



# Redefining the Self: Coming Out As Lesbian

*Laura A. Markowe*

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## **Redefining the Self: Coming Out As Lesbian** Laura A. Markowe

What experiences do women have when they come to identify themselves as lesbian? What happens when they consider telling family and friends about their sexual identity? This book examines these questions on the basis of interviews with particular individuals and other source materials. "Coming out" can only be understood, the author stresses, against the backdrop of a firmly heterosexist society. The dominant heterosexual culture tends to freeze gender divisions in such a way as to polarize sexual identities. The author focuses more upon the isolated lesbian, rather than upon political lesbianism. "Coming out" is seen to be a complex and emotional process, but one that is potentially highly rewarding. Lesbians, Markowe shows, have to struggle with both their "invisibility" in the predominantly heterosexual culture, and with perceptions of threat and abnormality. Coming out to family and heterosexual friends involves risks and benefits. Case studies of lesbian women are discussed in the context of the threat to, and reconstruction of, identity which the coming out process presumes. This book should be of interest to second-year undergraduates and those working in the fields of women's studies, social psychology and the sociology of gender.

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