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SEXUAL IDENTITY OF WOMEN WHO LOVE WOMEN

by

Nashae Yvonne Julian

An Abstract

Of a thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the Doctor of Philosophy degree in
Rehabilitation and Counselor Education
in the Graduate College of The University of Iowa

December 2012

Thesis Supervisors: Associate Professor David K. Duys
Associate Professor Susannah M. Wood

ABSTRACT

Historically non-heterosexual individuals have faced prejudice and discrimination in daily life. Non-heterosexuals experience oppression and discrimination that affect personal development on all levels. An increased awareness of sexual identity development could create more inclusive sexual identity models, a better understanding for counselor educators, and more effective training for counselors on issues of sexual identity.

The purpose of this study was to explore the life experiences that influence sexual identity in women who love women. This study required that subjects attach meaning to sexual identity formation. Qualitative research methodologies were used in the study. Participants were selected for this study in a thoughtful and purposeful manner and within specified parameters. Data were collected through two face-to-face interviews with the participants; member checking and peer debriefing offered consistency through the use of a semi-structured interview guide. Phenomenological approach and constant comparison was used for data analysis.

From the data collected, four themes emerged: I was Just Different, Information Seeking, View of Self as a Woman Within the Context of Culture, and Contextual Relationships. Findings of this study did not support a stage model of sexual identity development. Instead, this study supported the view that sexual identity is fluid and strongly related to relationships with peer groups. All participants reported that sexual identity formation was a painful process.

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Date

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Graduate College
The University of Iowa
Iowa City, Iowa

CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

_____

PH.D. THESIS

_____

This is to certify that the Ph.D. thesis of

Nashae Yvonne Julian

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To Mary

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And finally to the participants of this study, I express my most sincere gratitude. I truly enjoyed the time I spent with each of you. This study is your story, your interpretation, and your experiences; I can only hope that I have told it well.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

> The most important developmental task facing women today is the formation of identity, for it is in the realm of identity that a woman bases her sense of herself as well as her vision of the structure of her life. Identity incorporates a woman's choices for herself, her priorities, and the guiding principles by which she makes decisions. How does a woman come to form an identity? (Ruthellen, 1987, p. 3)

Issues of sexuality, sexual orientation, and sexual expression have been at the forefront of the psychotherapy profession since its inception. Homosexuality has evolved from a mental illness to a sexual preference within the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (American Psychiatric Association, 1968, 2005). In spite of the many changes surrounding these issues, non-heterosexual women still experience stigma and discrimination within therapeutic relationships (Garnets, Hancock, Cochran, Goodchilds, & Peplau, 1991). Some therapists continue to view a non-heterosexual identity as pathological, requiring direct attention in therapy, no matter the presenting issue (Garnets et al., 1991).

In the 1990s, the counseling profession embraced differences within cultures and educated counselors on how to incorporate cultural norms within the therapeutic relationship (Arredondo & Perez, 2003). Homosexuality was not initially perceived as a difference in culture or lived experience. Pope (1995) argued that the identity formation process and continued oppression affected personal development on all levels. To cope within discrimination and oppression, the lesbian community created norms of behavior, dress, and communication (Logan, 2005).

Statement of the Problem

Historically, homosexuality has been labeled as a disorder and condemned as a sexually deviant behavior. Homosexuals are still working to overcome the prejudices and stereotypes that have been cultivated and reinforced in society (Logan, 2006; Sang, 1989). The lack of civil rights and continued oppression experienced by homosexuals are reported to impact their sexual identity development (Pearson, 2003; Reynolds, 2003).

Recent statistics show that from 2000 to 2005, the number of identified same-sex partners increased more than 30% in the United States (Gates, 2006). However, when they were asked specifically about sexual identity, only 1.3% of women identified as homosexual whereas 3.8% identified as "something else, other than heterosexual, homosexual or bisexual" (Mosher, Chandra, & Jones, 2005, p. 3). Although these statistics suggest that women who engage in same-sex relationships may have an increased preference to sexually identify as something other than homosexual, research has failed to identify what the "other" is, or what influences sexual identity. Currently, an estimated 8.8 million individuals identify as gay, lesbian, or bisexual in the United States (Gates, 2006), but it is unknown if this number accounts for all non-heterosexual persons.

Oppression, Discrimination, and Stereotypes

The unique struggles faced by gay and lesbian individuals may be the result of discrimination and oppression that has defined the gay and lesbian community within the United States (Logan, 1996). Historical discrimination faced by lesbians includes, but is not limited to, a lack of civil rights, secret or semi-secret lives, oppression, rejection or ostracism by the family of origin, societal censure, lowered self-esteem due to internalized homophobia, fear of physical violence, and status as the object of campaigns of hatred and vilification by political and religious groups. One difference between this cultural minority and ethnic minorities is the fear of ostracism and rejection by their own family of origin (Pope, 1995).

Oppression, discrimination, and stereotyping have been shown to influence the development, mental health, identity, relationships, and important life experiences of lesbian women (Pearson, 2003; Reynolds, 2003). Such discrimination directed toward non-heterosexual women is often referred to as homophobia (Logan, 1996). Reynolds (2003) defined homophobia as "the fear or discomfort of lesbian, gay and bisexual individuals and feelings leading to intolerance, bigotry and violence to anyone not acting within heterosexual norms" (p. 55). Weinberg (1972) defined homophobia as "the dread

of being in close quarters with homosexuals" (p. 4). Logan (1996) suggested that most anti-homosexual responses fall into the category of prejudice rather than "phobia" and that the term "homoprejudice" more accurately describes the discrimination exhibited in mainstream society: "The continued use of homophobia as a descriptor for anti-homosexual responses may be seen by society as implicit permission to continue the oppression of homosexuals, excused by its being the result of inescapable fear" (Logan, p. 32). As counselors and counselor educators, it is imperative that we recognize the impact of language on the creation of an individual's reality. Therefore, this researcher will use homoprejudice in this study rather than homophobia, because it more accurately describes anti-homosexual and discriminatory behaviors and empowers rather than disempowers sexual minorities.

Homoprejudice, although the most prevalent form of discrimination, is not the only form of discrimination lesbian women experience. It can be assumed that most counselors and counselor educators do not consider themselves to be homoprejudiced; at the same time, many of these same individuals might fail to recognize heterosexism in their language, behaviors, and counseling styles. Heterosexism is discrimination by neglect, omission, and distortion of the experiences and daily realities of non-heterosexual individuals. Heterosexism is the belief that "heterosexuality is a more natural and normal form of loving, and therefore, should set the standard for love relationships" (Reynolds, p. 55). The psychotherapy literature has indicated that homosexuals experience both external and internal homoprejudice and heterosexism (Israel, Gorcheva, Burnes, & Walther, 2008; Logan, 1996; Szymanski, 2005). Homoprejudice and heterosexism affect every aspect of life and directly impact the mental health of homosexual individuals (Logan, 1996; Swim, Pearson, & Johnston, 2007; Wright & Perry, 2006).

Sexual Identity Development Models

Sexual identity development is the process by which persons with same sex attractions begin to identify as gay, lesbian, or bisexual; this process also has been referred to as “coming out” (Diamond, 2008). Sexual identity development has been widely studied across the fields of counseling, sociology, and psychology (Cass, 1979; Coleman, 1981/1982; Degges-White, Rice, & Meyers, 2000; Savin-Williams, 2005; Sophie, 1985/1986; Weinberg, 1972). According to Diamond (2010), the majority of the research relies on sexual identity models “based on retrospective data from highly selected subsets of sexual-minority populations” (p. 74). Sexual identity development models and theories have focused primarily on male homosexuals (Spargo, 1999). Over-reliance on models such as Cass’s six stages of sexual identity development has resulted in an inaccurate view of lesbian identity development (Diamond, 2010; Sophie, 1985/1986).

Developmental stage models continue to be the reference for normative sexual development (Diamond, 2008, 2010; Sophie, 1985/1986). However, these traditional models fail to recognize contextual, cultural, and historical considerations, and this over-simplification poses a problem for the ever-evolving concept of the non-heterosexual woman (Diamond, 2008; Sang, 1989; Savin-Williams, 2005). Consistent among all stage models of sexual identity development is the process of “coming out” (Carrion & Lock, 1997). This stage of development requires the individual to integrate sexual minority status into self-concept by identifying as something other than heterosexual. This integration process is achieved both by incorporating a previously unaccepted part of the self and by overcoming the anti-homosexual attitudes incorporated since childhood and current in everyday life (Carrion & Lock, 1997).

Like most developmental stage models, sexual identity stage models indicate that an individual must complete the tasks of a lower developmental stage before moving on to the next stage of development. Therefore, individuals who do not identify as a sexual

minority but who engage in same-sex relationships cannot become fully integrated and fulfilled (Cass, 1975; Coleman, 1985; Sophie, 1985/1986). This study challenged the notion that an individual must "come out" in order to achieve personal happiness. Attempts to reconstruct an accurate stage developmental model of lesbian identity have failed because of lack of sensitivity to social and historical contexts (Sophie, 1985/1986).

Differential Developmental Trajectories

Because little is known about same-sex attraction, some theorists recommend a framework rather than a comprehensive theory (Savin-Williams, 2005). The Differential Developmental Trajectories approach assumes that sexual development is a valid context for adolescence, regardless of sexual orientation (Savin-Williams, 2005). This framework disregards the notions that life progresses in a series of stages, that complexities and diversity of human development need not be considered when addressing sexuality, and that life can be understood through study (Savin-Williams, 2005). The Differential Developmental Trajectories encompass four main ideas: First, non-heterosexual women are similar to all other women in their development. Second, due to the manifestations of negativity toward same-sex attraction, non-heterosexual women differ in psychological development. Third, not all non-heterosexual women share the same experiences. And finally, general descriptions and group means may be irrelevant when applied to a specific individual (Savin-Williams, 2005).

Significance of the Study

Homosexuality has been a topic of interest since the inception of the mental health profession. Many psychotherapists, counselors, and doctors have fought to understand and assign meaning to homosexual identity. However, all have placed considerable emphasis on coming out and have failed to consider the environmental factors that are involved in the creation of an individual's sexual identity (APA, 1952).

Patterson (2008) called for counselors and counselor educators to look deeper into the development of sexual identity and how factors such as religion, family of origin,

social context, and environmental norms can impact sexual identity. This study takes contextual factors such as homoprejudice, discrimination, and oppression into account in the identity formation process. This study addresses the potential of such factors to negatively impact the mental health of women who love women and the possibility that coming out may not meet their sexual identity developmental needs. This deep and extensive qualitative look into the lives of women who love women has the potential to revolutionize the way that counselors and counselor educators view sexual identity development. An increased awareness of sexual identity development could create more inclusive sexual identity models, better understanding for counselor educators, and better training for counselors on issues of sexual identity. This, in turn, could change the way that counselors and counselor educators respond to women who love women, decrease oppression among counselors, and increase advocacy for women who love women.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore the life experiences that influence sexual identity in women who love women. Of particular interest to the study was the role of life experiences, such as race, culture, and oppression, in how one chooses to sexually identify.

The following question guided this research study:

> What life experiences have influenced the sexual identity formation of women who love women?

The question asked in this study required that subjects attach meaning to experiences and that the meaning be manifested in their identity. Therefore, qualitative research methodologies were well suited for studying the impact of life experiences on sexual identity among women who love women.

Appropriateness of Methodology

The purpose of qualitative research is to develop understanding and theory through inductive reasoning without a predetermined outcome or hypothesis (Denzin &

Lincoln, 2005; Patton, 2002). According to Heppner, Kivlighan, and Wampold (1999) qualitative research "involves understanding the complexity of people's lives by examining individual perspectives in context" (p. 235). Qualitative research should be undertaken when the nature of the research question necessitates deep exploration. Through this process, themes and patterns emerge from the data that provide insight into the world of the participants. Unlike quantitative research, qualitative research is not generalizable and is not intended to make sweeping statements about a population. While quantitative research investigates correlation and causality between two variables, qualitative inquiry looks for meaning in life stories and personal experiences (Patton, 2002). Qualitative research is the study of the empirical world from the viewpoint of the participants (Krefting, 1990). According to Krefting, there are two basic assumptions of qualitative research: "behavior is influenced by the physical, sociocultural, and psychological environment" and "behavior goes beyond what is observed by the investigator" (p. 214). These assumptions form the basis for naturalistic inquiry in which it is the researcher's responsibility to assess the subjective meanings and perceptions of the participants.

Cresswell (1997) described eight identifying factors of a qualitative inquiry. First, the qualitative inquiry asks "how" or "what" rather than "why." The question guiding this study (What life experiences have influenced the sexual identity formation of women who love women?) clearly sought a qualitative answer in the fact that the question addressed the phenomenology of a lived experience. Second, the topic must need to be explored. Many theories have attempted to explain the development of a homosexual identity (Patterson, 2008), but no theory has taken into account the complexities of lived experiences and how experiences have influenced sexual identity. Third, qualitative research seeks a detailed understanding of the topic. To gain insight into the lived experiences of women who love women, the researcher obtained intimate and detailed information regarding their individual experiences and perceptions of what (if any) lived

experience influenced their sexual identity. Fourth, qualitative research must be conducted in the field. This required the researcher to gain entry into the external world of the participants and gather information within a natural context.

This study emphasized the contextual similarities and differences of the participants; therefore, gaining insight into the participants' natural settings was an important step in gathering this data. Fifth, qualitative research is conducted when the researcher has a vested interest in bringing herself into the research. As a qualitative researcher, the primary instrument used was the researcher; therefore, the researcher had the literary desire to write from a personal position.

Sixth, qualitative research should be conducted when time and resources are available. Seventh, the audience must be receptive to the qualitative approach. Patterson (2008) called for qualitative research on sexual identity development and specifically on what contextual factors contribute to sexual identity development. Finally, the researcher must have a strong desire to be an active learner in the research process. The researcher must be willing to explore her own assumptions, perceptions, and experiences that have contributed to her own sexual identity. Qualitative research requires the researcher to complete a self-analysis document about the researcher's role as a human instrument.

This study focused specifically on the complexities of lived experiences and how such experiences influence sexual identity. No individual experiences or perceives her environment identically, nor does she share all contextual influences such as race, cultural, class, or educational levels. The question of what life experiences have influenced the sexual identity of women who love women necessitated an in-depth examination with detailed information from an individual perspective. Therefore, it was appropriate to utilize a qualitative design to guide this research. All research design begins with the selection of a topic and a paradigm.

Qualitative research is designed and interpreted through a theoretical paradigm. A paradigm is defined as "the basic belief system or worldview that guides the investigator,

not only in choices of method, but in ontologically and epistemologically fundamental ways" (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p. 105). When choosing a paradigm, the researcher must identify her own worldview and epistemology from which the research will be designed and executed.

The constructivism paradigm identifies the multiple realities of a given group and asks:

> How have the people in this setting constructed reality? What are their reported perceptions, "truths," explanations, beliefs, and worldview? What are the consequences of their constructions for their behaviors and for those with whom they interact? (Patton, 2002, p.134)

The ontology of constructivism is relativist in that reality is socially and experientially constructed and may be specific to an individual or common across a given group (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The foundation of knowledge or the epistemological assumption made in constructivism is that data are generated and awareness is cultivated through the interview process (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The ontology of constructivism is relativist in that reality is socially and experientially constructed and may be specific to an individual or common across a given group (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Guba and Lincoln (1994) identified the following assumptions of a constructivist study:

1. "Truth" is a matter of consensus among information and sophisticated constructors, not of correspondence with objective reality.
2. "Facts" have no meaning except within some value framework; hence there cannot be an "objective" assessment of any proposition.
3. "Causes" and effects do not exist except by imputation.
4. Phenomena can only be understood within the context in which they are studied; findings from one context cannot be generalized to another; neither problems nor solutions can be generalized from one setting to another.
5. Data derived from constructivist inquiry have neither special status nor legitimacy; they represent simply another construction to be taken into account in the move toward consensus. (pp. 44-45)

Stereotyping and labels assigned to sexual minorities have been toxic to the homosexual community. Lesbian women have worked to overcome such discrimination across their life experiences (Logan, 2006; Reynolds, 2003; Sang, 2003). The women in this study experienced historically situated injustices and oppression because of social

constructs that denied them the same rights and privileges afforded their heterosexual counterparts. This study focused on the meaning participants ascribed to sexual identity.

Most important to this study was how the individual interpreted reality and how it was constructed over time through the experiences of social, political, cultural, economic, ethnic, and gender values. This study assumed that perceptions, beliefs, and expression of sexual identity were constructed through experiences. Therefore, a constructivist paradigm was appropriate for this study.

This study focused on how lived experiences influenced sexual identity; therefore, phenomenological strategy was employed as the investigative technique. According to Rossman and Rallis (2003), phenomenology is a process by which “through dialogue and reflection, the quintessential meaning of the experience will be revealed” (p. 97). The basic assumption of phenomenology is that “we can only know what we experience” (Patton, 2002, p. 105). Phenomenology explores how one makes individual and shared meaning of experiences. This strategy provided a framework for understanding how women who love women construct sexual identity through lived experiences.

The phenomenological strategy approach assumes that consciousness is the only access humans have to the world. All experiences, whether empirical or subjective, are open to interpretation, description, and examination (Patton, 2002). Phenomenological data in this study were collected through a series of interviews.

By utilizing the phenomenological strategy, the researcher’s emphasis in this study was on how these participants constructed and made meaning of lived experiences and how such experiences influenced their sexual identity. Further, this strategy emphasized the importance of individual interpretations of sexual identity as well as how sexual identity was constructed through personal experiences. Therefore, the focus was on the participants’ descriptions of experience and specifically the shared experience of being a woman who loves women.

Participants within a phenomenological study must have experienced the phenomenon under investigation and have the ability to speak in detail about such experiences. Speaking in detail about sexual identity may have been cathartic and empowering for the participants in this research study. The voices of sexual minority women have largely been ignored or misrepresented within psychotherapy research and literature (Diamond, 2008). Sexual minorities continue to experience oppression and discrimination within society, forcing some to live secret or semi-secret lives. Furthermore, traditional sexual identity development models do not take into account contextual influences and may not accurately represent sexual identity formation for the women in this study. For this reason, a phenomenological strategy, which seeks to investigate what contextual experiences influence sexual identity, can prove to be extremely valuable to psychotherapy literature.

Researcher as Human Instrument

This study asked, “What life experiences have influenced the sexual identity formation of women who love women?” I will summarize the politic of my location and describe the experiences, values, and beliefs that contributed to my development and sexual identity.

As a lesbian who is a counselor educator, my investment in the research was both personal and professional. Qualitative research provided both the challenge and the freedom to explore lesbian sexual identity development from an interpersonal level.

I believe that Lesbian, Gay, Transgender, Queer, and questioning persons deserve the same respect, dignity, and rights afforded their heterosexual counterparts. In my personal experience in the field of counseling, as well as in my experiences as a counselor, I have observed and been told stories of prejudice and discrimination based on sexual identity. I believe that it is my obligation and duty to seek to reduce such negative experiences by educating counselors and counseling educators on the unique struggles of this population.

I value personal insight and exploration. I continue to benefit from my own personal exploration and development in the context of a counseling relationship. Due to my childhood experiences, I refuse to keep secrets and I am very open and honest in my relationships. I value empowerment and the ability to express my feelings towards my partner. I believe that others should have the opportunity to express their own sexuality, and that it should be received without judgment. I value spirituality and believe that spirituality can play an important role in emotional and mental health, as well as increase life satisfaction.

I am a fifth-year doctoral student in Rehabilitation and Counselor Education at The University of Iowa. Prior to entering this program, I completed a master's degree in counselor education and a bachelor's degree in communication. During my internship as a master's student, I was hired as a mental health counselor at a local social service agency. In this position, I consulted with area schools and parents regarding the behaviors of troubled children. I provided counseling services for adults and children, including couples and family therapy. I have a deep professional interest in the development of identity and sexuality.

Limitations of the Study

This study was developed to examine lived experiences that influence the sexual identity formation of women who love women. The findings from this study could be significant in understanding identity formation of women who love women. The results from this study cannot be generalized to cases beyond this study. Although this might be considered a study limitation, I maintain that the information gathered could be useful beyond all current data on sexual identity development because of the depth and richness that has been gained in the use of quantitative inquiry.

Qualitative research, in general, is subject to personal biases; this study is no different. As a lesbian woman, I will never be free from the experiences that have

influenced my own sexual identity formation. To maintain honesty, I kept a reflexive journal and discussed personal biases regularly with a mentor.

Definition of Terms

Language clarification was essential to understanding the experiences of women who love women, because from a social construction point of view, language creates an individual's reality (Logan, 2006). Below are the definitions of the following terms as used in this study: (a) bisexual, (b) closet, (c) gay, (d) heterosexism, (e) homoprejudice, (f) homophobia (g) life experience, (h) meaning making , (i) lesbian, (j) queer, and (k) cis-gender.

Bisexual: Can be defined as a "third orientation" and "heightened fluidity" (Diamond, 2008, p. 13). Persons who identify as bisexual experience greater fluidity in sexual orientation than persons who identify as lesbian (Diamond, 2008). Bisexual persons have flexibility in erotic response and do not choose to engage in sexual activity with persons of only one gender.

Closet: The term closet was used commonly as slang within the gay and lesbian community and was indicative of an individual who privately identified as non-heterosexual, but publicly appeared to be heterosexual (Weinberg, 1972).

Gay: Personal identity that means that an individual has freed herself from the constraints of the term homosexual and openly engages in sexual and romantic relationships with someone of the same sex (Weinberg, 1972).

Heterosexism: "Heterosexism refers to an ideological system that denies, denigrates, and stigmatizes non-heterosexual forms of behavior, identity, relationship, or community" (Rose, 2000, p. 1).

Homoprejudice: Anti-homosexual response to non-heterosexuals. The term was identified by Logan (1996) and has replaced the term homophobia.

Homophobia: Defined as overt disgust for persons who identify as homosexual (Weinberg, 1972). Homophobia has been used regularly in the literature to describe acts of hatred and violence against the lesbian population.

Lived Experiences: Active participation in events or activities, leading to the accumulation of knowledge or skill from which knowledge is derived.

Meaning Making: To assign meaning to a lived experience. In social construction, when an individual assigns meaning to an event, the experience becomes relevant to personal identity and, in this study, to sexual identity development.

Lesbian: Term most commonly used to describe women who love women.

Queer: Term used to describe persons who have same-sex attraction. Although it has been used to degrade the homosexual population, it has been reclaimed and is used as a word of empowerment.

Cis-Gender: When one's gender identity is consistent with gender role behavior.

Women who love Women: A woman born woman who identifies as a non-heterosexual and does not identify as asexual.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this chapter is to examine the literature surrounding sexual identity formation and to suggest a more appropriate lens through which to view this phenomenon. The following section will define social constructivism and outline how social constructivist theory is a more appropriate theory to examine identity formation in women who love women. Subsequent sections will identify cultural norms of women who love women, including the effect of prejudice and discrimination within society on this minority group.

History of Lesbianism in American Society

Lesbianism has been socially constructed in the media and within the larger culture through a series of social movements perpetrated by individuals who have not conformed to social norms. In the 1800s, women revolted against the lack of civil rights, including the right to vote and hold public office—rights granted only to men at the time; this movement was referred to as the suffrage movement (Faderman, 1999). Women who opposed the suffrage movement declared that "as women, we do not want the strife, bitterness, falsification and publicity which accompany political campaigns…" (Faderman, 1999, p. 16). There was a split among women during the suffrage movement in America between "true" women, that is, those keeping with the Victorian construction, and those who protested for equality. Women who stepped outside of the "true" Victorian construct were labeled as "unsexed" or "manly women" as punishment, and in the extreme, were condemned to prison (Faderman, 1999, p. 16). It was at this point in history that women began to become openly separated and outwardly shamed based on what the media proclaimed to be "perverse" sexuality (Faderman, 1999). Because of this, many women turned away from the suffrage movement for fear of becoming "unsexed" or being labeled as "manly" (Faderman, 1999). The media declared suffragettes to have "gender inappropriate" practices (Faderman, 1999). The suffrage movement had a

notable impact on women who love women. The message received during this point in history was that women who did not conform to the heterosexual framework would be shamed and exiled (Beemyn, 1997). However, it was not until the 1970s that sexual identity began to be explored within the literature as something other than perverse (Clarke & Peel, 2007). Within this exploration came positives and negatives. The positive is that researchers now have a template from which to view same-sex attraction. The negative is that often women who love women are marginalized within society and are expected to experience a similar identity formation process (Dean et al., 2000).

> If we are liberated we are open with our sexuality.
> Closet queenery must end.
> We're out. Where… are you?
> Were here. We're Queer. Get used to it. (Clarke & Peel, 2007)

Traditionally, sexual minorities have been labeled with a sexual disorder and condemned as sexually deviant. Women who love women today are still working to overcome these prejudices and stereotypes (Clarke & Peel, 2007; Logan, 2006; Sang, 2003). The lack of civil rights and the continuation of oppression experienced by homosexuals may have a direct impact on sexual identity development (Pearson, 2003; Reynolds, 2003). Recent statistics show that, from 2000 to 2005, the number of identified same-sex partners increased more than 30% in the United States (Gates, 2006). However, when women were asked specifically about sexual identity, only 1.3% identified as homosexual while 3.8% identified as "something else, other than heterosexual, homosexual or bisexual" (Mosher et al., 2005, p. 3). These statistics indicated that women who engage in same-sex relationships may have an increased preference to sexually identify as something other than homosexual. However, little is known about what influences the sexual identity of sexual minorities; currently, an estimated 8.8 million individuals identify as gay, lesbian, or bisexual in the United States (Gates, 2006).

It has been argued that the actions of homosexuals against police and politicians in the summer of 1969, known as the Stonewall Riot, was the beginning of the gay revolutionary movement (Gillespie, 2008). The rebellion was in direct response to the hostility and continued harassment by police in the form of raids and arrests of individuals at Stonewall, a known New York City gathering place for homosexuals (Gillespie, 2008). The social history of women who love women is hidden in the discourse of politics, religion, and closets (Clarke & Peel, 2007). Lesbian history is a subject that has not been widely discussed within the counseling literature or American literature in general (Faderman, 1999). History is recaptured by the important achievements of men; women are often identified only as heroines who are supportive and loving to the men who have accomplished great things (Faderman, 1999). Feminist history evolved out of the subordination of women to men; however, within the feminist movement, women who love women were excluded and forced to remain closeted for the betterment of the movement (Faderman, 1999).

Oppressive experiences, such as those described above, have had a considerable impact on women who love women (Clarke & Peel, 2007; Logan, 2006; Sang, 2003). Women who love women are at a greater risk of mental health issues including suicide and self-destructive behaviors (Roen, Scourfield, & McDermott, 2008). This is not due to sexual status, but rather, to the prejudice and oppression that women who love women experience within society (Logan, 2006; Sang, 2003). The counseling and psychology professions have attempted to gain insight into women who love women through the construction of sexual identity development models (Clarke & Peel, 2007).

Sexual Identity Development

Sexual identity development is the process by which persons with same sex attractions begin to identify as gay, lesbian, or bisexual. This process is also referred to as “coming out” (Diamond, 2012). Sexual identity development has been widely studied across the fields of counseling, sociology, and psychology (Cass, 1979; Degges-White et

al., 2000; Savin-Williams, 2005; Weinberg, 1972). According to Diamond (2008), the majority of the research relies on sexual identity models “based on retrospective data from highly selected subsets of the sexual-minority populations” (p. 74). Sexual identity development models and theories have primarily focused on male homosexuals (Spargo, 1999). Overreliance on models such as Cass’s six stages of sexual identity development has resulted in an inaccurate view of the developmental process of women who love women (Diamond, 2012).

Cass’s (1979) model of sexual identity development describes six stages homosexuals must experience in order to acquire a lesbian, gay, or bisexual identity. The stages are defined as (a) Identity Confusion, (b) Identity Comparison, (c) Identity Tolerance, (d) Identity Acceptance, (e) Identity Pride, and (f) Identity Synthesis. Each stage identifies a set of tasks that must be completed for homosexuals to be fully accomplished in their identity. In Identity Confusion, a woman recognizes that she has feelings and attractions that could be labeled as lesbian. Identity Comparison identifies women who compare what they are experiencing with other women who have identified as lesbian. Women in this stage tentatively accept they “might be” lesbian. Identity Tolerance identifies women who assume a lesbian identity, but have not yet accepted and committed to this identity. Women who have accepted the lesbian identity and begin to share this status with others have entered Identity Acceptance. In Identity Pride, women separate lesbian from non-lesbian, taking pride in being lesbian and expressing animosity and anger toward heterosexism and homophobia. In the last stage, Identity Synthesis, women feel self-actualized, able to interact well with both lesbian and non-lesbian individuals. Cass cautioned that this model is not applicable to all individuals (Cass, 1979).

Until recently, developmental stage models were the only reference of normative sexual development (Diamond, 2012). These traditional models failed to recognize contextual, cultural, and historical considerations, and thus was an oversimplification that

posed problems for the ever-evolving non-heterosexual woman within a clinical setting (Diamond, 2012; Sang 1989; Savin-Williams, 2005). Diamond conducted a 10-year longitudinal study on the reported sexual orientation of women and found that for the women in her study, sexual orientation was fluid, ever changing, and evolving over time (Diamond, 2005). Based on the information she collected, Diamond reported that "dynamical systems models are ideally suited for modeling female sexual orientation because they focus specifically on the underlying dynamics of complex variability in human experience over time" (p. 78).

Because so little is known about same-sex attraction, some theorists have recommended a framework rather than a comprehensive theory (Savin-Williams, 2005). The Differential Developmental Trajectories approach assumes that sexual development is a valid context for adolescents regardless of sexual orientation (Savin-Williams, 2005). This framework disregards the notions that life progresses in a series of stages, complexities and diversity of human development need not be considered, and life can be understood through research (Savin-Williams, 2005). This framework encompasses four main ideas. First, women who love women are similar to all other women in their development. Second, due to the manifestations of negativity towards same-sex attraction, women who love women differ in psychological development. Third, not all women who love women share the same experience. And fourth, general descriptions and group means may be irrelevant when applied to a specific individual (Savin-Williams, 2005).

History of Homosexuality in the Counseling Profession

Issues of sexuality, sexual orientation, and sexual expression have been at the forefront in the psychotherapy profession since its birth with Freud. Homosexuality has evolved from a mental illness to sexual preference within the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (American Psychiatric Association, 1968, 2005). Despite changes surrounding this issue, women who love women today still experience stigma

and discrimination within therapeutic relationships (Garnets et al., 1991). Some therapists continue to view a lesbian identity as pathological, requiring direct attention in therapy, no matter the presenting issue (Garnets et al., 1991).

In the 1990s, the counseling profession embraced differences within cultures and educated counselors on how to incorporate cultural norms into the therapeutic relationship (Arredondo et al., 1996). Homosexuality was not initially perceived as a difference in culture or lived experience. Pope (1995) argued that the identity formation process and continued oppression affect personal development on all levels. Further, counselor education has yet to incorporate a holistic view of homosexuality and heterosexism in the education of counselors (Smith, Foley, & Chaney 2008). This includes consideration of race, gender, and class within the cultural norms of women who love women. To cope with discrimination and oppression, the lesbian community has created norms of behavior, dress, and communication (Logan, 2006).

Historically, homosexuality has been labeled as a disorder and condemned as a sexually deviant behavior, and homosexuals today are still working to overcome the prejudices and stereotypes that have been cultivated and reinforced in society (Logan, 2005; Sang, 2003). The lack of civil rights and continuation of oppression experienced by homosexuals may have a considerable impact on their sexual identity development (Pearson, 2003; Reynolds, 2003).

The unique struggles faced by gay and lesbian individuals may be the result of discrimination and oppression that has defined the gay and lesbian community within the United States (Logan, 1996). Historical discrimination faced by lesbians includes, but is not limited to, a lack of civil rights, secret or semi-secret lives, oppression, rejection or ostracism by their family of origin, societal censure, lowered self-esteem due to internalized homophobia, fear of physical violence, and status as the object of campaigns of hatred and vilification by political and religious groups. One difference between this

cultural minority and ethnic minorities is the fear of ostracism and rejection by their own family of origin (Pope, 1995).

Oppression, discrimination, and stereotyping often have a direct impact on the development, mental health, identity, relationships, and important life experiences of women who love women (Pearson, 2003; Reynolds, 2003). Such discrimination directed toward women who love women is often referred to as homophobia (Logan, 1996). Reynolds (2003) defined homophobia as “the fear or discomfort of lesbian, gay and bisexual individuals and feelings leading to intolerance, bigotry and violence to anyone not acting within heterosexual norms” (p. 55). Weinberg (1972) defined homophobia as “the dread of being in close quarters with homosexuals” (p. 4). Logan (1996) suggested that most anti-homosexual responses fall under the category of prejudice rather than “phobia” and asserted that the term homoprejudice more accurately describe the discrimination exhibited in mainstream society. “The continued use of homophobia as a descriptor for anti-homosexual responses may be seen by society as implicit permission to continue the oppression of homosexuals, excused by its being the result of inescapable fear” (Logan, 1996, p. 32). As counselors and counselor educators, it is imperative that we recognize the impact that language has on the creation of an individual’s reality. Therefore, the researcher will use homoprejudice rather than homophobia, because it more accurately describes anti-homosexual and discriminatory behaviors and empowers rather than disempowers sexual minorities.

Homoprejudice, although the most prevalent form of discrimination, is not the only form of discrimination women who love women experience. It can be assumed that most counselors and counselor educators would not consider themselves to be homoprejudiced; at the same time, most of these same individuals may fail to recognize heterosexism in their language, behaviors, and counseling styles. Heterosexism is discrimination by neglect, omission, and distortion of the experiences and daily realities of lesbian, gay, and bisexual individuals. Heterosexism is the belief that “heterosexuality

is a more natural and normal form of loving, and therefore, should set the standard for love relationships" (Reynolds, 2003, p. 55). The psychotherapy literature indicates that homosexuals experience both external and internal homoprejudice and heterosexism (Israel et al., 2008; Logan, 1996; Szymanski, 2005). Homoprejudice and heterosexism affect every aspect of life and directly impact the mental health of homosexual individuals (Logan, 1996; Swim, Pearson, & Johnston, 2007; Wright & Perry, 2007).

Kegan's Model of Development: Helix of Evolutionary Truces

Kegan (1982) defined human development as a "succession of renegotiated balances which come to organize the experience of the individual in qualitatively different ways" (p. 81). Throughout the evolution of the one's development, one's focus changes, and this internal focus serves as the foundation of perception. That is, development is a cognitive process that is phenomenological in nature. Therefore, it is not only one's experience, but also the perceptions of one's experience, that evoke an emotional response, and these perceptions are grounded in one's development (Kegan).

Development can be viewed as two opposing poles, autonomy and inclusion, constantly pulling in an attempt to dominate one's personality. Although all persons have natural tendencies toward one or the other pole, each individual has a need for autonomy as well as inclusion. The struggle of each transitional era is balancing the need for inclusion and autonomy within the subject of the era. When an individual has mastered this task, she can then "make object" of the subject and move on to the next era (Kegan, 1982, 1994).

The difference in Kegan's model of human development and other developmental models is that, in Kegan's model, individuals actively organize their experiences (Eriksen, 2007; Kegan, 1994). "Experience is not what happens to you…it's what you do with what happens to you" (Kegan, 1982, p. 11) is the framework for the helix of evolutionary truces, that is, Kegan's model of human development. This helix consists of

five developmental eras that can be passed through and revisited at any time throughout the developmental process. The eras are identified as Incorporative (0), Impulsive (1), Imperial (2), Interpersonal (3), Institutional (4), and Interindividual (5). How the individual makes meaning of experiences determines his/her developmental era. Each era has a subject and an object; the subject is the meaning-making context of the era, and the object or objects are the subject(s) of preceding eras (see Kegan, 1982, for a full description of the model).

Psychosocial Environment

In objects relations theory, Winnicott (1965) emphasized that an infant develops within a context, referred to as a "holding environment," and this context is provided by care providers. Kegan (1982) adapted this concept of holding environment to include more than infancy. Kegan suggested that in each developmental era, a holding environment exists and that this psychosocial environment (holding environment) is essential to development. According to Kegan, if we want to understand others, "we must understand the way the person makes meaning of the world but we must also understand the way the world creates the person" (1982, p. 115). Care providers create the psychosocial context in which development takes place, eventually becoming "less psycho and more social," which is the definition of development (Kegan, 1982, p. 115). The most effective psychosocial environment is one that unconditionally supports and also knows when to let go (Kegan, 1982). The difficulty in using Kegan's model as a template for this research is that it fails to account for lived experiences and individual difference. The focus of this developmental model is cognitive and describes how persons relate to the outside world, but fails to identify how the individual comes to form meaning from lived experience.

Moral Development: Gilligan

Developmental theories, like that of Kegan (1982), define development in stages of cognition and behavior, and fail to address the differences in development between

males and females (Gilligan, 1982). Developmental stage theories assume that there are universal measures that identify higher and lower levels of cognitive or behavioral reasoning (Gilligan, 1982). Such theories fail to recognize differences between genders, race, or culture (Gilligan, 1982). The bias that forms the foundation of most developmental models is that male development is a better lens to view developmental processes because it fits the current model of corporate success (Gilligan, 1993). Psychologists have defined the discovery of the importance of intimacy and relationship building for men in mid-life as a stage of development, but because women are thought to have such moral values early in life, it is defined as intuitive and instinctive rather than developmental (Gilligan, 1993). These same traits of care and sensitivity have marked women as immature and latent in development (Gilligan, 1993). One example of the indiscretion towards societal influences is that one of the markers of child and adolescent development is an increase in separation from parent and other (Kegan, 1982). However, two standards of normative development exist in society: Women are defined and reinforced as feminine through the relationships they build, while the masculinity of men is contingent upon their ability to become independent beings (Gilligan, 1993). Yet within a developmental context, separation from other is necessary for normative development; therefore, women's lack of separation is interpreted as inadequate development (Gilligan, 1993).

Moral development has emerged within the field of psychology and counseling in response to the lack of attention to contextual factors by developmental theorists. Moral development is different from human development because it takes into account relationships to others and does not attribute growth to one standard measure (Gilligan, 1993; Loevinger, 1976). Specifically Gilligan's theory of moral development addresses the differences in male and female moral reasoning (Gilligan, 1993; Murphy & Gilligan, 1980).

Moral development according to Gilligan is defined within unambiguous assumptions that “the way people talk about their lives is of significance, that the language they use and the connections they make reveal the world that they see and in which they act” (Gilligan, 1982, p. 2). Developmental stages are identified through relationship to self, cognitive process, and decision making through the experience of moral conflict (Gilligan, 1982). Gilligan offered a structure for moral development that takes into account the unique experience of women. She chose not to define development by age, but rather through procession of moral obligations. During each stage, a transition takes place, focusing more on other and less on self. Gilligan identified three stages: Preconvention: goal is individual survival, transition is from selfishness to responsibility to others; Conventional: self sacrifice is goodness, transition from goodness to truth that she, too, is a person; and Post-Conventional: the moral concentration has moved to non-violence and towards care; it should be noted that this level of moral development may never be reached (Gilligan, 1993).

Women construct moral dilemma within the context of care and responsibility, whereas men focus on the differences between right and wrong (Gilligan, 1993). During the transition from lower to higher levels of morality, women focus more on cognition, comprehension, and reflection. This can be observed through language (“should, ought, better, right, good and bad”), moving from constructs of obligation and responsibility to care and avoidance of hurt (Gilligan, 1993, p. 74). According to Gilligan, a woman has reached the highest level of moral development when, in the context of moral decision making, she can be true to self while limiting the hurt caused to others.

Preconvention development can be described as egocentric, or the focus on self and one’s own values and beliefs (Gilligan, 1993). This moral construct is based on individual awareness and personal need. During this stage, a woman’s focus is on survival and self-care. Survival is the most important value during this stage of development. When presented with a moral question regarding stealing for survival, a

woman in this developmental stage will choose survival over law and order (Gilligan, 1993). Women begin to transition from this framework of moral reasoning when it becomes evident that focusing on personal survival is interpreted as selfish (Gilligan, 1993). This is learned through interaction with and observation of society. During the transition into the next stage, women become more aware of what is expected of them. This information is interpreted and personal judgments on behavior are made. From this process, a woman begins to see moral dilemmas more conventionally within societal norms, and desires to be seen as good to herself and others (Gilligan, 1993).

Conventional is the next stage of Gilligan's moral development. Women who are identified as conventional are self-sacrificing and focus more on others than self. During this stage, a woman has reflected on past values and beliefs about the world. Past moral decisions are interpreted as selfish and egocentric, and because of this, her moral decision making is based on perceived goodness (Gilligan, 1993). The conventional woman is in tune with the values and beliefs of her environment and contemplates moral decisions based on these values. She longs to be seen as someone who fits in with societal norms and thinks about the good and self-sacrificing thing to do. Women have a great understanding of their role in life as women. Different from men, women understand themselves to be caregivers, lovers, and friends. Therefore, personal values and beliefs are set aside and care for the other is the highest priority (Gilligan, 1993). Transitioning into the last stage of development involves gaining understanding of self outside of social norms. During this process, women think less about being good and following social norms and more about fighting for justice and doing what is in the best interest of self and other.

The highest stage of moral development, according to Gilligan (1993), is Post-Conventional. The primary guide to women during this stage of development is responsibility and caring about self and other (Gilligan, 1993). For men, this stage of development would equal the respect of others' beliefs; for women, it is about care for

self and other. Moral decision making moves self-critical, not being “good” enough, to responsibility of care for self and other (Gilligan, 1993). Women in this stage of moral development identify injustice. In questions of moral obligation, turmoil is not over what should be done (as in the instance of stealing medication for the survival of a loved one); rather, the injustice lies in not being able to obtain justice without hurting self or other.

When a study focuses on the voice and the lived experiences of women, women’s qualities are revealed and empowerment is achieved (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1997). What has been learned from other qualitative studies that embrace Gilligan’s developmental theory is that relationships and connections to others are a framework for the defining of self (Belenky et al., 1997). This is not a factor in the development of men.

Social Constructivism

> Every group in power tells its story as it would like to have it believed, in the way it thinks will promote its interests. (Kitzinger, 1987)

The Social Constructivism paradigm recognizes multiple realities of a given group. The epistemology of constructivism is that all knowledge is derived from language and culture (Cottone, 2007; Gergen, 2005). Because of this, it is impossible to subscribe a single definition to social construction (Cottone, 2007). Instead, one must consider all of the domains of discourse that one possesses, each within a different reality (Gergen, 2005). That is to say that each role an individual plays within her life is as authentic and influencing as the next, even if conflicting in value (Gergen, 2005). Therefore, knowledge of self and other is constructed through experience, and truth is pursued through internal consistency and social consensus. Knowledge is not a reflection of an objective reality; instead, it is constructed through language and cognitive process (Guterman, 1994; Neimeyer & Mahoney, 1995). The value of subjectivity and personal experience is what distinguishes the mental health profession from other clinical professions (Guterman, 1994).

The interpersonal process and construction of an individual's own reality is fundamental to social construction (Cottone, 2007; Gergen, 1985; Maturana, 1988). Social constructivism is the focus on "how change is structured whereas other paradigms focus on how structures are changed" (Cottone, p. 194). Knowledge and understanding is created in relationships through language and symbolic interaction and cannot be attributed to one individual (Lyddon, 1995).

Social construction theory emphasizes the importance of experiences through relationships and social interactions in that an individual cannot form an identity outside of her social context. The phenomenon that an individual is influenced and informed from her environment has appeared in counseling literature under the umbrella of multiculturalism. However, historically, homosexuality has been neglected within the multicultural counseling literature. Because of this, the social construction theory has not penetrated sexual identity formation within the counseling profession (Patterson, 2008).

Among the population of women who love women are differing identifying categories such as lesbian, butch, femme, dyke, homosexual, and many more. Through the use of language, this minority population can effectively communicate their own sexual identity within their culture. The language used creates the reality of this group. Within the paradigm of social constructivism, identity is formed through and within the language (Guterman, 1994; Lyddon, 1995). Within the field of counseling, multiculturalism has emerged as a paradigm through which a client's cultural values, practices, and perspectives are held as valid to the counseling relationship (Cottone, 2007). Multiculturalism, implicitly the ideas and philosophy, may be an emergent of social construction within the field of counseling (Cottone, 2007).

Social Construction of Lesbianism

Creation of an individual's sexual identity is a subjective experience influenced by social and cultural forces (Garnets, 2002; Kitzinger, 1987). Although sexual attraction is innate and unchangeable, how a woman sexually identifies is a story, or perhaps, many

stories, about her interpersonal and intrasubjective experiences (Garnets, 2002; Kitzinger, 1987). Sexual identity is shaped by culture, economic status, belief about gender, religion, acceptance of sexual status, and morality, to name a few factors (Garnets, 2002).

Very few researchers, especially in the field of counseling, have taken the opportunity to investigate how women who love women construct their sexual identity (Gergen, 2005; Kitzinger, 1987). In fact, after a great deal of investigation and consultation with leaders in the field of social construction, only three articles addressing social constructs were identified. Even within the field of multicultural counseling, authors who discuss the homosexual experience often fail to do so in a way that is inclusive of lived subjective experiences, cultural norms, and interpersonal communication (Cottone, 2007). Women who love women are often grouped with all minorities. This simplification of homosexuality fails to account for the unique cultural and political aspects of the women who love women population. Homosexuals have been forced to deny or hide their orientation for fear of societal, political, and personal attacks (Gergen, 2005; Pope, 2004). Also, by admitting or acting on same-sex attractions, lesbian are at risk of being exiled from their family of origin (Logan, 1999; Pope, 2004).

The crux in discerning a woman's view of her identity lies in how she constructs her experiences (Kitzinger, 1987). Each individual evaluates and decides for herself what is and is not prejudice; therefore, not all women who love women see homoprejudice in the same way (Kitzinger, 1987). This difference in perception depends heavily on personal beliefs, values, and interpersonal relationships (Gergen, 2005; Kitzinger, 1987). Clinicians and researchers who consider the non-heterosexual population "just the same as" heterosexuals are, in fact, acting within an anti-homosexual view by refusing to see difference or to acknowledge the discrimination and prejudice that is directed toward this population (Kitzinger, 1987).

Many researchers and clinicians in mental health professions have shown very little interest in Kitzinger's (1987) social constructionist approach to non-heterosexual

identity formation (Gergen, 2005). Moreover, when Kitzinger's work is discussed within the mental health profession, it is often misunderstood and construed as social learning theory (Gergen, 2005). Social learning theory is based on assumptions that one learns through observation (McGregor, 2009). Social learning theory is not based within a cultural and linguistic context. Rather, it implies that behavior (in this case lesbian behavior) is learned through observing women who love women within society. This perspective has been used to situate homosexuality as a socially learned behavior and has influenced women who love women to remain closeted (Logan, 2005; Savin-Williams, 2005). This epistemological shift of Kitzinger's works negates women who love women as a real phenomenon and diminishes sexual orientation to a learned behavior rather than a personal trait (Gergen, 2005).

Conclusion

As counselors, we separate ourselves from other mental health professionals in how we treat our clients. We believe in the holistic care of clients. This includes environmental factors that affect and influence the mental stability of our clients (Pope, 2004; Wampold, 2007). This contextual mode of mental health treatment requires that we consider the social construct from which our clients emerge. The heart of our modern view of the human psyche is discovering the world of our clients and how they view themselves within it (Gergen, 1992). It is most important that women who love women are able to tell their story from a subjective point of view, without counselor distortion (Neimeyer & Mahoney, 1995). "There is no such thing as universal, objective knowledge, but only local knowledge which represents the particular resources and commitments of given cultures" (Lynch, 1997, p. 5).

Social construction begins with language and uses language to validate culture (Lynch, 1997). The reality experienced by women who love women can only be expressed individually and can only reflect personal experiences. It is within the framework of social construction that counselors can begin to understand the

relationships built by women who love women and the context in which they live, without exclusion of race, culture, and oppression (Cottone, 2007).

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

Sexual identity development models were traditionally formed based on retrospective data from a highly selected subset of the sexual-minority populations (Diamond, 2012). Sexual identity development models and theories have primarily focused on male homosexuals and have not taken into account contextual factors such as race and culture (Diamond, 2012, 2008; Patterson, 2008; Sophie, 1985; Spargo, 1999). Thus, the counseling field must continue investigating the phenomenon of sexual identity development and the role that contextual factors play in this process in order to better serve the sexual-minority population.

The purpose of this chapter is to provide the epistemological and methodological foundation from which this study was conducted. The following sections define the study's purpose, sample selection, data collection methods, and data analysis. The role of the researcher, limitations, delimitations, and ethical considerations will be discussed.

This study explores the life experiences that influence sexual identity in women who love women. Of particular interest to the study was the impact of life experiences such as race, culture, and oppression on how the participants chose to sexually identify.

The following question guided this research study:

> What life experiences have influenced the sexual identity formation of women who love women?

The following sub-questions were used to acquire language, emergent themes, and patterns relevant to the study.

1. What role does gender play in sexual identity, if at all?
2. How do relationships influence sexual identity, if at all?
3. What role, if any, does culture play in sexual identity?

The questions asked in this study required that participants attach meaning to experiences—meaning that is manifested in a participant's identity. Therefore, qualitative research methodologies were well suited for studying the impact of life experiences on sexual identity among women who love women.

Site and Sample Selection

Qualitative research focuses on depth of experience of a small number of carefully selected participants; "information-rich cases yield in-depth understanding" (Patton, 2002, p. 230). For this study to yield results beneficial to the fields of counseling and counselor education, participants had to engage with the researcher in questions pertaining to identity, sexual orientation, and life experiences.

Participants were selected for this study in a thoughtful and purposeful manner. Because of the question asked in this study (What life experiences have influenced the sexual identity formation of women who love women?), it is only fitting that women who love women were selected for this study. The participants in this study had to meet the following specific criteria: (a) were at least 25 years of age, (b) were biologically female, (c) sexually identified as something other than heterosexual, and (d) identified as sexually attracted to women.

Research indicates that persons who have recently redefined their sexual orientation may be more susceptible to psychological and interpersonal problems due to homoprejudice within society (Bybee, Sullivan, Zielonka, & Moes, 2009). Therefore, women experiencing a transition into a new sexual identity may be psychologically vulnerable and were excluded from this study. Women transitioning into a new sexual identity can be defined as having recently (within the past 6 months) redefined their sexual identity. The process of transitioning is often referred to as coming out. However, coming out suggests that individuals are open about their own sexual orientation, and this was not a requirement of this study.

Participants were identified through snowball sampling. Snowball sampling is an effective and efficient way of gathering information-rich subjects in a relatively short amount of time (Patton, 2002) and was accomplished by asking well-situated people to identify persons who met the research study criteria and were seen as information-rich cases.

A total of 10 women from the Midwestern geographic region in the United States participated in this study. All 10 women participated in two semi-structured individual interviews, with the option of a third interview upon request. The same semi-structured open interview guide (SOIG) was utilized with all participants, and all interviews were conducted in person.

Throughout the study, I played an active role with all research participants. The following section will describe in more detail my role as the researcher.

Researcher Role

Gaining entry and access to privileged information within this oppressed group was somewhat difficult. In many societies, including the United States, sexual minority status is often associated with secrecy and shame. It was an advantage to the research process that I identified as a sexual minority. My identity as a sexual minority helped to build rapport with participants, which made the entry stage of fieldwork easier. However, even with the benefit of my own identity as a sexual minority, gaining insight into the lived experiences of the women in this study could have been difficult and time consuming because of the level of personal disclosure required of the participants. To ensure a level of comfort during the interviews, I set aside 15 to 30 minutes to establish rapport with each participant.

As the researcher, I contacted potential participants via phone or email, depending on the preference of the individual or the contact information that I received. During the initial communication with a participant, I explained the purpose and process of the research including confidentiality, and I answered any questions or concerns. At that

time, I also identified myself to participants as a woman who loves women. A copy of the introductory letter containing informed consent was given to each potential participant prior to the interview (see Appendix A). Informed consent included an explanation of confidentially and described how the data were collected and stored. The informed consent document was signed by the participants and collected by the researcher before the initial interviews of the participants (see Appendix B). Participants each chose a pseudonym, and real names were not used during the collection of data. All written and recorded data were destroyed after the information had been transcribed.

Reciprocity

As the researcher conducting this study, I gained knowledge and insight into how the lived experiences of the participating women influenced their sexual identity. This awareness will further the research on sexual minorities within the field of counseling and lead to a greater understanding of the role of contextual factors in sexual identity development. The information provided by the participants will lead to more complete counseling interventions and strategies for working with sexual minority women. Information generated in this study will provide insight into the meaning that is attached to sexual identity and will lead to journal publications and conference presentations. Women who chose to participate in this study will receive a copy of the study results. They may also benefit from the research by learning more about themselves and their own sexual identity development process.

Ethical Considerations

Throughout the project, I was conscious of my role as a researcher and mindful of not assuming the role of a counselor with interviewees. I made my role as a researcher clear to participants before the study began. However, this experience may have been therapeutic for some participants. Participants did not seek counseling or ask for a counselor referral during the course of this research.

To be confident that my research followed ethical procedures, I completed the following steps: (a) submitted my research questions to the Human Subject Committee for Institutional Review Board (IRB) and gained approval, (b) presented all research participants with an informed consent form and an introductory letter that clearly stated the purpose and procedures of this study, and (c) verbally informed clients of the expectations of this research and their role as interviewees.

Qualitative Interviewing

The purpose of the qualitative interview is to "enter into the other person's perspective" (Patton, 2002, p. 341). Interviewing is one of the most powerful ways of gathering data. "Increasingly qualitative researchers are realizing that interviews are not neutral tools of data gathering but rather active interaction between two (or more) people leading to negotiated, contextual based results" (Fontana & Frey, 2005, p. 119).

To obtain in-depth and insightful observations of each participant, I conducted two separate interviews. Each interview was conducted face-to-face. A semi-structured open interview guide piloted the interviewing session. The semi-structured interview guide and the interview process were consistent with the phenomenological research strategy. The phenomenological strategy emphasizes depth of experience and allows the researcher to gain insight into the meaning attached to experiences (Rossman & Rallis, 2003).

Semi-structured Open Interview Guide

The semi-structured open interview guide was developed based on the purpose of the study. The interview guide consisted of a set of questions regarding identity, sexuality, lived experiences, and gender, and served as a guide during the interview process (see Appendix C). Each question was written with full awareness of the study and its intentions. The interview guide allowed for flexibility within each interview, invited conversation, and ensured that each topic was addressed with the participants. Interviews took place over two sessions, approximately 1 hour in length; the time may

have differed among participants. Some questions were taken from previous studies and were altered to fit within the parameters of the current study. When the questions had been selected, a group of five women who love women from difference races, cultures, and backgrounds were asked to review the questions and provide feedback to the author.

The first session with participants focused on personal awareness and historical background. Section A: Background was intended to identify important life events and the cultural and historical context of the participant's experiences. Section B: Self-Description focused on the participant's sense of self in the present and in the past. Section C: Gender helped the participant define what being a woman means to the participant. Section D: Relationships helped participants identify what (if any) relationships have been and continue to be important in their lives. Also, this section focused on the meaning (importance) of these relationships to the participant. The last section of the first interview, Section E: Experience, focused on lived experiences and which lived experience had the greatest impact on the participant's life and, specifically, on her sexual identity.

The second interview focused on the sexuality and sexual identity of the participants. Section F: Sexuality asked the participant to state how she sexually identifies and the influence of her sexual identity on her life. Section G: Identity focused on other aspects of identity and the value of these aspects to the participant's sexuality. In Section H: Summary, the participant was asked to provide any additional information that she felt was important to the study.

Data Analysis

Phenomenological analysis is the process of locating the experiences of each participant. The focus is on experiences, individually and as a group, and how participants make meaning of the experiences. This approach to data analysis allowed for similarities and differences to emerge as the data were collected. In contrast to the researcher stance in other forms of data analysis, the researcher was encouraged to

remain subjective and attached during the data collection and data analysis (Patton, 2002). The researcher was immersed in the experience of the participants and worked to conceptualize each individual's experience first without consideration of others' experiences. Data collection and analysis were complicated by the requirement of the researcher to be scientifically removed, open to participants, and aware of self at the same time (Patton, 2002).

Phenomenological analysis occurred through the inductive and deductive analyses of the data collected through the interviews. This meant that during the interviews, the researcher acted as a participant observer, meaning that the researcher was present and open to participants (inductive) while thinking ahead to how the data served the research agenda as a whole (deductive). Deductive analysis is identifying and categorizing themes within the data. The specific data analysis technique that was used is known as constant comparison (Patton, 2002).

Constant comparison involves five steps during which the researcher identifies themes within the research, interprets the meaning of key phrases as an informed reader, conducts member checking to make sure that the researcher's interpretation is correct, searches for common emerging themes among all data collected, and offers a conclusion based on the information collected (Patton, 2002).

Data were bracketed within individual cases (indigenous), across cases, and holistically. Indigenous analysis identified categories that were expressed by each participant throughout the interview process. A cross-case analysis allowed the researcher to interpret categories from language used by individual participants. Finally, holistic analysis looked at the data as a whole and did not attempt to break up data into categories (Rossman & Rallis, 2004).

Interviews were recorded with the permission of the participants. Data were then transcribed into a written format. To ensure the fairness and accuracy of the data, each participant was given a copy of her transcribed data to ensure that oral data were

correctly recorded. In qualitative research, this is referred to as member checking. Member checking ensured that all participants were able to confirm or disconfirm data and allowed for an equal opportunity for all participants to be heard (Miller & Crabtree, 2005).

The focus of my analysis was on how the meaning attached to life experience is manifested in sexual identity. I searched for themes from all participants and found convergence within sexual identity. Therefore, data analysis began through the process of open coding by identifying indigenous categories through the language of the participants. This process fulfilled the requirements of the first step of constant comparison, in which key statements that addressed how the women made meaning of their sexual identity were categorized accordingly. An example of this categorizing is how a woman sexually identifies, such as lesbian, gay, or non-heterosexual.

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness is the validity or correctness of a study (Saukko, 2005), which ensures the objectivity, reliability and credibility of the study (Rallis, Rossman, & Gajda, 2007). Trustworthiness was addressed in this research through the use of prolonged engagement, member checking, reflexive journaling, peer debriefing, and consistency through the use of a semi-structured interview guide.

First, sufficient time was allotted to each interview so that participants could express themselves fully. The individual interviews took approximately 2 hours. Each participant completed two interviews with at least 1 week between the interviews to give the participant time for reflection. This concept in qualitative research is referred to as prolonged engagement. Prolonged engagement allows the researcher and the participant(s) to become comfortable and to work to eliminate biases (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Researchers must also have a keen sense of observation. Prolonged observation allows the researcher to observe commonalities and abnormalities among participants

(Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In this research, all individual interviews were conducted face to face, and the researcher was able to observe physical appearance, dress, and typical and atypical behavior. For example, when a participant became uncomfortable during the interview process, the researcher was able to address this directly with the participant. This allowed for clarification through data collection.

The accuracy of the data in qualitative research is tested through triangulation. Triangulation refers to multiple forms of data collection and is utilized within qualitative research to test for consistency, accuracy, and truthfulness within data collection and data analysis. “Triangulation strengthens a study by combining methods” (Patton, 2002, p. 247). There are four types of triangulation: data triangulation, investigator triangulation, theory triangulation, and methodological triangulation (Patton, 2002).

The researcher used data triangulation and investigator triangulation within this study. Data triangulation checks for consistency within the data through multiple sources of data collection. Two forms of data collection techniques were employed: individual qualitative interviewing and member checking. Investigator triangulation was achieved through the use of multiple evaluators. In this study, peer reviewers were utilized to check for researcher bias and transference. Interviewing and document analysis allowed the researcher to obtain in-depth and rich data and contributed to the transferability of the study (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Transferability can be described as the ability to relate information obtained in this study to others within this population.

Reflexive Journal

The purpose of the reflexive journal was to situate the subjectivity of the researcher so that personal biases were accounted for and acknowledged within the research study. Lincoln and Guba (1985) defined reflexive journaling as “a kind of diary in which the investigator on a daily basis, or as needed, records a variety of information about self and method” (p. 327). The reflexive journal serves as a record for the researcher and reader. Within the reflexive journal is information about how

methodological decisions were made as well as personal information about the researcher.

The process of reflexive journaling forces the researcher to acknowledge perspective and thus increases the truthfulness and rigor of the study (Patton, 2002). The reflexive journal format was created by the researcher and contained (a) the researcher's interviewing schedule and logistics about the study, (b) the researcher's reflections about interviewing experiences and growing insight, and (c) a methodological log. The reflexive journal was reviewed by Diane Luther, Ph.D. Dr. Luther is an established clinical psychologist and an expert in the field of counseling. She works as a clinical psychologist in Cedar Rapid, Iowa.

Researcher Self-Examination

When conducting qualitative interviews, the researcher took an active part in the research and refrained from emotional detachment, neutrality, and distance. Prior to beginning this research, the researcher completed an autobiography to examine personal perspectives and biases regarding sexual identity development. This process was used to situate the researcher within her perspectives on the topic and explore how her bias might influence this research study. This process is called epoche. Epoche is the process of removing oneself from the everyday or ordinary way of perception (Patton, 2002). Epoche is achieved through the process of writing a personal biography and positioning oneself within the research topic. This is often referred to as the Researcher as Self-Instrument and is described in Chapter I.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

Introduction

Each participant identified an environment within which she had attached meaning to her constructed sexual identity. This study was developed to gain a better understanding of non-heterosexual women's sexual identity formation process. It was the researcher's intention to investigate the context within which each woman made meaning of her sexual identity and how it related to the process of sexual identity formation Questions regarding the role of life experiences, gender, personal relationships, race, and culture in sexual identity were at the forefront of this investigation.

The purpose of this chapter is to provide the reader with emergent themes from inductive (within-case) and deductive (cross-case) analysis of the experiences of 10 non-heterosexual women. Data were collected through two face-to-face interviews with each participant, member checking, reflexive journaling, and peer debriefing, and consistency was maintained through the use of a semi-structured interview guide (see Appendix C). Snowball sampling was used to identify research participants. Participants were solicited based on richness of data and willingness to participate. Each participant chose a pseudonym, and some personal information was changed to protect the confidentiality of the participants. Each woman participated in (a) one information session to obtain informed consent and receive full disclosure as to the purpose of the study and the researcher's intentions with the data collected and (b) two semi-structured interviews lasting no longer than 2 hours.

Eleven women were solicited to participate, and 10 women agreed. The participants ranged in age from 25 to 62 years, with an average age of 57 years. Participants were all living in the Midwest within an 8-hour driving distance from Iowa City, Iowa. Although all were living in the Midwest, not all were born and raised in the Midwest (see Table 4.1).

All participants were women born women, identified as non-heterosexual, had shared their sexual preferences with at least one other person, and had been comfortable with their sexual identity for at least 2 years. Participant names and locations were changed to protect participant confidentiality. Table 4.1 provides a participant-specific breakdown of age, race, and the geographic location of origin. The way each woman constructed her own identity was unique to her. Of the 10 participants, two identified as gay, two identified as lesbian in which the term lesbian held political meaning, three identified as lesbian with no political meaning, one identified as neutral to gay and lesbian, one identified as neutral to homosexual and lesbian, and one identified as queer.

Table 4.1. Participant Demographics

PARTICIPANT	**AGE**	**RACE / ETHNIC GROUP**	**GEOGRAPHIC REGION OF ORIGIN**
Cora	59	Caucasian	Midwest
Barbra	62	Caucasian	Southeast
Ole	56	African American and Caucasian	West
TJ	52	Asian and Caucasian	Midwest
Sally	25	Caucasian	Midwest
Blue	56	Caucasian	South
Chris	51	Caucasian	Midwest
Maria	31	Mexican and Caucasian	West
Marie	40	Caucasian	Midwest
Roslyn	56	African American	East

Within-Case Analysis

Cora's Story

Cora was a 59-year-old Caucasian woman born and raised in the Midwest. Cora lived with her mother and father and was the oldest of five, with the sibling closest in age to her being 2 years younger and the farthest in age being 14 years younger. She described it as "two separate families" (P001:005).

She grew up on a ranch in the prairie surrounded by animals and boys. Cora and her youngest brother attended a small, rural grade school from kindergarten to eighth grade. During that time, she was one of four in her class, and one of 13 in the entire school. Cora stated that she and her brother, who was two years younger, were very close. They spent many hours walking to school together, riding horses, and driving at the age of 12. Cora laughingly stated that she "survived preschool with only one fracture" (P001:005). "I had some interesting times growing up" (P001:005).

Cora felt that she was treated similarly to the boys at school. She added, "After puberty, I wasn't supposed to be as rambunctious. My teachers were trying to get me to settle into a girl role, but I was fairly athletic, so I could play softball as good as the boys could" (P001:009). Sometimes the boys would pick on her, and after reporting this to her mother, her mother said, "Cora, we are going to go into town and get you the pointiest cowboy boots we can find, and the next time that happens, I want you to stand tall and say, 'If you don't leave me alone, I am going to kick you in the shins'" (P001:009). She went on to say that the boots probably did get her a little more respect, but she could "hold her own with [the boys] pretty good" (P001:009).

Cora's only "girlfriend was her grandmother" (P001:005), with whom she spent a considerable amount of time when she was young. Her grandmother had the larger of two houses on the land that her family ranched. Her childhood revolved around chores. "We worked hard. That was just part of being on a ranch. We had to get all of our chores done before we could do anything fun" (P001:017). Along with learning how to work on a

ranch at a very young age, Cora's parents were adamant that she save for college. So, she and her brother created a small business on the side. They would set up a concession stand at the state fair, harvest bluegrass (also known as sweet grass, often used in spiritual ceremonies), customize windows, and ride and break horses. As soon as she could write her name, her parents opened a checking account in her name and made her responsible for managing her own money.

Cora was surprised when her father announced that she would be going to a nondenominational religious high school in the middle of the prairie. She attended the high school and was thrown into a mix of women from all over the world.

> It was a very interesting cultural time; and here I was, this little kid from the prairie, scared to death because I had only gone to one school. [All] of [the other students] stayed in dorms there and lived on campus. There were only about a dozen of us that actually drove in for the day. (P001:013)

It was a new experience for Cora going from a small one-room prairie school to a religious school that required Bible reading and chapel service.

Cora did not grow up knowing she was gay. She was comfortable doing "boy or girl things" (P001:083). The first time that she was around other girls was in high school when she attended the all girls' Christian school. Cora was in graduate school before she had her first sexual experience with a woman. She said that experience "had a big impression on me" (P001:083). At the time of the interview, she was married to that woman. Growing up, Cora had no concept of "gay." It was not until she was in college that she met someone who was gay. Cora described the experience of identifying as gay as both "refreshing and at the same time really scary" (P001:087).

Cora always felt that she did not fit into the norm. "I cross in and cross out of the majority. We come in, do our thing, and then return to the edge of town where we live, and that is okay with me" (P001:049). She described herself as an "uncommon woman who is strong, patient and kind" (P001:033). Cora appeared to be a very understated woman with little to say about herself. She expressed her passion and love for her work

and for her partner. Cora stated that she “loves the sensuality of being a woman and being with a woman” (P00:053). Cora identified as a gay woman, meaning that she “has a community of women similar to myself that identify with it. [It] would mean that the woman in my life, that I love, make[s] my life complete, and we [she and her partner] work to make every day important” (P00:075).

Cora was very quiet about her identity and did not even remember the first person whom she told. She recalled feeling very unsafe and conscious of not expressing her sexual identity. When asked if coming out is, or was, important to her, she responded with ambivalence. Living in a very small community where she and her partner were prominent figures, it was assumed that they were a couple, but it was not something that was ever talked about. Cora and her partner’s business was the target of a hate crime and, since then, the town had been supportive and observant of their office.

Cora’s family responded to her sexual orientation. “It’s not a big topic of conversation in my family, which is fine with me” (P001:095). Her family referred to her partner by name and did not refer to their relationship. When Cora told her mother that she was going to marry her long-time partner, all her mother said was, “Okay” (P001:103). Getting married presented Cora with the opportunity to acknowledge her partner to her family and friends. “My straight friends were really excited about the wedding. They really got into it. It was interesting to listen to them and see their excitement about the wedding. It was a good feeling. It was cool” (P001:107).

Cora was conscious about the influence she had being gay in a small community. “I try to set a good example, just in general, and hope that pays off for any little gay person that comes behind me…who hopefully I have given a little bit of a positive example to” (P001:111). Within her professional organization, Cora and her partner stood up for gay rights. Within the last several years, they paid dues to the organization as a married couple, which was considerably cheaper than paying individual dues. Cora had

never identified differently and never had the desire to enter into a heterosexual marriage. She enjoyed relationships with men, but had no desire to be sexual with a man.

At the time of the interview, Cora and her long-time partner were operating a very successful medical business. They were both very active in volunteer services, including emergency medical services, raising money for trails, and participating in community activities that contributed to their own and others' ability to enjoy lakes and woods in the geographic region where they lived. When the researcher asked Cora about her life now, she said, "Life is good. I get to wake up every morning with an attractive woman beside me, who's been with me for over 20 some years. That's a good thing, and I enjoy my work. I like to be an advocate for animals and take care of them. Every day is different" (P001:029).

Barbra's Story

At the time of the interview, Barbra was a 62-year-old Caucasian female who was born in West Virginia and migrated to the Midwest. This move had a dramatic impact on her. She went from having the world at her back door and many relationships to an urban setting where she did not know anyone. She described this experience as very traumatic. Barbra had an older brother and two younger sisters. She described her childhood as very typical of the lower middle class in the 1950s and 60s. She identified her relationship with her family of origin as being very important to her, especially with her mother and father. Growing up, her mother suffered from mental illness and eventually became an alcoholic. Barbra sought her parents' approval in all that she did.

High school was difficult "given her identity" (P001:005). Barbra remembered that she first started her coming out process when her best friend's mom accused her of being a lesbian, after finding letters that Barbra had written to her friend. In the letters, Barbra wrote that she wished that she and her friend could get away from the world, stranded on an island where no one could find them. She recalled, "The funny thing is, I didn't know what a lesbian was" (P001:005).

Barbra knew that she was different. She liked boys, but did not find them sexually attractive. When she figured out what a lesbian was, she went to the library to research homosexuality. “The card catalog system had homosexuality female and homosexuality male, and I knew enough, somehow, to know that had nothing to do with me, but it was relevant to me” (P001:005). After checking out all four books that the library had on female homosexuality, Barbra decided that, since she did not act the way that was required by butch or femme homosexual women and because she did not identity as sick or perverted, she must not be a lesbian.

In Barbra’s experience growing up, she was sexually assaulted three times by different perpetrators, including her father’s brother and her own brother. She never told anyone. She was planning to tell her parents, but they died before she had the chance. Some years after her parents died, she told her sisters about being sexually assaulted and asked them not to tell anyone. However, during her brother’s annual Christmas call, he brought up the assault and the fact that she had told their sisters; he asked her if it was a recovered memory. She stated to him very clearly that there had not been a day that went by that she had not thought about what he did to her. “He wanted to apologize to me in the context of, if his ‘doing that to you had anything to do with you being a lesbian, I’m sorry’” (P002:029). Barbra was very angry about her brother’s apology.

In 1974, Barbra “came out” in Louisville, Kentucky. Although it was a struggle to be lesbian in 1974, especially in the South, Barbra helped create a very strong community. At that time, she felt a greater sense of community than she does today, living in a very open and accepting, large, Midwestern city. While Barbra was living in Kentucky, she wrote a letter to her siblings telling them that she was lesbian. She corresponded with one of her siblings a couple of times about the issues. When the opportunity presented itself, Barbra sent the letters to Meg Uman, who in 1988 wrote the book, *Coming Home: Coming-Out Letter*s. One of Barbra’s most memorable experiences

was going back, as an adult, to the same library where she sought information about being lesbian when she was 16 years old and finding the book to which she contributed.

Barbra described herself as a sensitive, good friend who is frequently hurt, but she said that she is working on not being hurt so often. Barbra tries to be a good person and works, as she calculated, 80 to 90% of the time to "do the right thing, whatever that might be" (P002:017). She said that she is thoughtful and puts energy into finding the meaning of things, and when and how to act, and if any action is needed at all. Barbra identified as a lesbian. "To me, knowing my history, it means that I did have sex with men in the past, but that I stopped doing that because I was not interested. I mean, I appreciate a good-looking man, but I have not felt an attraction to a man for 40 some years" (P002:048). Barbra acknowledged that being a lesbian means more than just

> …we are different from others and sisters who are heterosexual. I think we, as a group, and I say that with tongue-in-cheek because we are not a group, they don't have an association. We don't decide on an agenda or anything, at least they didn't ask me what I wanted to do that military thing, I did not get a vote in that the one, think about it as equal rights, that I think absolutely we should have equal rights." (P002:052)

Barbra went on to say that when she first came out it was "us" or non-heterosexuals against the rest of the world. She recalled an experience of walking across a park and realizing that if the people around her knew that she was a lesbian, they would hate her based only on that part of her identity. "It was really hard for me to get my head around that someone could feel so many emotions for me, not knowing me. It was something that you saw or heard or felt indirectly in the world at that time. So, I think it affects more than just my sexuality" (P002:052). Barbra emphasized the comforting effect of being a part of a group or community when surrounded by prejudice (P002:052).

When Barbra came out to her parents, they had very different reactions.

> When I came out to them, my dad cried and cried and cried. His daughter was trying to kill him, and took it to heart personally. My mom said one thing that entire night, and it was, "I always thought maybe you were." You know, during that conversation, I said to my dad, "If you choose to die over this, that's on you, that's not on me." I don't know [where] that moment of mental health clarity came from, but it was there when I needed it. (P00:033)

When her parents retired, they moved to South Carolina, where they both died unexpectedly in shortly over a year. But, before they died, the family gathered at the parents' home for Christmas; during the visit, both her mother and her father expressed a deep love and appreciation for Barbra and who she had become.

At the time of the interview, Barbra was living alone in an urban area in the Midwest. She had recently adopted a dog and was experiencing the joy of being a pet owner. Barbra stated that she was very happy with her life and how it turned out so far. She had good friends and, while there were some things she would do differently, she had always been satisfied. She is fine whatever comes her way. Barbra was passionate about equal rights and stated, "My government owes me equal rights and I think that it boils down to… is that people are creep(ed) out by what gay people do sexually, and they can't imagine giving us equal rights" (P002:013).

Ole's Story

At the time of the interview, Ole was a 56-year-old woman born into a large family in the West. She was the oldest of seven children in her family. Ole identified as biracial; her father was African American and her mother was American Norwegian. Ole's biological father sexually assaulted her at the age of 4. Her mother left him and remarried. Her stepfather adopted her, and she has only known him as her father. Ole's mother and father came from very different backgrounds. Her mother was from a middle-class Midwestern family, and her father was from a very poor Southern family. Neither her mother nor her father graduated from high school. Ole described her upbringing as very traditional.

Ole's paternal grandfather was a minister at an African-American Baptist church. Ole's mother was a proclaimed atheist. Her mother and father agreed to disagree on the issue as long as the children went to church. While she was growing up, the church was a big part of her life.

When Ole was young, her family was very poor. Her mother did not work and her father cleaned Greyhound buses. They lived very simply and very carefully. Her father was a wrestler and worked very hard to find a way to support his family. Eventually, her father became a famous member of the World Wrestling Federation (WWF) and her mother became a successful costume designer.

Ole's parents' successes led to a drastic change in her life. She went from living in a two-room shanty to traveling around the world and enjoying a privileged life of dance classes and vocal, modeling, and acting lessons. "My mother did that with all of us girls. She wanted us all to be ladies and find good-looking men and make pretty babies" (P003:006). Ole's life was different because she was around a lot of White people and, even though her family was Black, she described this experience as being "weird" (P003:006).

Ole's relationship with her adopted father was very meaningful to her:

> This is the man I call my father. He was a wonderful man—very appropriate, wonderful father, loved me unconditionally. I think about what life would've been like had I not had him, if the only father I ever knew was the one that had harmed me [sexually] and violated me. If I had not known about this man who protected me in every way and loved me, I think life would've been so different, really different. (P003:026)

Ole's mother was a very important person and continued presence in her life, who influenced her and introduced her to amazing experiences in her life, culturally, and racially.

> My mother was a woman before [her] time for sure. She was artistic. My mother thought of her children as Black, and she wanted us to feel that too. So, my mother was very involved in the civil rights movement. I marched with Martin Luther King when I was little girl. My mother spent a lot of time with my dad's people in the South, and I was sent there in the summers. It was my mother who really made sure all those things happened. She really got it. She really got what children needed and I was so blessed; and I wouldn't be a Black woman like this if it was not for my mother, my White mother. (P003:026)

Being an interracial couple at that time was difficult, and both of Ole's parents were advocates for their children and their children's education. Ole's father's job caused them to move a lot, so she and her siblings moved around to different schools and experienced

some gaps in their education. Even so, all of her siblings graduated from college and had professional jobs.

At the age of 13, Ole began to skip school and engage in negative behaviors, so her parents decided to send her to an all-girls reform school. She found herself surrounded by other girls who were rough and who were lesbians. Ole did not know what it meant to be a lesbian and had no experience around lesbians. Ole found herself more attracted to women and enjoyed the attention that she was getting from them, even more than she enjoyed the attention she had gotten from men. Ole explained that she did not know when or how it began, but it was at the reform school that she had her first sexual experience, and it was with one of the other girls. She said that it was not an assault, but that she was not what she would consider an active participant. Ole enjoyed the experiences, and she did not understand what was happening at the time.

For a short time after Ole left her first husband, she lived with her girl friend from high school. The nature of their relationship was kept secret and did not last long, because the girl friend was “mentally unstable” (P003:006). Within the next 37 years, Ole was married and divorced three times, with at least 10 years between each marriage. After her last divorce, her mother said to her, “You know you will not be happy until you figure out that you are a lesbian” (P003:006).

Ole was not convinced that she was a lesbian, and at the same time, she could not forget her first same-sex experience from high school. Thirty-seven years later, Ole decided to spend time with her girlfriend from high school, to figure herself out. While she was visiting, she once again witnessed her girlfriend’s mental illness and made the decision not to pursue a sexual relationship with her old friend (P003:006).

Ole identified as a feminine lesbian, meaning that she loves women and wants to be loved by women who are more aggressive or butch. Being raised as a lady and having the opportunity to attend charm school, Ole always enjoyed being feminine and feeling like a woman. Ole said she does not spend time talking about her sexual preference, even

though sometimes she feels compelled to, because she does not want to hide any part of who she is. “I want to be free to walk on this Earth exactly who I am, and I don’t want anyone to question me… just imagine if everybody came out in the same day. If we did, they could never discriminate against [us] again. They couldn’t deny our existence and who we are and our love and all that. I thought about that a lot. Why am I hiding? Not really hiding, but why don’t I tell the world that’s how I feel? But, I have this other side of me [that] says, ‘Why would I need to tell the world?’” (P003:066).

When Ole began to live with, and build a relationship with, a woman, she decided that she was going to wait to tell her family, especially her children, about the nature of her relationship. She wanted others to think that they were “just roommates” (P003:006). The moment in Ole’s life when she realized that she no longer had to hide her identity was when her son said to her: “Don’t you know, there’s nothing you could do to make me not respect you, make me not love you?”(P003:006). She knew from then on that her children would love her unconditionally.

At the time of this study, Ole’s life had been very difficult. One year before our interview, Ole’s 38-year-old son killed his two children and their mother and then killed himself. It was the largest homicide in Ole’s county, and it was very public. This was a huge loss for Ole, made even more difficult by the publicity that surrounded her family. In 1995, Ole was voted the most influential person in her county, and people knew her name and her face. “I haven’t had privacy in my grief at all. If I go to the grocery store, some cry, the clerk will cry. I don’t know her but she knows my face; so it’s been (a) very difficult year” (P003:014).

Ole, being a social worker in the county where this incident took place, decided to retire early and to find a new meaning in her life by educating people about depression and familicide. “My life is changed forever. In many lives, change forever. There’s a lot of victims. I don’t have a lot of words except I have decided that that’s my mission in life is to educate people about familicide. So, remembering them (my grandchildren and their

mother), accepting my son, and who he had become and what happened. Also, embracing the acceptance of the community about who I am as a lesbian" (P003:014). Because of all that happened in her life during the last few years, Ole learned to take care of herself. Throughout her life, she had always been a caregiver, but now she was learning to care for herself.

TJ's Story

At the time of the interview, TJ was a 52-year-old biracial woman who had been in a same-sex partnership for 17 years. She was of Japanese-American descent; her father was Caucasian and her mother was Japanese. TJ was aware that she could "pass" as White and identified in the world as a White woman.

TJ grew up in a small town in the Midwest with two sisters and two brothers. Her father was a professor, and her mother was a stay-at-home mom. TJ's mother and father met during World War II when her father was a civilian prisoner-of-war in Japan. "He was put in jail for 4 years and came home with a Japanese woman" (P005:017). While in jail, he was not harmed in any way. "He did have to work. He lost his hearing working in a shipyard in China remedying ships, but he's the kind of person that thinks of life experiences as learning experiences. It's really remarkable; he told a story about how one guy refused to eat Asian food, and he starved himself to death, because he was so adamant that he would not eat Asian food. He [her father] definitely was a survivor" (P005:021).

Social justice issues were one of the main topics at the dinner table in TJ's home growing up. Her family sponsored a child in another country and organized walks for hunger. They also had international students every semester, so her life was filled with culture. One thing that stood out for TJ growing up was the differences between genders. Women in her family were the servers. They did all the cooking and cleaning and waited on the men in the family. Without being told, she and her sister would get up from the

table and begin clearing and washing the dishes. When I asked her what her brothers and father would do, she replied that she had no idea.

TJ's father was a geography professor, so her family valued difference and experiences. At the age of 10, TJ and her family moved to Hong Kong for 2 years. "I went to the British government school. So, going from a town of 12,000 to a city of 4 million is a very big part of who I am, in terms of the way I see the world" (P005:006). After they returned to the United States, TJ's family enjoyed inviting people over and serving exotic food such as fried grasshoppers and chocolate-covered ants. With five children in the family, they would make trips to an Asian food store in Chicago, where they would find such exotic foods. In the small town where TJ grew up, there were few minorities, no African Americans, and members of her family were the only biracial people in town. She described this experience as interesting and formative, but did not elaborate any further.

TJ was a counselor and at the time of the interview worked with male perpetrators of domestic violence, "batterers' treatment" (P005:025). "I worked with victims for 10 years before I started working with batterers. It is just a lot easier to work with men. They are much less complex. Women have so many pieces to them. It's my bias, and I definitely have one" (P005:025).

Within the last few years, TJ had some major transitions in her life. Her father died at the age of 92, and she became the caregiver for her mother. TJ was 52 years old, and this was the first time in her life that she had been a caregiver.

> I mean I've been actually transitioning to it over 10 years. I've been visiting my parents every week, and taking care of the finances, and things like that, but this increased interpersonal caregiving is very different. I used to be more task oriented. I would clean up [the] refrigerator and take my parents grocery shopping, pay their bills, clean up their apartment, that kind of 'tasks stuff'. Now it is more about spending quality time with her. She is in assisted living. She is still ambulatory and talks, but circularly, no short-term memory. So, we answer her questions over and over again. (P005:034)

TJ's life had become increasingly stressful with work and her caregiver obligations.

TJ described her relationship with her partner of 17 years as “extremely enmeshed, ideally enmeshed. It’s a good thing, a really good thing. I define it as we’re on the high end of enmeshment” (P005:042). TJ liked spending as much time with her partner as possible. She and her partner worked at the same agency and had offices that were next to each other. “We’re very professional at work. Usually students don’t know anything about our relationship, until our colleagues out us somehow. We were in the middle of a staff meeting, and our boss says to my partner, ‘How’s TJ doing?’ My partner was like, ‘Hello?’” (P005:046). TJ shared that this was the best relationship she had ever been in, and being with her partner gave her energy. At the time of the interview, the most important and influential person in her life was her partner. TJ stated that her enmeshed relationship with her partner met her needs at this point in her life. The people throughout TJ’s life that had been important and influential to her had been female, including her sister.

TJ described herself as consistent and as holding the same beliefs since she was 5 years old. “There’s the Chinese zodiac. My year’s the year of the dog, which is loyal, and that describes me. A dog is about beliefs. I have to defend them, and I’m very clear about what they are” (P005:054). She believed in social justice and paid close attention to power dynamics, and how power was represented in the family. TJ saw herself as older and wiser, but held the same beliefs and sense of self that she did when she was 5 years old, with the exception of her appearance.

TJ believed that women have both emotions and empathy that most men find difficult to access and employ. “My belief is that women want to connect with other women in order to grow and change, and that’s required for them; and I think it is a gift that women provide. I don’t think it’s true of all women; but I think the majority of women tend to have more nurturance, and then, and I would describe myself that way, too” (P005:066). TJ went on to say that women are superior to men, in that they are not only needed for procreation, but also necessary for the balance of psychological health of

the human race. “I believe that women can, through their connection, find different ways of managing the world, navigating the world, and solving problems; and that they’re not so invested in being right” (P005:070).

TJ identified as a lesbian. To her, this meant that she was sexually, emotionally, and physically attracted to women. TJ described that being a lesbian was also a political designation. In graduate school and college, TJ dated boys and did not identify as something outside of the heterosexual norm. During the same time, she had sexual relationships with men. However, she did not identify as bisexual because she knew that she would not be able to get her emotional needs met by a man.

In 1979, TJ started volunteering at a battered women’s shelter. That experience shed light on the huge power dynamics between men and women. Identifying as a counselor was powerful and, in turn, as a lesbian, which also became a political affiliation. The same year, she was singing in an all-women’s choir and was asked out by one of the women. She accepted, and, as she described it, there was no turning back from there.

Coming out was important to TJ. “I’m aware that I didn’t do it in a sort of traditional way. But it was, more than anything, I started dating a woman, it was comfortable, and it felt right” (P005:122). TJ’s sister had come out before her, and she thought it would be easier for her, but it was not. While her parents did not directly express their disapproval to her, they did to her sister. Later, TJ’s sister told her how upset they were. TJ stated that her parents were hard on her sister, but she did not go into detail.

TJ’s sexual orientation affected all aspects of her life:

> I have to be thoughtful about privilege, and how I pass. My coworkers know, they notice all the time, but my students and my clients don’t know. My students will know when I tell them at the end of the year, but I really don’t want it to influence how I work with people. I don’t want it to be a factor in my supervision of students. I have an expectation that they will be accepting of the people that are different from them. (P005:130)

Being a lesbian counselor in a domestic violence shelter, working with male perpetrators, TJ needed to be especially cautious about her sexual orientation, because some male perpetrators believe that lesbians run all shelters. TJ also was very careful to hide her sexual orientation from the women she worked with. “As a therapist, I work with, you know, extremely conservative Christians, who believe that being gay or lesbian is a sin, inappropriate or God-given or whatever you would call it. But they don’t know, and I still work with them. For example, there’s a very conservative mother, and I work with her teenage daughter; and I have been working with them for a year and they just stopped coming, and I got this feeling that they just somehow found out” (P005:138). So, while coming out and being herself was important to TJ, she was very conservative in expressing her sexual orientation at work and in public.

Sally’s Story

At the time of the interview, Sally was 25-year-old Caucasian woman, the oldest of two, who was working at a large university in the Midwest. Growing up, Sally was an excellent athlete and student and a “perfectionist” (P004:008). Sally’s mom and dad were very important in her life. She was closest to her father, and her brother was closest to her mother. “I just had a special relationship with my dad; my mom and my brother have that special connection; and we were, for the most part, a happy family” (P004:008). When Sally was a freshman in high school, her mother was diagnosed with cancer and underwent surgery and chemo. Sally’s mother was cancer-free for 2 years before she was diagnosed terminally and died 8 years later.

Sally struggled with being socially engaging; she was quiet and reserved. She went to counseling and developed her personality from being socially awkward to being a member of the homecoming court. “I wanted to sit at the popular table and never made it. It’s so funny to me now, looking back then in high school, popular like me.” Sally believed that if she was not popular, then she was not liked, “and not being liked did not equate with being perfect” (P004:008).

Sally had a master's degree in student affairs. She was a health promoter, with a primary focus on sexual health and alcohol outreach for the undergraduate populations. "[How] I got there was totally not backwards, but it wasn't the path most chosen. [As an] undergrad, I was a math and psych major. I was going to go into statistics. I do that all 4 years; and I changed my mind last minute and went into student development; and then I got an assistantship at the University's Health Center. Imagine me in the health field with student affairs; and it's perfectly what I am now, different career definitely" (P004:008).

Sally's family had always been close, but she was unsure about coming out to her family. She made the decision that, if she ever found herself in a relationship, she would tell her family at that time that she was gay. As it turned out, in her senior year of her undergraduate degree, she began dating a woman. When she revealed to her parents that she was dating a woman, neither her mother nor her father responded negatively, instead only showing interest in meeting her girl friend.

Sally identified as both gay and lesbian, although, when asked, she often said that she was gay, because it sounded more acceptable to her. However, the words had the same meaning to her. Being gay and lesbian inferred to Sally that she was in relationship and wanted to be sexual with women and not men. Sally's first same-sex relationship was the first time that she had even been around gay people. When she told her friends, "they were okay with me. They were all straight people, so they never talked about these things" (P004:086). The experience of being accepted impacted Sally greatly. For the first time, she felt that she could be liked and be herself.

When Sally first came out, she felt that she had to sit down with each of her friends and family members and tell them that she was gay. Then she became more open about her experience, but did not feel that she owed anyone an explanation. "It comes up when it comes up, if it comes up" (P004:090). Coming out, and being accepted by her family and friends, gave her self-confidence and helped her to find her own voice. "Because when you talk about your sexual orientation, it's not something that you can

see. It's the words that come out of your mouth, and it feels like I have confidence in what I am saying" (P004:094).

Sally never dated men; however, there were a few incidents when she would kiss a guy or dance with a guy. She always felt like she was faking in order to fit in with her friends. Although Sally did not hide her sexual orientation, she did not tell everyone. She taught at a large university and also coached a 12-year-old girls' soccer team. With both groups, she was very quiet about her sexual orientation so that she did not offend anyone or make others feel uncomfortable. Sally wanted one thing in her life, and that was to be accepted, for who she is and what she is, unconditionally.

Sally also identified as a White, privileged, well-educated person. These were qualities that she valued the least; but, at the same time, she said that all of her identities make her who she is, and she was happy to be that person. Sally feared that her socio-economic status and her higher education would make her appear arrogant. Being arrogant to Sally would mean that her father, who does not have a higher degree, would feel less worthy around her, especially if she had things or brought in a higher income than her father.

Blue's Story

At the time of the interview, Blue was a 56-year-old Caucasian woman. She was born in the South and had two older brothers and one younger sister. Her father was a doctor and her mother was a nurse who became a stay-at-home mom. Her parents were married at the end of World War II. Blue's father was born in Buenos Aires, and his first language was Spanish. He was also fluent in German, French, and Italian, which made him popular as a doctor. They were a Catholic family.

When Blue was growing up, her family was well off, but they were not flashy. They did not have boats and expensive toys to show off to neighbors. Blue's father had a number of patients who could not pay, and he would often trade his services or go without payment all together; among his patients were a large number of nuns and

priests. Blue and her siblings were brought up in what she describes as a very traditional household. Both of Blue's parents were proper in their dress before they left the bedroom. Her mother always wore a girdle and make-up, and her father never left the house without shined shoes, pressed pants, and white shirt and tie. Blue describes her family as Catholic and Democrat and surrounded by food, especially seafood. Her mother was a gourmet cook. Every Sunday, they served an elaborate meal at their home, and the house was full of people. Along with food and entertainment, drinking was a cultural norm in her family. Drinking was socially expected of Blue's parents. Blue's mom became a heavy drinker and was treated twice for alcoholism.

Blue's family had the same housekeeper for 25 years. Her name was Thelma, and she was a big part of Blue's life. Thelma was Cuban. When she was away from Blue's house, she endured segregation and discrimination in the community and in her own poverty-stricken neighborhood. This experience was something that Blue continued to think about and was bothersome to her. Thelma was more like a mother to her, in some ways, than her own mother. Blue grew up with Thelma's children. She recalls one of Thelma's daughters showing her a welt on her leg where she was bitten by a cockroach. "I didn't know how much they did for us. I remember going to their house once, and it was literally the size of a room—cinderblock, four inches of concrete, no air-conditioning, which in the South is horrible" (P006:009). Blue continued to visit Thelma until she died and was still in contact with Thelma's children.

Privilege was prevalent in Blue's life. She was given the best education and the best food. She wanted for nothing and enjoyed play and being a kid. Blue's two older, adopted brothers were never treated like they were adopted. "The only reason I mention it is because a male child is very important in our culture; and when they couldn't have a child, they adopted my first brother, and then, when they tried again and did not get pregnant, they adopted my second brother, and they were in the process of adopting a third boy when my mom found out she was pregnant with me" (P006:009).

As a child, Blue was surrounded by boys. She had a younger sister, but she spent her time playing in the fields with “the boys.” Her brother and she were best friends with boys across the street. They were all close to the same age and enjoyed the same things. From the time they were young, they were inseparable. Blue’s parents were best friends with the boys’ parents, and Blue became really close to them. “I've always had adults that I've looked up to. My parents had really good friends. When I was home, I probably spent more time with them than I did my own parents. They were like second parents to me. They were really good people, very Southern” (P006:052).

Blue and her siblings all went to gendered, private Catholic schools. Blue remembered walking over to the boys’ school to take chemistry and physics, because they did not teach those courses at the all-girls’ school. Blue compared her school experiences to college, as far as what was expected of her in curriculum and behavior. Education was, and always had been, important to Blue. She continued her education and completed a master’s degree in library science while working full-time in campus security.

After finishing her master’s degree, Blue accepted a job at a large university in Texas as a research librarian. “There’s a bar on every corner, and there’s a church on every corner; and they were the nicest, kindest people; and it turned out that there is a big lesbian community” (P006:009). It was at that university that she met her second girlfriend, whom she followed to Iowa.

To Blue being a woman meant being a caretaker. “To me, it's someone who more easily appreciates beauty, and more easily can express it and show it unashamed” (P007:048). Being a woman, to her, also meant being vigilant, always aware of what was going on around her, so that she could protect her children and herself. “I think women are beautiful. Being a woman is who I am” (P006:060).

Blue identified as a homosexual and a lesbian, and had never identified as anything else. She just did not have the words. Like most of the women in this study, she described searching for information about being different.

> When I was seventeen I would go to the library in Illinois, when [libraries] had the card system. The cards that were looked at the most had marks in the corner, the images were so worn; and the card that had lesbian on it, was very worn. There was one book called, *Everything That You Want to Know About Sex that You Never Wanted to Ask*, there was one chapter on homosexuality; it was all about men putting stuff up their rectums and ending up in the emergency room. There are millions of same-sex couples doing loving things to one another, but it was this story that is talked about. I have done all that I could do to fight against these stereotypes. (P006:096)

When initially asked how she sexually identified, Blue said, “homosexual.” As the interview progressed, she said that, if directly asked, she would use the word lesbian, because that better fit how she sees herself. The meaning she gave to being a homosexual or lesbian was “that the only person that I'm going to be physical with is a woman” (P006:081). Blue chose to identify as lesbian because of the women whom she was around, “Because it made me feel okay, it made me feel good. They were strong people, and I looked up to them, and I thought they were brave” (P006:096). Blue was careful to clarify that she had loved men and even dated men, but that she only wanted to be physical with women.

Blue’s mother became an alcoholic and went into treatment several times. During her second stay in the hospital, her family was invited to a family session. Her mother was telling all of them in detail about a woman in her group who was a non-heterosexual woman. Blue’s mother was crying, telling them how upsetting it was that she was in the same group as the “dyke,” and how offended she was by this woman talking about her sexual exploits and using vulgar language. “I thought, oh my God, I felt it personally. So later, I was at mom and dad's house. She [Blue’s mother] was still in the hospital. I said, ‘Dad’, and started to cry. All he said was, ‘I thought such’” (P006:009). Blue had not intended to come out to her family at the time, but was so hurt by what her mother was

saying about the non-heterosexual woman in the group, that she felt that she needed to tell her family that she was not a heterosexual woman.

After Blue came out to her father, she then came out to all of her family, including her sister, brothers, and sisters-in-law. Her sister and sisters-in-law had known that she was a lesbian for a long time. It was no surprise to them. Her oldest brother responded similarly, stating his acceptance and love for her. Blue's youngest brother's response was different. They were never close; in fact, the only person in her family that he was close to was her father. Her youngest brother was very conservative and not accepting of her sexual orientation or her partners. However, he had never treated her or her partners unkindly. Blue never revealed how her mother responded to her being non-heterosexual.

At the time of the interview, Blue was living with her long-term partner and their several dogs. She worked at a small Midwestern university as a research librarian. She and her partner lived in the country, and Blue was a volunteer firefighter and emergency medical technician.

Chris's Story

Chris was a 51-year-old Caucasian woman born and raised in the Midwest. She was the oldest of four children, all girls, with the youngest being 11 years younger than she. Only one of Chris's sisters was married. Chris was the only one who was non-heterosexual.

Chris came from a middle-class family. Her father was a toolmaker and her mother was a homemaker in a very small town. Neither of her parents were college graduates. Chris's father was the seventh of 13 children. He came from a relatively poor farm family. Chris's maternal grandparents were both only children. Chris's mother was one of two children. On her father's side, she had 54 first cousins. On her mother's side, she had two. Chris's maternal grandmother, Ethel, was an important part of her life, "She was like a third parent" (P007:005). Ethel ate supper with them every night, went on family vacations, and spent every holiday with Chris's family.

Chris had a few relationships in her life that impacted her. The first was her maternal grandmother, with whom she had a close relationship as a child. Chris was mesmerized by the stories that her grandmother told. Chris's grandfather died at the age of 50, but her grandmother lived until she was 96 years old. Chris described her as multi-talented; she was a painter and a wonderful cook. She taught Chris how to make dandelion wine. She also made many of Chris's clothes growing up, including her first communion dress. Having lost her husband at a young age, Chris's grandmother had a wealth of friends whom she could count on. Chris was completely intrigued with her grandmother's independence and strength. She had a stroke in her late 70s and her struggle to regain language was the reason that Chris went into speech therapy.

Chris experienced isolation growing up, both geographically and culturally. Chris was raised Catholic and "is still somewhat Catholic" (P007:005). Chris went to parochial school and was taught by nuns. School and church were meshed into one and provided all the activities for Chris during her youth. Chris observed the transition of Vatican II, and the rules of church and religion were, at times, confusing to her. Chris recalled when the nuns went from wearing long habits to short habits: "In third grade, they changed to the shorter habits, and I think those were the first women I had crushes on, or at least looked up to" (P007:009). Being a nun was the only alternative to a life without marriage and motherhood, and it seemed very attractive to Chris. "Being a mother is not what I wanted to do. Quite frankly, being a nun seemed to be the only plan B" (P007:009).

Chris's parents were slow to accept that she was different from most girls. For example, Chris asked her parents for a knapsack, canteen, and BB gun for Christmas. Chris was so excited on Christmas morning to wake up and find her canteen and prepare for a camping trip. But instead of a canteen and a knapsack (she did not expect the BB gun), she found Francine and a cookbook. Francine was Barbie's cousin and was a rare, pristine doll. Chris described it as the worst Christmas ever. After Christmas break, Chris and her classmates were to bring their favorite Christmas present to school. So, Chris

hauled Francine, in her box, to school. She came home and put the doll in her closet; Francine stayed there until Chris went to college, when she was discovered by one of her sisters.

Chris's parents remembered the disappointment in her face. So, for next Christmas, they got her the basketball and swim flippers that she asked for, plus the canteen, even though she did not ask for it. As Chris got older, Francine became a joke between Chris and her mother. However, at first, it was difficult for Chris's parents to accept that she did not like the same things that other girls liked. Chris's mother was angry with herself; it took awhile for Chris to convince her that she did nothing wrong, and it was okay that Chris did not like Francine. Her parents accepted that she was a tomboy, but being non-heterosexual was never a thought for Chris or her parents.

Chris achieved her master's degree and became a professor. Chris's academic and career achievements were very meaningful to her, because growing up, her family valued men over women. Chris was accomplished in grades and in athletics; however, no matter how well she did, she could never measure up to her male cousins. "The grandsons, they had the family name. They played football. It was nice that I was on the honor list, or I made the National Honor Society, or I was a Merit scholar, or if I scored 12 points in a girls basketball game; but that's not nearly as good as the guys"(P007:063). Chris's experiences had been very patriarchal; women did all the work and men got all the credit.

Falling in love for the first time had a dramatic impact on Chris. She had experienced crushes, but loving another woman or being sexual with another woman had not been an option for Chris. Chris and her first girlfriend were roommates. Chris was working in broadcasting (her first career and job), and her roommate was finishing a degree in social work.

> I always thought it was a strange that she really didn't have a guy, and things over the year just developed. We were sitting there one Friday evening, I had to work at 5:30 the next morning, and she leaned over and kissed me. I kissed her back. Then I said, "Oh no, this will never happen again." She told me I was stupid pulled me into the bedroom and that was it. I mean, my God, it was the best thing

> that ever happened in my life! It wasn't just the sex (sex is the expression of what you do when you really become intimate with someone), just touching her, just breathing with her, was wonderful. (P007:058)

The next morning at work Chris was very worried that her roommate was going to be angry with her.

> I was starting to get nervous, you know, what have I done here? We had this nice thing, and I have ruined it, and she is never going to want to talk to me again. I really felt like we had crossed a line. Why did I do this? I felt really guilty. At 9:30, she called me at work, said she was just getting up and she missed me, and that she could not stop thinking about me. (P007:058)

At the time, neither Chris nor her roommate would admit that they were gay. Chris would bring her roommate home with her on holidays, because Chris's roommate's parents lived far away in Florida. Chris's parents loved her, but they only knew that she was her roommate. Chris struggled with hiding the nature of her relationship with her roommate from the outside world.

After 3 years, their relationship changed; "I became this major caretaker for her instead of her partner" (P007:058). Chris's roommate had affairs with men because her mother was pressuring her to bring a man home for them to meet. Their relationship was complicated by homophobia. Chris was becoming more and more accepting of herself as a non-heterosexual woman, and her roommate was feeling more and more pressure to marry a man. Chris began to read everything that she could about lesbians. "I read a book on homosexuality. In that, there was one chapter on lesbians, and the rest of it was on gay men, and most of it was men doing awful things in prison" (P007:058).

By this time, Chris was in graduate school, and there was a faculty member in her department who was gay. Chris approached her and asked her what to do; she told Chris that she should find gay friends. When Chris went home to her roommate and told her that they could go to gay bars, make friends, and begin to tell people who they were, her roommate said that she would not, because she feared that she would lose her job. "So, it just didn't go. That was the end of the relationship. It opened things for me, changed me; and I never wanted to go back to what I was before the line had been crossed, and I

developed into somebody else, I longed for what could have been for awhile. Got over it and found somebody else to share life with" (P007:059).

Chris identified as a gay woman and saw gay woman and lesbian as interchangeable. "Around here, and depending on which group you are with, how you put things into words, sometimes it pisses people off. The older members of my group wouldn't necessarily say, 'This is my partner.' They refer to their partners as friends, 'That's her friend.' So, being gay is most common in my immediate group of friends; being lesbian is a taboo" (P007:092). Being over the age of 60, most of Chris's friends came out in a time when being lesbian meant that a woman was butch, feminist, activist, and viewed as rebels. Their reality was that lesbians were women who did awful things in prison, and not normal, sexually healthy people. Most of Chris's gay friends would never identify as gay or lesbian; instead, they had roommates and "friends."

Coming out was of little importance to Chris. When she came out to her parents, she and her first girlfriend had just broken up, and Chris was devastated. Chris's dad was very supportive. He told her, "God made you like you are; and I wish you would've told me, because I would've liked to have known her, and I would've treated her like a member of the family, more than just your friend" (P007:104). Her mother was not as open and affirming. Instead, she was very concerned that she had done something wrong to make Chris gay. Chris reminded her mother that she had three other daughters, and none of them were gay, and she had raised them the same.

Chris had been with her current partner for 21 years. Her partner was 20 years older than Chris. She summed up her life in one word: contented. At the time of the interview, Chris saw herself differently than she had in the past. She argued that it is impossible not to see yourself differently as you age. Chris said the feeling of being less than, or inadequate, as a girl had a direct impact on her sexual orientation. Chris never expressed the desire to be male, but she felt that she did not want to be subservient to a man. She knew from a very young age that she did not want to be a wife. As she aged,

the feeling of not wanting to be someone was replaced with the realization that she was a non-heterosexual woman.

Maria's Story

At the time of the interview, Maria was a 31-year-old woman of Mexican and German descent who grew up in small-town California. Living in a small town, her family was well-known and she had the experience of being biracial. However, Maria looked White and had the experience of being treated as White while away from her hometown. Maria was very close to her family and struggled with being so far away from them. She was a very reflective person and found herself thinking about her family and her upbringing and how it related to her identity. Maria had an older sister with whom she was also close and considered her a best friend. As adults, Maria and her sister were very different. She described her sister as very attractive, sporty, and sophisticated. She met her husband in college, and they had beautiful children and a storybook relationship. She described her sister as someone who was very grounded and responsible, in contrast to how Maria saw herself.

Maria's mother had major depressive disorder, and she described her as a hanging wooden bridge that was missing a board.

> It's a scary, unsteady place, and you go looking for something to step on, but you find yourself on empty space. I love my mom, and she had a whole set of experiences in her life that led up to [her depression]. I think, generally, the experience of expecting nurturing and love, and just having an empty space there, was something that stands out to me for my early life. (P008:020)

Conversely, Maria and her father had, and continue to have, a steady, strong relationship. He was "very sensitive to me, and we've been close—really, really close—since I was very young" (P008:020). Maria's father worked in skilled trades and, when Maria was a child, he fell off a roof. The accident left him with chronic back pain and he was permanently bent in the shoulders. This incident did not stop him from embracing Maria and comforting her, even lifting her up to express his deep love and concern for her.

Maria stated that her father sees her and understands her, a concept that was very important to Maria.

When Maria was 18 years old, she started babysitting for a family and doing research for the dad (a man she never names but describes as her “boss”; P008:030), a mental health professional. Maria had very mixed feelings about her boss. When she was first invited to work with him, she learned about attachment (the paradigm from which he worked). She was very excited to continue her education and have this very educated and admired professional as a mentor. Maria’s relationship with her boss became very close. “He was like a father figure to me, a hero to me” (P008:023).

Maria moved quickly from being a research assistant to treating adolescents with serious mental health issues. Maria was engaged at the time she was working for her boss, and she could not understand why her boss did not support her relationship with her fiancé. Maria’s relationship with her boss changed when she shared a poem with him. During the discussion of her poem, Maria’s boss reached out and held her hand. Shortly thereafter, the relationship changed from that of mentor and student to one that was sexual. Maria broke off her engagement and became very isolated from friends and family. Her relationship with her boss was very secretive, because he was married and she was very close to his family. Maria felt manipulated and trapped, and thought that the only way out was suicide.

Maria quit her job. She went home for Christmas and told her family what had happened. They were loving and supportive. The best part of this experience was the closeness that she found with her family. When Maria was leaving home to go back to where she was living at the time, she and her father were standing in front of the house. “We were hugging, and he picked me up and said, ‘You are not too heavy for me to carry you’”(P008:041). This was one of the most beautiful moments in Maria’s life. Her father instinctively knew how to show her affection and give her the support that she craved. This is one of the few times in her life that she felt completely understood (P008:041).

After being used and manipulated by her boss, Maria had a series of experiences that led to her healing. She engaged in a relationship with a man from Australia, whom she met in the Mohave Desert when camping and hiking. This relationship gave Maria control over her sexuality, over her sexual life. She gained a sense of agency, of being understood and loved (P008:075). That relationship was healing for her (P008:077).

After spending some time with the man in Australia, she went home to welcome her nephew, another experience that was healing for her (P008:076). Seeing the birth of her nephew and holding him in her arms for the first time, Maria experienced a love that she had never felt until that moment, and a knowing that she would do anything for the small person whom she held in her arms (P008:075).

The last experience she described occurred while she was working for a family-owned dress shop in her hometown. While working in the dress shop, she learned that she could choose to be happy. She could recognize that she had survived painful experiences, and she could still be happy (P008:081). This concept was new to Maria, and one that gave her permission to move on and get her master's degree and work with young adults (P008:083).

Maria presented in a very feminine way and described herself as being cis-gendered, meaning that she experienced herself as a woman and was comfortable with that experience. Maria's partner was transgender, and Maria struggled with the privilege that came with being cis-gendered. Maria felt guilty because she looked feminine, was treated like a woman, and identified with being a woman.

> I would prefer to be trans, but that feels to me unfair somehow, because the world doesn't perceive me that way for the most part. It's not just an internal identity, because there is a social reality of: I'm not going to have the experiences of most trans people, [because I] present in a feminine way. (P008:091).

Being a woman to Maria felt like a privilege because she was a cis-gender woman.

For Maria, having a partner that identified as transgender and who experienced gender as complex and unachievable caused her to question the concept of gender as a

social construct. Her relationships with lovers had a direct impact on her sexual identity. When Maria had sexual experiences only with men, she identified as heterosexual. When Maria had a sexual experience with a woman, she identified as lesbian. Maria found it difficult to construct her sexuality outside of her sexual experience and whom she found attractive. Because there was no consistency in attraction or in sexual experience, Maria was most comfortable with queer identity (P008:106).

Maria identified as queer. Maria did not build intimate, sexual relationships based on gender; rather she was attracted to individuals who moved away from a specific gender and were more androgynous. There was no distinct pattern in her sexual relationships; queer was an inclusive term that covered all of the sexual relationships that Maria had experienced. Sexual identity was complex for Maria. “Being heterosexual/bisexual/lesbian is kind of buying into the binary construction of opposite genders. But I think, for me, queer feels the most loose and the most free than any understanding of how [I] identify with my own gender and with my partner’s gender” (P008:102).

Coming out was very important to Maria, in particular, because of the relationship that she had with her boss and having to hide a sexual relationship. Coming out allowed her to share her intimate partner and life with her family and also gave her a non-biological family within the queer community (P008:114). Coming out served another purpose, activism. Maria believed that in order for change to happen, everyone needs to come out.

Shortly after moving to the Midwest, Maria met and fell in love with Liz. Maria had planned on returning to California as soon as she finished her master’s program, but after falling in love with Liz, Maria made the decision to stay in the Midwest until her partner finished a Ph.D. program. The feeling of being in love with Liz, and experiencing a strong and nurturing relationship, aided in her feeling of being grounded and her newly found self-confidence. Before Maria moved to the Midwest, she described having the

experience of falling apart, re-building herself, and gaining the strength to move on with her life.

Maria felt more grounded than ever before. She was a recent graduate with a master's degree in student development, and st the time of the interview, was working at a large university in the Midwest. She was very dedicated to social justice and worked closely with the social justice committee at the university to enlighten the community and expand the social knowledge of transgender identity. Working as a hall coordinator, she lived in the most expensive residence hall on campus, surrounded by wealth and privilege. One of the major aspects of her current relationship was activism. Liz was also very passionate about social justice, and together they worked to educate others regarding gender and expression of sexual identity. Maria enjoyed working with social justice issues and incorporated activism in all that she did, not only with issues of gender and sexual orientation, but also race, culture, and socio-economic status.

Marie's Story

At the time of the interview, Marie was a 40-year-old Caucasian woman from the Midwest. Her mother was Czechoslovakian and her father was German, first-generation American. Marie's mother's family held on to their heritage. Marie had one sibling, a brother, who was born when she was 7 years old. She was an only child for 7 years and the only female grandchild, so she was used to being showered with love, attention, and traditional little-girl gifts from her parents and her grandparents (P009:005). Her mother and grandmother spoke Czechoslovakian. Marie's parents divorced after 23 years of marriage, and her mother came out as a lesbian. Her mother had since married a woman and had been in that relationship for 12 years (P009:005). Even though her parents were divorced, they were friends and spent holidays and special occasions together.

Marie was 22 years old when her mother came out and her parents divorced. Her brother was 15. At first, her parents tried to hold the relationship together for the sake of her brother, but quickly realized that would not work for them. In school, Marie's brother

was teased for having a gay mom. For a short time, he was angry with her and was not supportive of her having a relationship with a woman. Marie knew that she was not a heterosexual at the time, but was not comfortable telling her family. Marie saw the pain and hurt that her mother's sexual identity caused her father and brother and did not want to cause the same hurt, so she decided to keep her own sexual questioning to herself (P009:021). Marie was supportive of her mother and yet was uncomfortable making the decision to identify herself as a non-heterosexual, even though she had experienced same-sex relationships.

Some of Marie's earliest memories were from the top of her father's shoulders at Cardinals' games (P009:041). She credited him with giving her the love of sports. Marie also credited her father with her choice in careers. She vividly recalled a conversation with him when she was 10 years old, in which he told her that, when she grew up, she could be and do anything that made her happy (P009:041). This was significant, because Marie's father was forced by his father to be a CPA (P009:041).

Her mother was equally empowering. Marie recalls, "Growing up, I was just enamored by her. I can't really put a specific finger on it, other than maybe extrinsically knowing that we are more alike than we knew" (P009:041). Marie described her mother as being full of life and independent. Her mother and father presented as equals, and Marie admired her mother for being her own person, independent of her father. Marie's mother was a basketball coach, and often a young Marie would tag along and practice with kids twice her age, an experience she found to be very enjoyable.

Marie's Czechoslovakian grandmother was deeply involved in Marie's life (P009:041). Marie's maternal grandmother was determined to give her granddaughter the space and support she needed to become the woman that she desired to be. A woman before her time, Marie's Grandma ensured that her daughter would not be forced to conform to stereotypes. Marie shared a Christmas story told to her by her mother: "There's a story of when my mom was growing up and, for Christmas, she got a doll, and

my uncle Rich got a football. My mom bawled, and my grandma takes one look at my grandpa (remember, this is the 1940s), and says, 'Well, Rudy, take that back and get her a football'" (P009:041).

Marie's family was also very religious, her paternal grandparents in particular. Her paternal grandfather was a pastor. Her parents met while attending the same Lutheran High School that her paternal great-grandparents helped to build. Marie attended Lutheran grade school and begged her parents to allow her to attend secular high school. "I knew if I went to public school, I would be around all kinds of different people. I crave that. So, I think that experience definitely shaped who I am, as a person, and my value set. Then, also not ever wanting to be sucked into something [religious]" (P009:049).

While growing up, Marie was surrounded by people different than she was. Her family accepted all people, no matter their cultural background, sexual orientation, or race. Being different, in Marie's family, was acceptable. Most of her friends assumed that Marie would be elated at having a parent come out. "Most people are like, 'Your mom is gay. That's totally cool. That's really empowering, and that must have made it really easy and great for you.' Well, actually, no. It didn't. It sucked. At one point in my life, I use the phrase: She stole my thunder" (P009:049).

Marie graduated from high school and went to college on a soccer scholarship. In college, her soccer coach (Randy) had a dramatic impact on her identity and sexual expression. As a young college student, Marie idolized him. He groomed her into a soccer coach and taught her all she needed to know to be successful. Randy often made comments to the entire team about another coach's sexual orientation and used the term "dyke" as a way to slander the coach and her team. Marie internalized these comments, because he was an important person to her. She realized that he would not accept women who were openly non-heterosexual (P009:041).

After leaving college, Marie began her career as an NCAA coach. During her tenure as a coach, one of Randy's assistants called her and asked if she would be

interested in working for him. Marie asked the assistant if Randy knew that she was gay. The assistant responded that he did, but because Marie was not "throwing it in anyone's face," she was acceptable to him. Marie responded by turning down the job offer and letting go of her admiration for Randy. "I [realized], [Randy] did more to destroy my identity than he did of helping it, and up until that point of realization I would've considered him one of my greatest all-time mentors" (P008:041).

Marie started coaching in a Division 1 program and worked her way up from graduate assistant to head coach. Over 13 years, she worked for two NCAA colleges. She enjoyed working with student athletes on a college campus. What was difficult for her was being in an environment where being a lesbian was taboo and not tolerated by many universities. Marie identified a current case in the NCAA in which a female coach was fired when she came out as a lesbian and had a child with another woman. The reason given was that her relationship did not fit with university standards and moral values.

Marie knew that she would never be able to be identified as a lesbian and remain a coach. For Marie, not being out meant not being true and honest to herself. Marie lived in fear that someone would find out that she was a lesbian, and she would not get a contract renewal or would be fired for some minor infraction. The university where Marie coached was slowly eliminating all of the identifiable lesbian coaches, and Marie was vulnerable. When the time came for Marie's contract to be renewed, she was told that she would not be asked to return the next year. She was fired.

> It was the first time in my life [that] I failed. I did not have my contract renewed. [They] told me I'm not good enough for [coaching], and no one in my life has ever told me that I wasn't good enough. What do I do? That whole piece of what my dad instilled, you know, always doing your best. I was doing my best and what [they were] telling me is, my best isn't good enough, and that doesn't fit. People told me that it was not what I was doing, but that I got hosed. So, yes, I may be a people-pleaser, but sometimes I can't be, because I can't let someone else define what is my success or isn't [my success]. (P009:045)

It was at this low point in her life that Marie met her spouse. They were engaging in a long-distance relationship, and each of them was actively looking for a coaching job.

So, they decided that each of them would look for a new job in the Midwest, and the one who did not get the job would follow the one who did. Marie's spouse landed a coaching job at a large university in the Midwest, and Marie followed, using the opportunity for a career change. Marie is now working in student development and feels like she is living an "authentic" life (P009:012).

Marie sexually identified as a lesbian. For Marie, this meant that she loved a woman and was committed to creating a family and a life with her life partner. Lesbian was the term that Marie used to describe her sexual orientation because it was "the way society seems to frame categories of sexuality," and this was the term that most accurately identified her sexual identity (P009:071). Marie did not affiliate any political expression with the term lesbian.

Coming out was important to Marie. She explained, "I think, for me, I spent a good deal of my life, up until this point, probably up to my 30s, having to hide [my sexual identity], or feeling as if I had to hide it, because of my career, where I was headed in my career. So, I think that, yes, it's very important for me to come out and to be authentic to people, so people know who I am. I don't walk around with a badge on saying, 'This is who I am', but, certainly, I find myself not running around the topic and conversation that naturally comes up" (P009:079).

As a woman, Marie felt that she was part of a larger network of people, a group that had the ability to connect emotionally and support one another. According to Marie, women have the ability to enjoy the finer things in life and endure ridicule for not following gender norms and expectations (P009:037). Marie struggled with being a woman and being athletic. There came a time in her formation when being a "tomboy" was no longer socially acceptable. As a coach of young women, Marie worked very hard to make sure that her female athletes had the same benefits as male athletes (P009:037).

For Marie, meeting her partner was the single experience that most impacted her life. Marie and her partner had been together for 7 years and married for 2 of those years.

They were at a point in their life and relationship where they were starting to contemplate having children and creating a family that each of them desired (P009:058).

Roslyn's Story

At the time of the interview, Roslyn was a 56-year-old African-American woman. She grew up in New York City, the middle of six children. Her mother and her father were both present in the home. With six children, Roslyn's home was very active. She and her siblings were not allowed to fight; they could discuss, but could not hit one another. They were lower middle class, and Roslyn's mother made most of their clothes. Her mother was very talented. Roslyn's aunts would often look down the back of her shirts looking for tags, even though all of the kids had clothes made from the same material.

Roslyn was very active as a child. She played stringed instruments in school and even took private lessons. She was also very active in sports. In high school, she played softball. She played varsity field hockey and junior varsity basketball, and was a scorekeeper/manager for softball at Queens College in New York after high school. The women's varsity basketball team was the first women's team to play in Madison Square Garden. In 1974, "it was the ultimate venue" (P010:045).

Growing up as a Black woman, Roslyn was not treated differently than the men in her family. She did not even realize that there was a power difference between men and women until she reached high school. Being a woman came second to being Black. As an African-American woman, Roslyn first had to prove herself as an African American, before she had the chance to prove herself as a woman. Roslyn stated, "I was never denied anything because I was a woman. I was denied things because I was Black" (P010:070).

In elementary school, Roslyn was bussed 30 minutes away to another neighborhood so that her New York school would appear to be more integrated. When Roslyn got off the bus, White people were yelling and screaming obscenities at her

(P010:070). Roslyn's protection was that her mother was able to work at the school. The noise died down after about 2 months, when the White people realized that the Black people were not so different from them. Gender difference became obvious when Roslyn joined the Army.

> Being in the Army was a totally different thing. You were a second-class citizen, and that was back in the '70s, mostly because I was a woman. There were a lot of Blacks in the military, so I wasn't really separated that way. The attitude was that women in the army were there either to find a husband or because you were a slut or dyke. Being a woman was definitely an issue when you go to the hospital. It was a horrible thing. We were not treated with any respect. It was horrible when I had to see a gynecologist. They would leave the door open, because they were afraid you are going to accuse them of something; so people walking by the hall could see or hear; or they would be talking to a doctor in another room across the hall; so they had no privacy. (P010:070)

In college, Roslyn realized that there was a life beyond her family. She made many friends and traveled frequently for sporting events. "I went berserk…did many things I have never done before, stayed up all night" (P010:037). Roslyn dropped out of college after a year and was living at home and working. One night, when her mother was out shopping, Roslyn wanted to be nice and decided to make dinner for her father.

> I thought I did a pretty good job, but he was just in a bad mood or something, and he said, "You burn the food. You throw it at me," and I said, "Fuck you. Do it yourself." So, he slapped me. I figured I was 21 years old, and he couldn't hit me, so I hit him back. We commenced to fight throughout the house. I ended up on my bedroom floor with him beating me. I had two black eyes. I bit his hand and scratched his face. My brother Richard was there the whole time, and he didn't do anything. After my dad got himself cleaned up and left for work, my brother said, "You shouldn't have cussed at him," and I said, "Yeah, thanks a lot for your help." (P010:017).

The fight completely changed her relationship with her father. Before the fight, Roslyn would watch sports on TV with her father and hang out and talk. She would help him work on cars, just spend time with him. After the fight, Roslyn did not speak to her father for 6 months. When they did speak, they were short and curt with one another (P010:017). Shortly after her fight with her father, Roslyn went into the Army and moved to Seattle. Within the year, her father passed away. Roslyn and her father never made amends, and his passing was very hard on Roslyn. Her father had been dead for 30 years.

Her mother had never dated another man, or even thought about dating another man, even though her children had tried to set her up (P010:025).

Her father's death was conceivably the hardest time in her life, and Roslyn lived through it by compartmentalizing her feelings (P010:066). During this time she also lost her ex-girlfriend and roommate. Roslyn and her ex-girlfriend were both in the Army and were roommates on post. They moved off post together and had an additional roommate named Philippe. They were all heavy drinkers and partiers. Roslyn was also close with her ex's new girlfriend because they worked together. During the time after her father's death, Roslyn's ex-girlfriend and her ex's new girlfriend were killed in a car accident.

After the accident, her ex's family harassed Roslyn. They even called the Army and reported Roslyn for not giving them all of her ex's things (which she had done). Roslyn was frightened that her ex's parents were going to out her. Between the stress and pain of her father's death, and the stress and concern that she would be outed, Roslyn spent her time hiding in alcohol and drugs (P010:066). Roslyn stopped using drugs and alcohol when confronted by a coworker. He said to her, "If you keep doing this, you will kill yourself" (P010:066). She wanted to go into treatment, but her supervisor told her that if she did, she would lose her security clearance. Instead, he invited her to his home to spend time with him and his family. This was helpful to Roslyn, because she was comfortable with a large group and it reminded her of her own family (P010:066).

Roslyn had also lost two of her siblings: her sister, Bambi, who was 2 years older, to a heart condition, and her brother, Peter, of Scleroderma Raynaud's syndrome (P010:005). Both died before the age of 40. Roslyn also had the same heart condition as her sister, Bambi. She was alive because she had an automatic heart defibrillator.

When Roslyn was young, her mother would call her "bull dagger" [a slang word used to describe a non-heterosexual woman]. Roslyn did not know what a "bull dagger" was until she was in college (P010:053). When Roslyn's mother was in the Army, there was a woman by the name of Shirley, who was very butch. Others taunted her, including

Roslyn's mother, about being butch. Roslyn believed that her mother was transferring her own fear of being non-heterosexual, or even butch, onto Roslyn (P010:053).

Roslyn was involved in sports. She was more comfortable around a group of boys, but did not express the same interest in men as her sisters (P010:057). Boys would often go on dates with Roslyn in order to get a date with her older sister. Her brother would tell girls that, if they wanted to date him, they had to share him with all the other women in his life. Neither of these models of dating and relationships was attractive to Roslyn (P010:057). When Roslyn was young, sexuality and sexual orientation were not talked about on TV. There were no models of healthy non-heterosexual relationships. Roslyn wondered if any of these experiences impacted her sexual orientation, but she stated that she was "not sure what impacted [her sexual orientation]" (P010:057).

Roslyn did a lot of traveling during her young adult years. She moved to Chicago after leaving the Army and worked for the post office. Living in Chicago was a life-changing experience for Roslyn. While living there, she met many of her life-long friends and her partner of 20 years (P010:049). Roslyn and her partner had been married for 17 years and had one child, a 16-year-old girl. Roslyn was a stay-at-home mom and her partner was a physician. Raising a child was a life-changing experience for Roslyn. Her daughter "is a good kid, turned out all right, despite her parents" (P010:049).

Roslyn described herself as a quiet, caring, loving, truthful person who was concerned about the needs of others (P010:082). She had worked hard in her life to be compassionate, and, for her, this was a skill that she had learned (P010:148). Roslyn identified as a lesbian, meaning that she preferred female partners (P010:100). Roslyn preferred the term, lesbian, to gay or bisexual, because gay had always been equated with men, and being bisexual meant that you could have a meaningful relationship with men or women. Neither of those fit for Roslyn. She thought that the people in her life influenced the way she identified. "I'm around more women who call themselves lesbians and are totally comfortable with it, so it's easier for me to be comfortable with it"

(P010:108). Coming out was not important to Roslyn, and she did not think that being non-heterosexual had affected what she had done with her life.

The within-case analysis provided the identity formation process of each individual from her own perspective and in her own words. From their stories, several themes emerged. Table 4.2 identifies emergent themes and sub themes from the personal stories of the participants.

Table 4.2. List of Themes

THEME	SUB-THEME
I WAS JUST DIFFERENT	Acknowledgment of some perceived differences between self and other women.
INFORMATION SEEKING	Actively seeking knowledge about sexual identity
VIEW OF SELF AS A WOMAN IN THE CONTEXT OF CULTURE	Meaning of being a woman, changes in self-perception over time strongly relates to culture
CONTEXTUAL RELATIONSHIPS	Family, friends, partners, co-workers that have impacted sexual identity, fitting in

The next section will examine each of the emergent themes and sub themes. Each of these themes provided the lived experience in which participants from this research formed their own sexual identity.

Cross-Case Analysis – Emergent Themes

Qualitative research and, in particular, phenomenological design allows the participants to create the outcome of the research through emergent themes.

Theme 1: I Was Just Different

Each of the participants in this study told the story of her life from childhood to adolescence and into adulthood. Nine out of the 10 participants, during the formative years of childhood and adolescence, identified feeling different from those around them, no matter their age, race, or cultural background. Some pointed themselves out as different. Cora was confused by adolescent expectations. She stated, “After puberty, I wasn’t supposed to be as rambunctious. My teachers were trying to get me to settle into a girl role, but I was fairly athletic, so I could play softball as good as the boys could” P001:009). Even as adults, Cora and her partner identified as being outside the norm. “We cross in and cross out of the majority. We come in, do our thing, and then return to the edge of town where we live, and that is okay with me” (P001:049). Ole stated, “ I don’t know when I started thinking about girls exactly, but I know that when I was very young, I was different than my girlfriends” (P003:006). Blue, Chris, Marie, Sally and TJ, all at some point in their lives, identified as being different from other girls and not finding men sexually attractive.

Others were pointed out as different. Barbra remembered that she first started her coming out process when her best friend’s mom accused her of being a lesbian after finding letters that Barbra had written to her best friend. Barbra recalled, “The funny thing is, I didn’t know what a lesbian was” (P002:005). After being confronted, Barbra stated that she knew she was different, but she had no idea what a lesbian was (P002:005). Roslyn’s mother accused her of being a “bull dagger” (P010:053).

Marie was the only one out of the 10 women who did not identify as sexually different during her formative years. In fact, sexually identifying differently opened Marie’s eyes to the difference and prejudice that others experienced in everyday life (P009:083).

Theme 2: Information Seeking

Lack of information, knowledge, or awareness of self and other had been and, in some cases, continued to be a major struggle for the participants in this study. Maria did not have the experience of being sexually different during her childhood and adolescence. At the time of the study, Maria was in a relationship with a transgendered male. This relationship evoked within her a strong passion for social justice surrounding sexual identity and, in particular, transgender sexual identity. Her knowledge seeking went beyond the normative, "I want to understand myself," that most participants experienced, and into "I want others to understand me and my relationship with transgender" (P008:030). "Being heterosexual/bisexual/lesbian is kind of buying into the binary construction of opposite genders. But, I think, for me, queer feels the most loose and the most free than any understanding of how [I] identify with my own gender and with my partner's gender" (P008:102).

Marie grew up around differences. At the age of 22, her mother came out as gay. Although it might seem that having a gay mother would make it easier for Marie to express her own sexual identity, it actually made it more difficult. Marie's knowledge-seeking experience did not come from a book, but rather through her own lived experiences. Being a coach and working for a college, Marie experienced discrimination and prejudice and spent her young adult life hiding her sexual orientation. Through this experience, she gained the knowledge and self-awareness necessary to live a life and work in a career where her sexual identity was accepted and embraced. "I think there's so much energy that I spent trying to make sure that I hid that piece of myself. I'm going to keep this hidden, because I'm not ready for the potential risk and pain that it might cause. That's not a part of my life role, in terms of feeling that I have to hide that [my sexual identity]" (P009:033).

Blue knew that she was different, but had no knowledge of the feelings or attractions that she was experiencing. Even though she was not pointed out as different

by a parent or other adult in her life, she observed the difference and sought to gain knowledge about this difference, like many others, in a book. “When I was 17, I would go to the library in Illinois, when [libraries] had the card system. The cards that were looked at the most had marks in the corner, the images were so worn; and the card that had lesbian on it was just very worn. There was one book called, *Everything That You Want to Know About Sex that You Never Wanted to Ask*, and there was one chapter on homosexuality; and it was all about men putting stuff up their rectums and ending up in the emergency room. There are millions of same-sex couples doing loving things to one another, but it was this story that is talked about. I have done all that I could do to fight against these stereotypes” (P006:096).

Chris was older and had experienced her first same-sex relationship when she was in her 20s. “I became something else. There came a point in my life where I've said, ‘This is who I am.’” Chris also sought knowledge of self in books and in bars. “I started to read Rita Mae Brown, ‘The Well of Loneliness.’” (P007:058).

Many of the women in this study had no concept of gay (Cora), bull dagger (Roslyn), or lesbian (Barbra). All three of these women were pointed out as different by a parent or another adult in their lives who was in some position of power. Similar to Chris and Blue, these women sought knowledge in their local libraries. As described by Barbra, “The card catalog system had homosexuality female and homosexuality male, and I knew enough somehow to know that had nothing to do with me, but it was relevant to me” (P001:005). After checking out all four books that the library had on female homosexuality, Barbra decided that she must not be a lesbian because she did not act the way that lesbians did in the books, and she did not see herself as disgusting or perverted.

In the context of relationships, Roslyn did not know what a “bull dagger” was until she was in college (P010:053). But what she did know was that when her mother was in the Army, there was a woman by the name of Shirley who was very butch. Others taunted Shirley and Roslyn’s mother about being butch. Roslyn deduced that her mother

was transferring her own fear of being non-heterosexual, or even butch, onto Roslyn (P010:053). For these participants, the information that they received, whether from a person in a position of power or from a library, greatly impacted their sexual identity development.

Theme 3: View of Self as a Woman in the Context of Culture

One of the questions posed to the participants in this study was, “What does being a woman mean to you?” In response to this question, each participant told a story of finding meaning in her own developmental process. For example, as a child, TJ was taught that a woman’s place was to serve men. TJ continued to serve, but in a different capacity by serving women who were victims of domestic violence. Her role of woman changed from servant to protector. For TJ, being a woman meant being willing to grow and change. She saw women as superior to men because they balanced human kind (P005:066). “I believe that women can, through their connection, find different ways of managing the world, navigating the world, and solving problems; and that they’re not so invested in being right” (P005:070).

For Sally, Barbra, and Ole, gender identity influenced their understanding of self and others, because being a woman meant to be a strong, emotionally present, and capable person who was willing and able to take care of others, even to their own detriment or while on their deathbed (P004:059). Being a woman meant a constant struggle for survival and a responsibility to lead (P003:022). “I started very deliberately to introduce myself as a butch lesbian feminist activist woman since 1974, and probably before that, but I know that I’ve been one since 1974; and part of what was encouraging me to say that was that a lot of people didn’t hear those particular words strung” (P002:025)

Blue, Marie, and Chris associated the ability to appreciate beauty with being a woman: “To me, it's someone who more easily appreciates beauty, and more easily can express it and show it unashamed” (P006:048). “Women have the ability to enjoy the

finer things in life and endure ridicule for not following gender norms and expectations" (P009:037). "Feminine is the type of woman, in my opinion. I don't consider myself feminine, because I have too many raw areas; but I've known gay and straight women who I thought were very feminine; and a lot of them would not be considered classic beauties" (P007:025). Even Marie separated herself from other woman by identifying as a privileged cis-gendered female but preferring to identify as trans-gendered (P008:091).

Roslyn, however, was different. For her, being Black was more important to her identity than being a woman. She was not treated differently from her male siblings, and she was not expected to take on a specific set of behaviors because of her gender. Her view of self derived from her race and not from her gender. "I was never denied anything because I was a woman. I was denied things because I was Black" (P010:070). Roslyn was in high school before she realized the power difference between men and women. When Roslyn joined the Army, gender was the only difference that mattered (P010:070). "Being a woman in the Army, you were a second-class citizen, women [in the Army] were there to find a husband or because you were a slut or a dyke" (P010:070).

Theme 4: Contextual Relationships

The importance of relationships, and the impact of relationships on the expression of sexual identity among women who love women, was evident as participants explored their sexual identity in the context of past and present relationships. During formative years, participants described the importance of perceptions of gender difference by parents and influential adults. All participants expressed a desire for group acceptance of sexual identity expression.

For many of the participants, sexual identity was not something that was talked about, and many were not even aware of sexual differences. Cora had no concept of "gay" until she was in college (P001:087). Blue did not have the words to express her sexuality differently (P006:096). Ole did not know what it meant to be a lesbian and had no experience around lesbians until high school (P003:006). Chris knew from a very

young age that she did not want to be a wife. As she aged, the feeling of not wanting to be gay was replaced with the realization that she was a non-heterosexual woman (P007:013). In graduate school and college, TJ dated boys and did not identify as something outside of the heterosexual norm (P005:122). Sally was aware of her sexual identity at a very early age, but was afraid that her parents would reject her or be disappointed in her (P004:020).

Marie was unique to this sample of participants in that her mother came out as a lesbian when Marie was in her early twenties. Most of her friends assumed that Marie would be elated at having a parent come out. “Most people are like, ‘Your mom is gay. That’s totally cool. That’s really empowering, and that must have made it really easy and great for you.’ Well, actually, no. It didn’t. It sucked. At one point in my life, I used the phrase: She stole my thunder” (P009:049).

Two participants experienced ridicule from parents or close adult friends for behavior that was outside the norm for heterosexual women. Barbra’s best friend’s mom accused her of being a lesbian (P001:005), and Roslyn’s mother called her “bull dagger”(P010:053). In both cases, the participants were confused and hurt by the name calling.

All participants at the time of the interview sexually identified based on what was most common or acceptable among their peer groups. Chris most accurately expressed this phenomenon: “Around here, and depending on which group you are with, how you put things into words, sometimes it pisses people off. The older members of my group wouldn't necessarily say, ‘This is my partner.’ They referred to their partners as friends, ‘That's her friend.’ So, being gay is most common in my immediate group of friends; being lesbian is a taboo” (P007:092). Being over the age of 60, most of Chris’s friends came out at a time when being lesbian meant that you were butch, feminist, and activist and were viewed as rebels. Lesbians were seen as women who did awful things in prisons, and not normal, sexually healthy people. Most of Chris’s gay friends would

never identify as gay or lesbian; instead, they had roommates and “friends.” Roslyn also thought the people in her life influenced the way she identified. “I’m around more women who call themselves lesbians and are totally comfortable with it, so it's easier for me to be comfortable with it” (P010:108). Cora identified as a gay woman, meaning that she had “a community of women similar to myself that identify with it. [It] would mean that the woman in my life that I love makes my life complete and we [she and her partner] work to make every day important”(P00:075).

Summary

This chapter presented the inductive and deductive analysis of face-to-face interviews conducted with women who love women. The inductive or within-case study was presented first, detailing the participants’ sexual identity formation processes. The second section presented the deductive analysis, or the themes that emerged from the inductive analysis. The four discovered themes provided insight into the sexual identity formation process of women who love women. In the next chapter, the findings of this research will be discussed, and implications for further research opportunities will be presented.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to explore the formation of sexual identity in women who love women. I was interested to discover how the participants made meaning of lived experience and how this meaning-making process influenced their sexual identity development. The first two chapters offered information from current literature and research regarding development, sexual identity development, oppression, and discrimination faced by women who love women and the role that counselors play in the continuation of stereotypes. The fourth chapter presented the meaning-making process of sexual identity formation of the 10 participants who identified as non-heterosexual women who love women. The purpose of this chapter is to discuss the importance of this study based on the emerging themes.

Discussion of Themes

The themes that emerged from this study provide insight into how the participants constructed their sexual identity through individual constructs, such as relationships, lived experience, race, religion, and social norms. The non-heterosexual women interviewed in this study averaged 49 years of age, ranging from 25 to 62 years, or a combination of 488 years of lived experiences from which to make meaning of self and other. Each participant created her own identity based on individual experiences, relationships, and culture. Although no participant had the same individual experience, there were common themes regarding how the participants in this study constructed their sexual identities. The common themes that were important in the formation of the participants' sexual identity were: "I Was Just Different" (the experience of being different), "Information Seeking" (the experience of actively seeking knowledge about sexual identity), "View of Self as a Woman in the Context of Culture" (the meaning of being a woman and changes in self-perception over time), and "Contextual

Relationships" (friends, partners, co-workers and other relationships that impacted sexual identity).

Theme 1: I Was Just Different

What does being a woman mean to non-heterosexual women who love women? Previous research focused on the formation of sexual identity through developmental stage models (Degges-White et al., 2000; Diamond, 2008, 2012; Savin-Williams, 2005). The results of this study did not support a stage model of sexual identity development. Instead this study supported the view that sexual identity is fluid and strongly related to relationships with peer groups.

This finding is very similar but not identical to Diamond's (2012) longitudinal research study on sexual identity formation. All participants in this study experienced a feeling of being different from other women at some point in their developmental process. However, it was not always their sexual attractions or experiences of sexuality that were confusing to them. Instead it was the expectations placed on them because of their gender. Participants told stories of how their rambunctious play was no longer acceptable when they had reached a specific age or developmental milestone. Two participants told stories of being pointed out by adults as being non-heterosexual for exhibiting behavior that was considered socially unacceptable for women. Most confusing for the participants was when behavior that was seen as acceptable suddenly, and without explanation, became unacceptable. This experience may be the beginning of discrimination faced by non-heterosexual women (Logan, 1996). The participants expressed a general fear of being rejected because of sexual identity, even if their families of origin did not reject them.

Theme 2: Information Seeking

According to sexual identity development research and developmental models, non-heterosexual individuals experience identity confusion followed by identity comparison (Cass, 1979). Organic in each participant in this study was a genuine desire

to better understand her sexual curiosities. All participants were raised within a heterosexual paradigm and did not have a model of how to be in a non-heterosexual relationship. Many of the participants had never encountered a non-heterosexual woman and did not know what gay orientation was. Although this was not expressed or experienced as confusion, each participant wanted to have a greater understanding of her experience.

Information seeking emerged from a lack of information about difference beyond heterosexual norms. Participants told stories of going to their libraries, bookstores, and gay bars to find the meaning of being non-heterosexual. When Chris realized that she was sexually attracted to women, she sought information about women who love women in many different ways, including from fiction and nonfiction sources, as well as in known gay bars and from non-heterosexual faculty at the college she was attending (P007:059). What was unfortunate for these women was that the information they encountered about having non-heterosexual attractions often excluded being gay or lesbian as an option because they did not exhibit the behaviors that were described in books about homosexuality. This finding may be related to the increase in the number of identifiable same-sex partners that do not identify as homosexual, bisexual, or heterosexual (Gates, 2006).

Theme 3: View of Self as a Woman in the Context of Culture

The women in this study all sought to make meaning of the attraction they felt for someone of the same gender. Meaning was not only made from the experience of participants' sexual selves but also constructed by participants through the process of discovery, knowledge, and experience of being "different" from their heterosexual role models.

Throughout her development, each participant had a set of experiences that greatly influenced how she viewed herself in the context of her environment. It became obvious that culture and the values that were presented during a participant's formative

years provided the foundation for how a participant viewed herself as a non-heterosexual woman. Although some of the participants' views changed as they aged, the messages they received from their parents and formative groups were influential throughout their lives.

Participants revealed differences in the meaning-making process of being a non-heterosexual woman. It was interesting to see the process each individual used to discern her identity, first as a woman and then as a non-heterosexual woman. All participants reported a process of creating their identity as a woman through interpreting the behavior of the women closest to them. These female role models provided an example of the behavior that participants used to make meaning of their own identity as women.

As participants developed their sexual identity, the acceptance or rejection from female role models was an important part of the participants' view of self as a non-heterosexual woman. The literature documents the impact of discrimination on the development, mental health, and identity of non-heterosexual women (Pearson, 2003; Reynolds, 2003). For the women in this study, gender was so strongly embedded in the understanding of sexuality that part of identifying as non-heterosexual was presenting themselves as "butch" (a more masculine identity) or "femme" (a traditional feminine appearance). This phenomenon was not found in the sexual identity formation literature or identified in any of the studies reviewed, yet the language was consistent among all participants in this study. All participants reported a fear of rejection and abandonment from their female role models. Although no participant experienced complete rejection or complete acceptance, all described the identity formation process as painful.

Theme 4: Contextual Relationships

Relationships had a tremendous impact on sexual identity formation for all participants in this study. Past and current relationships had the most impact on these non-heterosexual women's lives. All participants expressed their identity through relationships. The words that each participant used to describe her own sexual identity

were those that were most acceptable and were used by persons in her closest circle. In the case of sexual identity, language created reality. This is consistent with Logan (1996, 2006), who showed from a social construction standpoint that language creates an individual's reality. Language clarification was essential to understanding the experiences of women who love women in this study. The language used by participants was based on the common and acceptable language among their peer groups. The language used to express sexual identity, and in one case, sexual orientation, changed as the participants' peer groups changed.

All participants had internal knowledge of their non-heterosexuality before they chose the language of their sexual identity. However, they did not reveal this knowledge out of fear of rejection from the most important people in their lives at the time, which included both family of origin and peer groups. The fear of rejection was so threatening that some of the women in this study entered into heterosexual relationships, and even marriages, so that they would not disappoint the people they loved.

Implications

Counseling

Understanding the experiences of non-heterosexual woman's formation of sexual identity is part of the agenda of counselors who work with this population. This study offers practicing counselors insight into the lived experiences of these non-heterosexual women.

Patterson (2008) called for counselors and counselor educators to look deeper into the development of an individual's sexual identity and how factors such as religion, family of origin, social context, and environmental norms can impact sexual identity. This study examined the connection between such contextual factors and the formation of sexual identity. The information collected and analyzed in this study can give counselors a deeper understanding of the complexities experienced by non-heterosexual women. For example, it is imperative that counselors allow clients to identify their own process of

sexual identity formation rather than prescribe a developmental process that may be irrelevant to their clients.

The women who participated in this study were from multiple age groups and different backgrounds, races, and family constellations. Each participant told her story from her own perspective with her own insights, struggles, and self-awareness. This perspective provides counselors with valuable information about the ties between experiences, relationships, and environmental norms. This was most evident in the narratives of participants who came from multiracial backgrounds. Ole described the difference in being “gay” in a “White” family and being “gay” in a “Black” family: “I know that in Black families when somebody is gay, the immediate family is very accepting; they don’t cast away their children, we don’t do that in our culture, but don’t you tell nobody at church, don’t you tell anybody down the street; we are private. But in other cultures they [non-heterosexuals] lose their family permanently, so that’s a whole set of differences. [We are comparing] someone who has some loss to complete loss [of family] to someone who has acceptance but only behind doors ” (P003:153).

Counselor Education

Counselor educators are responsible for training and molding the next generation of counselors. Counselor educators are held accountable by accreditation and certification boards, such as the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP, 2009) and the National Board of Certified Counselors (NBCC, 2005). Counselor education programs follow the standards proposed by such governing agencies to develop competent and well-rounded counselors. Among the standards set by CACREP are those that specify that counselor educators provide a foundation in social and cultural diversity including cultural trends, attitudes, beliefs, and identity development (2009). Currently, master’s-level counselor education covers sexual identity development within the multicultural curriculum.

The multicultural curriculum relies in part on data gathered in the 1970s on a subset of non-heterosexual individuals consisting mostly of males (Cass, 1979; Coleman, 1981/1982; Degges-White et al., 2000; Diamond, 2012; Savin-Williams, 2005; Sophie, 1985; Weinberg, 1972). Sexual identity formation is discussed within the context of developmental stage models and does not take into account the gender identity of non-heterosexual women. Sexual identity developmental stage models view sexual identity outside of social norms, personal experiences, and relationships. Developmental models do not consider social norms, expectations, prejudice, or discrimination faced by non-heterosexuals. Further, stage models are linear and require that individuals "come out." This study shows that coming out is a value rather than a requirement of the formation of sexual identity. For example, Chris lived a contented life with her long-term partner and shared her sexual identity sparingly. Coming out was of little importance to Chris.

This study and the research conducted by Diamond (2005) showed the fluidity of sexual identity formation. With this emerging realization, counselor educators have the opportunity to expand the knowledge base of master's-level counselors through curriculum and continuing education. Counselor educators now have the knowledge to engage non-heterosexuals in a dialogue regarding aspects of culture, race, experience, and relationships that have influenced sexual identity. Further, counselor educators have the duty to expand sexual identity education to include the multiple layers of gender identity. By including gender identity in sexual identity, counselors and educators may better understand how the individual's sexual identity relates to gender identity.

Future Research

Much of the research on sexual identity formation was conducted with large samples of homosexual men. Further, the existing research used by most counselors, specifically Cass's developmental stage model, was developed in the 1970s and does not reflect the experience of today's non-heterosexual women. The counseling profession has a long history of unjust and inaccurate diagnosis and treatment of mental illness based on

sexuality alone. Counselors must work to repair the professional relationships they have with women who love women; one way this can be done is through research.

Findings from this study have several implications for the researcher who seeks to explore and understand the developmental process of women who love women. The social cultural experiences and relationships of women who love women impact the development of their sexual identity. Researchers must acknowledge that women who love women experience discrimination and oppression in daily life. Researchers must also realize that many women who love women have been ostracized from family, friends, or coworkers and may hide their sexual identity to gain acceptance from others.

Additional research on the role of gender identity in sexual identity is needed to better understand how an individual comes to identify as feminine or butch—identity roles that may not be limited to women who love women. The connection between gender identity and sexual identity may be more common for persons of specific cultural backgrounds. In this study, gender and sexuality were most prevalent among the African-American participants; although this study was too limited to explore a connection, further research may provide more insight into this phenomenon.

Finally, researchers who enter into a study with women who love women must do so with the understanding that it is a power relationship. Even if the researcher identifies as non-heterosexual, the researcher retains power in the relationship. This power can be used and abused if not acknowledged within the relationship and treated with respect.

Limitations

This study was developed to examine lived experiences that influenced identity formation in women who love women. The findings from this study contribute to understanding identity formation in women who love women. However, the findings have some limitations. For example, one of the major complaints regarding sexual identity development stage models is that these models are based on “retrospective data” (Diamond, 2012, p. 79), a process that was also used in the data collection for this study.

Participants were asked to recall past experiences and report how these experiences influenced them in the past and in the present. Because of the nature of this study's methodology and process, retrospective data were unavoidable. If identity is truly contextual and fluid, it is possible that the participants would report a different meaning-making process during different stages of life and within a different context. Diamond (2005, 2010) was able to avoid this limitation by conducting a longitudinal study over a period of 10 years, an option that was not available to this research process. Further, every attempt was made to gather both written and verbal data from participants to assess consistency across more than one form of data. However, participants were not interested in providing written data. Therefore, only verbal data were collected. Having multiple forms of data would have added to the transferability of the data collected in this study.

Another limitation of this study was that participants had to live within an 8-hour drive of Iowa City, thus confining the study to participants in the Midwest. Although participants were living in the Midwest at the time of the interviews, participants originated from many geographic areas of the U.S. and some have since returned to their hometowns or moved on to new locations.

Qualitative research, in general, is subject to personal biases; this study is no different. As a lesbian woman, I will never be free from the personal experiences that have influenced my sexual identity formation. To retain honesty, I have kept a reflexive journal and regularly discussed personal biases with my mentor, Dr. Diane Luther.

Conclusions

Oppression, discrimination, and stereotyping have an impact on sexual identity development (Pearson, 2003; Reynolds, 2003). All participants in this study reported that they struggled with oppression, discrimination, and stereotyping; these experiences influenced their careers, relationships, finances, and mental health. All the women in this study experienced homoprejudice and feared telling others about their sexual identity.

The interpersonal relationships and experiences shared in the interviews impacted how the participants in this study constructed their reality, a process that is fundamental to social construction (Cottone, 2007; Gergen, 1985; Maturana, 1988). Participants in this study were not afforded the same civil rights as their heterosexual counterparts. Same-sex marriage is not yet recognized at a national level, and in many states two women cannot legally parent a child. These social restraints are prejudicial and oppressive to the women who participated in this study. Further, each participant feared and in some cases continued to fear rejection from family based solely on her sexual identity. Rejection and ostracism by family of origin is unique to non-heterosexual minorities (Pope, 2004).

Women who love women are often grouped with other minorities. This simplification of same-sex attraction does not take into account the full experience of non-heterosexuals, including the cultural and political issues that are unique to this population. All participants in this study reported being forced to deny or hide their identity for fear of societal, political, and personal attacks, an experience that is common among the non-heterosexual population (Gergen, 2005; Pope, 2004).

Very few researchers, especially in the field of counseling, have taken the opportunity to investigate how lesbian women construct their sexual identity (Gergen, 2005; Kitzinger, 1987). In fact, after investigation and consultation with leaders in the field of social construction, I found only three articles addressing social constructs focused on non-heterosexual women. Even within the field of multicultural counseling, authors who discussed the homosexual experience often failed to do so in a way that was inclusive of lived subjective experiences, cultural norms, and interpersonal communication (Cottone, 2007).

The purpose of the qualitative interview is to “enter into the other person’s perspective” (Patton, 2002, p. 341). This study is a testimony to the statement that interviewing is one of the most powerful ways of gathering data. The participants in this study shared their individual journeys to sexual identity development. Each of them

expressed a need for the acceptance of others closest to them and described the pain of being rejected within relationships. This fear of rejection as described by Sally, the youngest of the participants, was most compelling:

> I decided that I would wait to tell my parents I was gay until I was seriously dating someone. This happened my senior year of college. So, I waited until the last possible day to come home for Christmas break. I come home. I beeline it upstairs, and unpack my bags; my dad comes up—asked me how my semester was going and I said 'I don't ever want to disappoint you guys' and he said, 'You'll never disappoint us' and he kept saying it over and over again. And then he said, 'Is there something you want to tell me?' So, I told him, and he said, 'I've known since you were in third grade.' (P004:059)

APPENDIX A

IRB APPROVAL

THE UNIVERSITY OF IOWA

Human Subjects Office/
Institutional Review Board (IRB)
105 Hardin Library for the Health Sciences
600 Newton Road
Iowa City, Iowa 52242-1098
319-335-6564 *Fax* 319-335-7310
irb@uiowa.edu
http://research.uiowa.edu/hso

IRB ID #: 201005771

To: Nashae Julian

From: IRB-02 DHHS Registration # IRB00000100,
Univ of Iowa, DHHS Federalwide Assurance # FWA00003007

Re: Sexual Identity of Women Who Love Women

Approval Date: 09/23/11

Next IRB Approval

Due Before: 09/22/12

Type of Application:	**Type of Application Review:**	**Approved for Populations:**
☐ New Project	☐ Full Board:	☐ Children
☒ Continuing Review	Meeting Date:	☐ Prisoners
☒ Modification	☒ Expedited	☐ Pregnant Women, Fetuses, Neonates
	☐ Exempt	

Source of Support:

This approval has been electronically signed by IRB Chair:

Janet Karen Williams, PHD

09/23/11 1339

IRB Approval: IRB approval indicates that this project meets the regulatory requirements for the protection of human subjects. IRB approval does not absolve the principal investigator from complying with other institutional, collegiate, or departmental policies or procedures.

Agency Notification: If this is a New Project or Continuing Review application and the project is funded by an external government or non-profit agency, the original HHS 310 form, "Protection of Human Subjects Assurance Identification/IRB Certification/Declaration of Exemption," has been forwarded to the UI Division of Sponsored Programs, 100 Gilmore Hall, for appropriate action. You will receive a signed copy from Sponsored Programs.

Recruitment/Consent: Your IRB application has been approved for recruitment of subjects not to exceed the number indicated on your application form. If you are using written informed consent, the IRB-approved and stamped Informed Consent Document(s) are attached. Please make copies from the attached "masters" for subjects to sign when agreeing to participate. The original signed Informed Consent Document should be placed in your research files. A copy of the Informed Consent Document should be given to the subject. (A copy of the *signed* Informed Consent Document should be given to the subject if your Consent contains a HIPAA authorization section.) If hospital/clinic patients are being enrolled, a copy of the IRB approved Record of Consent form should be placed in the subject's electronic medical record.

Continuing Review: Federal regulations require that the IRB re-approve research projects at intervals appropriate to the degree of risk, but no less than once per year. This process is called "continuing review." Continuing review for non-exempt research is required to occur as long as the research remains active for long-term follow-up of research subjects, even when the research is permanently closed to enrollment of new subjects and all subjects have completed all research-related interventions and to occur when the remaining research activities are limited to collection of private identifiable information. Your project "expires" at 12:01 AM on the date indicated on the preceding page ("Next IRB Approval Due on or Before"). You must obtain your next IRB approval of this project on or before that expiration date. You are responsible for submitting a Continuing Review application in sufficient time for approval before the expiration date, however the HSO will send a reminder notice approximately 60 and 30 days prior to the expiration date.

Modifications: Any change in this research project or materials must be submitted on a Modification application to the IRB for prior review and approval, except when a change is necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to subjects. The investigator is required to promptly notify the IRB of any changes made without IRB approval to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to subjects using the Modification/Update Form. Modifications requiring the prior review and approval of the IRB include but are not limited to: changing the protocol or study procedures, changing investigators or funding sources, changing the Informed Consent Document, increasing the anticipated total number of subjects from what was originally approved, or adding any new materials (e.g., letters to subjects, ads, questionnaires).

Unanticipated Problems Involving Risks: You must promptly report to the IRB any serious and/or unexpected adverse experience, as defined in the UI Investigator's Guide, and any other unanticipated problems involving risks to subjects or others. The Reportable Events Form (REF) should be used for reporting to the IRB.

Audits/Record-Keeping: Your research records may be audited at any time during or after the implementation of your project. Federal and University policies require that all research records be maintained for a period of three (3) years following the close of the research project. For research that involves drugs or devices seeking FDA approval, the research records must be kept for a period of three years after the FDA has taken final action on the marketing application.

Additional Information: Complete information regarding research involving human subjects at The University of Iowa is available in the "Investigator's Guide to Human Subjects Research." Research investigators are expected to comply with these policies and procedures, and to be familiar with the University's Federalwide Assurance, the Belmont Report, 45CFR46, and other

applicable regulations prior to conducting the research. These documents and IRB application and related forms are available on the Human Subjects Office website or are available by calling 335-6564.

APPENDIX B

INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE

I invite you to participate in a research study. The purpose of the study is to gain a better understanding of sexual identity formation in particular the role that culture, personal relationships and lived experience has on how you see yourself as a non-heterosexual person.

I am inviting you to be in this study because you are over 25 years of age and sexually identify as something other than a heterosexual. Approximately ten people will take part in this study at the University of Iowa.

If you agree to participate, we would like you to contact Nashae (Nikki) Julian via phone XXX-XXX-XXXX or email nashae-julian@uiowa.edu, to set up a time to meet to begin the research process or gain further information about the research study.

If you have any questions about the research study itself, please contact Nikki Julian at XXX-XXX-XXXX.

Thank you very much for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Nashae (Nikki) Julian
Ph.D. Candidate, MS. Ed.
Primary Researcher

APPENDIX C

SEMI-STRUCTURED OPEN INTERVIEW GUIDE

Session 1

Section A: Background

1. What stands out for you in your life over the past few years?
2. Tell about what your life is like right now.

Section B: Self-Description

1. How would you describe yourself to yourself?
2. Is the way you see yourself now different from the way you saw yourself in the past?

Section C: Gender

1. What does being a woman mean to you?

Section D: Relationships

1. Looking back over your life, what relationships have been really important to you? Why?
2. How would you describe your family of origin?

Section E: Experience

1. What experiences would you say have had the greatest impact on your identity?
2. Are there any experiences (positive or negative) that you would identify as having a direct impact on your sexual identity?

Session 2

Section F: Sexuality

1. How do you sexually identify?
    a. What does it mean to you to be_____?
2. What has influenced how your view of sexual identity?
3. Is coming out important to you?
    a. Has coming out influenced your life how or how not?
4. How does your sexual orientation influence your life?
5. Have you ever sexually identified differently?
    a. What did it mean to you to be_____?
    b. How did you decide to identify differently?

Section G: Identity

1. How else do you identify?
    a. Is there ever a time when you purposefully chose not to reveal a part of your identity?
2. What parts of your identity do you value the most?
    a. What do you think has contributed to this value?
    b. The least?
    c. What do you think has contributed to this value?
3. Is there anyone in your life that you closely identify with?
    a. What do you think attracts you to this person?

Section H: Summary

1. Is there anything else that you would like me to know about how life experiences have influenced your identity?
2. How was this interview process for you?

APPENDIX D

SAMPLE OF PARTICIPANT TRANSCRIPT

Nikki: I would like to start by you telling me about yourself, how you came to be; your childhood, anything that you would like to tell me.

Roslyn: I grew up the middle child of 6 my mother and my father were present in our home and I grew up in New York City a rather interesting household we always went places for example e-mail it during Christmas we would always go down to 24 street and looked at the windows and see what was in Macy's window, in Lord and Taylor, Gimbel's, in all the stores that was an annual thing to do. It is fun going up doing stuff {in New York}. As kids who weren't allowed to fight, we could discuss something that we weren't allowed to fight, when we were real little we were allowed to box with her parents there with boxing gloves on we would fight each other boxing gloves and but that was never much fun because the boys couldn't hit the girls who we had a hard time hitting them anyway and could get my mom goes than she would yell Ricky their hitting me so what was the point of that. I have an older sister named Bambi is 2 years older than meeting then there's my brother Richard and then there's me in any year between and then Peter Trevor and Hester and out of those Bambi died in Peter died both before they hit 40 my sister died of a heart condition and my brother died of scleroderma ringnoid syndrome so basically his long stride out and he can feel hot or cold that's all I can remember from it though he was sick for about 12 years he seemed pretty healthy growing up and when my parents said he was a sick cat I thought that many meant he had to go to the hospital my brothers always ended up in the emergency room because when we were growing up they had bunk beds from the Army severities iron bunk beds and they would be wrestling in the room and we would hear doink and then you hear mom and she go back there be blood everywhere one of them would need stitches or she would have to take them to the emergency room, my brothers are laughing one day when they were telling me that they could remember each everyone [scare] and what they were doing when they got it, so that was pretty funny I played string instruments that took up most of my time from Junior high school to part of college and I took private lessons did a couple musicals over the summer that has stuff we all played some kind of instrument which my parents insisted on much if it did anything for us but I played violin and Viola I haven't played since college so I asked the family just sold my violin a year ago and thought I had included in all these years might as well let it go.

Nikki: Are there any experiences that you would say have directly impacted your sexual identity?

Roslyn: yeah cause my mom when I was in junior high school she always called me bull dagger and I never knew what she meant and it took me until I get college to figure it out I wouldn't deny it or anything I just didn't understand why it made her so angry when she would say it I found out later that when she tells you stories about when she was in the Army some woman named Shirley but people called her butch and called my mother butch she kind of sort of confessed that she had relationships with them that she said that they were after her so I think that was her fear and she just transferred on to me my mom and dad both were in the Army my mom was in the Army in she actually got kicked out of the Army she was honorably discharged because when she went into the Army she lied she used and her sister's birth certificate who was 2 years older than she was to get in and when they found out that she was younger they kicked her out because she was only 17 when she went in that she said she was 19 and so she managed to get away with it for 2 years but then they kicked her out.

Nikki: Do you think that affected your orientation or your identity, do you see a difference?

Roslyn: I guess, my orientation I wonder what impact it may be because I got more involved in sports I was around more women had more to say felt more comfortable with group with a bunch brother so there's never any interest on my part they didn't excite me they were all like brothers I could go guys once or twice in my sister hooked me up with 2 guys and both of them one of him outright said that he was only going out to me because he wanted to get with my sister so that was not fun and the other guy didn't say it but it was pretty obvious then I had an older brother who was always going out with different girls and I tell them if them want to go out with you and he said will I tell them that if they want about me they have to share me with all the other girls in my life and I said you actually tell the man they still want to go out with you he's yeah so I thought I just don't understand I don't get the attraction for years even up until he got married 5 years ago he was still going out multiple women he had 2 women he was going out with for 16 years they knew about each other but they didn't know who each other were and when he decided that he wanted to get married he had to decide which one asked my mom to help him out and she wanted him to marry one and he ended up marrying the other was crazy. That sexuality was anything that was talked about her back then TV had nothing about sexuality so there was just nothing, I'm just not sure what impact it.

Nikki: What does being a woman mean to you?

Roslyn: I consider myself having the advantage of not using my sexuality to get what I need to select active prove myself more it's a double whammy because I was so myself as black before I saw myself as being a woman because in my family it was equal and being a woman and being a guy was equal liver treated equally so I didn't realize there was a difference until I got in high school and I was never denied anything because I was a woman I was denying things because I was black that's why I prioritize it differently than most people that's even living in New York State when I was in 4th grade when I finish fourth-grader hippie bus to school for 5th and 6th grade and a white neighborhood that was in the 60s not many people knew about it then they thought was happening in the south but they wanted to integrate more New York City schools so they started in 64 or 65 so to get off the bus and have people yelling and screaming at you when you're in 5th grade is it was unbelievable in New York to hear that the good thing about going there was that they had my moms the school late because she was the most eligible and she needed to job and her kids are going to school there so she applied the school we were going to so we felt kind of protected being there things die down after a couple months of being in school when they found out that we weren't bad kids are aliens. There's far as what makes me I guess I would just answer that more like being a black woman that I saw a lot of barriers growing up because of it when I got to college and I saw that I did have some recourse in the things that I could do sports may be somewhat confident in myself as a woman and being in music did I was often times the token one [black person] but I never let it bother me I just didn't let it stop me from doing what I want to do I always had to support my parents and knew that I was good at what I was doing. Now being the Army was a totally different thing you were totally second-class citizen and that was back in the 70s mostly because I was a woman there were a lot of blacks in the military so wasn't really separated that way that being a woman was definitely an issue when you go to the hospital was horrible thing he retreated at any respect that he had to see a gynecologist they would leave the door open because they were afraid you are going to accuse them of something so people walking by the hall could see or hear or they would be talking to a doctor in another room across the hall so they had no privacy and you are treated like you either for lesbian you couldn't you can be anything but the 2 unless you're married before I got out I try to take the tests for warrant officer which is

the highest specialty that I could've gotten my field even though I had recommendations for mobsters in my unit other units people that I've worked with they said they were given the job woman anymore and that wasn't an army could do then say I didn't understand my woman wasn't good enough to have that job but there was never any woman that had that job and they wanted to keep it that way that was that but once I got out of the Army I didn't really see a lot of problems or issues with being a woman and being black and surviving life.

Nikki: Has being married to someone who looks white had any impact on your life; in particularly like your view on being a woman in what being a woman means to you and what being a woman means to her, do you differ in your views?

Roslyn: No when we 1st met we both had lots of friends and our friends were glad to see us with someone who loved us in caring about us and that was not an issue I didn't see any differences in family dynamics know my spouse's mom treated each for kids differently but it didn't seem that she treated him differently because of their gender I think that parents broke their kids and their labels are roles that was the thing I saw was different.

Nikki: Did your mom do that?

Roslyn: yeah to a degree but she had too many to keep track of I was the peacemaker like a firm identifying I would and stopped them are call my mom down when she was put my brother out of the house and yelling at him most of the time he deserved exactly that one time she ripped his pajamas off and threw them out the door and told him to go out to the world the way he came in. I thought that might be a bit much until she tried to bite me in her teeth hit mine and teach at my tooth my mama always got mad and always does get mad at people say she's crazy and in on my mind my mom was crazy as a loon and who wouldn't be with 6 kids and a husband and you try to make it and you don't have enough money but the people that were calling her crazy they were crazy too. My mom thought he was fooling and around but I don't think he was fooling around here as much as she thought he was penalty how he could when he was working at the post office he was or not people's cars trying to make ends meet are driving us around so I don't know when he had time.

Nikki: How would you describe yourself to yourself?

Roslyn: observant quiet caring loving I tell people the truth where its at intelligent forward thinking way to keep the couple steps ahead of stuff I tried to be sensitive to people to their needs or whatever I tolerate people pretty well unless they are stupid I honestly try not to judge people but I'm not a percent of non-perfect person and sometimes I do try to be friendly and reach up people not as much as they used to but when I was in situations where I was around a lot of people and some of those off to the side I could relate to that because I thought I was when I was younger I was the one that didn't have many friends sign it felt like so…

Nikki: Is there anything else you would like for me to know?

Roslyn: NO!

APPENDIX E

SAMPLE OF MEMBER CHECKING

Original:

Roslyn's Story

Family of Origin

Roslyn was a 56-year-old African-American woman. She grew up in New York City, the middle of six children. Her mother and her father were both present in the home. Roslyn's mother and father were both in the Army. Her mother was discharged for lying about her age. During World War II, Roslyn's mother wanted to get into the Army, so she used her older sister's birth certificate to register herself. When the Army found out her true age, she was quickly discharged. Roslyn's mother was a stay-at-home mom until her youngest child went to kindergarten. At that time, she became a teacher's aide. After retiring from the Army, Roslyn's father began working for the post office.

With six children, Roslyn's home was very active. She and her siblings were not allowed to fight. They could discuss, but could not hit one another. They were lower middle class, and Roslyn's mother made most of their clothes. Her mother was very talented. Roslyn's aunts would often look down the back of her shirts looking for tags, even though all of the kids had clothes made from the same material.

Roslyn was very active as a child. She played string instruments in school and even took private lessons. She was also very active in sports. She played varsity field hockey, junior varsity basketball and was a scorekeeper for softball (P010:043). Roslyn continued to play sports at Queens College in New York after high school. Her basketball team was the first women's team to play in Madison Square Garden. In 1974, "it was the ultimate venue" (P010:045).

In college, Roslyn realized that there is a life beyond her family. She made many friends. She traveled frequently for sporting events. "I went berserk…did many things I have never done before, stayed up all night" (P010:037).

Roslyn dropped out of college after a year. She was living at home and working. One night, her mother was out shopping. Roslyn wanted to be nice and decided to make dinner for her father. "I thought I did a pretty good job, but he was just in a bad mood or something, and he said, ' You burn the food. You throw it at me,' and I was like, 'Fuck you. Do it yourself.' So, he slapped me. I figured I was 21 years old, and he couldn't hit me, so I hit him back. We commenced to fight throughout the house. I ended up on my bedroom floor with him beating me. I had 2 black eyes. I bit his hand and scratched his face. My brother Richard was there the whole time, and he didn't do anything. After my dad got himself cleaned up and left for work, my brother said, 'You shouldn't have cussed at him,' and I said, 'Yeah, thanks a lot for your help'" (P010:017).

The fight completely changed her relationship with her father. Before the fight, Roslyn would watch sports on TV with her father and hang out and talk. She would help him work on cars, just spend time with him. After the fight, Roslyn did not speak to her father for six months. When they did speak, they were short and curt with one another (P010:017). Shortly after her fight with her father, Roslyn went into the Army and moved to Seattle. Within the year, her father passed away. Roslyn and her father never made amends, and his passing was very hard on Roslyn. Her father has been dead for thirty years. Her mother had never dated another man, or even thought about dating another man, even though her children have tried to set her up (P010:025).

Her father's death was conceivably the hardest time in her life, and she lived through it by compartmentalizing her feelings (P010:066). During the time after her father's death, Roslyn's ex-girlfriend, with whom she still lived, and her ex's new girlfriend, were killed in a car accident. Roslyn and her ex-girlfriend were both in the Army and were roommates on post. They moved off post together and had an additional

roommate named Philippe. They were all heavy drinkers and partiers. Roslyn was also close with her ex's new girlfriend.

After the accident, Roslyn was harassed by her ex's family. They even called the Army and reported Roslyn for not giving them all of her ex's things (which she had done). Roslyn was frightened that her ex's parents were going to out her. Between the stress and pain of her father's death, and the stress and concern that she would be outed, Roslyn spent her time hiding in alcohol and drugs (P010:066). Roslyn stopped using drugs and alcohol when confronted by a coworker. He said to her, "If you keep doing this, you will kill yourself" (P010:066). She wanted to go into treatment, but her supervisor told her that if she did, she would lose her security clearance. Instead, he invited her to his home to spend time with him and his family. This was helpful to Roslyn, because she was comfortable with a large group like her own family (P010:066).

Roslyn has also lost two of her siblings: her sister, Bambi, who is two years older, to a heart condition; also, her brother, Peter, of Scleroderma Raynaud's Syndrome (P010:005). Both died before the age of forty. Roslyn also has the same heart condition as her sister, Bambi. She is alive today, because she has an automatic heart defibrillator.

When Roslyn was young, her mother would call her "bull dagger." Roslyn did not know what a "bull dagger" was until she was in college (P010:053). When Roslyn's mother was in the Army, there was a woman by the name of Shirley, who was very butch. Others taunted her, and also Roslyn's mother, about being butch. Roslyn believed that her mother was transferring her own fear of being non-heterosexual, or even butch, onto Roslyn (P010:053).

Roslyn was involved in sports. She was more comfortable around a group of boys, but did not express the same interest in men as her sisters (P010:057). Boys would often go on dates with Roslyn in order to get a date with her older sister. Her brother would tell girls that, if they wanted to date him, they had to share him with all the other women in his life. Neither of these models of dating and relationships was attractive to Roslyn (P010:057). When Roslyn was young, sexuality and sexual orientation were not talked about on TV. There were no models of healthy non-heterosexual relationships. Roslyn wonders if any of these experiences impacted her sexual orientation, but she states that she "is not sure what impacted [her sexual orientation]" (P010:057).

Roslyn did a lot of traveling during her young adult years. She moved to Chicago after leaving the Army and worked for the post office. Living in Chicago was a life changing experience for Roslyn. While living there, she met many of her life-long friends and her partner of 20 years (P010:049). Roslyn and her partner have been married now for 17 years and have one child, a 16-year-old girl. Roslyn is a stay-at-home mom and her partner is a physician. Raising a child has truly been a life-changing experience for Roslyn. Her daughter "is a good kid, turned out all right, despite her parents" (P010:049).

Growing up a black woman, Roslyn was not treated differently than the men in her family. She did not even realize that there was a power difference between men and women until she reached high school. Being a woman came second to being black. As an African-American woman, Roslyn had to first prove herself as an African–American, before she had the chance to prove herself as a woman. Roslyn states, "I was never denied anything because I was a woman. I was denied things because I was black" (Po10:070).

In school, Roslyn was bussed thirty minutes away to another neighborhood, so that her New York school would appear to be more integrated. When Roslyn got off the bus, white people were yelling and screaming obscenities as her (P010:070). Roslyn's protection was that her mother was able to work at the school. The noise died down after about two months, when the white people realized that the black people were not so different from them. Gender difference became obvious when Roslyn joined the Army.

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Edited by Roslyn (italics):

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APPENDIX F

PARTICIPANT CODING

Participant 1 P001

Participant Response During Interview.....Response…..:000

Participant P001	Cora
Participant P002	Barbra
Participant P003	Ole
Participant P004	Sally
Participant P005	TJ
Participant P006	Blue
Participant P007	Chris
Participant P008	Maria
Participant P009	Marie
Participant P010	Roslyn

APPENDIX G

MYSELF AS A HUMAN INSTRUMENT

In order to describe myself as a human instrument, I must first describe and evaluate my experience as a researcher, my interest in research, and my expectations of research. It may be difficult to identify what is and is not important when acting as a human instrument. Moreover, what is important will vary depending upon the question being asked and the purpose of the research. However, there is no doubt that perceptions, experiences, and beliefs shape my reality and interpretations of reality when one acts a human instrument.

My interest in research began my senior year in college. I wanted to understand the experience of Catholic religious women (nuns). To accomplish this, I began interviewing selected members of the Sister of the Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary in Aberdeen, South Dakota. This was my first experience with qualitative research. Looking back, I realize that there were many things I could have improved upon. For example, I did not consider that the sample of women chosen might skew the results. Nor did I research the questions I used to gather information. I later turned this qualitative inquiry into a quantitative research project with the expansion of the subject base and the addition of a survey. The subjects were still chosen out of convenience, but the survey questions were based on theory and previous research. My experience with this research project taught me the importance of literature reviews and a valid and reliable survey methodology.

This experience also gave me the opportunity to work with both qualitative and quantitative research. In my research experience, I discovered there are specifics about each type of research that I enjoyed. In my first encounter, I felt enriched by the personal interactions with the sisters. I was able to better understand the perspectives and opinions of each interviewee. When using the survey as the interviewing tool, I was not able to clarify questions and had to rely on the interpretation of the person reading the survey.

Therefore, I believe that the results obtained in the quantitative inquiry had more potential for insight into the population.

My experience with research in the classroom is strictly quantitative. I have taken three classes, two of which were statistical analysis, and the third was research design. I have learned that research inquiry and design are my strengths, while statistical analysis is my weakness. From my educational experience, I have discovered that in order for research to be meaningful it must be grounded in literature, constructed properly, and statistically sound.

Based on my experience, in and out of the classroom, I have drawn several conclusions. First, I enjoy the personal. That is, that I like the interview process, and the ability to interact with research subjects. Two, research is not easy and should not be taken lightly. A researcher should be careful to include all relevant studies, literature, and personal experience. Finally, any inquiry made should interest the researcher. Research takes time and energy; a lack of interest in the research tope may lead to incomplete or insufficient research.

Research interest is often derived from personal experience. Currently my research interests include lesbian adolescent sexual identity development and generational differences between lesbian women and the influences of life experiences on sexual identity. Some of the questions I would like to answer are: First, what influences sexual identity development? Second, how has the experience of lesbians evolved throughout the last 30 years? Third, how does the experience of lesbian adolescents of today compare to the experience of lesbian adolescents 5, 10, 15, or even 20 years ago? And, finally, how does environment (life experience) affect sexual identity development?

My interest in this area comes from my own experience as a lesbian struggling to find a place in the world, and my observation of other lesbians. I have noticed that some young women struggle with sexual identity while others rejoice in their difference. This

phenomenon intrigues me, and I yearn to discover the differences so that the successes of some can ease the pain of others.

Research should lead to conclusions. My expectation of research is that a conclusion can be drawn from the data collected, even if the conclusion is that more data must be collected. I expect research to give me some insight into the phenomenon being studied. I have some experience with quantitative and qualitative research and I see the value of each process and inquiry. I also respect the fact that each of these forms of research answers questions differently.

At the time I began this study, I was 29 years, had been married for 3 years, and was expecting our first child. I was naive regarding how to be a good mother, partner, and friend while maintaining my academia and supporting my family with a full time job. As this study comes to a conclusion, I am 34 and still married to the same woman; we now have two children, ages 5 and 3, and I am still at a loss as to how to be a good mother and partner. What I know now that I did not know at the start is that this research and the years between have changed me for the better. The privilege I have had in walking with the women in the this study for a short time has enlightened me to the kind of person, counselor, researcher, educator, partner, and parent I want to be.

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