incorrect. Utterances interpreted as information or facts are valid if taken seriously. Stating facts belonging to non-members and treating them as funny, the facts are rendered humorous, as errors and/or mistakes.

The incorrect facts attributed to non-members are heard as incorrect because of the reflexive use of lesbian knowledge to interpret them. Similarly, by demonstrating the incorrectness of stereotyping utterances through laughter, the talk constitutes lesbian social knowledge. In this way, the talk and the social knowledge cannot be separated from one another. Example 6 illustrates the constitution of knowledge through humor.

**Example 6.**

One night Karen, who was sitting at the bar, stated to Barb that she was going to the restroom.
When Barb put her hand on Karen's arm and started to stand, Karen said, "But I have to, (pause) you know, queers hang out in public restrooms." Barb laughed and sat down while Karen walked toward the back of the bar.

In example 6, for Karen to say, "But I have to, you know, queers hang out in public restrooms," and for it to be viewed as an appropriate statement, one of two assumptions must be operating. Either Karen is straight and is giving from her straight perspective a true account concerning lesbian stereotypes, or she is a lesbian and is stating the assumed stereotype as a means of showing it as false. Since it is known that Karen is a member of the lesbian community, it may be assumed, based upon the perceived sexual preference of women who enter the lesbian bar, that Karen is a lesbian.

Another clue to the indexical meaning of the utterance is that Barb immediately laughs. If a straight woman entered the bar and uttered example 6, members would not laugh unless she was known as wise. For example 6 to be heard as lesbian humor, the utterance must be heard as an AB-event. Both speaker and listener must know, and must know that the other knows, that the utterance in example 6 is untrue. It is untrue, in this case, when interpreted using lesbian social knowledge. Second, both A and B must know that non-members can hear
the utterance as true. The second point is necessary if one is to hear an utterance as humorous. For example, one cannot substitute "Queers lay eggs in public restrooms" for "Queers hang out in public restrooms." Substitution of this type cannot be perceived as humorous, because shared lesbian social knowledge cannot be used to interpret it.

Inasmuch as no one is perceived as hearing the "laying eggs" utterance as true, members do not talk about it. By not talking about laying eggs or the possibility of anyone hearing this as true, it is not constituted as lesbian knowledge. What is talked about concerning restrooms is hanging out because straights are thought to hear hanging out as true.

Returning to the necessary conditions for hearing "Queers hang out in public restrooms" as humorous, two highly related propositions are needed for reflexive work.

6a. Lesbians go to the restroom to urinate (not for sex).

6b. Straights think gays (although the claim is usually directed toward gay men) engage in sex in public restrooms or spend time in them for a thrill.

The utterance in example 6 states proposition 6b from a straight perspective. Using proposition 6a to interpret the utterance, the utterance can be heard as untrue.
Since the untrue form of the proposition begins, "Straights think," treating the utterance as humorous constitutes 6a (what lesbians think is true concerning going to the restroom) as true. In this way, lesbian knowledge is used to interpret the utterance as humorous, and in so doing, constitutes lesbian social knowledge.

Example 7.
One night as I was approaching the bar, I saw a member whom I knew (Patty) leaving the building. "Hi," said Patty. "Hi. What're you doing?" I asked.
"Oh, I thought I'd go out and rape a few kids," answered Patty who then laughed.

Verbally, the observer is treated as a member, and is therefore expected to be knowledgeable. If the observer does not have such knowledge, the utterance, "I thought I'd go out and rapd a few kids," can not be interpreted humorously. Utterances heard as stereotyping humor are done only in the presence of other members. If a member does the utterance in the presence of non-members, lesbian knowledge can not be used to hear the utterance as humorous. If one can not use lesbian knowledge for sense-making, the utterance is heard as a serious intention. The listener's reaction would then probably be feelings of fear or revulsion instead of laughter.
Assuming the speaker is a lesbian and assuming she is not a child molester—which would have no connection to her lesbianism, according to lesbian social knowledge—the utterance must be heard as humorous or an intentional lie. For the utterance to be heard as a lie, the speaker assumes the observer does not have the community's knowledge. Since the observer is about to enter the lesbian bar, the member assumes I am a member and have necessary social knowledge to hear her utterance as humorous.

Similar assumptions must be invoked to hear example 7 as humorous. The form, although not the content, is the same for all instances of stereotyping humor. The utterance must be heard as an AB-event and two highly related propositions of lesbian knowledge must be used for interpreting the utterance. The two propositions are (1) what lesbians know to be true, and (2) what lesbians know straights think is true. Schematically, the form of stereotyping humor is as follows.

\[
P_1 \text{ (Proposition 1), } P_2 \text{ (proposition 2), } U \text{ (utterance)}
\]

\[
P_1 \text{ and } P_2 \text{ are mutually exclusive. If } P_1, \text{ then not } P_2. \text{ If } P_2, \text{ then not } P_1. \text{ Both } P_1 \text{ and } P_2 \text{ cannot be heard as true when interpreting } U. \text{ } U \text{ states } P_2.
\]

To do humor, \( S \) (straights think) is added to \( P_2 \).

\[
P_1 \text{ and } SP_2 \text{ can both be heard as true when interpreting } U. \text{ If } P_1 \text{ and } SP_2 \text{ are heard as true, } P_2
and U must be heard as false. By interpreting U using \( P_1 \) and \( SP_2 \), U is heard as false and humorous since \( P_2 \) is attributed to straights \( (SP_2) \). The message is "Straights think false (dumb) things about lesbians." Since the utterance is attributed to straights, it then fits in the membership categorization device, "Dumb Things Straights Say," which has been previously shown to be humorous.

The following two propositions are necessary for hearing "I thought I'd go out and rape a few kids" as humorous.

7a. Lesbians do not have an interest in molesting children. A few sick individuals (both straight and lesbian) may be interested in children, but such individuals are not predominantly hetero-or homosexual. The number of lesbians who might have such an interest is equal proportionally to the number of straight women who want to molest children. (Same as proposition 1)

7b. Straights think gays frequently molest children.

As in example 6, the utterance in example 7 can be heard as a statement of what straights believe, given lesbian social knowledge of straights. What straights think and proposition 7a cannot both be true; by interpreting utterance 7 using 7a, the utterance can be
heard as humorous. The presumed straight knowledge of the situation can be heard as incorrect, and lesbian knowledge thereby is constituted.

The form, or how stereotyping utterances can be heard as humorous, is much the same for all examples of stereotyping humor. To avoid redundancy in the following examples, I shall focus on the content.

Example 8.
Two lesbians sitting in the bar are discussing the need for more women to participate in a local women's organization.
Sandy: "What we need is to get more of the straight women interested. I mean, they have as much to gain as we do."
Tonie: "Yeah, well, I think some of 'em are afraid. You know. It could be contagious."
("It" refers to lesbianism.)

The word, contagious, implies that one can catch lesbianism. That lesbianism is contagious implies it is a social disease. Furthermore, implying that lesbianism is a disease suggests, inasmuch as one cannot be immunized against it, that anyone can become a lesbian if one is in contact with lesbians. Lesbians hear the contagious utterance as incorrect and humorous given the following propositions.
8a. One does not decide to be a lesbian, nor can one be recruited. One either is a lesbian or one is not. A crucial factor is becoming aware of one's potential lesbianism. Only one who is a lesbian can become a lesbian.

8b. Straights think contact with gays may cause a straight to become gay. A closely related idea is that lesbians recruit straight women or seduce them.

Example 9.
Two members are sitting in the bar, and Judy is talking about the deterioration of her present relationship with her lover. The topic is sex (or the lack of it).
Judy: "I'm feeling really deprived, ah, I mean . . . ."
Suzy: "That's depraved."
(They both laugh although the conversation has been serious before Suzy's utterance.)

Example 9 is interesting because of the play on words; the change of one letter from an "i" to an "a". Not only does the change of one letter change the interpretation, it changes it such that members can hear the two meanings as nearly opposite. Deprived, which can be heard as true and serious within the community--and the specific relationship which is the topic of the talk, is
artfully changed to depraved. Depraved can be heard as non-serious when interpreted using lesbian knowledge.

9a. Lesbians are normal people. (They are not deviant, perverted, sick, or disgusting.)

9b. Straights think lesbians are deviant and/or perverted.

Besides changing the meaning of the word and changing the conversation from serious to humorous, depraved can be heard as constituting both women as lesbians. Depraved works to constitute Suzy as a member because one must be a member to have necessary communicative methods. Depraved also allows Suzy to be heard as constituting Judy as a member. Judy is constituted as a member because the utterance is in response to her talk concerning her sexual relationship. Even though Judy claims not to be doing lesbian sex (deprived), Suzy constitutes her as still being a lesbian (depraved). In this way, one can be constituted as lesbian not only through one's own talk, but also through the talk of another member.

In the final two examples of stereotyping humor, the propositions used are 9a and 9b. Examples 10 and 11 are presented to display how different humorous utterances are interpreted using identical social knowledge.
Example 10.

One night a group of softball players were sitting in the bar drinking after a game. The following conversation occurred.

Connie: "Everybody take your 'Lite' can and crunch."

(They all do so using one hand.)

Debbie: "What are we anyhow? What are we doing?"

Connie: "Hostile movers!"

(This was followed by much loud laughter.)

To hear example 10 as humorous, one must be able to generalize interpretations from the perceived stereotype. Example 10 is the only instance in which the words, "hostile movers," are recorded. When I asked members to define the utterance, they could not provide a definition if I did not tell them the context of the talk. When I explained the context, as it is presented in the example, members said the utterance fit the image they believed straights held of lesbians.

To interpret example 10 as humorous, the indexical nature of language must become observable. The observability occurs because members interpret the talk indexically. The words, hostile movers, are not normally used as a means of stereotyping lesbians. The interpretation, based upon members' ability to generalize concepts from lesbian knowledge, illustrates the unlimited
accomplishments of language use. Utterances new to members can be interpreted through specific community knowledge if they are heard as being in some way similar to utterances which have occurred in the social histories of members. New utterances are interpreted as familiar utterances with which they are similar. Members can hear hostile movers as a humorous utterance because, based upon its social context, its indexical meaning is heard as similar to other incorrect stereotypes of lesbians.

Hostile movers is interpreted as belonging to a membership categorization device which includes a number of other members of the device heard as humorous. Members of the device can be heard as humorous when they are interpreted using propositions 9a and 9b (page 145). Some of the other items in the device are truck drivers, stompin' dykes, child molester, pervert, and deviant. All of the members of the categorization device can be used to do humor. The generic category, which might be labelled "Stereotypes of Lesbian Women," is heard as containing incorrect items. The AB-event nature of the utterances and member reflexive work allow members of the device to be heard as humorous.

Through the reflexive use of lesbian knowledge, members recognize member categories of the device. Two conditions must be satisfied if members are to recognize new instances of member categories of the device. First, the words must be capable of being heard as describing
hard, ugly, ill-mannered, morally degenerate people. Any such description can be interpreted using proposition 9b and therefore, attributed to straights. Second, the words must indexically reference lesbians. For example, in the following conversation, hostile movers would not be heard as a lesbian stereotype even if the talk occurred between members.

Cathy: "Did your stuff all get here from Michigan ok?"
Karen: "It got here, but a lot of it was broken. They sure were hostile movers."

In the example, the hostile movers are heard as being furniture movers who were hostile toward the belongings they moved. In example 10, hostile movers can be heard as referring to lesbians because of the preceding actions and utterances. Women do not usually crunch beer cans with one hand. Doing so can be viewed as unfeminine. The next utterance, "What are we anyhow? What are we doing?" presents the pronoun "we," twice. When the next utterance, "hostile movers," is spoken, it can be heard as referring to the "we" of the two questions. In this way, hostile movers verbally is constituted as "we," and the "we" of the conversation indexes lesbians.

A simple test for negative images of women is as follows. Imagine a girl saying to her mother, "When I grow up, I want to be a ______." Fill in the blank with the questionable phrase. If one would expect mother's
response to be, "That's nice," the image is not negative. The more shocked or upset one would expect mother to be, the more negative the female image is among straights.15

**Example 11.**
One night two members (Beth and Vicky) who have been going together for a number of years are sitting at a table with a group of friends. Beth leans over and kisses Vicky on the cheek.
"You pervert," says Vicky.
All of the women at the table, including Beth, laugh.

Example 11 illustrates interpretive work using propositions 9a and 9b. The word, pervert, can be heard by members as having two meanings. Pervert can be heard as true only from a straight perspective, according to lesbian knowledge. When interpreted using lesbian knowledge, pervert is heard as incorrect and/or humorous. Pervert is a member of the same device as hostile movers. Pervert, however, is a commonly used category whereas hostile movers is not.

Among members, pervert is heard as humorous because listeners know the speaker can not be serious; she is a member. In the example, to call one's own lover a pervert would be the same as calling oneself a pervert if one were heard seriously. As in example 11, pervert can be the
locus of humor and also constitute affection. For example, during a party in their own home, a member said to her lover,

"Hey, pervert, get the potato chips." If the word is heard as an insult, one would expect the speaker's lover to start an argument (dery being a pervert) or throw the chips. Instead, the member addressed as "pervert" smiles at her lover and walks to the kitchen to get the chips. Used as an affectionate term, pervert may be interpreted as affirming one's relationship with another member.

Pervert must be heard as an AB-event if it is to be heard as affectionate and/or humorous instead of insulting. Both members must know they share propositions 9a and 9b. Through the reflexive use of the propositions, the utterance constitutes their relationship—whether they are lovers or friends—as a lesbian relationship. Pervert, interpreted as stigma by non-members, is interpreted by members such that it constitutes lesbians as lesbians and the speech community as a lesbian speech community.

In examples 6-11, straight knowledge, as it is known by lesbians, (propositions 6b, 7b, 8b, 9b) verbally is constituted as humorous and incorrect. When one holds another's social knowledge as humorous and incorrect, it becomes easy to consider their knowledge as inferior to one's own. This inferior view is similar to the way Western society looks upon treatment by witchdoctors in other cultures. When one views oneself as superior, alternative views can be interpreted as
Knowledge and Power. In everyday life, adults often hear accounts of children as humorous. Adults interpret children's utterances as affectionately amusing whereas lesbians interpret straights' utterances as stupidly humorous. Adults should know better; children are cute and naive. The relationship between adults and children and the relationship between straights and lesbians is influenced by power. Power is defined as the ability to regulate the behavior of others. In the relationship between adults and children, adults have power to regulate children. Children must behave when in the presence of adults. In the relationship between straights and lesbians, straights have power to regulate lesbians. Lesbians must pass when in the presence of straights.

Lesbians have more knowledge about lesbianism than straights. Usually, individuals thought to be most knowledgeable on a specific topic are also thought to be most powerful in that domain. "Knowledge equals power" is not true for a lesbian concerning lesbianism when she is outside her speech community. A lesbian is outside of her community most of the time, and she cannot use her knowledge of lesbianism to gain power. She cannot gain power by displaying her knowledge because straight power forces her to pass. To pass, she must hide her knowledge of lesbianism.
Within her community, a lesbian can display her knowledge and gain power. An artful way of displaying lesbian knowledge is through lesbian humor. Inasmuch as a lesbian does not need to hide her knowledge, she can compare it to straight knowledge. Through lesbian humor, members normalize the relationship between knowledge and power.

**Exclusive Social Knowledge Humor**

Lesbians constitute, as a part of their social knowledge, the social fact that straights have incorrect and inferior knowledge about lesbianism. Since lesbians and straights do not share identical social knowledges, members can interpret their social knowledge as community specific and exclusive. For utterances depending upon the exclusive nature of knowledge to be humorous, no breach is necessary. Although the humor is not related to a breach outside the community, it is necessary for talk to acknowledge the existence of the straight community. For a secret to be a secret, a community must exist whose members do not share the knowledge. One cannot have a secret unless one also has someone for whom the information is unknown.

Lesbian social knowledge is exclusive insofar as it is a non-AB-event. Members do not share their knowledge with straights; they could not share and continue to pass. Not sharing allows them to have more knowledge
and, within the community, more power. Communicatively, non-AB-events are lesbian interpretive procedures. Lesbian membership categorization devices are not shared with straights; straights are not capable of lesbian interpretation. If one cannot interpret as a member, one can never know what members know. Withholding devices is sufficient for making knowledge secret.

Withholding lesbian device information is accomplished in and through lesbian's ability to pass as straight outside the community. Although passing can be seen as problematic for a lesbian, the withholding of one's lesbian identity is the ultimate secret. Concerning passing, Goffman states:

These errors of identification are chuckled over, gloated over by the passer and his friends. Similarly one finds that those who at the moment are routinely concealing their personal or occupational identity may take pleasure in tempting the devil, in bringing a conversation with unsuspecting normals around to where the normals are unknowingly led to make fools of themselves by expressing notions which the presence of the passer quite discredits.15

By not sharing their identities or social knowledge, lesbians hold information secret and constitute for themselves a sense of exclusive power.

Recall childhood and the thrill experienced when one had a secret; it is similar to the power of lesbian secret identity. Power is important insofar as it helps equalize a member's relationship to straights. A sense of power can be gained from secrets by withholding
information. As adults, most individuals perceive themselves as special if another chooses to share with them secret information. A conversation usually begins, "I shouldn't tell you this because nobody else knows, but . . . ." Within the lesbian community, the secret is not a derivative bit of information; it is personal and membership identity.

Members' talk constitutes two information domains as secret from straights. First is identity as lesbian, and the ability to pass. Second is information about lesbian sex. One member explained, "If they think we're so damned perverted, let them imagine whatever they want." The lesbian belief that their knowledge is superior to straight knowledge is an underlying assumption of the secret domains. Superiority is seldom stated in the talk; instead, interpretation is done by laughter. The laughter constitutes straight knowledge as inferior by accentuating straights' inability to use lesbian devices. The secrets--identity, sex, and superior knowledge--are constituted as group secrets inasmuch as the secret information is known only by lesbians. All members are expected to know the secrets. Examples of the reflexive use of secret lesbian knowledge follow.

Example 12.
One evening a member (Becky) was giving an account of an automobile accident. Near the end of her
account, the following talk occurred. (Becky is the member in the accident; Carol is a member who heard the account; Marie is Becky's lover.)

Becky: "I wasn't hurt, but the cop said I was really lucky."

Carol: "You're lucky you didn't break your neck."

Marie: "I'm lucky she didn't break her fingers."

Everyone at the table laughs.

Example 12 is the most explicit of the samples concerning a specific statement of secret knowledge. The secret is the knowledge of lesbian sex. Marie's utterance, "I'm lucky she didn't break her fingers," provides explicit information concerning the secret of lesbian sex.

Marie's utterance can be heard humorously in two ways. First, Marie's utterance directly refers to lesbian sexual behavior kept secret among members. The utterance can be heard as humorous because members believe straights think lesbians do abnormal things with one another. The abnormal belief is interpreted by members as incorrect, using proposition 9a. Inasmuch as straight knowledge of lesbian sex can be conversationally constituted as incorrect, straights can be characterized as naive in relation to lesbian sex.

Second, when Marie's utterance is heard not only as a reply to Carol, but also as a reply to Becky, the
word, lucky, can be heard as a member category of more than one membership categorization device. Although the policeman is correct in his assessment of luck, Marie's utterance constitutes him as unaware of the interpretation members might ascribe to Becky's luck.

Utterances constituting exclusive knowledge relative to non-members allow members an identity as belonging to an exclusive community. Through their talk, members constitute their community as separate from all other communities.

Example 13.
This story is provided by my informant, Mary. I asked her to write about a humorous experience she had had because of her lesbianism. She wrote: "Last fall, I became friends with a woman in one of my classes. We're kept in contact with each other ever since and are pretty close, but I haven't yet found it necessary to tell her I'm gay. Recently, she told me that since I'm always saying how much I dance on the weekends, she'd like to join me some weekend because she also likes to dance. I kept a serious face when talking to her about it, but when I got home my roommate and I giggled about it. I suppose this is a type of lesbian humor—we said, 'If she only knew where we go dancing and where she wants
to go.' I suppose the fact that it's kept such a secret as to where I do my dancing is what makes it humorous, when most people assume it's a 'straight' disco. But we also laughed at the irony of it, because we predicted that it would probably be one of the best times she's had as far as dancing is concerned, because lesbian bars and gay bars are noted for their good music and all night dancing."

Mary's talk can be heard as evidence of her ability to pass as straight outside the lesbian community. The account allows Mary to formulate her passing as successful unless she suspects the friend is lesbian. If the friend is a lesbian, her request to go dancing would be heard as asking for a date instead of a naive humorous request. Mary's friend is straight, and Mary's account constitutes the friend as straight because the talk is presented humorously.

The account is not heard as humorous because the friend wants to go dancing. The account is interpreted as humorous because the friend is unaware that Mary is a lesbian. Since the friend is unaware that Mary is a lesbian, she is also unaware that Mary dances in lesbian bars. The friend's unawareness of Mary's lesbianism shows Mary to be a good passer in the straight community. As individuals become friends, more information about
self is shared. Mary has accomplished a friendship (she calls the woman her friend and the friend asks to go dancing with her) and not shared her secret.

I asked Mary if she had "suggested" that she dances in straight bars. Her answer was, "Naw, they always just assume that you're straight." Assuming straightness outside the community is similar to assumed lesbianism within the community. That all individuals are straight, members know to be an incorrect and naive assumption. Lesbians, however, do not view the assumption that all women within the community are lesbians as incorrect or naive. The straight assumption does not lessen the importance of passing. One verbal slip such as "when I'm with my lover, she . . ." would constitute one as a lesbian.

Members use talk which presents passing as humorous as evidence of competent communicative methods. By constituting passing as humorous instead of a problematic activity, members can interpret their behavior outside the community as casual. Through humorous talk concerning passing, members constitute themselves not only as lesbians, but also as highly verbally skilled individuals.

Example 14:

On at least three separate occasions, the observer has heard a lesbian mimicking a straight
person say, "What do they really do anyway?"
This is always followed by laughter.

In example 14, do refers to lesbian sexual behavior.
The utterance, "What do they really do, anyway? is
indexically heard not as a serious question but as
lesbian sexual talk about straights. The highly indexical
nature of the utterance displays the necessity of members
interpreting it as an AB event. For secret humor, however,
it is not only necessary for the utterance to be heard
as an AB-event between speaker and listener, it must be
heard as a non-AB-event between members and non-members.
Straights are thought of as believing lesbian sex is
highly abnormal. The straight perception of lesbian sex
can be disregarded and/or treated as humorous so long as
the talk constitutes straights as ignorant concerning
"what lesbians really do."

Although the question portion of the utterance is
attributed to straights, the performance of the word,
d o, works to constitute a speaker as a member. The
question attributed to straights works to constitute
straights as ignorant; if one asks about something,
it is usually assumed they are seeking missing infor-
mation. The word, do, is important for discussing
lesbian sex similar to the way out is important for
becoming and being a lesbian. To be out, one must do
something. Usually the word, do, is used only to gloss
sexual, rather than talk oriented, ways of being out.

On the other hand, no one ever checks out the implied behavior glossed by *do*. To ask for specific details concerning the behavior could be perceived as a breach of etiquette if a member asks the question seriously. The breach could occur because the member would be heard as questioning taken-for-granted knowledge of community members. Consequently, the use of the word, *do*, allows members to make sense of talk concerning lesbian sex without making problematic or questioning the specific behavior. One must think of lesbians as *doing* sex instead of *having* sex. The emphasis is on the action itself.

**Example 15.**

One evening a group of members were discussing a woman who—based upon their knowledge of her and lesbian social knowledge—was thought to be a lesbian. The woman was not thought of by members as defining herself as a lesbian. One of the members said, "She just doesn't know it yet."

This utterance was followed by laughter.

Example 15 can be heard as humorous because of secret knowledge about passing and lesbian identity discussed in example 13. In example 15, however, the woman is not constituted as knowingly passing and hiding her lesbian identity. The secret identity is a secret from the
woman herself, and she is seen as a potential lesbian. The idea that the woman is a lesbian or potential lesbian is not humorous. For the utterance to be humorous, one must possess lesbian knowledge concerning the visibility of lesbians to other lesbians.

The utterance, "She just doesn't know it yet," is heard as humorous and as a reinforcement of superiority of lesbian knowledge. The talk constitutes lesbian knowledge as superior by stating the woman's interpretation of her own sexual preference is incorrect. In this way, the woman can be perceived as doing an ultimate pass. She is passing as straight so convincingly that not only do straights view her as straight, she views herself as straight.

The utterance in example 15 is sometimes used to help explain individuals outside the community who are perceived as trying to persecute members. Members can use lesbian knowledge which claims the ability to identify other lesbians and potential lesbians to reflexively interpret persecuting individuals as follows.

If individuals are so afraid of homosexuals that they have to mount a campaign against homosexuality, these individuals must have homosexual tendencies which they cannot accept within themselves and which they also cannot perceive.

The reflexive work constitutes a ready-made account which can be used to interpret individual behavior as threatening if the reason for the threat is perceived to be lesbianism. The "they must be secretly gay" account has
been used to make sense of a female professor's behavior (she gave members low grades after a class discussion on lesbianism), a local minister who preaches against homosexuals on campus, and Anita Bryant.

Constituting anti-homosexual individuals as gay through the use of reflexive accounts allows members to see themselves as powerful inasmuch as the accounts work to constitute the individuals as similar to the persecuted group. The difference between persecuted and persecutors can then be seen as having or not having awareness. Since members view awareness as superior, members can use the ready-made awareness accounts to constitute themselves as superior to their persecutors.

Example 16.

A number of members sitting in the bar were discussing past and present jobs. One member suddenly said, "I teach school." (The women at the table looked at her and then laughed.)

"I teach school" must be heard as a highly indexical utterance for one to interpret it humorously. Many women teach school, and teaching is not usually perceived as a humorous occupation. To hear the utterance humorously, one must know the speaker is a lesbian and she passes at the school. Straights are believed to be fearful of homosexuals teaching school; they think homosexuals molest children. Consequently, lesbians who teach school
must be extremely careful at passing.

"I teach school" is heard as humor not because the woman teaches, but because she teaches and is a lesbian. That many teachers are lesbians is the secret. Not only are many lesbians working as teachers, they also are not molesting students and are not known to be lesbians.

"I teach school" is humorous although "I type in an office" is not humorous. If schools are the one place straights do not want lesbians, then being in schools is humorous because through the ability to pass, lesbians are not identified as lesbians. The ability to pass as straight and have one's lesbianism be invisible to straights is interpreted humorously.

Members can accomplish lesbian humor because they can provide accounts of talk and events occurring outside the community. Straights presuppose the reality of their social knowledge inasmuch as they are not aware of lesbian knowledge or lesbian reality. Members listening to accounts within the community hear inconsistency between straight and lesbian social knowledge. Because of the additional lesbian level of reflexivity, both social knowledges and social realities exist for the member. Only her own social knowledge and lesbian social reality, however, are perceived as real. Consequently, talk which provides accounts from a lesbian perspective can be heard humorously because the accounts allow the realness of lesbian social reality to be for members.
Through a reflexive view of the accounts, the talk constitutes straight social knowledge as naive and straight social reality as humorous. Lesbian social knowledge is constituted and lesbian social reality exists in and through members' artful verbal practices.

Lesbian verbal practices, in the form of lesbian humor, can be heard in the introduction to a song nationally distributed by Olivia Records, a feminist recording company. The following humorous account was written and told for a presumed lesbian audience. The instances of humor in this true story are followed by laughter as indicated. The talk is an introduction to a song and also an account of an event which occurred in the speaker's life. The account is interpreted humorously through the reflexive use of lesbian social knowledge.

Meg Christian's Introduction to "Ode to a Gym Teacher"19

Well, this song is really, I think, a very significant song because I don't think a song has ever been written on this particular subject before. And I think it's high time that somebody wrote a song about this woman because this woman has had, I think, one of the most important roles in the molding of young women's minds of any group of women, except maybe the camp counselor (1)(yeah, whooo, laughter) Let us not discount the importance of the camp counselor (2) (laughter and cheering) However, there is one, I think, that even surpasses that. And that is (pause) the gym teacher. (3)(cheering and laughter) Oh yes. Yes, the gym teacher (4)(more cheering and laughter) I hardly know what to say. I hardly know which gym teacher to pick to tell you about. (5)(laughter) Well, there was one, though. There was one who had a very special place in my heart, and she was my eighth grade gym teacher. Her name was Miss Berger. Miss Berger, are you there? (6)(laughter) Miss Berger,
it still yet makes my heart go pitter pat to think about Miss Berger. (7)(cheering and laughter)
I was notorious in the school for my adoration of Miss Berger. (8)(laughter) But it was ok then because, what are you in eighth grade, you're thirteen or fourteen, it's a phase, (9)(much laughter and cheering) and so it's ok.
I have to tell you a story that is a perfect example of my feelings for Miss Berger and the way everyone reacted to them. Miss Berger had to teach hygiene every six weeks. They take you off the court and into the classroom and make you take hygiene, and nobody liked it. Miss Berger didn't like it, and we didn't like it. She used to get pretty excited about various aspects of hygiene. (10)(laughter) She had this baby blue ruler and whenever she got real excited she started slamming on the desk with this ruler. One day she was getting real worked up about something, and she went whomp on the desk, and I was sitting about two rows back (pause) it was the closest I could get in the rush for the front row seats. And she went wham and half of that baby blue ruler went flying into the air and landed somewhere a few rows away on the floor. And without a moment's notice, (11)(laughter) I leapt up out of my seat (12)(much cheering and laughter) and went crawling on arms and knees over to that ruler. And everybody's going (ooooooooohhhh). And just as I was reaching to get it, (13)(laughter) Betsy Norfleet snatched it up (14)(laughter) and put it in her pocketbook (15)(laughter) and she sold it to me the next day for a dollar fifty! (16)(much loud laughter) That's a true story. (17)(laughter) She could have gotten five! (18)(much loud laughter and cheering)

As can be noted from the numbered text, 18 places occur where the member audience interrupts the account with laughter and/or cheering. How the talk preceding the laughter can be heard as humorous is the topic of the following section.
How Humor Exists in Meg's Account

Before beginning a discussion of Meg's account, the context of the talk is necessary. The listeners know Meg is a lesbian, the location of the recording (as given on the album cover) is a lesbian bar, and the listeners are assumed by the speaker to be lesbians. Furthermore, the listeners are assumed to have shared past experiences similar to the one presented in the account. All listeners are assumed to hear all the talk.

Examples one through five are similar because they depend upon the social knowledge of stereotyping by occupation. The phrase, "the molding of young women's minds," is important because it characterizes lesbianism humorously without explicitly stating it. According to shared lesbian social knowledge, women who choose specific occupations are more likely to be lesbians than women who choose other occupations. Unless proven to be otherwise, (similar to the assumption about women who enter the bar), women who engage in occupations which can fit under a membership categorization device, "Probably Lesbians," are viewed as lesbians or potential lesbians (maybe they don't know it yet). Occupations which fit the device are camp counselor, recreation leader, gym teacher, truck driver, other unmarried teachers if they are past their mid-twenties, and professional athlete. Occupations which do not fit the device are nurse, secretary, housewife, and store clerk. Obviously many occupations are available
to women not listed here. Most of these would fit outside the device. Meg's account is about an occupation within the device.

In examples 1-5, Meg mentions the camp counselor twice and the gym teacher three times. Repetition of membership categories of the "Probably Lesbians" device reminds the audience of the device and also reinforces the lesbian stereotype. The statement, "Let us not discount the importance of the camp counselor," refers directly to lesbianism. According to shared lesbian knowledge, many young, potential lesbians are first attracted to camp counselors (and/or gym teachers) when they are searching for a role model. The stereotype of a gym teacher as a lesbian role model, and the inclusion of gym teacher within the device, is reinforced by the statement, "I hardly know which gym teacher to pick to tell you about." At this point, a member of Meg's audience yells, "They're all the same." The category of gym teacher within the "Lesbian" device is confirmed verbally. Through examples 1-5, Meg formulates her account as about lesbianism in her past.

In example 6, Meg reinforces the identity of her gym teacher as a lesbian by asking if she is in the audience. Since the audience is comprised of lesbians and the setting is a lesbian bar, for Miss Berger to be in the audience, she would have to be a lesbian. Miss Berger's lesbianism is humorous because it is inconsistent
with straights' perceptions of teachers. Miss Berger's ability to pass as straight at school implicitly reinforces lesbian knowledge because of the secret of Miss Berger's lesbianism. The secret is constituted as a secret because Meg does not report that anyone else thought Miss Berger was a lesbian. Lesbian social knowledge assumes that if many other people shared Meg's perception, Miss Berger would not have been the gym teacher.

In example 7, Meg discusses her own lesbianism in a rather artful manner. Although she has never directly stated that Miss Berger is a lesbian (or was assumed by Meg to be one), Meg's admission of affection for the teacher directly identifies Meg as a lesbian. The audience knows Meg is a lesbian, but her verbalizing the secret is heard humorously. Meg's lesbianism is not a secret from her audience, but her audience knows that it was a secret at the time the events in the account occurred. In addition, most of Meg's audience members can be assumed to still be doing the secret of lesbianism during their everyday lives. They are passing as straight although Meg is not.

Example 8 provides for the audience the idea that Meg's lesbianism may not have been well hidden. Although Meg does not give specific examples of talk and events which occurred because she was "notorious" for her "adoration for Miss Berger," the member audience would
hear example 8 as an account of a painful breach of Meg's social reality. She "adored" Miss Berger and felt that it was normal although others viewed her as "notorious." The negative view of lesbianism is one encountered by many young lesbians, and it may be assumed therefore that some of the audience members shared similar experiences. In example 8, Meg is saying, "You and I have shared similar painful breaches of our lesbian social realities. Let's laugh about them and normalize them."

Example 9 is only partly dependent upon example 8 for its humor. "It's a phase" is often used by non-members to explain lesbianism. The utterance is heard as humorous because it is interpreted as naive; one either is or is not a lesbian. One can view oneself as straight and be a potential lesbian, but real lesbians do not go through phases. A woman doing a lesbian phase is a straight stereotype of lesbianism. Non-members mistakenly believe members can always change if they want to. The concept of a lesbian phase and changing to straight is naive and humorous. Members know social realities are not to be confused with phases.

Example 10 confronts a stereotype both lesbian and straights hold, although the emphasis differs. Lesbians are viewed as being "excited" about other women. For lesbians, the "excitement" exists between lesbians (and only between lesbians if the feeling is acted upon). Members think straights believe that lesbians become
"excited" about all other women and then try to seduce or rape them. In example 10, Meg uses the inconsistency between the two perspectives of excitement to artfully create a statement members hear as humorous. Meg's statement implies that Miss Berger became "excited" concerning female anatomy.

Women who have experienced eighth grade health class would hear the utterance, "various aspects of hygiene," as the female reproductive system. Thus, example 10 appears to reinforce both the lesbian and straight perspectives of the interests of lesbians. On the other hand, if one accepts that Meg is one of the few members of her class to recognize Miss Berger as a lesbian, one must assume that the lesbian perspective of excitability is being discussed. Therefore, Meg is reinforcing lesbian knowledge to interpret excited, while ignoring the straight perspective. Meg's utterance is humorous because it is heard as correct while putting-down straights about a phenomenon both lesbians and straights claim to understand.

The sentence directly after example 10 begins the account of the specific event Meg wishes to share. Example 11 and 12 can be heard as humorous inasmuch as the breach occurred when Meg forgot to pass and acted "without a moment's notice." The inappropriateness of Meg's behavior in the context of a straight, eighth grade classroom is heard humorously in example 12 and also
in example 13. For an eighth grade girl to crawl after the broken belonging of the person she loves is not humorous if the loved individual is an eighth or ninth grade boy. For Meg to try to publicly retrieve a broken ruler belonging to the person she loved is humorous because the person is her female gym teacher. The painful experience is interpreted as humorous because of the breach of social reality involved. Had Meg reached the ruler in time to grab it, the story could have ended with Meg's embarrassment.

The humorous turn of the story occurs, however, when the audience is told that the ruler was "snatched up" by another eighth grade girl. The girl's name, Betsy Norfleet, is heard as humorous because of the nature of the last name. Norfleet is not heard as a feminine name. The name is humorous to members because it implicitly suggests a battleship image. Although the name is heard as unflattering to the snatching girl, the name also reminds the audience of the gym teacher's status. Female (lesbian) gym teachers are stereotyped by straights as big and ugly and "built like battleships." The straight stereotype is assumed to be undesirable. Gym teachers who are lesbians are desirable to other lesbians. The inconsistency concerning desirability is heard humorously because through lesbian interpretation, the lesbian criterion becomes valid.
Example 15 is partly dependent upon example 14 for it's humor. The word, pocketbook, is humorous for two reasons. First, pocketbook is a word which would not normally be used by a member. Pocketbook fits in a membership categorization device, "Old-Fashioned Words for Women's Apparel." Other membership categories of the device include bonnet, stockings, nylons, galoshes, and anklets. Pocketbook is humorous because old-fashioned implies traditional and traditional implies straight. Lesbians and modern women carry purses; Betsy carried a pocketbook. Hence, Betsy is constituted as a non-member. Consequently, her name, Norfleet, can be heard as describing the stereotype of Miss Berger instead of Betsy herself inasmuch as Betsy is straight. Second, Meg failed in her attempt to get the ruler because a girl's pocketbook is off limits to others. A pocketbook can be viewed as an article of clothing, and as such, could not be searched or molested.

Betsy's sexual status is confirmed as straight in example 16 when she sells the ruler to Meg for "a dollar fifty." The statement sounds like the end of Meg's breaching story. After the social embarrassment Meg suffered in the classroom, she did not gain the ruler until she paid Betsy for it. In her struggle for possession of the ruler, Meg is the winner even though she failed in the classroom.
Meg is successful because she gained possession of the ruler. Her admission of buying it from Betsy is heard as normal; straights are expected to take advantage of gays. When Betsy has the ruler, she had power over Meg. By selling the ruler to Meg, Betsy unknowingly relinquished this power. Meg successfully equalizes the power relationship outside the community by gaining possession of the ruler and within the community through her verbal account.

Meg emphasizes the realness of her success by stating, "That's a true story." Since Meg is a performer and the setting has her on stage with her listeners as audience, example 17 is important. Meg's statement that the account is true allows the audience to perceive the events more humorously than if the story is a fictitious account told only to entertain inasmuch as naturally occurring lesbian humor indexes true accounts. The validity of the account gives it a sense of social realness for the audience. Although stereotyping and secret knowledge humor exists in Meg's account, the story is primarily an example of breaching humor.

As breaching humor, Meg's last utterance is crucial; it reinforces the superior nature of lesbian social knowledge. The statement, example 18, "She could have gotten five!" displays the superiority of lesbian knowledge concerning the worth of the broken ruler. Implicitly, Meg is telling her audience, "Betsy, with
her straight social knowledge, was too 'dumb' to realize how important the ruler was in the specific situation."
The secret sharing of the worth of the ruler knowledge is humorous inasmuch as the knowledge is shared only within the community. The talk displaying a sense of humor in Meg's account normalizes a breach of lesbian social reality, constitutes lesbian social knowledge which is also reflexively used to make sense of the account, and reinforces the secret nature of shared lesbian knowledge within the community.

Summary

Lesbian humor is a complex communicative skill; the ability to do and interpret humor shows one to be a member-in-good-standing. Lesbian humor exists because lesbians pass outside the community but do not forget they are lesbian. Conversation occurring outside the community is interpreted from a lesbian perspective and straight assumptions about lesbianism are heard as naive and humorous.

Breaching humor normalizes specific breaches of lesbian social reality. Accounts are given of conversation from outside the community which breached lesbian reality. The accounts are interpreted using lesbian membership categorization devices and social knowledge. The breach is normalized through laughter which indexes straight knowledge as naive.
Stereotyping humor normalizes anti-lesbian stereotypes. A stereotype is said which lesbians know straights believe about lesbians. The laughter constitutes the straight stereotypes as incorrect and reinforces lesbian knowledge. Schematically, the form of stereotyping humor is as follows.

\( P_1 \) (proposition 1), \( P_2 \) (proposition 2), \( U \) (utterance) \( P_1 \) and \( P_2 \) are mutually exclusive. If \( P_1 \), then not \( P_2 \). If \( P_2 \), then not \( P_1 \). Both \( P_1 \) and \( P_2 \) cannot be heard as true when interpreting \( U \). \( U \) states \( P_2 \). To do humor, \( S \) (straights think) is added to \( P_2 \). \( P_1 \) and \( S \)P_2 can both be heard as true when interpreting \( U \). If \( P_1 \) and \( S \)P_2 are heard as true, \( P_2 \) and \( U \) must be heard as false. By interpreting \( U \) using \( P_1 \) and \( S \)P_2, \( U \) is heard as false and humorous since \( P_2 \) is attributed to straights (\( SP_2 \)).

The message is "Straights think false (dumb) things about lesbians." Since the utterance is attributed to straights, it then fits in the membership categorization device, "Dumb Things Straights Say," which has been previously shown to be humorous.

Exclusive knowledge humor constitutes lesbian knowledge as being shared only by members. The knowledge is secret inasmuch as it is an AB-event only among members; withholding lesbian devices from straights allows lesbians to pass outside the community.
Through an examination of lesbian humor, the following can be heard as propositions of lesbian social knowledge.

1. Lesbians do not have an interest in molesting children. A few sick individuals may be interested in children, but homosexuality is not a factor. The number of lesbians who might have this interest is equal proportionally to the number of straight women who want to molest children.

2. Being a lesbian does not change a woman other than her sexual preference for women.

3. Lesbians do not rape other women.

4. Lesbians see other lesbians as their primary sexual partners and do not engage in sexual behavior with straight women unless they are viewed as unaware, potential lesbians.

5. There is nothing unacceptable about having a family member who is a lesbian.

6. A woman either is a lesbian, or she is not. A particular lover does not cause a woman to be a lesbian and cannot be blamed for that woman's lesbianism.

7. There is nothing wrong with being a lesbian. One should not have to hide one's sexual preference, although lesbians often do hide it for a variety of practical reasons.
8. Parents do not wish to acknowledge their child's lesbianism.

9. One does not decide to be a lesbian, nor can one be recruited. One either is a lesbian or one is not. A crucial factor is becoming aware of one's potential lesbianism. Only one who is a lesbian can become a lesbian.

10. Lesbians are normal people. (They are not deviant, perverted, sick, or disgusting.)

Analyzing humor is difficult inasmuch as to do and interpret humor one must have a high degree of community knowledge and interpretive procedures but also be capable of making the knowledge and interpretation problematic and observable. In the next section, problems and limitations of the study are discussed as well as the usefulness of examining naturally occurring talk, and more specifically humor, within speech communities.
FOOTNOTES TO SECTION 3


4Sacks, 1974, p. 346.


7Goffman, 1963, p. 5.

8Goffman, 1963, p. 4.

9The utterance violates person or course-of-action typifications. For example, every time a member talks to her mother, she sees and hears her mother as the same mother. Mothers are types of people who talk in certain ways. More specifically, the member knows a typical way her mother talks. See Alfred Schutz, On Phenomenology and Social Relations, ed. Helmut R. Wagner (Illinois: The University of Chicago Press, 1973), pp. 116-122.

10Such feelings of panic are not uncommon. One member reported that when her mother casually mentioned lesbianism during a conversation unrelated to the daughter, her face turned so red that her mother abruptly asked her if she was feeling ill.
Garfinkel instructed students to talk to their parents as if a boarder in their parents' home. In four-fifths of the cases family members were stupified. See Harold Garfinkel, *Studies in Ethnomethodology* (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1967), pp. 47-49.

When discussing the study with members, I retold example 3. The members laughed after the utterance, "Just pretend like she’s dead." When the account was originally told, members did not laugh at this point. The difference occurred because members hearing the example from me could interpret it within the context of a study of lesbian humor. In the bar when it was first personally told, the father's utterance was heard only as painful. Only after the last utterance of the example could members who heard the original account make sense of it humorously.

An interesting breaching experiment would be for individuals to act as if particular objects do not exist. Example: daughters who routinely help their mothers prepare meals could help fix dinner while acting as if the stove did not exist.

Labov, 1972, p. 156.

A woman once told me of an event which occurred when she was a young girl. One day she was looking in the dictionary and happened to find the word, lesbian. She did not know what the word meant, but the dictionary said (as she remembers it) a lesbian was a female who loved other females. The girl decided that this described the close friendships she had with her girlfriends. Feeling proud of her new word, she went home and said, "Guess what, Mom. I'm a lesbian." Her mother fainted.


A good account of the importance of acting casual when passing can be found in Garfinkel's study of Agnes. As a transsexual, Agnes had to learn to act and talk as a normal, natural female while appearing casual. The term used to describe the casual appearing activities is "practiced carelessness." One must practice and work at appearing as if one is not working at being casual. See Harold Garfinkel, "Passing and the Managed Achievement of Sex Status in an Intersexed Person, Part 1," in *Studies in Ethnomethodology* (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1967), pp. 116-185.
Garfinkel provides examples of talk which takes away its taken-for-granted nature. One such example is Case 6.

The victim waved his hand cheerily.

(S) How are you?

(E) How am I in regard to what? My health, my finances, my school work, my peace of mind, my . . . ?

(S) (Red in the face and suddenly out of control.) Look! I was just trying to be polite. Frankly, I don't give a damn how you are.

See Garfinkel, 1967, pp. 42-44.

Introduction to "Ode to a Gym Teacher," Copyright © 1974 by Thumbolina Music. From Meg Christian's I Know You Know album produced and distributed by Olivia Records, 2662 Harrison St., Oakland, Ca. Used with permission.
SECTION 4

DISCUSSION

Overview

A number of issues implicit in this work are discussed. Investigating everyday talk is viewed as a valid subject for analysis. Through the analysis, underlying social knowledge and interpretive procedures can be examined. Humor is worthy of serious consideration inasmuch as its complexity requires more than passing knowledge and interpretation. Problems which exist in the study of humor and limitations of the study are discussed. The final section is the two accounts from the introduction. The accounts are provided so the reader can interpret using social knowledge and interpretive procedures explicated in sections 2 and 3.

Examining the Ordinary

Researchers examining everyday talk and interpretive procedures view these activities as legitimate phenomena for study. Talk as talk is usually taken for granted because it is considered common by social scientists. The extraordinary is often the subject of analysis instead of the ordinary. The study of everyday talk is important inasmuch as it allows one to become
aware of the constitutive and reflexive work necessary to achieve and maintain a sense of social reality. Becoming aware enables a researcher to work from a member instead of a social science perspective. By attempting to display a member perspective, a researcher can begin interpreting the speech community in a way similar to members. Many social scientists interpret member activities from a social science instead of a member perspective.

The Importance of Awareness of Everyday Talk

Awareness is necessary for becoming a lesbian. One cannot become a lesbian until one is aware of one's potential lesbianism. Lesbianism is reflexively viewed as having always existed, but one was unaware of it. All awareness is done through talk. Awareness is important inasmuch as one can only talk about something that he/she is aware exists. The request, "Talk about something of which you are unaware," is impossible to fulfill.

In a similar manner, everyday interpretive practices have always existed. Before one can examine interpretive procedures, one must become aware of their existence. Becoming aware of a phenomenon's existence is achieved through the indexical use of talk. Social scientists usually talk about what talk does. Written accounts of what talk does are an important part of the context of
social science inasmuch as utterances within the social science community are interpreted indexically. What talk does is an important contextual feature for indexically answering questions such as "What is social science?" Social scientist members seldom discuss interpretive procedures because membership is displayed in and through what talk does.

Investigating interpretive procedures adds a level of reflexivity to one's interpretive process. The added level of reflexivity discloses talk as more complex and more dependent upon indexicality for its sense. Through an examination of talk, one can gain a view of interpretive activities. The talk itself, however, ceases to be perceived as common and becomes problematic. By making talk problematic, reflexive work becomes observable. One can become aware of community social knowledge necessary for talking and interpreting as a member.

Examining member verbal practices allows one to formulate social knowledge and to observe the underlying interpretive work. Knowledge which is specific to the community is variant; its use can be interpreted differently in different situations. Knowledge used within the community to interpret talk as humor and cue the member to laugh may be used outside the community to interpret talk as an insult and cue the member to take no turns. A knowledge proposition, "Lesbians do not molest children," can be used to hear an utterance such as humor
example 1 (p.121) humorously. The same proposition was used by the speaker of example 1 during the outside event to interpret the mother’s talk. Instead of laughing, the member said “oh.”

The Importance of Humor in Everyday Talk

Humor is a highly complex form of talk. To do humor in a specific community, one must not only possess community knowledge, but also be capable of differentiating subtle nuances in the knowledge. The indexical nature of language is crucial for doing humor. In comparison to the high degree of knowledge and verbal skills necessary for doing humor, the knowledge necessary for passing within the community could be considered a gloss.

The complex level of knowledge necessary for doing humor adds a level of reflexivity to interpretive activities. A member must not only be able to interpret an utterance in its social context based upon what is said, but must be capable of hearing a meaning different, and often opposite from the given utterance. Because humor is indexically determined, making sense of it becomes problematic. The problematic nature of gaining a sense-of-humor allows the social knowledge of the community to become observable. Inasmuch as ethnomethodologists strive for a member sense-of-meaning, one studying humor strives for a member sense-of-humor.
Studying humor in the lesbian community allows one to articulate member knowledge.

The following section shows that one can take the humor of any speech community and through its display, make observable member knowledge. The observability of social knowledge through a display of humor is particularly possible when the underlying propositions are viewed as exclusive to the community by members. Instances of knowledge which are community specific are most observable. Knowledge which is not community specific is less observable inasmuch as it is used less for humorous interpretations. Most lesbian humor exists because lesbians are different than straights. Knowledge used to interpret the humor is lesbian community specific; it is not shared with straights. If the knowledge is shared, less difference might exist, and less talk might be interpreted as lesbian humor.

Humor and Social Knowledge

Humorous talk occurs inasmuch as members share common social knowledge and rules for the reflexive use of the knowledge. Rules for the use of knowledge can be either variant rules or invariant interpretive procedures. Variant rules are situationally used and are community specific. Section 2 discusses rules for talking as a lesbian within and outside the community. How a member talks about the time before she was aware of her
lesbianism is a variant rule. Interpretive procedures
are underlying sense-making practices not situationally
determined. The schematic for interpreting stereotyping
humor (p. 141-142) is an example of invariant procedures.
Any utterance can be heard as humor if members share social
knowledge and interpretive procedures to constitute the
talk humorously. By unpacking the humorous talk of a
community, one can make community knowledge observable.
An example from outside the lesbian community may clarify
the importance of indepth knowledge as opposed to the
glossing knowledge necessary to pass.

Two teaching associates are sitting in the T.A.
office discussing students in their classes. One of the
T.A.'s started to discuss a student who had not been
attending classes. She said, "And so she comes in (into
the T.A. office) after two weeks and says her grandmother
died." All of the T.A.'s present laugh. The social
knowledge necessary to pass as a T.A. does not include
information concerning dead grandmothers. One could
learn to act and talk as a T.A. without knowing about
the subtle information concerning students' excuses for
missing classes. The talk is interpreted humorously
because of the frequency students claim a grandmother has
died to avoid class work. Although occasionally a
student's grandmother may die during a quarter, the
majority of stories concerning grandmothers are assumed
not true.
More subtly, students usually will not state that a live member of their family has died. Consequently, "My mother died," is not interpreted humorously. Death is not humorous; student claims to avoid class work are humorous. The knowledge is observable inasmuch as the knowledge is community specific. If the information that students lie about the death of a grandparent to avoid work were shared, the dead grandmother talk would not be heard humorously because students would stop using dead grandmother accounts to avoid work. For the humor to occur, members must believe the knowledge is not shared. "My grandmother died" can then be heard as a membership category of the device, "Dumb Things Students Say."

Individuals who can share the knowledge are those who are members of the community, are past members, or are members of a similar community. Being a member of a similar community may allow individuals to share some, but not all, of their knowledge across communities. Although individuals outside the community do not possess community specific knowledge, some individuals within the community have more or less knowledge than other members. Members having the most community specific knowledge are the most accomplished at doing humor. Within any speech community, a member may be able to identify individuals who have more community knowledge than other members. In the previous example, T.A.'s who have taught longer are more aware and knowledgeable. Among lesbians, members
who have been out longer or are more out are more aware and knowledgeable.

Members who possess the most community specific knowledge should be best at doing community humor. Similarly, members who artfully do community humor are most accomplished at interpretation using community specific knowledge. In this way, members who are best at community humor may be most aware of community social reality. Social scientists may use humor ability as a criterion for selecting informants. Members who artfully do community humor may have more knowledge of the community than members who do little or no humor. This does not mean that all members who do not engage in humor are not capable of doing so. One can have sufficient knowledge to do humor and choose not to do so. One cannot do the humor however, without the knowledge necessary for interpretation of the talk as humor.

By examining the incidence of humor among individuals in a community, one may be able to observe the extent to which specific individuals are knowledgeable about the community. Because of the added level of reflexivity necessary for interpreting talk as humor and the knowledge necessary for its constitution, the ability to do community humor is a better indicator of membership than the ability to pass. One can learn to pass within a specific community without being able to use the social knowledge of the community. One cannot intuitively do
and interpret community specific humor without members' shared knowledge. When one can do and interpret speech community specific humor, one has entered member social reality and become a member.

Talk is the most observable (or "hearable"), and yet, the most important contextual feature of any speech community. The talk doing the humor also does the constitution of community specific knowledge. Humor and social knowledge exist and are believed real through members interpretive practices. Humor is interpreted using social knowledge; knowledge is constituted through talk. Humor is talk. Humorous talk which is interpreted using social knowledge also works to constitute knowledge. The interrelationship demonstrates the fragility of social reality. Humor, social knowledge, and one's sense of social reality exist because members talk as if they exist. The unquestioned nature of one's social reality allows one to make sense of talk from that reality, and at the same time, to constitute reality through talk.

Problems in the Study of Humor

Because the humor of a specific speech community exists only through a detailed understanding of shared knowledge of that community, the study of humor is difficult. If one chooses to analyze humor of a foreign community, one can read over or not hear the humor as
humor because of insufficient knowledge and interpretive procedures. A social scientist may not recognize or be aware of potential data. If a social scientist is passing in the field, he/she may be capable of recognizing humor when it occurs within a community, but may not have enough social knowledge to interpret it. A social scientist who can recognize talk as humor may know what exists for members, but not how it exists.

The statement, "You had to be there," is not always true because if it was, breaching humor could not be heard; the event of the account occurs outside the community. One must, however, be capable of a sense of being there for the account to be humorous inasmuch as a sense of being there is a necessary part of the social context. A sense of being there is knowing a typification of the situation. One must have a sense of the social context to display community humor, social knowledge, and interpretive practices.

Encountering interpretive problems in foreign speech communities, a social scientist may choose to display humor and social knowledge of his/her community. The problem one encounters in one's own community is that one must be capable of making one's own interpretive procedures problematic so as to make them observable. By making one's own sense-making practices problematic, one renders problematic one's own sense of reality. Questioning one's own sense of social reality breaches it. Section
discusses individual reactions to breaches. Reactions include anger, confusion, or treating the incident as a joke; but not a competent display of social knowledge or interpretive procedures. The breached individual is too busy interpreting to step back and examine his/her interpretive procedures.

Individuals wishing to investigate interpretive practices need to question enough of social reality to see more than one reality. Although one can only sense a singular reality at a time, the ability to switch reality perspectives allows one the flexibility necessary for explicating interpretive procedures. One would need to be a member constitutively and not be a member reflexively. One would be and not be a member.

How one makes sense of these problems is a difficult, but a necessary, question. What is going on in a speech community is determined by how members interpret it. Only when the taken-for-granted nature of how talk works in everyday life is displayed can a new genre of questions be constituted.

Limitations

A number of limitations exist for this study as well as for ethnomethodological studies in general. For this work, the use of tape recordings would have been useful inasmuch as tape allows the collection of more data. Data collected through the use of tape is also more
complete; taking notes limits the amount of talk recorded at any given time. Taking notes has other limitations as well. If one decides to use abbreviations so as to write as much as possible, abbreviations are often formulated during writing. Unless one returns to the fieldnotes soon after writing, abbreviations may not make sense. Instances also occur when one thinks one knows what an abbreviation means but is not sure. When translating abbreviations, it is possible for one's own interpretive procedures to influence the data.

One's own interpretive procedures also influence what counts as data. If one can hear multiple conversations, one must decide which conversation to record. If one wishes to record lesbian humor, the decision is made inasmuch as one conversation is interpreted as being more humorous or more potentially humorous than others. How observer interpretation is done does not become a subject for analysis. The observer is too busy interpreting and recording to stop and examine self interpretations influencing decisions.

Another limitation, which is not specific to this study, is the amount and kinds of feedback one can receive from members. Specifically, inasmuch as data was collected for two and a half years, many of the members who frequented the bar at the beginning of the study are no longer in the bar. They have either moved to other cities or simply are not coming to the bar. Further,
members could not be asked for feedback while data were being collected inasmuch as the giving of feedback to a study concerning lesbian humor would have become a part of the context. Providing feedback to an observer is not a part of the normal lesbian bar context.

Requesting feedback is also difficult inasmuch as the vocabulary used in ethnomethodological work defines the intended audience as ethnomethodologists and/or other social scientists, not members. Consequently, feedback was requested primarily from members who have social science knowledge. The most generalizable problem concerning feedback is the response from members. The most common response was "Yeah, I agree with it, but I'd never thought of it that way before." ("It" refers to the information and interpretation contained in the section I had asked them to read.) One can achieve an ethnomethodological display with which members will agree, but not a member display inasmuch as observer interpretation and members interpretation cut into social reality at different levels.

The study cannot be replicated. Inasmuch as social reality is an ongoing process, the speech community which I examined no longer exists as it did during data collection. More specifically, each time I entered the bar a different community existed than the ones I had observed on previous nights. The community existed to be analyzed only inasmuch as I interpreted it as such.
Conversely, each time I entered the community, I was a different observer.

Although the inability to replicate work can be extended to all studies inasmuch as reality is an ever changing process, the inability to replicate is particularly problematic for ethnomethodological work. Ethnomethodology examines the ongoing practical activities of individuals, and in so doing makes observable the untenability of replication.

Two Accounts

"Tonight is ladies' night. Men - $5.00 cover charge." The sign was wooden, somewhat weather beaten, and nailed securely to the door. As Sharon reached for the door, she paused. It was early evening and the spring sun could not strengthen her sagging courage or stop the queezy feeling lodged in her stomach. She opened the door and took what she hoped looked like a confident step inside. Blinded! Her eyes, unaccustomed to the darkness, saw only blackness. You can't stand here, her mind screamed. Move! After a couple of hesitant steps, a long wooden bar came into view. "Yeah?" came a soft slightly southern voice from behind the bar.

"I, ah, I'd like a beer, ah, um, Busch." She accepted the beer and handed the bartender a five dollar bill so she wouldn't have to admit she didn't know the price of a beer. The change was returned. "Thank you."
The soft voice was pleasant, but not friendly.

She's only a couple of years older than me, thought Sharon as she watched the bartender walk to her seat at the other end of the bar. Well, I can't stand here. Turning, she noticed that the bar was long and narrow. It was still rather dark with the only light coming from various beer signs and a light hung over a pool table near the front. Four other women besides the bartender were in the bar. Two were shooting pool and laughing with one another, and two were sitting in a booth near the back of the bar.

Unsure of herself, Sharon moved to a table near the center of the bar and sat facing the bar. Counting her change, she discovered that her beer cost 55¢. Not bad, she thought, at least now I know how much to pay without having to ask. She sat feeling alone and scared, but also excited, and glanced nervously around the room.

She looked at the mirror behind the bar and at the small deserted dance floor. Whenever she looked at the other women, she felt that they averted her eyes. She also had the distinct impression that they were all watching her. I need to be doing something instead of just sitting here. She was drinking the beer much too fast hoping it would calm her nerves. The words, "Gay Bar" kept repeating themselves in her mind. Calm down and be cool, she told herself as she picked up her empty beer can and walked toward the bar. "Another one?"
"Um," she nodded. This time she paid for the beer with exact change and smiled at the bartender. She did not return the smile. She hesitated as she turned back toward her table. Slowly, she approached the pool table. She stood watching the game. Both of the players ignored her. One of the players made a difficult shot, and Sharon said, "Nice shot."

The player glanced at her and then mumbled, "Thanks."

She abruptly turned her back to Sharon and said something softly to her opponent. Suddenly, they both laughed. Shaken, Sharon suddenly blurted, "I, ah, I'm supposed to be meeting a couple of friends of mine here. Do you know where I could call them? I mean, is there a phone outside close?"

"There's a phone in the back," one of the players said staring directly at her.

"Yeah, but I mean a phone booth, you know, I, ah well, you know . . ." she stammered, letting her voice trail off.

"Down the street by the market." The stare was replaced by a turned back.

"Yeah, well, ok. Thanks. Ought to go call. Ok, thanks."

She turned and moved quickly toward the door forgetting, or not caring about, the nearly full pack of cigarettes she had left lying on the table. Through the
door and into the unrelenting sunshine. She hurried down the street in the opposite direction from the phone booths and around the corner to her car.

I made it. I did it and I made it and I've been in a gay bar, a voice sang in her head. Slipping behind the steering wheel, she sat motionless for a few moments as the tension began to drain from her body.

As she started the car, she reached for a cigarette. "Damn," she said aloud.

Inside the bar, the two players, Ann and Betty, looked at each other in amusement. "Looked new to me," said Betty.

"Yeah," Ann answered, "Wonder if she's even out yet."

They both laughed. Calling to the bartender Ann said, "Hey, how about two more." As she paid her friend for the beer, she said, "I think we ran another one out of here."

"Maybe," came the reply, "but I bet that one will be back."

Night Two

The night air was cool for an early autumn evening as Sharon and her three friends approached the door with its wooden sign. Sharon always smiled to herself when she looked at the sign because it kept the interior of the bar safe from outsiders. A place to relax, to be
oneself, confident with the marvelous feeling which comes only from being part of a majority.

They entered and paid the 50¢ cover charge they had learned to expect on weekends. Sharon walked to the bar. "A Busch with no glass?" Sharon still liked the sound of that voice although they had never become friends.

"Yeah," she nodded as she looked for familiar faces in the crowd of women which filled the bar.

"Sharon, Sharon." "Man, I haven't seen you for a while."

"Hey, good to see you too," Sharon replied giving her friend an affectionate hug.

"Who are you with? You want to sit with us? We can get some more chairs."

"Ah, Wendy and Carol and Marge. Marge, who used to go with Pat."

"God, I haven't seen her for a long time. Thought they were still going together."

"Well, you know how it goes," Sharon said laughing lightly. "Just a minute and I'll see what they want to do," she added.

Sharon nudged Wendy, who was paying for her usual gin and tonic. "Connie's here with some people and wants us to sit with them, ok?"

"Sure," Wendy answered as Carol and Marge nodded. They carried extra chairs over to the table pushed against a booth. Four women including Connie sat in the
booth beside her friend, and the others sat around the table.

Connie was introducing her friends, but Sharon wasn't paying attention. She was feeling good inside and comfortable crowded beside her friend in the dark, soft booth. She gazed across the bar to the dance floor and watched eight couples dancing slowly. "And he was killing me softly with his words, killing me softly . . ." sang the jukebox. Such a lazy night for being out, thought Sharon, feeling mellow.

"Hey, Sharon." The words jolted Sharon back into the conversation. "I haven't seen you around school lately. I looked for you in the journalism building, but I couldn't find you. You still in school?"

"Yeah, but I got closed out of all my major courses so I'm just taking a math course and a history course I need. That and working keeps me pretty busy."

"Yeah, well I hope to see you next term. I have two classes in that building next quarter."

"I should be there. They promised me I could get the classes I need next quarter because I got closed out this time."

"Want to bet on that?" asked Carol, laughing.

"Well, they better let me in something, or I'm going to raise hell."

Sharon looked around the table with what she hoped was a fierce expression. The two women sitting opposite
her were whispering to one another about the recent break-up of two close friends. No one was going to challenge Sharon's ability to raise hell with the university.

As the women sat watching six women dance to "Do it Anyway You Want It," the door swung open and members of a local softball team entered.

"Hey, we lost again," shouted one of them as the others laughed. They proceeded to the bar and bought beers.

Moving to a large round table near Sharon and her friends, one of the ball players nodded in Sharon's direction. "How ya doin', J.D.?” Sharon asked.

"Ok, um, yeah."

Another slow song began, and Sharon noticed that the dance floor was beginning to get crowded. I should ask Wendy to dance before too long, thought Sharon.

"Have you seen Pat and Kelly lately?" Connie suddenly asked. "I need to move some stuff and I'd like to use their truck."

"Huuuuunnnn?" Sharon asked.

"Have you seen Pat and Kelly?" Connie repeated. Everyone shook their heads "no," as Sharon answered, "Not in a couple of weeks. They're really busy on the farm this time of year." Back into the music, Sharon sang, "And so I fooled around and fell in love . . . ." Wendy looked at Sharon, reached over and playfully poked
at her ribs. She hesitated for a moment watching for retaliation, and when none came, kissed Sharon gently on the cheek.

"Such a fine woman," Sharon said to no one in particular, and then she and Wendy grinned at one another as the other laughed softly.

It was close to midnight and the bar had become crowded and noisy. A woman at the table of ballplayers was shouting, "But she was out anyway. I don't know where they get that shit."

"I'm glad we got here when we did," Connie said.

"Yeah, it was real nice of you to come early so we'd have someone to sit with. It's hard to find a seat after eleven," Wendy said smiling at Connie and her friends in the booth.

"Bullshit," mumbled one of Connie's friends whose name Sharon had forgotten.

The woman who owned the bar was walking among the tables carrying a tray of drinks. She delivered them to the booth in front of Connie's. "Everything alright here?" she paused by them for a moment and emptied their ashtray.

"Ah, we'll have a couple more," said Sharon nodding toward Wendy.

"Bring me one too."

"Ummm, yeah."
"Ok, that'll be two Lite, one Busch, a Stroh's, and a gin and tonic," she said as Wendy set her empty glass on the tray.

She returned quickly and set each woman's drink in front of her. Sharon paid for her beer and Wendy's drink and Connie paid for her beer and the beer of one of the other women sitting in the booth. The "bullshit" friend paid for her own beer after fumbling through a handful of loose change. She's kind of high, thought Sharon.

"You could always put some of that in the juke box," teased the owner gesturing toward the coins.

"Hell, it ain't worth it on weekends. By the time your songs come up, you're already been gone for an hour." The owner laughed in agreement as one of her friends asked her to dance.

"Just let me put this on the bar," she said waving the tray as she walked away. Sharon looked at Connie's friend. Well, she thought, she may be a little drunk but she's not dumb. Sharon nudge Wendy as she slid out of the booth. "I have to go to the restroom."

"Have a good time," Wendy cheerfully replied.

Walking toward the back of the bar, Sharon noticed a number of women she had not seen before. There sure are a lot of new kids in here, she thought. Up the stairs and around the corner, and "damn," there's a line. The two women in front of her were talking.
"Want to come over to my place after the bar closes?"

"I don't know. It's pretty late."

"Well, I'm having a small party."

"Oh? Who's gonna be there?"

"I've asked a few people, ah, ah like Sue and Becky, and ah, I don't really know for sure, heheheh. I've got beer in the frig and plenty of smoke."

"Oh, ok, sure."

"It's pretty crowded around my place. Why don't you just leave your car here and ride with me. I can always bring you back for it later."

"Um, ok."

"Hey it's your turn."

As the woman walked into the stall, Sharon looked at the back of the other woman's head. Do people still fall for those kinds of lines?

Returning to her booth, she noticed that two of Connie's friends had left. "We were beginning to give up on you," said Connie.

"Yeah," Marge added. "We were beginning to think you had run off with some young thing you met in the can." They all laughed loudly as Sharon put her arm around Wendy.

"Ain't no way cause I already got the best." Wendy turned and looked at Sharon.

She asked, "Is that why you haven't asked me to dance all night?"
"Ah, sorry. Well?"
"Well what?"
"Well do you want to dance?"
"Sure."

As they walked toward the dance floor, Marge yelled, "She thought you'd never ask."

"I love you," Sharon whispered to Wendy as they began to dance slowly together.

"I know."

At the end of the dance, Sharon saw the owner bring two more drinks to their table. "I ordered for us. You were gone so long I drank mine and yours was almost empty." After Wendy paid for the drinks and they were seated again, Sharon noticed that Connie was gazing around the bar.

"You sure don't see many of the old regulars anymore, do you?" Connie said.

"No," Sharon agreed. "A new bar opened on Cleary Street and a lot of the women are going up there. We went there once and saw Ann and Betty and that whole crowd they run with."

"I've never been there but I hear it's kind of rough," Marge added.

"It is," said Wendy looking at Sharon who nodded. The crowd was beginning to thin out. It was about two in the morning when Connie suddenly asked if anyone wanted to go out for breakfast.
"The old out for breakfast trick, huh."

"No, I mean I'm hungry."

"I could stand to grab a bite to eat," said Wendy.

Sharon leaned over and whispered to Wendy, "I could stand to grab a bite," in what she hoped was a suggestive tone.

"Watch yourself, pervert, or I won't let you take me home with you," Wendy said loud enough for the group to hear. They all laughed, including Sharon.

Sharon finished her beer and they stood to leave.

"Well, we almost closed it up again tonight," said Marge nodding toward the few women who remained. They walked as a group toward the door. As they passed the bar, the bartender leaned on the counter.

"Goodnight," she said softly and smiled.

Sharon smiled back and stepped out into the now chilled early morning air. Turning to say something to Connie, her eye caught the door and she laughed softly.

"What's so funny?" asked Wendy.

"Nothing," said Sharon, "nothing at all."

Tonight is ladies' night. Men - $5.00 cover charge.

Summary and Conclusions

Examining naturally occurring talk is valuable in that it allows one to become aware of constitutive and reflexive work necessary for achieving and maintaining a
sense of social reality. Through an analysis of humor, one can discover social knowledge and interpretive procedures of speech community members. Inasmuch as the ability to do and interpret humor is held only by communicatively competent members, social scientists may use humor ability as a criterion for selecting informants. Investigating interpretive procedures used for humor is problematic inasmuch as one needs to be a member constitutively and not be a member reflexively.

A lesbian speech community was chosen for this study inasmuch as it was accessible and intriguing. Examining various communities from an ethnomethodological perspective would provide data necessary for a comparative analysis of social knowledges and interpretive procedures. Through comparative analysis one can gain insights into the invariant properties of member practices for constituting and reflexively interpreting social reality.
APPENDIX A

FIELDNOTES FROM THE FIRST TWO NIGHTS OF OBSERVATION
NIGHT 1

I'm pretty uptight about being inside. Lighting is dim and it took time for my eyes to adjust. Felt I had to walk in; couldn't stand there in the doorway too long.

Choice of clothing was right--mainly casual (college style) jeans and shirts.

Ordered a beer at the bar--55¢--not bad. Did not ask for my ID. I don't know what to do; decide to go to a table and sit drinking beer.

Observe:

2 girls (about college age) playing pool. They are laughing and talking. 2 other girls are at a booth talking softly. I can't hear them. 2 women are at the corner of the bar talking to the bartender. They seem to know her. Heads are bent--quiet, close talk.

Otherwise, the bar is deserted.

A woman from the booth walks the length of the bar (past me) to juke box and puts in money. Popular songs. On her way back, she looks at me--I feel uncomfortable.

I get another beer at the bar (no table service). Bartender glances at me but only says, "Thank you" as I give money. Soft, slightly southern voice--casual.

I walk over and begin watching 2 girls at pool table.

They ignore me.

One of them makes a hard shot. I say, "nice shot."

She looks at me indifferently and turns away to face the
other girl. The other says something I miss and gestures to the table. Girl 2 laughs, takes shot, misses. I feel like a fool and really out of place. Without looking at anyone, I leave.

NIGHT 2

I have been in the bar for about 1/2 hour and it is getting crowded. Some "couples" are sitting talking quietly in the back. People are joking (at least they are laughing a lot) toward the front. Many sitting at the bar.

Many of these people act as if they already know one another--people say, "Hi" to them when they come in, call them over, arms placed around shoulders, some hugging. Groups other than couples are sitting at large tables. Some dancing--mostly slow.

People are not overtly stereotyped as I expected. (Who leads when dancing? How do they know?)

Only some women use glasses for drinking beer, some drink from cans. Is there a difference?

Nobody will talk to me. I'm beginning to feel that my behavior is viewed as pushy.

I try to make contact. I walk to bar where a girl is sitting alone.
Me: "Hi"

She: "Hi"—looks at me and looks away.

Me: "Come in here much?" (trying to sound casual)

She: "Some" (sounds disinterested)

Me: "I'm pretty new myself. I'd like to get to know some people."

She: "Oh" (pause) "Yeah" (she gets off her bar stool and walks away).

I feel like I don't know what to say or the "rules" yet.
I think I'm trying too hard.
APPENDIX B

EXAMPLE OF TALK RECORDED IN THE BAR
AND INFORMATION FROM INFORMANTS
The following four examples of pick-ups were recorded.

Example 1
Judy: "What are you doing after the bar closes?"
Beth: "Nothing."
Judy: "Why don't you come over to my place. I have some beer in the frig."
Beth: "Ok."
(They pick up their things from the table such as cigarettes and leave together. As they walk past me, Judy is smiling.)

Example 2
Carol: "Hey, do you need a ride home?"
Betsy: "Not really. I came with Abbey."
Carol: "Oh, well, I just thought I could give you a ride if you needed it. (pause) I thought we might stop somewhere first and get some breakfast if you wanted to."
Betsy: "Oh, (pause) ok, just a minute."
(Betsy walks to Abbey and whispers in her ear. She then walks back to Carol and smiles.)
Betsy: "Ok." (they leave)

Example 3
Karen: "I'm having a small party after the bar closes. Would you like to come? There will be plenty of beer and smoke."
Patty: "I guess so. Who's going to be there?"

Karen: "Well, I asked Liz and Maggie and a couple of other people if they show up.

Patty: "Yeah, ok."

Example 4

Marsha: "I'd really like to take you home."

Connie: "I can't. I have a lover."

Marsha: "Well, tell her you're going to a party or out to breakfast."

Connie: "But I can't. I'd be cheating on her, and I've never done that in the two years we've been together."

Marsha: "We've been talking all night, and now you have to ruin my evening. This has really been a waste of my time."

(Marsha suddenly stands, grabs her beer, drinks the remainder of it quickly, and "stomps" out of the bar. Connie sits looking down at the table.)

When I showed these examples to my three informants, all said that the woman in the fourth example was acting "too aggressive." Not only did she break the "rule of indirect pick-up," she also admitted she knew the rule by suggesting to Connie that she tell her lover she was
leaving for one of the "acceptable reasons" a party or breakfast.

One possible problem which I saw in example four was Marsha's lack of knowledge concerning Connie having and being loyal to a lover. Consequently, I asked Mary (the informant) the following questions.

Me: "How do you let someone know if you're going with someone or not?"

Mary: "When I first begin talking with someone, I somehow let them know somewhere in the conversation that I have a lover and don't go home with other women."

Me: "How?"

Mary: "I don't know. (pause) I guess I mention her name a few times in the conversation and imply things are good between us. Basically, I expect her (the other woman) to get the message."

Knowing if a woman has a lover (particularly if the lover is in the bar) is important information not only for pick-ups, but for other more casual activities such as dancing. The following two examples were recorded. In the first example, this information is known; in the second, it is not.

Example 1

June and Pat were sitting together at a table talking. Pat turned to June and said, "Wanna dance?" June said,
Sure," and they walked to the dance floor.

Example 2
One evening a number of women were sitting at a large table. One of the women at this table (Kathy) wanted to ask a woman who was not at the table to dance. The following conversation occurred between Kathy and the other members at the table.

Kathy: "Do you think I ought to ask her?"
Terry: "Sure, go ahead."
Kathy: "I don't know. Does she look like she's with anyone?"
Nancy: "I don't know. She's been talking to a lot of different people."
Kathy: "Should I ask her?"
Terry: "Go on."
Kathy: "Well, (pause) I'll wait for the next song."
Nancy: "Go on and ask her."
Kathy: "What if she says, 'no?' I don't want to ask her if she's really with someone. (pause) Besides, the song's almost over."
Terry: "You dumb shit."
Kathy: "Well . . ." (word is drawn out)

I asked Mary to make-up talk for me which a member in the bar might utter if she wanted to ask another woman to dance with her. Her answer follows.
Mary: "From my own personal experience, gay women usually ask me to dance in one of three ways. 'Would you like to dance?' Or the sly approach to see if a woman is actually seeing someone or with them, 'Would you like to dance—oh—are you with someone?' Or, in the case of asking someone to dance who obviously has a lover, 'Would she mind if you danced with me?'"
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