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The Complexities of Female Sexuality: Narratives of Women who Have Experienced Both Heterosexual and Same-Sex Marriages

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Abstract

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by

Krista A. Paduchowski-Butland

MA, University of Massachusetts at Lowell, 2009

BA, Salve Regina University, 2006

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

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Abstract

Due to social stigma, millions of sexual minorities have concealed their true sexual identities by entering into heterosexual relationships and marriages. Eventually, some transition to same-sex relationships and are able to live authentic lives. This latter group had identified as genuinely heterosexual, never questioning their sexuality until a particular time in their lives when same-sex desires spontaneously appeared. The experiences of transitioning from heterosexual to same-sex partners are not well known, particularly for women who have been legally married to both men and women. Diamond's dynamical systems theory for same-sex sexuality and McCarn and Fassinger's lesbian identity formation model provided the theoretical framework for this qualitative narrative study investigating the life stories of 15 female participants recruited from social media, who had experienced a transition from heterosexual marriage to same-sex marriage. Face-to-face interviews were conducted and data were coded and analyzed to identify emergent categories. The findings revealed that the women experienced shifts in private and public sexual identities over time. Despite external obstacles and personal concerns in transitioning from heterosexual to same-sex relationships, all the women had more positive experiences in their same-sex marriages than they did in their heterosexual marriages. Understanding these women's life stories will allow mental health professionals to better understand and address the needs of this population in more clinical and applied settings. This study will also help educate the general public about women who experience shifts in the desired gender of their relationship.

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Dedication

The completion of this study is dedicated to my grandmother, Jeannette Paduchowski, who has been my number one fan my entire life. She has been my inspiration for as long as I can remember and the completion of this degree is not only for me, but for her, too. She has believed in me every step of the way on my very lengthy academic journey and if it were not for her, I wouldn't be where I am today. I owe her everything. Thank you Mem. This one is for you.

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Thank you to my friends who have given me the space I have needed during this very busy time of my life. I promise my social life will be back to normal now! Thank you to all of my family who have believed in me since I began my undergraduate journey in psychology in 2003. They never let me falter and they certainly wouldn't have allowed me to give up. I thank them for that.

I want to say thanks to my dear friend Tracy Daniel who I was fortunate enough to meet in my third Walden residency in Maryland. We were both in a similar spot early

on in our dissertation journeys and have guided each other every single day since then. I am grateful for her support and encouragement. I look forward to a lifelong friendship.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

The focus of this study is on the experiences of women who transition from heterosexual marriage to same-sex marriage. In this study I explored these transitions and specifically look at changes in these women's identity labels, as well as the social and personal influences that aided and hindered these transitions. It is significant to understand the lived experiences of these women as they are the first to have the opportunity to remarry to a member of the same sex, specifically in the United States. Currently no researchers have looked at women who were once married to men and who are now remarried to women. I chose to examine these experiences for that reason.

In recent years, women have been leaving their husbands for other women in higher numbers than their male counterparts (Buxton, 2005). However, to be able to commit to another woman at the level of marriage has only recently been an option to some (Human Rights Campaign, 2015). Same-sex marriage has been legalized in only 35 of the 51 states in the U.S. It has therefore been difficult to conduct research with this population until recently; same-sex marriage was not an option to anyone until 2004 when Massachusetts was the first state to legalize it (Human Rights Campaign, 2015). In more than one-third of the United States, gay men and women are still not allowed legal marriages.

The population of this study will likely increase through the years as same-sex marriage becomes legal in more countries and states in the U.S. What will also increase will be the relevancy of this study in upcoming years; same-sex marriage and Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT) rights are at the forefront of political and social

discussions at this time. By allowing these women to share their experiences marrying two different sexes, those who interact with this population can better understand them and the influences that guided their choices. This will result in positive social change as it will open up doors for more effective counseling services and other pertinent programs for women now in same-sex marriages who have had previous relationships, and more specifically, marriages, with men.

In Chapter 1, I will review the background of the study, the problem statement and the purpose of the study. I will also cover the research questions used in the study as well as the nature of the research. I will conclude the chapter with a discussion of the assumptions, scope, delimitations, limitations, and significance of the study.

Background

In about 2 million marriages between a man and a woman, one of the current (or former) spouses is bisexual, gay, or lesbian (Buxton, 2004). Due to the stigma of being a sexual minority, or being different, many individuals have, and continue to, live public heterosexual lives (Bates, 2010). They follow through with a heterosexual marriage while simultaneously denying their genuine feelings and desires (Thompson, Forsyth, & Langley, 2009). Others discover their same-sex attractions later on in life after living genuine heterosexual lives; their sexuality is fluid and they later transition from a heterosexual to same-sex relationship (Diamond, 2005). Though these trajectories are quite different from one another, the end result is just the same: they fall in love with a woman.

Sexual orientation was traditionally considered an all or nothing phenomenon where one was either straight or gay. Kinsey, in 1948, contested that philosophy, believing that sexual orientation occurred on a continuum with a lot of gray areas (Kinsey, Pomeroy, Martin, & Gebhard, 1953). Due to recent perspectives that have contested historical models of sexual orientation formation, there is much debate on whether or not sexual orientation is fixed and developed early in life, or if sexual orientation is more fluid and continuous, particularly in the case of women. Most researchers who have done attempted to understand the causes of homosexuality have been conducted on men by other men (Mustanski, Chivers, & Bailey, 2002). The experiences of sexual orientation may be very different for men and women (Baumeister, 2000; Peplau, Spalding, Conley, & Veniegas, 1999). The variability in sexual attractions, desires, and behaviors cannot be fully accounted for in all existing biological, genetic, and developmental perspectives.

Transitioning from identifying as heterosexual to lesbian has been well researched. What have not yet been examined are the experiences of women once married to men who are now re-married to women. Limited research is available for this particular phenomenon, though researchers have examined lesbian identity development, origins and models of sexual orientation, and the phenomenon regarding those who label themselves homosexual while in heterosexual marriages (Bogaert, 2005; Colucci-Corrit, 2005; McCarn & Fassinger, 1996). Work has also been done with women and men who have transitioned from a heterosexual marriage to a gay and lesbian identity, respectively.

Though the stigma of being gay in society has decreased over the years, there is still much prejudice and discrimination against anyone who is not heterosexual (Boon & Alderson, 2009). Exploring the experiences of women who leave the heterosexual lifestyle to begin a committed journey with a same-sex partner is very significant as it allows for an understanding influences at play in the decision to transition. As more and more individuals come out while married or immediately after divorcing, the more it is imperative to understand their identity trajectories, their choices, and their own personal meanings behind their transitions.

Problem Statement

Many sexual minorities have difficulty forming a positive identity because of the stigma associated with being homosexual in society (Bates, 2010). They are socialized into heterosexual social worlds and learn that any difference is stigmatized (Stein, 1997). In the 20th century, especially, many men and women concealed their homosexuality due to social, cultural, and religious beliefs and constraints (Patterson, 1995). This is still true today, however, it is promising that more and more men and women are disclosing their true sexual identities (Buxton, 2004). Lack of information, as shown by a dearth of recent research, presents a challenge for women who are trying to make sense of their same-sex feelings and transition from a heterosexual relationship to same-sex experiences. Discrimination, lack of understanding, and heterosexist attitudes, present multiple challenges for women who experience a shift, or fluidity, in their sexual identity, and for those who decide to come out to others after a period of public heterosexuality. As a result of the stigma and repression many gay men and lesbian women deny their true

selves (Bates, 2010). Many delay, or conceal, who they really are to conform to ideal societal standards and attitudes (Boon & Alderson, 2009). Lesbian women can be so enmeshed in this heteronormative social life that forming a healthy sexual identity is an ongoing struggle (Thompson, Forsyth, & Langley, 2009).

Some feel pressured to participate in heterosexual relationships, and for a large majority this means getting married to the opposite sex and having families (Remez, 2000). As a result of heterosexual ideologies, many current bisexual or lesbian women marry men just to follow the tradition of marriage and to gain societal acceptance (Thompson et al., 2009). Some women have married in the past because of the over 1,000 benefits and privileges associated with it (Human Rights Campaign, 2014). In the past, in order to gain these benefits women needed to marry the opposite sex. For some, it is possible marriage occurred out of necessity.

For other women, they marry men early in their lives out of love and later leave them for women they fall in love with (Diamond, 2008). These sexually fluid women may have different identity trajectories than those who knew of their same-sex attractions early in life (Diamond, 2008). Regardless of the varying trajectories, all these women face personal and societal challenges in their transitions from the heterosexual world to the same-sex world. Leaving a husband for another woman is a challenging undertaking often not understood or accepted by society.

Researchers have yet to look at in-depth experiences of women who have transitioned from a marriage to a man to a marriage to a woman. A qualitative study of this group of women who have been married to both sexes is significant. It is imperative

to examine the social and internal factors that played a role in their decisions to marry a man and a woman. Additionally, it would be valuable to examine any variables that aided and hindered their transitions from a heterosexual marriage to an eventual same-sex marriage.

Purpose of the Study

The philosophical assumption, or paradigm, that guides this study is ontological in nature. The appreciation of multiple realities for the researchers, participants, and readers is the key to the ontological assumption (Creswell, 2013). This philosophical assumption allows a researcher to report how individuals view and explain their similar experiences so differently (Creswell, 2013). The interpretive framework within the research paradigm of this study is social constructivism. This worldview is applicable to this research because it encourages subjective meanings of life based on personal experiences (Creswell, 2013). Social constructivism considers personal experiences as unique, complex, and multifaceted. This framework appreciates the influence of the social and historical context of the individual in each situation (Creswell, 2013). This framework is pertinent to a qualitative study, particularly a narrative analysis, as it allows individuals to describe their experiences as they see them (Creswell, 2013).

The purpose of my qualitative study was to explore the experiences of women who were once married to men who are now married to women. I sought to understand their subjective experiences of coming out to important others, divorce, and seeking relationships with women. I examined the identity trajectories of each woman, and how each publically and privately labeled her sexual identity, if at all. Using the social

constructivism framework, it explored historical, social, and personal influences that played a role in their life stories. Ultimately I looked at these women's experiences surrounding their transition from a heterosexual marriage to a same-sex marriage, a phenomenon that is fairly new in society because of the recent legalization of same-sex marriage in some locations of the United States.

Research Questions

1. What is the experience of women in same-sex marriages who were previously married to men?

2. What are the sexual identity labels these women have given themselves throughout their lives (both past and present)?

3. What are the experiences of transition from being in a heterosexual marriage to a same-sex marriage?

4. What personal and social factors hindered and assisted in this transition?

Theoretical Framework

The major phenomenon in this study is the experiences of women who have transitioned from a heterosexual marriage to a same-sex marriage. Sexual identity development is diverse, particularly for women (Diamond, 2005). One theoretical framework does not explain the variations in experiences; more traditional model of lesbian identity formation is combined with a more contemporary and fluid model to create the appropriate conceptual framework for this study. It is important to acknowledge the numerous influences (personal and social) that collide to influence each

female's individual experiences of recognizing their same-sex desires, acknowledging them, and acting upon them. McCarn and Fassinger (1996), in their lesbian identity formation model, considered how one's personal identity interacts with group identity. McCarn and Fassinger admitted that despite the influence of group identity and the social context, lesbian identity formation is primarily an internal, individual process. Some women may have been aware of their same-sex awareness and exploration early on in their lives but were unable to complete all of the phases in the model because of social influences (i.e. family values, social norms).

Not all women have same-sex desires early on in life. For some women, same-sex desires and behaviors occur much later on in life and some women marry men because they are truly heterosexual. Later on in life they discover same-sex attractions and leave the heterosexual lifestyle for relationships with women. Diamond (2007) proposed another a dynamical systems approach to sexual orientation in an attempt to explain these atypical women who do not experience sexual identity in such a linear process. These women's experiences should not be ignored or devalued. Rather, their experiences should be included in a study such as this.

It is important to acknowledge and understand women who knew they were attracted to the same-sex at a young age, and those who discovered such desires later on in life. Combining both frameworks allows for a more comprehensive background for exploring women who transition to same-sex marriages. More detailed explanations of each theoretical framework will be described more in Chapter 2.

Nature of the Study

The nature of this study was qualitative. Qualitative research is appropriate as it allows an opportunity to explore and understand the experiences of a particular group of women who have yet to be examined. When an issue or experience needs exploration and a complex, detailed understanding is required, a qualitative inquiry is usually necessary (Creswell, 2013). What have yet to be explored are the unique life experiences of women who transition from a heterosexual marriage to a same-sex marriage. Qualitative studies allow such individuals to share their unique life stories, empowering them to express their voices and tell others about their experiences (Creswell, 2013). In doing so, researchers can examine the power and importance of these women's experiences.

One type of qualitative research is narrative analysis, the most appropriate for the goals of this study. This explorative, descriptive inquiry allows for clarification and deeper understanding of the series of life events and transitions of these women (Bates, 2010). A narrative method focuses on the experiences "as expressed in lived and told stories of individuals" (Creswell, p. 70, 2013). The primary focus of this dissertation is to examine these life stories using in-depth, face- to- face, semistructured interviews. Data was collected through 60-90 minute interviews with women who had once been married to men and who are now re-married to women.

Definitions

Bisexual: An individual who is sexually attracted to both men and women (Bates, 2010).

Coming out: Revealing one's same-sex orientation to others (Bates, 2010). This term is only applicable to nonheterosexual individuals since heterosexuality is considered the norm in society.

Once-married: Women who have been legally married at least once (Bates, 2010).

Fluid lesbian: A woman who has alternated between lesbian and non-lesbian labels over a period of time (Diamond, 2005).

Gay: A man whose sexual and romantic attractions are toward an individual of the same-sex (Rosenthal, 2013).

GLBTQQ: An abbreviation that stands for gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, queer, and/or questioning (Rosenthal, 2013).

Homophobia: Negative attitudes and behaviors towards homosexuals. This "fear of homosexuals" can lead to acts of discrimination (Blumenfeld, 1992; Herek, 1990).

Heterosexism: The belief that heterosexuality is or should be the only acceptable sexual orientation and the fear and hatred of those who love and sexually desire those of the same sex; this thought results in prejudice, discrimination, and acts of violence towards sexual minorities (Blumenfeld, 1992)

Homosexual: An individual who is sexually attracted to same-sex individuals (Bates, 2010).

Heterosexual: An individual who is sexually attracted to opposite sex individuals (Rosenthal, 2013).

Legally married: A heterosexual or homosexual marriage recognized by the state

government (Bates, 2010).

Lesbian: A woman whose sexual and romantic attractions are toward an individual of the same-sex (Rosenthal, 2013).

*Sexual identity: Re*fers to the sex of those to whom one is sexually and romantically attracted (sometimes used interchangeably with sexual orientation) (APA, 2011).

Sexual orientation: The consistent, enduring pattern of sexual desire for the same-sex, opposite sex, or both sexes (Diamond, 2008).

Sexual fluidity: Situation-dependent flexibility in sexual responsiveness; this term was generated by psychologist Lisa Diamond to refer more specifically to women (Diamond, 2008)

Stable lesbian: A woman who has maintained a consistent lesbian identification over a period of time (Diamond, 2005).

Assumptions

I chose to conduct semistructured interviews in order to learn the life stories of the 15 women who were once married to men and who are now remarried to women. The first assumption I had regarding these women is that they would be open and honest when sharing their experiences of marriage to two different genders with me. I assumed they would have initial minimal concerns about privacy or security and what types of questions will be asked. I eased their minds by taking all appropriate steps both physically and verbally to inform them of their confidentiality. I gave them an idea of what types of topics we would cover in the interview questions. The participants had no

hesitations clearly expressing their life stories to me. All participants were able to speak English and understood the interview questions I asked. All women were able to provide me detailed answers to my questions and were available for the full time that I needed to conduct the interview. All women were biologically born as females and their first marriages were to men who were biologically born as males. Their current marriages were to women who were biologically born as females. I did not show any biases or personal opinions during the interview process. I remained neutral and professional.

These assumptions were necessary in order to set up the study. Individuals who choose to take part in a study that involves an interview should understand that questions will be asked of them and they will be requested to respond. This is a necessary assumption in utilizing an interview format for data collection. The assumption that these women will speak fluent English is also necessary. If they are able to respond to initial communications in English, it seems logical that unless otherwise noted, they will be able to communicate in English in person as well. Assuming that these participants were all born biologically female, is also necessary.

I did not attempt to look at men who have transitioned to women as they are a separate gender identity group. Assuming that these women married men who were also biological males, is also significant. The purpose of this study was to explore sexual identity and its fluidities not gender and its fluidities. It was important for me to assume that I would keep all personal biases in check. This was particularly true during the creation of the research design, data collection, data analysis, and data interpretation. It is significant to assume that researchers have their own personal opinions about certain

topics, but that they actively work to keep their biases in check during the important stages of the research process.

Scope and Delimitations

The focus of this research was to understand the experiences of women who transition from a heterosexual marriage to a same-sex marriage and to consider the personal and social factors that play a role in this transition. The opportunity to marry is not available for all same-sex couples in the United States and the world, so the population who has had this experience was small. Their stories, however, are invaluable and have yet to be examined in a qualitative fashion. Understanding in-depth why these women chose to marry men, how they transitioned to same-sex relationships, and what sparked the decision to marry a member of the same-sex, are the key goals of this study.

In order to participate in this study an individual must had to fulfill the following criteria: (a) be biologically female, (b) have been legally married to a man at least once in the past, (c) be currently legally married to another woman (d) be able to speak fluent English, and (e) be between 18 and 65 years of age. Anyone who did not fit these criteria was excluded from the study and not eligible to participate. Individuals who were emotionally and mentally disabled were ineligible to participate in the study. Anyone who was a non-English speaker, going through crisis, and over the age of 65 were also excluded from the study. Any individual who was a subordinate, student, client, or potential client, of the researcher, was also ineligible for the study due to potential conflicts of interest.

Two separate theoretical frameworks were combined for this study. Because of the diversity in female sexuality, more than one theoretical approach needed to be used. Other relevant frameworks that were not used included traditional stage models of sexual identity development (i.e. Cass, 1979; Troiden, 1979). These models, though applicable to women who knew of their same-sex desires early in life, do not account for significant social forces in identity formation. Understanding external influences is one goal of this study. Other relevant approaches include Cox and Gallois's (1996) homosexual identity model that integrates the social identity theory and Baumeister's (2000) erotic plasticity model that acknowledges social and cultural factors in the shaping of female sexuality. Baumeister dismissed the application of stage models for female sexuality. Though this erotic plasticity may be true for some women, others may line up quite precisely with a more traditional identity formation sequence.

Delimitations of this current research study include only examining women who have been previously married to men and who are currently married to women. Another delimitation is that only the participants themselves were interviewed. Family members and wives of the participants were not interviewed. For purposes of time and requirements, it was unnecessary to interview multiple groups of people for this study. Gaining perspectives from family and members and significant others of the participants is an area that could use future exploration. Lastly, another delimitation of the study is that it did not fully explore the participant's views on why she is gay. This is beyond the scope of this study; this study attempted to understand the subjective experiences of

transitioning from a heterosexual marriage to a same-sex marriage and was not attempting to explore the origins of sexual orientation.

Qualitative studies generally have smaller sample sizes and do not always lend themselves to generalizability to a larger population (Creswell, 2013). Findings can be transferable to other settings. Transferability refers to the amount that qualitative research findings can be generalized to other settings. As a researcher I did my best to be specific about my research context and the assumptions of my study. Other researchers or those who read my research will be well informed and able to make an even better judgment of whether or not the results of my study should be transferred to other applicable settings.

Limitations

Interviews rely on individuals to be open, honest, and detailed generally in a face-to-face setting, as was the case in this study. Though a researcher takes this information at face value, it cannot be guaranteed to be completely accurate for several reasons. Self-reports (i.e. questionnaires and interviews) lend themselves to more errors and inaccuracies because of memory decay (particularly when trying to retrospectively recall), selective memory, attribution issues, and exaggeration (Patton, 2002). It is often the case that participants are also concerned about staying within social norms and not appearing too deviant and different, influencing the extent to which they share information or portray themselves and their experiences (Patton, 2002). This can be especially true with snowball sampling, the sampling technique used in this study.

Because a researcher relies on personal social networks, there may be a slightly greater chance of participants being concerned about what information they provide and

how it is structured. Because participants may have a mutual friend or acquaintance with the researcher they may feel compelled to present information in certain ways or avoid certain topics. On the other hand, because of the mutual contact, it is possible that participants may feel more comfortable sharing their stories and open up more than they would in another circumstance.

A personal researcher limitation could potentially be my inexperience with interviewing. This was my first experience interviewing anyone in a professional, formal way. It is possible that my inexperience influenced the way I conducted the interview and the way I presented myself. This limitation may have had an effect on the rapport I had created with these women during the interview process, influencing their responses, degree of depth, and general comfort level.

I probed and asked additional questions if clarification was needed with any responses that seem unclear or contradictory. I safeguarded my personal biases by keeping them out of the way I asked questions and responded to my participants. I kept questions objective and did not interject with personal beliefs or opinions. I remained objective throughout the entire process. By doing so, I eliminated any unnecessary effects on my communications with these women. As this was my first time interviewing anyone for academic research, I was sure to practice interviewing prior to the real interviews. This way I could reflect on and have others critique my verbal and non-verbal communication styles that may interfere with the rapport with my participants. Practicing the interview process, how I would conduct myself, and what I would and would not say, allowed me to feel better prepared when the actual interviews took place. I consistently

reminded myself to keep all statements objective and that providing my personal thoughts is inappropriate and harmful in this particular context.

Significance

According to Buxton (2004), in about 2 million marriages between a man and a woman, one of the current (or former) spouses is bisexual, gay, or lesbian. When a marital partner discloses his or her sexual minority status, one-third of the couples try to stay married while the other two-thirds decide to end their relationship (Buxton, 2004). According to Kitzinger and Wilkinson (1995), between a quarter and a third of women who now define as lesbian were once married to men. This number is underreported because many choose not to come out at all. Societal expectations to stay traditionally married along with discrimination against those who admit and act on same-gender attractions, represses many individuals from being true to themselves (Buxton, 2004).

It is possible that many women see identify shifts later in life where they may have been happily married to a man, but at some point during that marriage fell in love with and felt desire for the same sex. This *female sexual fluidity*, as it is called, is still not yet understood fully. Despite the sizeable number of women in same-sex relationships who were once married to men, very few empirical studies have been conducted. This is an important area for further study. Homophobia and heterosexism are two major obstacles that many lesbian women face (Boon & Alderson, 2009). Cultural definitions of social and sexual categories for women are quite limited and highlighting women's experiences in both the straight and lesbian social worlds is in need of more work (Thompson et. al., 2009). Potential life-course and historical context have been found to

greatly impact the experiences and identity trajectories of LGBT individuals (Bates, 2010).

Understanding the transition and developmental processes of previously married lesbian women is particularly important in understanding their past and present experiences as a function of the social context, and in assisting them to develop positive self-identities (Bridges & Croteau, 1994). In a study with gay men in heterosexual marriages, distinctive dilemmas took place: understanding one's sexual identity, internalized homophobia, social isolation, facing expectations, stereotypes, and rejections of the heterosexual world (Pearcey, 2005). The success of one's lesbian identity is generally based on one's ability to come out and make others aware of their authentic self while also successfully dealing with such dilemmas. The individual is then able to demonstrate the ability to adjust appropriately to their true authentic sexual identity (Bates, 2010). The stronger an individual's identity with self and the more social support, the more likely he or she can overcome internalized homophobia and experience a positive lesbian identity (Bringaze & White, 2001).

Just as important, the results of this study will help others understand the magnitude of female sexual fluidity and that homosexuality and heterosexuality is not always fixed from early on in life. These women are not confused. Sexual identity trajectories can be subject to change; understanding the variability in identity labels and sexual experiences can help society to be more accepting of women who transition from heterosexual marriages to same-sex marriages.

This study contributed to the very limited body of research that has been conducted in the area of women who have transitioned from marriages to men to relationships, and more specifically, marriages, to women. Psychologists, educators, marriage and family therapists, GLBTQQ counselors, advocates, clinicians, families, and friends of women who have experienced this phenomenon, will benefit from this research. Deeper knowledge of female sexuality and of women who experience shifts in the gender of their chosen relationship, will help deteriorate the confusion and stigma and increase empathy, understanding, and treatment of this population.

Summary

Chapter 1 was an explanation of the purpose of the study which was to explore the life narratives of women who transition from heterosexual marriage to same-sex marriage. Despite the different routes of getting there, all these women ended up marrying a woman. Chapter 1 also explained the background, the problem statement, and the purpose of the current study. It presented the study's research questions, the conceptual framework, and the nature of the study. The chapter discussed the assumptions, limitations, delimitations, and the scope of the study. Chapter 1 concluded with a section on the significance of the study.

Chapter 2 is a review of the current literature on theories related to female same-sex sexuality, the process of coming out and transitioning from heterosexuality. It will also include information on the current state of same-sex marriage and will discuss factors that hinder and aid in the transition.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

When a marital partner discloses his or her sexual minority status, one-third of the couples try to stay married while the other two-thirds decide to end their relationship (Buxton, 2004). According to Kitzinger and Wilkinson (1995), between a quarter and a third of women who now define as lesbian were once married to men. Many sexual minorities have difficulty forming a positive identity because of the stigma associated with being homosexual in society (Bates, 2010). Sexual minorities are socialized into heterosexual social worlds and learn that any difference is stigmatized (Stein, 1997). As a result of the stigma and repression, they deny their true selves (Bates, 2010).

The following comprehensive literature review present in this chapter supported the importance of the study and the potential for raising awareness and understanding the diversity of women's sexual lives. The first part of the chapter provides an overview of the literature search strategy. The next section highlights Lisa Diamond's (2008) dynamical systems theory as it applies to female same-sex sexuality is provided. The following section includes a quick overview of sexual orientation and goes on to provide a brief overview of the history of female sexuality and the historical and current models of same-sex sexual orientation formation. I will then discuss the coming out and disclosure process and the concept of mixed orientation marriages. In the remainder of the chapter I will continue with a review of the literature specific to men and women who were once in heterosexual marriages who have transitioned to same-sex relationships

and/or lesbian and gay identities. I will conclude chapter 2 with a section on same-sex marriage and the decision of couple's to commit at this level.

Background

Not all lesbians are forced into the heterosexual lifestyle due to stigma and discrimination, however. It is possible that some women base their attractions on "the person and not the gender" (Diamond, 2005, p. 120). This person-centered attraction may explain why some women are "fluid" in their sexuality. Women who are predominantly attracted to women may fluctuate in their sexuality and may not have had a consistent lesbian identity throughout their lives. Though these women's trajectories are different than those whose lesbianism was more stable, the end result is just the same: they fall in love with a woman. This project will explore the experiences of women in same-sex marriages who were previously married to men.

Transitioning from heterosexuality to lesbianism has been well researched. What have not yet been examined are the experiences of women once married to men who are now re-married to women. Limited research is available for this particular phenomenon, though the researchers have examined lesbian identity development, origins and models of sexual orientation and the phenomenon regarding those who label themselves homosexual while in heterosexual marriages. Researchers have also examined women and men who have transitioned from a heterosexual marriage to a gay and lesbian identity, respectively.

Same-sex marriage has only recently been legalized in one third of the states in the United States and is still not legal for more than two-thirds of the States and many

other countries in the world (Human Rights Campaign, 2013). The population of women who have experienced the transition from a heterosexual marriage to a same-sex marriage are not well known and are, by default, small in scope at this time. I closely examine the life stories of women who have experienced this transition in a qualitative fashion instead of testing a particular hypothesis or theory or looking for relationships between variables (Creswell, 2013). An increase in understanding for those who interact with this population will result from the opportunity to share these personal life narratives in this study. The information presented in this study will allow psychologists, clinicians, counselors, GLBTQQ advocates and therapists, and other pertinent professionals to better understand and address the needs of this population in more clinical and applied settings. More informally, this study will help educate the general public about women who experience shifts in the desired gender of their relationship. There are many potential influences that play a role in a woman's decision to marry a man, seek out a woman, and marry the same sex. A search of the literature is intended to give background information on these influences.

Literature Search Strategy

The Walden University electronic library was used extensively in the process of locating relevant scholarly journal articles. Particularly, the use of the Elton B. Stephens Company (EBSCO) system allowed for a search with multiple databases simultaneously, including Academic Search Complete, PsycINFO, PsycARTICLES, SocINDEX, Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC), and Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender (LGBT) Life.

A variety of search terms and keywords were used in the search for peer-reviewed journal articles for this literature review. These search terms included words, phrases, and combinations of the two, including *lesbian, lesbian identity, sexual identity, married to men, heterosexual marriage, previously married, mixed orientation marriage, female sexuality, sexual fluidity, transition,* and *same-sex marriage.* The EBSCO system allows for searching databases simultaneously so all the above databases were searched with all of the terms. Doing this allowed for a more exhaustive search and compilation of articles. Because one source often cites many others, I was able to use a relatively small amount of articles as a starting point. I was then able to directly search for and later use the references cited in these articles. In the EBSCO system, I switched the drop-down search box to "Authors" to search specifically for the author(s) of these articles only. If that failed, I was able to search for the exact titles or keywords of those titles since all information was available to me. In some cases, particularly for material on biology, I needed to extend my search to other databases, like MEDLINE. It is important to note that because the LGBT population is limited in scope and because not all individuals are open with their sexuality, research is fairly limited. Much of the research that first examined sexual minorities are more than 3-5 years old. This is a reason that more research is needed with this population, especially with those who have concealed sexual identities and have later come out. Some of the research used in this literature review is more than a decade old. After doing an extensive literature search, more recent studies were sparse and were found to be irrelevant to the purposes of this particular study. Older

research was justified because of its appropriateness and relevancy to the background of this study.

Theoretical Frameworks

Understanding the diversity of experiences of women in their sexual identity development is difficult to do without the consideration of more than one theoretical framework. In order to fully encompass the varying timing of feelings, desires, and behaviors regarding female same-sex sexuality, a more traditional model of lesbian identity formation is combined with a more contemporary and fluid model. It is important to acknowledge the numerous influences (personal and social) that collide to influence each female's individual experiences of recognizing their same-sex desires, acknowledging them, and acting upon them. Traditional stage models (i.e. Cass, 1979; Troiden, 1989) assume that individuals are aware of their same-sex sexuality early on in childhood and develop through linear stages until they reach full acceptance in early adulthood. This is true for some women, but not all.

McCarn and Fassinger (1996) proposed a lesbian identity formation model that considers how one's personal identity interacts with group identity. Their model appreciates the importance of group membership (being a part of the GLBT community) but considers the significance of prejudice, discrimination, and oppression that the sexual minority community experiences. Considering societal influences on group identity is a valuable component of this model. Older, more traditional stage-like models do not consider environmental influences and believe that identity development is primarily an internal process that proceeds regardless of the context. McCarn and Fassinger's model

acknowledges that one's individual identity development is not an isolated event, but rather it is experienced in relation to the larger society and other relevant contexts (McCarn & Fassinger, 1996).

McCarn and Fassinger suggested that identity formation requires a four-phase model. Phase 1 is called Awareness where the individual notices she is not like her heterosexual peers and may become more attentive to the lesbian community. Phase 2 is titled Exploration where the woman attempts to understand her position as a function of her new membership. Looking at new attitudes is included in this phase (McCarn & Fassinger, 1996). Phase 3 is the deepening/commitment phase where the female personally commits herself to the lesbian group, becoming more aware of the pros and cons of being a part of this group (McCarn & Fassinger, 1996). The fourth and final stage, Internalization/Synthesis, is when the female fully integrates herself personally and socially as a member of the lesbian community. A new positive self-concept is formed and a sense of security and acceptance occurs (McCarn & Fassinger, 1996). These stages are progressive, sequential, and the final stage is the most desirable outcome for a fully integrated lesbian.

McCarn and Fassinger (1996) admitted that despite the influence of group identity and the social context, lesbian identity formation is primarily an internal, individual process. This is important to note. This model is a significant piece of my conceptual framework for this study; it is likely to describe some of the participants who went through these phases in a private, internal manner. They may have been aware of their same-sex awareness and exploration early on in their lives but were unable to complete

all of the phases in the model because of social influences (i.e. family values, social norms). It is possible that these women were likely to marry men to please society. Their internal same-sex feelings and desires did not, however, match their public heterosexual behaviors.

Where the problem lies with McCarn and Fassinger's (1996) lesbian identity formation model is that it does not fit the experiences of all lesbians (Diamond, 2008). For some women, this model is unfitting. Not all women have same-sex desires early on in life. The assumption that one's homosexuality is always discovered and accepted by adolescence is also erroneous (Horowitz & Newcomb, 2001). For some women, same-sex desires and behaviors occur much later on in life. Some women marry men because they genuinely identify as heterosexual. Later on in life they discover same-sex attractions and leave their heterosexual relationship for relationships with women. It is important to acknowledge these women who do not fit the traditional sequence; these "atypical" and nonlinear behaviors should not be ignored as they are both explainable and more common than originally thought (Diamond, 2007).

Diamond (2007) proposed another approach to explain women who did not follow the typical trajectory with their sexuality. Diamond believed a dynamical systems approach should be applied to sexual orientation, specifically to the development and expression of female same-sex sexuality. Diamond's reasoning was based off her longitudinal research findings that indicated that major variabilities and discontinuities existed within this population, even within just a 10 year time period. Diamond discovered females had nonlinear discontinuities in their sexuality, and that some women

had unfolded same-sex awareness through the years while others experienced more abrupt transformations in attractions and desires.

Diamond (2007) also found that over a 10 year period women shifted their identity labels quite regularly, indicating that identity development is not necessarily fixed or linear. Some women reported that these transitions to same-sex desires were abrupt and occurred as "singular transformative moments" (Diamond, 2007, p. 147). Such shifts showed that variability and transitions are common in sexual identification, particularly among sexual minority women. A dynamical approach is necessary as the second part of this conceptual framework.

Diamond's (2007) model considers changes in sexuality over time and "within-person variability" (p. 143). Diamond's dynamical systems approach as applied to female same-sex sexuality takes into account all factors associated with change, and appreciates all the complex processes involved. The dynamical systems approach provides a strong basis for such diversity. It examines the multiple variables and complex factors associated with female sexuality and identity development. It does not ignore the women who do not fit into the traditional stage model of homosexual development.

I examined the life stories of women who were once married to men and who are now re-married to women. In order to make sense of their unique and varying life experiences, it is important to utilize a conceptual framework that acknowledges the full range of female same-sex experiences and lesbian identity formation. This framework consists of two opposing but relevant approaches; one that is a linear, progressive model

that describes women who were aware of same-sex desires early on in life and another that considers transitions in attractions and desires later in life.

Many women do not progress through all of the traditional stages of sexual identity development models. This does not mean they have incomplete identities. This has been one criticism of traditional stage models that the last stage always equals success or completeness (Peplau & Garnets, 2000). This may not always be true. Regardless, social pressures may bring sexual identity completion to a halt; these women feel forced to marry men and give in to the heterosexist attitude that is pervasive in our society (Peplau & Garnets, 2000). Other women discover and explore same-sex attractions spontaneously or later in life, not having same-sex desires at any previous point (Diamond, 2007). These women experience genuine heterosexual trajectories and make sometimes sudden transitions to same-sex desires and sexual experiences with women. These women are not confused; they may have once loved men and been heterosexually married, but are now truly in love with women and are interested in committing to them at a deeper level, such as marriage (Diamond, 2007). Simply because their same-sex desires and transitions experiences do not occur in a traditional fashion, does not mean that their experiences should not be considered any less notable (Diamond, 2007).

Sexual Orientation

Sexual orientation is defined as the consistent enduring pattern of sexual desire for the same-sex, opposite sex, or both sexes (Diamond, 2008b). Someone who would consider oneself a heterosexual would be someone whose sexual orientation is towards

individuals of the opposite sex. This orientation is the majority in society. The current

slang term for heterosexuals is straight (Rosenthal, 2013). Homosexuals, on the other

hand, are individuals who are attracted to individuals of the same-sex (Bates, 2010). This

orientation is currently the minority. What is more contemporarily used are the terms *gay*

and *lesbian* referring to homosexual men and women, respectively, though the term *gay*

is also used to describe homosexual women (Rosenthal, 2013). A bisexual person is an

individual who is sexually attracted to both men and women to varying degrees (Bates,

2010).

Some individuals believe that bisexuality is its own sexual orientation while

others believe that it is simply part of the continuum between homosexuality and

heterosexuality (Rosenthal, 2013). There is very limited research in the area of

bisexuality because of its ambiguity, although Diamond (2008b) suggested that

individuals with bisexual attractions outnumber those with same-sex attractions,

especially women. This concept of female sexual fluidity will be discussed later in this

chapter.

Historically, sexual orientation was considered an all or nothing phenomenon

where one was either straight or gay. Kinsey, in 1948, contested that philosophy,

believing that sexual orientation occurred on a continuum with a lot of gray areas (Kinsey

et al., 1953). Kinsey's orientation scale assembles sexual behavior on a continuous scale

where 0 represents exclusively heterosexual behavior, 3 represents a combination of

heterosexual and homosexual behavior, and 6 represents exclusively homosexual

behavior (Diamond, 2008b). Individuals are asked to rate themselves based on sexual

behaviors only. The limitation of this scale is that it did not take into account a person's emotional attachment or sexual identity, which may be different from one's sexual behaviors (Coleman, 1987). It also did not consider any changes or outside influences that occur in an individual's life (Rosenthal, 2013).

Regardless, Kinsey fought the traditional dichotomous paradigm of either/or. In fact, human experience generally does not fit into just one or two discrete categories (Garnets, 2002). Other measures have been created to assess variability in sexual orientation, including Klein's sexual orientation grid, or KSOG (Klein, Sepekoff, & Wolf, 1985). This measurement considers sexual behavior, sexual fantasies, sexual attraction, social preference, emotional preference, lifestyle preference, and self-identity (Klein et al., 1985). Klein et al. found that for some individuals sexual behavior can change at different times in one's life and one's sexual identity may not correspond to one's sexual behavior.

Though I discuss homosexual identity development in detail, it is important to briefly discuss heterosexual identity development. It is important to acknowledge that some of the women in this study may have developed heterosexually at one point in their lives. Most of the literature focused on homosexual identity development but there have been some models in the past 2 decades that have attempted to conceptualize heterosexual identity development (Fassinger and Miller, 1996; Klein, 1990; Marcia, 1987; Sullivan, 1998).

Using previous models, Worthington, Savoy, Dillon, and Vernaglia (2002) developed a more complex model. They defined heterosexual identity development "as

the individual and social processes by which heterosexually identified persons acknowledge and define their sexual needs, values, sexual orientation and preferences for sexual activities, modes of sexual expression, and characteristics of sexual partners" (Worthington et al., 2002, p. 510). Worthington et al. included in this definition acknowledgement that heterosexual identity development requires an understanding that heterosexuality is the dominant and oppressive majority group which brings with it a particular set of attitudes, beliefs, and values.

Worthington et al.'s model of heterosexual identity development suggests that an individual progresses through identity development while being influenced biologically, psychologically, and socially. Two reciprocal and parallel processes occur: (a) an individual recognizes and accepts his sexual needs, values, sexual orientation, and preferences, and (b) the individual recognizes oneself as a member of a social group of individuals with similar sexual attitudes (i.e. heterosexual identity) and attitudes towards sexual minority groups (Worthington et al., 2002). During these parallel processes, individuals experiences five identity development stages, (a) unexplored commitment, (b) active exploration, (c) diffusion, (d) deepening and commitment, and (e) synthesis (Worthington et al., 2002). These stages can occur at various times so sexual identity development should be seen as fluid and flexible with multiple trajectories and various outcomes (Worthington et al., 2002).

Numerous factors are significant in sexual identity development including biology, microsocial context, gender norms and socialization, culture, religious orientation, and systemic homonegativity, sexual prejudice, and privilege. This model of

heterosexual identity development appreciates influences that previous models did not. It considers the impact of social identity processes, group membership affiliations, and heterosexual privilege with identity statuses (Worthington et al., 2002).

Currently there is no scientific or social consensus on the group of experiences that are suitable to define as gay, lesbian, or bisexual. In fact, there is still much debate surrounding a lot of the terminology in the field. This makes it very difficult to study certain concepts and certain people. As a result Diamond (2008b) believes that those who do not fit as exclusively heterosexual or exclusively homosexual often get left out of the research. Being bisexual, unlabeled, or questioning, are not labels that fit into the traditional binary system and are therefore under examined and under reported (Diamond, 2008b).

Due to recent perspectives that have contested historical models of sexual orientation formation, there is much debate on whether or not sexual orientation is fixed and developed early in life, or if sexual orientation is more fluid and continuous, particularly in the case of women. Most research done in the past that has attempted to understand the causes of homosexuality have been conducted on men by other men (Mustanski, Chivers, & Bailey, 2002). The experiences of sexual orientation, however, may be very different for men and women (Baumeister, 2000; Peplau, Spalding, Conley, & Veniegas, 1999). It is important to acknowledge the inconsistencies in this research and that very little conclusive evidence has been found. The variability in sexual attractions, desires, and behaviors, cannot be fully accounted for in these biological, genetic, and developmental perspectives.

Female Sexuality and Homosexuality

Historical Trends

Only recently has conversation begun and research been conducted on female sexuality and sexual orientation. For quite some time, women were not considered sexual beings. Victorian attitudes of the 19th century constructed women to be "sexually disinterested" (Garnets & Peplau, p. 185, 2000). Women were not sexual beings unless they were aroused by a man; a penis was essential for sex (Bem, 1993). Sex between women was therefore, unheard of, and laws were put in place in England in 1885, making homosexuality a crime (Garnets & Peplau, 2000). Sexologists Richard von Krafft-Ebing (1908/1950) and Havelock Ellis (1897/1928) in the early 20th century were highly influenced by this Victorian view of female sexuality. They theorized that women who were sexually attracted to other women were not real women if all women were to be considered asexual (Garnets & Peplau, 2000; Peplau et al., 1999).

The term *sexual invert* was developed to label these supposed masculine women, who were believed at the time to have biological deficiencies (Garnets & Peplau, 2000). This *inversion theory*, as it was called, proposed three views of female sexuality. The first was that all heterosexual women were feminine while all lesbians were masculine. The second was that heterosexuality was a normal orientation while homosexuality was a perverse and neurotic condition. The last view was that sexual orientation was stable and determined at birth (Garnets & Peplau, 2000; Peplau et al., 1999).

The 20th century shifted ideas about women and female sexuality (Garnets & Peplau, 2000). It brought about the opportunity for Western women to have greater

financial and social autonomy, full citizenship, participation in higher education, paid, full-time employment, and other social and economic advancements (Garnets & Peplau, 2000). Major advances in reproductive technology have also played a role in women's increasing independence over their bodies, allowing for reliable forms of birth control. Sexuality, which was once a very private matter, became a public discussion and a significant part of a woman's social identity (Garnets & Peplau, 2000). Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic theory disagreed with a biological cause of sexual orientation. Instead, his assumption was that heredity along with parental behaviors and dysfunction in early childhood (i.e. fathers who were distant and mothers who were overbearing) were the causes of homosexuality (Garnets & Peplau, 2000; Rosenthal, 2013).

Later, the work of Kinsey et al. (1953) and Masters and Johnson (1966) confronted the view of women's asexuality. According to these researchers women were found to be capable of sexual arousal and that there were, in fact many variations in female sexual expression (Garnets & Peplau, 2000). More scientific methods began to take form in the study of women's sexuality, shifting from the use of biased, subjective data to objective, rigorous material (Garnets & Peplau, 2000). An important historical landmark occurred in the year 1973 when the American Psychiatric Association revoked homosexuality as a mental disorder in its Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (2nd ed.; Bringaze & White, 2001; Garnets & Peplau, 2000). After this shift in 1973, homosexuality was only considered a disorder if the individual was distressed by their same-sex attractions and wanted to become heterosexual (Rothblum & Cole, 1989). In 1987, homosexuality was removed altogether as a diagnosis (Rothblum & Cole, 1989).

This helped pave the notion that homosexuality was not pathological, but simply a variance in sexuality.

A brief history of attitudes and historical events in sexuality has shown that interest has increased in the subject but that stereotypes and inaccuracies were major obstacles. It is important to recognize the historical context of the perceptions of women and sexual minorities as they were very different than they presently are. Great strides in appreciating female sexuality and understanding of the lives of gays and lesbians were made over these periods of time.

Social Movements

In addition to historical landmark events, important social contexts paved the way for more conversation about female sexuality and homosexuality. Society's lack of understanding regarding sexual orientation changed drastically in the last part of the 20th century (Galatzer-Levy & Cohler, 2002). A large part of that was due to the significant social movements that occurred during this time. Second-wave feminism, feminist action that began in the early 1960's in the United States, helped bring gender inequality issues to the forefront. These issues included female sexual expression and freedom, reproductive rights, the family, and the workplace (Garnets & Peplau, 2000). Feminists believed that the current beliefs regarding female sexuality enhanced strict, traditional gender roles, and encouraged gender inequality (Garnets & Peplau, 2000).

Not soon after, a gay/lesbian rights movement was propelled in 1969 in the United States. This effort served to protect legal rights of lesbians and gay men in the workplace, military, child custody, adoption, and foster are (Garnets & Peplau, 2000). It

also helped to highlight the biases against sexual minorities, reduce marginalization within social institutions, and help produce cohesive social identities for those out of the heterosexual norm (Garnets & Peplau, 2000).

A monumental event occurred on June 28th, 1969 when patrons of a gay bar, the Stonewall Inn, in New York City's Greenwich Village, stood up and fought back against a police raid on the bar (Galatzer-Levy & Cohler, 2002). The police attempted to catch men and women engaging in homosexual behaviors, including dancing with the same-sex, which at the time was considered illegal (Galatzer-Levy & Cohler, 2002). Many believe that these Stonewall riots marked the beginning of the gay liberation movement (Olson, 2011). Following this attack, many men and women began to stand up self-affirmed with gay and lesbian labels, replacing shame with pride and refusing to back down to judgment and negativity (Olson, 2011). Gay men and women discovered solidarity and a visibility they hadn't had before, and they began to grow as a minority community (Olson, 2011).

The gay/lesbian movement and the outcomes surrounding the Stonewall riots helped pave the way for public disclosure of sexual orientation (Olson, 2011). The next three decades following the events at Stonewall Inn, were dramatically different for gays and lesbians and drastically changed beliefs about sexuality and sexual identity (Galatzer-Levy & Cohler, 2002). The ability to form a positive, healthy gay identity was now possible; same-sex socioerotic identity, according to Sullivan, was seen as practically normal (as cited in Galatzer-Levy & Cohler, 2002).

The second-wave feminist movement, the gay/lesbian rights movement, and the Stonewall Riots, were noteworthy social actions that changed the way the public saw both women and homosexuals. Females and sexual minorities finally had significant public opportunities to stand up for their rights and take a stand against the prejudice and discrimination they had been facing. Their actions paved the way for the visibility and priority of women's and sexual minorities' rights.

The Development of Sexual Orientation

Biological, Genetic, and Developmental Perspectives

Over the years, attempts to understand the origin of sexual orientation, more specifically, homosexuality, were of particular interest to scientists. Since heterosexuality was considered the norm, any deviation from that sparked interest and curiosity. Researchers in various fields, attempted to find the answer for being gay. Researchers from biology, genetics, and psychology, all had their own perspectives.

Biological influences on sexual orientation are limited and have been conducted primarily on men (Garnets, 2002). Krafft-Ebing lead people to believe in the inversion theory, that homosexuality resulted from a biological abnormality and was pathological in nature (Peplau et al., 1999). Ellis (1928) continued this belief by hypothesizing that prenatal hormones were influential (as cited in Peplau et al., 1999). These assumptions lead many people to believe that biology played a primary role in the development of homosexuality.

An initial study done by Henry in 1948 attempted to discover major physiological differences in the masculinity and femininity of lesbians and heterosexual women (as

cited in Peplau et al, 1999). Results were inadequate and conflicting. Later, adult hormone levels were hypothesized to be correlated with women's sexual orientation and that lesbians would have hormonal patterns similar to men (Banks & Gartell, 1995; Meyer-Bahlburg, 1984). Though there were slight reported differences in early studies, recent replications with more rigorous methods have found no significant differences between the hormone levels of adult lesbian women and adult heterosexual women (Dancey, 1990).

Prenatal hormone research has presented a different story is attempting to understand sexual orientation. An examination of women with congenital adrenal hyperplasia (CAH), an uncommon genetic disorder that prenatally exposes them to androgens, found mixed results (Zucker, Bradley, Oliver, Blacke, Fleming, & Hood, 1996). Comparing sexual experiences of CAH women with their non-CAH sisters, researchers found no major differences in sexual orientation except for a slight increase (27%) in reported bisexual fantasies for women with CAH.

Meyer-Bahlburg and his colleagues (1995) attempted to re-create this study using a population of women who were prenatally exposed to DES, a medicine pregnant mothers were given in the 1940s through 1960's to prevent miscarriages (Meyer-Bahlburg, Ehrhardt, Rosen, Gruen, Veridiano, Vann, & Neuwalder, 19995). DES was known to contain hormones that had a masculinizing effect on the fetus' brain (Meyer-Bahlburg et al., 1995). Ninety-seven women exposed to DES were compared to control groups. Similar results to Zucker's research were found: only slight non-significant increases in bisexuality were found (Meyer-Bahlburg et al., 1995).

The maternal immune hypothesis presented by Bogaert (2005) proposes that a pregnant woman's immune system is affected if she is carrying a male; a male fetus alters particular proteins in her immune system, thereby changing prenatal brain development of succeeding male fetuses only. This assumption has been supported by studies that have found that the more older brothers a man has, the higher his changes of being gay (approximately a 33% increase in probability) (Blanchard & Bogaert, 1996; Blanchard, Cantor, & Bogaert, Breedlove, & Ellis, 2006).

Prenatal hormones have been found to relate to physical anatomy, such as bone growth. Williams and his colleagues tested the 2D:4D ratio, index fingers (2D) are roughly the same length as the ring fingers (4D) of women, but for men, the index finger is shorter (Williams et al., 2000). They suggested that prenatal exposure to androgens (the "male" hormone), would affect ring size. Indeed it was found that for lesbians, the 2D:4D ratio was similar to that of men (Williams et al., 2000).

One of the most influential theories of a biological base of sexual orientation is the neuroendocrine theory proposed by Ellis and Ames (1987). The two suggest that exposure to certain prenatal hormones while in the womb, affect the development of particular brain structures thereby influencing sexual orientation (Peplau et al., 1999). "Sexual orientation in all mammals is primarily determined by the degree to which the nervous system is exposed to testosterone, its metabolite estradiol, and to certain other sex hormones" (Ellis & Ames, 1987, p 248). Contradictory findings and inconclusive results have been unable to solidify the validity of this theory. It is possible that even if

neuroendocrine influences do play a role, it may be only for certain individuals as certain areas of male and female brains are very different (Diamond, 2008b).

A controversial study was conducted by Simon LeVay in 1991 where he attempted to find consistent differences between brain structures of heterosexuals and homosexuals (Peplau et al., 1999). He hypothesized that the nuclei in the hypothalamus of the brain was smaller in individuals who were attracted to men (gay men and heterosexual women), and larger in individuals who were attracted to women (heterosexual men and homosexual women) (Peplau et al., 1999). LeVay looked at the brains of 41 cadavers (16 presumed heterosexual men, 6 presumed heterosexual women, and 19 presumed gay men).

LeVay made assumptions about homosexual women but his research was conducted with gay males only. One area of the hypothalamus (INAH-3) appeared to be two times as big in heterosexual men than in heterosexual women and gay men (LeVay, 1991). Though one of his hypotheses was supported, it is important to note that these individuals were presumed to be of the sexual orientations they self-reported, and it does not mean that this smaller brain structure is directly related to sexual orientation (Rosenthal, 2013). This finding has been reported as the discovery of a gay gene, though many remain skeptical about the methods used and the direct causation to sexual orientation (Peplau et al., 1999).

Numerous researchers have examined the genetic influences of sexual orientation. Bailey and Pillard (1991) used concordance rates to determine the sexual orientations of gay men and women and their siblings. They found a probable genetic component to

sexual orientation in that those who had an identical twin who was gay or lesbian had approximately a 50% chance of also being gay. It is difficult to determine if this number is a result of genetic similarities or a more social factor, like spending a significant of time with one another. Percentages decreased drastically with fraternal twins and non-twin siblings (Bailey & Pillard, 1991). These concordance rates, though telling, demonstrate there is more to sexual orientation development than just genetics.

A much larger twin study conducted in Sweden found that genetics played an even lesser role in gay men's sexual orientation (approximately 34-39%) (Langstrom, Rahman, Carlstrom, & Lichtenstein, 2010). This percentage was much lower for female sexual orientation at 18-19% (Langstrom et al., 2010). These researchers concluded that environmental influences had a much larger effect on sexual orientation than genetics. Over the years numerous scientists have attempted to find a gay gene, to no avail. However, a recent study by Camperio-Ciani, Cermelli, & Zanzotto (2008) did find a connection to two specific genes, one of which lies on the X chromosome. This appears to play a role in male homosexuality only (Camperio-Ciani et al., 2008).

More than a half a century of biological research has failed to conclusively demonstrate influences in the development of sexual orientation. This seems to be especially true for females who have been left out of the research and whose results have been significantly different from their male counterparts. It appears that there may be a genetic component to sexual orientation, though research is only currently able to show a minimal role. Same-sex attractions are likely to not be entirely genetic or biological, but rather formed from a combination of forces.

Psychosocial theories take a very different stance than those previously discussed. Proponents of psychosocial theories believe that sexual orientation is learned or formed from environmental influences. Freud and his psychoanalytic theory believed homosexuality was formed by early childhood experiences. More specifically, a male became gay as a result of emotionally distant or weak fathers and overbearing mothers (Rosenthal, 2013). Parental behaviors played the primary role in determining one's sexual orientation later on in life. Despite the popularity of his claims at the time, no empirical evidence has ever supported this theory.

Learning theorists suggest that simple operant conditioning and classical conditioning principles are primary in determining one's sexual orientation. Individual's associate reinforcement or punishment to particular behaviors. An individual may become homosexual if he had bad heterosexual experiences, then associating heterosexuality with punishment and homosexuality with reinforcement (Rosenthal, 2013). In order for this theory to be true, it would mean that every heterosexual who has a bad heterosexual experience or series of bad heterosexual experiences, becomes homosexual as a result. This is simply incorrect. To this day there has yet to be one social factor that has been found to determine same-sex attraction on its own (Rosenthal, 2013).

Another developmental perspective, "Exotic becomes Erotic", was originally proposed by Daryl Bem in 1996 (Bem, 1996). This theory suggested that gender nonconformity in childhood played a major role in the development of sexual orientation; girls who preferred more masculine activities and boys who preferred more feminine activities would end up with homosexual orientations (Bem, 1996). Empirical evidence

in support of this theory is weak, particularly for females (Garnets & Peplau, 2000). These studies were done retrospectively, lending itself to much error due to bias and memory decay (Bem, 1996; Garnets & Peplau, 2000). In addition, much research supports the fact that interests in childhood do not dictate sexual preference. Bailey and Zucker (1995) found that in a meta-analysis of 16 studies, a majority of girls who were tomboys, even those with extreme masculine interests, later ended up with heterosexual orientations. Burn, O'Neil, & Nederend (1996), found that about half of American girls and women retrospectively called being tomboys in childhood. Yet, only 3% of adult women report being lesbians (Laumann, Gagnon, Michael, & Michaels, 1994). The numbers do not add up. In order to fully support this theory, more longitudinal studies are needed in order to follow girls into adolescence and young adulthood. Retrospective reports are inconclusive.

Similar to biological influences, childhood experiences tend to have a larger and more effective role on male sexuality than female sexuality (Baumeister, 2000). In addition, these theories do not fully account for the development of one's sexual orientation. The origin of homosexuality has not yet been found though research in the area continues. However, it is still uncertain if the origins of sexual orientation, regardless of the type, are not biological or genetic at all, but something else entirely. Though evidence points to a biological predisposition, nothing conclusive has been discovered.

Perspectives on Same-Sex Sexual Orientation Formation

Developmental Stage Models

In recent years, several stage models have been proposed to explain the development of a gay and lesbian identity. These models develop from an essentialist perspective, the philosophy that one forms a homosexual identity by first becoming aware of their genuine sexual orientation then naturally progressing to a homosexual identity by acting upon these true desires (Horowitz & Newcomb, 2001). Stage theorists believe identity formation is an evolving, linear process that occurs in particular stages (Bringaze & White, 2001). Sexual identity development is defined simply as the process by which sexual minorities come to recognize their sexual orientation (Diamond, 2000).

The first and most influential model to explain this process was developed by Vivienne Cass in 1979. Cass's model consisted of six stages of identity formation, all of which, she believed, were experienced sequentially. Her stages were developed from experiences of gay men only. She believed that children are raised in a heterosexual society and that the beginning of their personal questioning starts with an incongruence, where they realize their perceptions of themselves are different from the perceptions others have of them (Cass, 1979). Stage 1 of her model is titled Identity Confusion; this is when the individual feels confusion about being different as he is becoming aware of sexual attractions and tendencies that are not heterosexual in nature.

Stage 2, Identity Comparison, is when the individual begins to compare himself to heterosexual peers, and create an inclination he may have a different identity. This leads to feelings of seclusion and concern about being gay in a heterosexual world (Cass,

1979). Stage 3 is Identity Tolerance where the individual starts to accept he may be gay and attempts to build a network of gay peers for support. Additionally one begins to tolerate, though not accept, his sexual orientation. Stage 4 is when the individual finally accepts himself. This stage is titled Identity Acceptance (Cass, 1979). The individual may tell selective others of their new discovery.

Identity Pride is Stage 5. The individual advances to a state of pride regarding his same-sex sexuality. He no longer desires to be heterosexual or pass as heterosexual. It is possible that in this stage a sense of resentment for the heterosexual privilege occurs and anger develops as a result of prejudice and discrimination towards sexual minorities. It is likely that if it hadn't already happened, this would be the time that the individual would publicly come out to family, friends, and others. The final stage of Cass's model is the sixth stage of Identity Synthesis in which the anger and resentment resides and the dichotomy of heterosexuality and homosexuality diminishes in the individual. He is finally able to completely synthesize, or bring together, his sexual identity with all other aspects of his life (Cass, 1979).

On the heels of Cass's work, Troiden created a gay identity model specifically formulated for gay males (1979). His model consisted of four stages of identity formation: Sensitization, Dissociation and Significance, Coming Out, and Commitment (Troiden, 1979). His stages are very similar to Cass's stages though he combines two of them into one for a more simplistic model. One major difference is that in his second stage of dissociation and significance, the gay male may attempt to justify same-sex desires, dissociating himself from these tendencies. Troiden's model cannot be used to

describe the experiences of lesbian women. His work was conducted with gay men only. Women's experiences may be very different.

Coleman (1982), a stage theorist, developed another model for homosexual identity formation. This model was linear and sequential in formation, similar to Troiden (1979) and Cass (1979). The five stages of this theory included Precoming Out, Coming out, Exploration, First Relationship, and Integration (Coleman, 1982).

With the exception of Cass (1979), all stage theorists had conducted models primarily based on gay male's experiences. In 1987, Sophie attempted to fill that gap by developing a model specifically for lesbian identity. This model, similar to Troiden (1979), consisted of four stages of identity development: awareness, testing/exploration, identity acceptance, and identity integration (Sophie, 1987). Sophie believed that identity formation very closely followed these stages in a sequential order. She found some differences from previous research. Women were more likely to enter their first relationship with an individual of the same-sex much later than men. Moreover, she suggested that negative identity may not always occur prior to positive identity (Bringaze & White, 2001).

These stage models have been highly criticized over the years. Though they may be accurate in providing a general framework for sexual identity development (Horowitz & Newcomb, 2001), many believe they are much too linear and simplistic (Horowitz & Newcomb, 2001; Suppe, 1984), do not take into account the social context or situational influences (Troiden, 1984), and that female sexuality, in particular, is much more discontinuous and fluid (Diamond, 2008). These developmental stage models take on an

essentialist perspective, that sexual orientation is fixed, innate, and discovered in adolescence or young adulthood (Horowitz & Newcomb, 2001; Kitzinger & Wilkinson, 1995).

Most research with stage theories often only look at younger populations as a result of this assumption. These stage theories are considered to be much too rigid (Kitzinger & Wilkinson, 1995). They do not consider the idea that identity formation may not happen until later on in life or that women may transition from heterosexuality to lesbianism (Kitzinger & Wilkinson, 1995). Women who label themselves heterosexual early on in life but later identify as homosexual are seen by these theorists as repressed lesbians or lesbians with political mid-life agendas (Kitzinger & Wilkinson, 1995). Others see these individuals as deficient because they do not fit the typical linear trajectory (Horowitz & Newcomb, 2001). This is certainly not the case for most women; it is important to consider perspectives that address the diversity of women's sexual experiences and to research women who differ from the typical developmental trajectory.

Multidimensional/"Fluid" Approaches

In even more recent years, in an attempt to rid the sexual identity research of the male bias, and the rigidity of developmental stage models, researchers have developed new perspectives of sexual identity development that are more fluid, fluctuating, and dynamic in nature (Kitzinger & Wilkinson, 1995). They take on a social constructionist perspective, a philosophy that people "actively construct their identities and perceptions and use their social context to do so" (Horowitz & Newcomb, p. 10, 2001). Sexual identity is seen as much more complex than an early label and a set of behaviors

(Horowitz & Newcomb, 2001). Most of this research has focused on the idea that female's sexual experiences and identity formation are much more variable and subject to change than males (Diamond, 2008a).

These approaches have considered the social context, the significance of group membership, previous relationships, situations, and circumstances (Rosenthal, 2013). They also consider the human desire to categorize and compare (Horowitz & Newcomb, 2001). The concepts of homosexuality, heterosexuality, and bisexuality, are seen as self-constructs that are influenced by one's relationship with the self and with others (Horowitz & Newcomb, 2001). All of these factors must be considered when attempting to understand the multidimensionality of homosexual identity.

Cox and Gallois's homosexual identity model included the social identity perspective (1996). Their model acknowledges the impact of social and individual influences on identity development (Horowitz & Newcomb, 2001). The importance of appreciating the social categorization that humans use to understand who they are in relation to others was a highlight of this model and made it very different from previous approaches (Horowitz & Newcomb, 2001). Cox and Gallois (1996) used two parallel dimensions in their perspective: social identity and personal identity (Horowitz & Newcomb, 2001). Social identity theory is suggested to infer two major processes in sexual identity development (Horowitz & Newcomb, 2001). The first process entails categorizing oneself as homosexual and incorporating this into one's social and personal identity.

This awareness and categorization is based off "sexual behaviors, erotic orientation, emotional attachment, friendship choices, political values, and so forth" (Cox & Gallois, 1996, p. 16). This model set the stage for considering environmental influences on personal sexual identity development. Horowitz and Newcomb call Cox and Gallois's model "refreshing in its reframing of developmental issues and its moving away from stage theories" (2001, p. 7).

Roy Baumeister (2000) believed that work with female sexuality needed to take into account the malleable nature of women's sexual orientations. "The currently available data offer the best guess that male homosexuality is more strongly linked to innate or genetic determinants while female homosexuality remains more subject to personal choice and social influence" (Baumeister, 2000, p. 356). This does not mean that a woman chooses her sexual orientation, but rather that her attractions and desires are "unexpected and beyond her control" (Rosenthal, 2013, p. 236). Empirical research has agreed with this statement; differences of the patterns of sexual thoughts, desires, and behaviors, may be related more precisely to gender than sexual orientation (Garnets, 2002).

The sexualities of men and women are different regardless of sexual orientation (Garnets, 2002). Females tend to desire more relational, emotion-based orientation while males tend to desire more casual, body-centered orientation (Peplau, 2001). When it comes to sexual desire, this difference appears to remain the same (Garnets, 2002). In Sear's (1989) study of gay men and lesbians, one gay man described a homosexual as

someone who has sex with the same-sex while one lesbian described a homosexual as someone who has an intimate love for an individual of the same sex.

It has been suggested that love and intimacy may be more important in understanding female sexuality in comparison to male sexuality (Peplau & Garnets, 2000). Men are more likely to sexualize while women were more likely to romanticize the experience of sex (Regan & Berscheid, 1996, p. 116). Emotional intimacy is of utmost importance in women's sexual experiences (Peplau & Garnets, 2000). These thoughts seem to exemplify gender differences in perceiving and understanding sexuality.

Baumeister (2000) suggested that there were gender differences in what he called *erotic plasticity*. He defined *plasticity* as the "degree to which a person's sex drive can be shaped and altered by cultural and social factors, from formal socialization to situational pressures" (p. 348). His belief was that stage theorists, particularly in the case of women, had it all wrong. Female sexuality, especially, is subject to change and may not be rigidly structured and invulnerable to outside influences (Peplau & Garnets, 2000). It is, in fact, influenced strongly by sociocultural contexts and is not predominantly determined by one's biological makeup (Baumeister, 2000). Baumeister had three predictions in his paradigm: if sexuality is plastic and fluid, it may be guided by a variety of social and situational factors (Baumeister, 2000). He found substantial evidence to support the influence of education, religion, and culture on aspects of female sexuality (Baumeister, 2000).

Laumann and his colleagues (1994) conducted the National Health and Social Life Survey and found that men who identified as gay or bisexual were twice as likely to

have completed college. A 90% increase occurred in women who completed college and identified as lesbian or bisexual (Laumann et al., 1994).

Baumeister's second prediction in his new perspective was that erotic plasticity would allow for the possibility of having nonexclusive attractions towards both men and women across the lifespan (Baumeister, 2000). More specifically this would allow a woman to change her sexual identity labels over a period of time. It appears that this assumption has been found to be true and that women's labels (homosexual, heterosexual, bisexual) can vary over time (Baumeister, 2000).

In one study, 77% of 6,935 self-reported lesbians in the United States disclosed their experiences with one or more male sexual partners in their lifetime (Diamant, Schuster, McGuigan, & Lever, 1999). Simply because a woman labels herself in a particular manner at a particular time does not mean her sexual past is parallel (Peplau & Garnets, 2000). This may not be true for all women, but it is important to acknowledge the capacity for change for some women (Diamond, 2000). Female sexuality is also largely dependent on historical and cultural contexts (Peplau & Garnets, 2000).

Baumeister's third and final prediction pertinent to sexual fluidity concerns attitude-behavior consistency (Baumeister, 2000). If women's behaviors are more varied and fluid then there is a higher likelihood their behaviors will not always match their initial attitudes (Baumeister, 2000). Though some women may report consistencies in their identity, desires, and behaviors, it is likely that this is not true for all women; her perceptions, labels, attractions, and actions, may not always align. In comparison to men,

women are much more likely to disclose attractions to women without having had sexual encounters with them (Laumann et al., 1994).

Recent research has also examined the role of gender in partner choice (Garnets, 2002). The belief that an individual's gender is the only criterion for attraction to a partner has come into question (Garnets, 2002). Rust (2000) described this phenomenon as bisexuality while Diamond (2008a) referred to them as *person centered attractions.* Nonetheless the basic idea is that certain individuals have the potential to desire "the person, not the gender" (p. 172). Such individuals assert that they can respond erotically to anyone whom they create a strong emotional connection and that the gender of that individual is irrelevant to their attraction (Diamond, 2008). Data pertaining to bisexual men and women seem to validate this claim (Garnets, 2002). Bisexuals appear to be less restricted to gender in choosing a partner and look for individuals with desirable personalities (Garnets, 2002; Diamond, 2008a).

These attractions completely dissolve traditional models of sexuality as they reveal that individuals have the potential to be flexible and fluid (Diamond, 2008a). This phenomenon had been discovered years before. Blumstein and Schwartz (1977) identified person-centered attractions as primarily a female concept. Nonetheless they noted that for some, sexual desire is based on the context of the relationship itself and not on an initial preference for a man or a woman (Diamond, 2008a).

In Blumstein and Schwartz's research, the role of other physical cues (i.e. companionship, intimacy, admiration) seemed to be more pertinent to female sexuality than to male sexuality, which was largely based on physical characteristics and acts

(Diamond, 2008a). Researchers studying bisexuality in San Francisco a decade later in the 1980's discovered the same phenomenon: men and women who "had disconnected gender from sexual desire" (Diamond, p. 173, 2008a). These researchers called it *open gender schema* (Diamond, p. 173, 2008a). There is potential that future researchers will try to decipher if these person-centered attractions could constitute a separate fourth sexual orientation or if they are simply "an independent characteristic all individual possess, in greater or lesser degree" (Diamond, 2008a, p. 188). Regardless of its future, present thoughts on the matter suggest it is quite possible for this sexual fluidity to be the case for many women in their lives.

This female sexual fluidity has been an increasingly hot topic in the world of female sexuality. Fluidity in sexual identity is described as the shifts in labels applied to one's sexual orientation over certain periods of time whereas fluidity in sexual attraction implies change at the sexual orientation itself (Diamond, 2000). Diamond interviewed 80 women between the ages of 18 and 25 years about their sexual identity development, over a span of two years. At the initial assessment, all participants claimed a nonheterosexual orientation or refused to label themselves. Results were statistically significant.

Diamond found that 61% of participants changed their sexual identity labels more than once since the initial assessment (Diamond, 2000). Twenty four percent of lesbians reported sexual contact with men over a 2-year period while still maintaining their sexual identity label (Diamond, 2000). One woman described her current identity during an interview, "I don't know—I don't really feel like I'm bisexual. I feel like I'm a lesbian

involved with a man. Of course, people just don't accept that. But all of my other attractions are for women, and I feel like this is sort of an exception" (Diamond, 2000, p. 248). The presumption that sexual identity dictates attraction and behaviors and is stable over time appears to be unfitting for the women in this study (Diamond, 2000).

Sexual attractions appeared to shift more dramatically for bisexual-unlabeled women but changes were relatively small. Diamond suggests that sexual identities and behaviors tend to be particularly fluid (2000). Diamond's sample was limited to primarily White, middle-class and highly educated women. These narrow demographics certainly limit the generalizability of these findings. Additionally, this study only included younger sexually minority women between the ages of 18 and 25 who had all admitted to questioning their sexual identity prior to the study. Some sexual minority women do not question their sexual identity until middle or late adulthood (Kitzinger & Wilkinson, 1995). Their reports on identities, attractions, and behaviors may be dramatically different.

In 2003, Lisa Diamond conducted a study to determine if sexual minority women who had abandoned their sexual minority label over a 5 year period had different developmental backgrounds, attractions, and behaviors, than sexual minority women who did not change their sexual minority label (Diamond, 2003). Eight nonheterosexual women between the ages of 18 and 25 were initially interviewed at intake, and two follow up interviews were conducted two and five years later (Diamond, 2003). Almost 50% of women changed their sexual identity label from interview one to interview three. Half returned to their heterosexual identities while the other half stopped labeling

themselves altogether (unlabeled). Twenty-two of the 80 women abandoned their lesbian/bisexual identities for heterosexual or unlabeled identities. Two women shifted from unlabeled identities to heterosexual identities and shifted again back to unlabeled identities at the final interview (Diamond, 2003). Diamond's sample was small, convenient, and largely nonrepresentative. This study, because it was only conducted with women, cannot be generalized to men (Diamond, 2003).

In a different study, Diamond examined the potential for a typology in an attempt to create "alternative criteria for sexual categorization" (p. 119) and to differentiate between subtypes of same-sex sexuality. From her previous findings in 2000, she discovered changes in lesbian identification over the selected time periods and wanted to create a useful typology in categorizing these differences (Diamond, 2005). The term *stable lesbians* were given to those women who had consistently maintained a lesbian identity label over the 8-year period. Those who fluctuated between lesbian and nonlesbian labels were given the term *fluid lesbians*. For the women who never once acknowledged a sexual minority identity label, the term s*table nonlesbian* was applied to them (Diamond, 2005).

Applying these terms and definitions to her previous research findings, Diamond not surprisingly found that stable lesbians had the largest amount of same-sex attractions, fluid lesbians with the second largest amount, and stable nonlesbians with the least amount. Fluid lesbians also had more physical and emotional same-sex attractions than did the nonlesbians over the specified time period of 8 years. However, fluid lesbians had less same-sex attractions than the stable lesbians. Stable lesbians reported the most same-

sex sexual contact and had the highest percentage of romantic relationships in comparison to fluid lesbians and stable nonlesbians. Stable lesbians experienced much less change in their sexual behavior than either of the other two categories (Diamond, 2005). Her work is not meant to replace existing terms used for sexual orientation, but rather to consider the possibility of creating more distinct sexual categorizations for sexual minority women.

A 10-year longitudinal study was later conducted again by Lisa Diamond in 2008. Including five waves of assessments with 79 nonheterosexual women, Diamond examined the stability and transformation in bisexual and lesbian women's attractions, behaviors, and identities (Diamond, 2008b). In total, 32% of women changed identity labels from Interview 1 to Interview 2, 25% changed identity labels from Interview 2 to Interview 3, 30% changed identity labels from Interview 3 to 4, and 28% changed identity labels from Interview 4 to Interview 5 (Diamond, 2008b). In the 10 year span, collectively more than 67% had changed their identity labels at least one and 36% had changed identity labels more than once. Bisexual women had the largest changes in their sexual attractions over this time period. Bisexual women were also more likely to have sexual contact with men than the lesbian and unlabeled women (2008b).

Though Diamond's research helps expand the knowledge base on female sexual fluidity, it is limited in its ability to generalize to all sexual minority or heterosexual women. The sample was predominantly White, highly-educated, and middle class, young in age, and cognizant of their sexual identities early on in life (Diamond, 2008b).

On the heels of Diamond's recent work, Brooks and Quina (2009) investigated the sexual identity patterns of lesbians, bisexuals, and unlabeled women. Two hundred eight non-heterosexual women completed an anonymous online survey about their sexual orientation and beliefs and perceptions regarding their sexual identity (Brooks & Quina, 2009). Results indicated that lesbians had more same-sex attractions, same-sex behaviors, and same-sex emotional attractions than both unlabeled and bisexual women. Unlabeled women reported more emotional attractions to the same sex than bisexual women (46% and 31%, respectively) (Brooks & Quina, 2009).

Lesbians reported the strongest desire for a collective identification, what the authors described as a fully integrated sexual identity with increased social involvement and public disclosure (Brooks & Quina, 2009). Lesbians were significantly more likely than bisexual and unlabeled women to believe that sexual orientation was out of their control and determined by fixed/innate predispositions. This supports the notion that women who consider themselves unlabeled often believe that attractions and desires can change, and that specific, fixed labels do not fit them.

Brooks and Quina's study does not go without limitations. It is difficult to find a representative sample of sexual minorities as they are a small and "partially hidden population" (p. 1040). It is possible then that their findings are not generalizable to all sexual minorities who may be less comfortable sharing their sexual experiences. Their sample was also very politically liberal and more highly educated than the typical population (Brooks & Quina, 2012).

Researchers Steven Mock and Richard Eibach (2012) attempted to expand Diamond's sample by drawing on national longitudinal data from a U.S. sample that included men, women, heterosexual, and sexual minorities. The two studied reports of sexual orientation identity stability and change from a 10 year period. The data came from two waves of the National Survey of Midlife Development in the United States (MIDUS I and II) and the researchers looked for three patterns: heterosexual stability, female sexual fluidity, and bisexual fluidity (Mock & Eibach, 2012). Two-thousand five hundred and sixty participants took part in the survey with 54% female and 46% male. Wave 1 showed 97% claiming a heterosexual identity 1.25% claiming a homosexual identity, and 1.33% claiming a bisexual identity.

As a whole, heterosexuality was found to be the most stable identity label. Bisexuality appeared to be the most unstable identity label for men while heterosexuality and homosexuality were fairly stable (Mock & Eibach, 2012). Homosexual and bisexual women, on the other hand, appeared to be equally unstable while heterosexuality was the only stable identity label. These results reveal a gender difference; sexual orientation identity fluidity is seemingly more of a female phenomenon.

These perspectives on sexual identity development are dramatically different from traditional developmental stage models. These multidimensional approaches consider the concept of fluidity, particularly for lesbian and bisexual women. Anything outside of the dichotomous labels of heterosexuality and homosexuality was seen as ambiguous and erroneous (Diamond, 2005). Female sexuality has the potential for plasticity and nonexclusivity and may vary drastically across the life span.

Coming Out and Disclosure

Being able to personally and publicly identify oneself with a sexual minority label is an important step in identity development. *Coming out* is defined by Galtazer-Levy and Cohler, as "the process of accepting same-gender desire as an aspect of one's identity, telling others, and seeking other's affirmation" (2002, p. 255). This definition has changed numerous times over the years (Galtazer-Levy & Cohler, 2002). Coming out is a short term for *coming out of the closet* which was initially presented by Karl Ulrichs, an LGBT advocate in the 19th century who believed that homosexuals who were open and public about their sexuality would transform popular, often negative, views on homosexuality (Rosenthal, 2013). Being able to acknowledge, accept, and share one's sexual orientation to others has both benefits and risks (Rosenthal, 2013).

Acceptance of one's self and acceptance from others is a pivotal stage for personal integrity and coherence (Galtazer-Levy & Cohler, 2002). Sexual minorities typically come out to supportive friends first, followed by siblings and their mother. Generally the father is the last person to know (Savin-Williams, 2001). In a study conducted by Beals and Peplau (2001), lesbians were most likely to first come out to a best heterosexual female friend (77%) and then a best heterosexual male friend (53%). Lesbians were much more likely to come out to their mothers (43%) than their fathers (23%) (Beals & Peplau, 2001). Consistent with previous research, lesbians in this study were much more likely to come out to friends first and parents last.

Being out does not guarantee acceptance from others. Benefits include being honest and true to oneself and no longer having to deny one's identity and hide one's true

feelings (Rosenthal, 2013). Legate, Ryan, and Weinstein (2001) found that lesbians and gay men who were out reported higher satisfaction in their relationships; more positive work attitudes, and showed slower progression of HIV. For lesbians it appears that disclosing sexual orientation to family and friends, decreases anxiety, and increases self-esteem and positive emotions, like happiness and love (Jordan & Deluty, 1998). Rejection from friends, siblings, and parents, however, is a possibility. A study conducted by D'Augelli and Hershberger (1993) found that 46% of sexual minorities lost at least one friend after they disclosed their sexual orientation to them. Additionally, over a quarter (26%) of young gay males were coerced to leave home after coming out (Edwards, 1997). When one is out, her risk of being a victim of a crime, increases dramatically. Data from the Department of Justice in 2009 reported that almost 30% of hate crimes were directed towards sexual minorities (Rosenthal, 2013).

Despite the challenges of disclosing sexual orientation, gay and lesbian advocates encourage sexual minorities to do so. The philosophy is that the more gays and lesbians who come out, the less societal homophobia there will be. Herek (1986) found that the more positive contact with homosexuals and the more visibility of sexual minorities, the less prejudice there was among heterosexuals. His advice to the gay and lesbian community is to come out.

When and how a person discloses his sexual orientation depends on internal and social factors (Parks, 1999). Education, race, occupation, political stance, and religious views, all play a role in the timing of coming out (Rosenthal, 2013). Floyd and Bakeman (2006) explored the effects of social and historical contexts on the process of coming out

in a sample of 767 participants. Ninety three percent of the respondents reported gay and lesbian identities. Results indicated that respondents who self-identified as children or adolescents engaged in sexual coming out milestones (i.e. consensual same-sex experience, disclosure to mother) earlier in life than those who self-identified in later adulthood (mid-20's) (Floyd & Bakeman, 2006).

Those who came out at a younger age experienced different developmental circumstances than those who came out at an older age. Those who came out in adolescence experienced disclosing at the high school level and under parental authority where those who came out in their mid-20's were likely to be free of parental authority, have more financial and economic opportunities. The youngest respondents appeared to experience the most recent historical context of greater acceptance and more positive attitudes towards the GLBT community. As a result, these respondents reported earlier coming out milestones (Floyd & Bakeman, 2006).

Findings from this previous study were similar to those found in Calzo, Antonucci, Mays, and Cochran's study conducted 5 years later in 2011. The timing of first same-sex attraction was linked to first self-identification and coming out. Those with early trajectories identified their attractions at a younger age, self-identified sooner, and come out earlier (Calzo et al., 2011). The ages of these respondents were also significant; those of younger ages more likely to represent the early trajectory. Older respondents were more likely to follow the middle and late trajectories. They were more likely to have been in a heterosexual marriage than those from the early trajectory (Calzo et al., 2011). These differences represent a potential for multiple influences, including "a complex

combination of individual-and contextual factors" (Calzo et al., p. 1667, 2011). Later onset development could be a result of a closeted sexual identity through much of life, or the appearance of an unexpected same-sex attraction at some point in the life span (Calzo et al., 2011).

Gender differences were found in this study as well. Women, in comparison to men, experienced later first awareness, same-sex experience, and self-identification. Women also reported greater amounts of heterosexual experiences and more bisexual identities (Floyd & Bakeman, 2006). The use of retrospective reports makes it difficult to discern the level of accuracy in reported information for this study. Since data was gathered at a gay pride celebration in Atlanta, Georgia, it is likely that these respondents were much more out and had different characteristics than the typical sexual minority (Floyd & Bakeman, 2006).

Coming out is the process of recognizing, accepting, and expressing one's sexual orientation to others. This process is restricted to anyone who does not identify as heterosexual since heterosexuality is considered the norm (Rosenthal, 2013). Not every sexual minority comes out. The decision to do so depends on many different factors, including those that are personal and those that are social. Pearcey (2005) suggests that coming out is significant but not required for complete assimilation of a gay identity into one's self-concept.

Coming out can be a positive and negative experience and is very different for each individual. Coming out and disclosing one's sexual orientation are significant steps in sexual identity development. It allows one to live freely and be authentic with

attractions, desires, and behaviors. Despite how one identified in the past, coming out

allows one to transition to an appropriate relationship with the same-sex, if desired.

<div align="center">**Positive Supports in Coming Out**</div>

Connecting with Others/Positive Role Models

Research has demonstrated that there are certain variables that positively assist in

the coming out process. Identifying these factors is an integral part of aiding in this phase

of sexual identity development. A study of 262 lesbian women in leadership and public

roles in the lesbian community were investigated to determine what factors supported

healthy, lesbian development in their lives (Bringaze & White, 2001). Findings resulted

in three separate classifications of resources. The first classification found that assisted in

coming out was associating with gays and lesbians. Socializing with gay friends, gay and

lesbian role models, and making contact with individuals in GLBT organizations, was the

primary resource reported. Feelings of isolation and uncertainty occur at the point of

questioning one's sexual minority identity (Bringaze & White, 2001).

It is beneficial for these individuals who are uncertain of themselves, to reach out

to others who are certain of themselves, and who can provide knowledge and information

about the gay and lesbian community. Positive contact with the lesbian community can

help transform negative beliefs about lesbianism (Bridges & Croteau, 1994). Meeting

other lesbian women, joining support groups, attending community events, and utilizing

peer counseling, can also be beneficial (Bridges & Croteau, 1994). This is especially true

for women who were previously immersed in a heterosexual identity. These women may

be feeling particularly isolated and unsure of their new lesbian identities. Creating contact with positive lesbian role models can help build confidence, acceptance, and optimism.

Restructuring Thoughts

Turning damaging views of one's lesbian identity to affirming views can assist in developing a healthy lesbian identity (Bridges & Croteau, 1994). Mentally restructuring one's thoughts about lesbianism is essential in producing a sense of certainty and pride. Instead of continued negative stereotypes, newly identified lesbians can benefit from creating positive views of themselves and the lesbian community. Deconstructing negative attitudes can often lead to personal satisfaction and a sense of achievement (Sala & De La Mata Benitez, 2009). A positive identity will lead to positive psychological adjustment during this period of development (Bridges & Croteau, 1994).

High Self-Esteem

Self-esteem, the extent to which one believes she is worthy, is integral to coming out and accepting one's sexual identity (Peterson & Gerrity, 2006). Those with higher self-esteem generally have more positive perceptions of themselves than those with lower self-esteem. Levine (1997) found that there was a positive correlation between lesbian identity development and self-esteem. According to this study, the better a woman feels about her overall self, the more positive she was about her sexual orientation and the development of her lesbianism. Additional studies to support this conclusion are lacking.

Parental Support and Knowledge

Parents can also assist in the coming out process of their gay and lesbian children. Parents who have contact with the gay and lesbian community and support groups for gay

and lesbian parents (i.e. PFLAG), tend to be more supportive of their children after they come out (Galatzer-Levy & Cohler, 2002). Parents can network with other parents who are going through similar circumstances and learn and share from one another. This helps them feel less isolated, more educated, and more comfortable. Parents can them be more empathetic towards the sexual minority's experiences and be more effective in assisting them through their identity development. Herek (1994) noted that interpersonal contact with gays and lesbians predicted heterosexuals' attitudes towards the LGBT community. This correlation can be applied to anyone, but should be especially considered for parents of children who have recently come out.

Positive and frequent contact with gays and lesbians, gaining knowledge about the GLBT community, and transforming negative views about gays and lesbians to more positive views, are all effective in assisting with creating a positive sexual identity. Additionally, increasing overall self-esteem, feeling good about oneself, and having parents who are supportive, can also assist greatly in the coming out process.

Barriers to Coming Out and Reasons for Heterosexual Marriage

Compulsive Heterosexuality

There are ample amounts of barriers, both personal and social, that interfere with coming out and identifying as a sexual minority. Girls are socialized into a heterosexual society where heterosexuality is the norm and anything different is often invisible or abnormal (Kitzinger & Wilkinson, 1995). This compulsive heterosexuality, as it was first labeled by Adrienne Rich (1980), makes it difficult for girls and women to undertake an identity they were so regularly suggested to avoid. Women are trained to pay attention to

heterosexual cues only and disregard cues associated with emotional attachments to women (Bridges & Croteau, 1994). Being a lesbian is either unheard of or not discussed, or considered perverse and something that should be avoided (Kitzinger & Wilkinson, 1995). Heterosexuality and femininity are expected for females and anything outside of that should be avoided (Kitzinger & Wilkinson, 1995).

Marriage to men was assumed and encouraged; anyone who was unmarried at a certain age was stigmatized (Arendell, 2004). Historically, women married men out of necessity and in order to make ends meet financially. To avoid suffering and deprivation for themselves and their children, many entered into heterosexual marriages. The economic and social environment was not conducive to exploring lesbianism particularly since women were often dependent on men (Green & Clunis, 1989). To avoid being ostracized or seen as abnormal, they went through the motions. Many may have been faithful and tolerant towards the institution of marriage even if their feelings didn't match (Rich, 1980; Menasche, 1999).

To maintain the respect of society and fulfill the traditional gender roles, women married men. There have been and still are many government, medical, tax, and estate planning benefits to marriage (Human Rights Campaign, 2014). It is possible many women married men for access to such benefits that they could not receive otherwise. In other words, commitment at this level potentially occurred as a necessary out of necessity for some. Currently women can marry other women in some areas, so feeling forced to marry the opposite sex has likely diminished.

Heterosexism

Heterosexism is the view that heterosexuality is the only acceptable sexual orientation and that fear and violence towards sexual minorities is justified as a result of this (Blumenfeld, 1992). This belief lends itself to "silencing nonnormative identities, emotions, and desires" (Sala & De La Mata Benitez, p. 829, 2009). The mentality is that anything but heterosexuality is not discussed and therefore does not exist (Sala & De La Mata Benitez, 2009). Heterosexist influence can make it difficult for a woman who is experiencing attraction to women for the first time to understand her feelings. Considering the possibility of being a homosexual can be challenging, particularly if one is unfamiliar with the vocabulary.

One woman describes her inability to process being homosexual because of this compulsive heterosexuality (Sala & De La Mata Benitez, 2009), "My mind couldn't understand it, I had no way of externalizing it, it was like….eh, tut tut, no way, impossible, I didn't have any points of reference" (p. 828). The prevalence of heterosexism can lead to a lack of understanding of one's feelings and the invisibility of one's true sexual orientation within society. For a sexual minority, heterosexism in society can become internalized and result in a denial and hatred of one's true self.

Heterosexism does not affect just women. Higgins (2002) found that more than 65% of his gay and bisexual male respondents got married to women because it was the only thing that seemed natural. Another 65% believed that heterosexual marriage was the only avenue to having children and a family life. They were unaware that anything but heterosexuality would bring them happiness and fulfillment. In fact, 53% married simply

for companionship and another 53% believed that marrying a woman would assist in ridding themselves of homosexual desires (Higgins, 2002). These reasons for heterosexual marriage display the pervasiveness of compulsive heterosexuality, that relations with the opposite sex are the only means to satisfaction and a happy life. They show the strong, yet inaccurate, influence of society on one's belief about a fulfilling life and marriage. Homosexuality was assumed to be impossible in creating a gratifying lifestyle.

Internalized Homophobia

Homophobia can be described as a range of negative attitudes and fears towards sexual minorities. This societal homophobia can become internalized in those who are questioning their sexual identity resulting in shame, guilt, and regret of their genuine attractions and desires. A study of 26 gay and bisexual men who were once in heterosexual marriages indicated a significantly higher level of homophobia during their heterosexual marriage than their current attitudes (Higgins, 2002). This demonstrates that a "conscious negative self-concept" was present (Higgins, 2002, p. 29).

Half of the 26 men identified as gay or bisexual while heterosexually married, and two of the men indicated they felt a moderate to extreme amount of guilt, anxiety, and shame about being gay (Higgins, 2002). Higgins suggests that this internalized homophobia is connected to why gay men marry. Though only two of the 26 indicated internalized shame, it is important to acknowledge that these negative emotions do exist in those who identify as something other than heterosexual, often as a result of society's negative attitudes towards homosexuals.

One gay male shared that he felt bad for being gay as he had internalized his father's negative views of gays (Pearcey, 2005). Another male recalled his desire to feel normal and heterosexual as a kid and hoped that marrying a woman would help rid him of his problem (Pearcey, 2005). Homophobia struck early in life for another gay male participant; he recalled that he was unable to identify his same-sex feelings and make sense of his sexual identity because of the prevalent negative societal attitudes. He felt his bisexuality was socially unacceptable and he rejected his own genuine feelings (Pearcey, 2005).

The stigma associated with having a sexual minority label makes it difficult to transition to one. Lesbians are seen as different and atypical (Menasche, 1999). This stigma is highly difficult to deal with and is easily internalized because of its strength and pervasiveness. Many sexual minorities report having to alter their public lives to fit in and limit the prejudice and discrimination (Menasche, 1999)

Family Expectations and Social Norms

Family values and societal expectations can interfere greatly with identity development for gays and lesbians (Bates, 2010). This appears to be true for those who experienced same-sex feelings in childhood and adolescence. Family and social norms were reported to have hindered exploration of same-sex feelings for 75% of once-married African American women in one study (Bates, 2010). These women reported that they felt forced to repress their thoughts, deny their attractions, and forget about their feelings for the same-sex. They revealed that their family's and community belief systems encouraged heterosexual marriage as a necessary event in one's life (Bates, 2010).

Getting married was an expectation in the African American community; it was normal, developmentally appropriate, and significant (Bates, 2010). One woman admitted that she got married because it was a required natural progression in a relationship in her community (Bates, 2010).

In one study, social and personal expectations were the number one reason for lesbian women to marry men (Wyers, 1987). Another woman admitted that getting married was an opportunity for her to fit in with society while another disclosed that marrying would lessen family turmoil. Many women reported pressures from their mothers to get married (Bates, 2010). The importance of gaining approval from their families added significant pressure to sacrifice their true feelings. Homophobic parents made it particularly difficult for one woman to act upon her desires (Bates, 2010).

Thompson, Forsyth, and Langley (2009) found that for many lesbian women, the inability to disclose their sexual identity came primarily from a fear of rejection from family and friends. Many were afraid to be open about their lesbian identity because of parental rejection and potential conflict (Thompson et al., 2009). One woman admitted that she married a man simply because she sought acceptance from her family while another disclosed that she feared her father's reaction so much, she waited to come out until he passed away (Thompson et al., 2009). More than 82% of the respondents indicated that even though they had already left their heterosexual marriages, they were still afraid to disclose their lesbianism to some family members and friends (Thompson et al., 2009).

A desire to please family and society does not appear to be gender specific. Out of 26 gay and bisexual men who were once heterosexually married, almost 43% got married because of pressures from family and 36% got married because of pressures from girlfriends (Higgins, 2002). One gay male participant in a 2005 study admitted that he was drawn to a particular male friend in childhood but did not label it as sexual or anything worth pursuing because of the anti-gay social climate of the 1950's and 1960's (Pearcey, 2005).

Years later, Tornello and Patterson (2012) found similar results; gay men reported that they married women for social acceptance and pressures from their girlfriends and their families (Lee, 2002). The men also added that they desired that they wanted to have children and entering into a heterosexual marriage seemed to be the easiest way to achieve this goal (Lee, 2002; Higgins, 2002; Tornello & Patterson, 2012). A study of once-married lesbian women indicated the same reason for marriage: a desire to have children (Arendell, 2004). Two men in a 2005 study admitted that they didn't tell their wives about being gay out of fear of losing their homes, their families, and their status in their communities. They were afraid of losing their jobs and destroying their intact families (Pearcey, 2005).

Lack of Role Models

Another obstacle to constructing a new lesbian identity is a lack of role models, or examples, within the GLBT community. Struggling to find points of reference during the identification stage, makes the process that much more of a struggle (Sala & De La Mata Benitez, 2009). If an individual is unable to identify and recognize herself in another

public image, it may increase the likelihood of rejecting her homosexuality. Herek (1994) found that contact with gay men and lesbians as well as suitable gay role models were significant in the timing of coming out.

Higgins (2002) discovered that the absence of positive gay role models play a large role in why gay men may feel pressured to marry women. One gay male disclosed that in the 1960's when he was growing up, no one used the word *gay* (Pearcey, 2005). He admitted that he didn't know a gay person personally and there was no one he could relate to. When being gay was discussed, it was generally negative and included stereotypes and derogatory statements like "faggot…limp-wristed…queer" (2005, p. 25). Positive portraits of homosexuality were lacking and negative stereotypes were pervasive (Higgins, 2002). No role models in the local community and pop culture were in existence in any form, including television, newspaper, and film. Having no one to relate to encouraged gay men to live a heterosexual lifestyle with many role models.

The lack of role models is even true for couples in same-sex relationships; unlike heterosexual couples, same-sex couples do not have numerous points of reference for their own relationships (Spitalnick & McNair, 2005; Boon & Alderson, 2009). This may lead lesbian couples to believe that their relationship issues are related to their sexual orientation and not just general relationship difficulties (Spitalnick & McNair, 2005). Lesbian role models are helpful in assisting lesbians on an individual basis as well as for those in lesbian relationships.

Negative Perceptions of Sexual Minorities

A negative perception about gays and lesbians is an additional hindrance in the development of a positive lesbian identity. Society's negative portrayal of gayness creates struggles with self-definition for sexual minorities (Bridges & Croteau, 1994). The inability to understand what it means to be gay in a positive way creates an internal suffering. Internalized damaging beliefs can lead one to feel adversity towards being gay. These women reported remembering how gays and lesbians they knew were stigmatized and discriminated against and how they felt pressured to conform to a heterosexual lifestyle to avoid this same treatment (Bates, 2010). These women noticed the lack of support and acceptance for sexual minorities.

One woman admits to her stereotypical, negative view of lesbians:

The image I had of a gay woman was the typical butch kind of woman, rejected by everyone, and by society, in general, really negative, you know? I don't know really…because I didn't identify with that image, I rejected it. But right from when I was little, I had the feeling that I might like women or be physically or emotionally attracted by a woman (Sala & De La Mata Benitez, 2009, p. 831).

For many women, especially those who were previously immersed in a heterosexual life may have a very narrow understanding of sexual orientation (Bridges & Croteau, 1994). Their views on sexuality may be restricted, and they may believe that sexual orientation is fixed and one can either be homosexual or heterosexual. These

narrow labels may confuse a woman who once labeled herself heterosexual but who now experiences same-sex attraction.

More than 90% of gay males in one study admitted that they lived straight lives and married women because the gay community appeared to be unhealthy, sleazy, and not viable for personal goals (Pearcey, 2005). They reported having anti-gay attitudes, believing that gay men could not have families and sustain healthy relationships; they felt that those in the gay community were only interested in partying, having sex, and living on the edge. Many men in this study did not believe they could relate to the gay lifestyle even though they themselves privately identified as gay (Pearcey, 2005).

Religious Intolerance

The impact of religion on the acceptance of one's sexual identity was prominent in Bates' (2010) interviews with once-married African-American lesbians. A significant theme that occurred in the identity development and coming out process for these women was the significant influence of religion on their senses of self and their overall identity (Bates, 2010). Of the 83% of the total women in the study ($n =12$) who regularly attended church as children, more than 90% of them disclosed that religion hindered their identity. Views on gender expectations and homosexuality taught by their church produced countless feelings of anger and fear for them (Bates, 2010).

Black churches, in particular, were reported to be very important to their African-American community and demonstrated rigid and traditional values for their members. One woman remembered her Southern Baptist church condemning homosexuality and likening homosexuals to molesters and rapists (Bates, 2010). A Church of Christ member

recalled her religious community teaching that homosexuals should be feared as they were deviant and sick and acting against God's will. Another woman recalled her Jewish congregation's old-fashioned views on love and marriage: a woman was to take care of a man and procreate (Bates, 2010).

Many other women recalled the church's negative attitudes of sexuality having a major impact on their internal struggles with their identities. Many described fear, internal strife, and regret for their same-sex attractions because it was incongruent with religious teachings (Bates, 2010). In order to live authentically, many women admitted to moving away from the church and becoming spiritual instead. They were able to find a sense of peace that they were unable to do so prior.

Higgins (2002) found that religious fundamentalism in one's family was strongly correlated to negative perceptions towards gays and lesbians. The gay men interviewed in this study admitted that the religious views of their family did play a role in their decision to marry a woman; those whose families were tied to more conservative and strict religious views were more likely to get married to a woman than those who were not exposed to such fundamentalist values (Higgins, 2004). Exposure to literal interpretations of religious texts may have created the mentality that marriage between a man and a woman was both necessary and natural (Higgins, 2004).

Repression

A personal barrier to coming out and developing a healthy sexual identity is blocking it out, or repressing one's same-sex desires. This is particularly true for women who had substantial prior heterosexual experiences. About 25% ($n = 19$) of participants in

one study who labeled themselves as lesbian after living a heterosexual life, discussed

how they felt an internal refusal to be a lesbian. One woman admitted that she had fallen

in love with a woman while heterosexually married, but pushed aside her feelings to the

back of her mind because she didn't want to believe that she may be a lesbian.

The thought of answering the question, "Am I a lesbian?" was too hard for many

women, so they instead chose to deny feelings and hide them away (Kitzinger &

Wilkinson, 1995). Numerous strategies were used to avoid answering yes to that

question; some had attempted to bargain with themselves saying they would try the

lesbian lifestyle once the kids were out of the house, while others attempted to buy some

time and postpone their new self-labeling (Kitzinger & Wilkinson, 1995). Repressing

same-sex feelings is often a result of society's belief system of homosexuality; such

behavior is considered bad and should be avoided (Bates, 2010). One lesbian woman

recalled repressing her same-sex feelings for most of her life so that she could have her

family's approval and continue to be affiliated with her community (Bates, 2010).

Personal Resistances

In addition to repressing same-sex attractions and desires, many women in

Kitzinger and Wilkinson's study disclosed their personal reasons for resisting the lesbian

label. Two women titled their strong emotional attachments to particular women as just

good friends. Both were convinced at the time that being in love with a woman was an

impossible notion and they chalked it up to a very strong emotional friendship. Others

resisted the lesbian label by convincing themselves that they were simply experimenting

and that since they were sexually attracted to men too, they surely couldn't be lesbians

(Kitzinger & Wilkinson, 1995).

The belief that lesbians could not have sexual desires for men at all prevented

many to self-identify as lesbians. One woman disclosed her anxiety after her first same-

sex experience: "This doesn't mean I'm a lesbian. I just wanted to try it, and it was nice,

but I don't want to do it again." She admitted that she went out and slept with 5 other

men to prove she wasn't a lesbian (Kitzinger & Wilkinson, 1995, p. 99).

A few women recalled their same-sex experiences in adolescence. They admitted

that those relationships meant nothing to them at the time and they were unable to make

sense of it all. The confusion of labels and lack of understanding of sexual orientation

created the misconception that their same-sex desires were nothing more than an

experiment or a phase. In justifying these experiences, the women were able to move

forward in the heterosexual culture.

Kitzinger and Wilkinson (1995) also found that some women claimed that they

were in love with a person who just happened to be a female and that this didn't

constitute a lesbian label. They believed that being in love with another woman for the

first time did not make them a lesbian, especially if the other woman was not a lesbian

either. To them, being in love with a woman had little to do with the gender, but rather

the relationship itself. It was love but it didn't establish a new sexual identity.

Another personal resistance to lesbianism was the justification that one couldn't

"be a lesbian because I….have children/enjoy cooking/have long hair/can't fix my own

car" (Kitzinger & Wilkinson, 1995, p. 99). Encompassing lesbian stereotypes was a

common strategy to refusing a new sexual identity. Almost 75% of their sample (*n* =57) used these narrow categories to resist any belief of a new label. Since they didn't fit the stereotypical lesbian lifestyle and look, they couldn't be possibly be lesbian themselves.

Not Conscious of Same-Sex Desires

Interviews with once-married gay males and lesbians indicate that many were very unaware of any same-sex attractions until after they had married the opposite sex. Coleman (1985) found that more than half of his female sample was unaware of their bisexual inclinations before their heterosexual marriage. Women who married at especially younger ages, admitted they were not even aware of their same-sex preferences until after they got married (Bridges & Croteau, 1994). Nineteen out of 20 gay males shared that they were not consciously aware of their same-sex attractions and were not consciously deceiving their wives upon marrying them; they did not purposely attempt to manipulate their wives in any way (Pearcey, 2005).

These statements seem true even cross-culturally. In interviews of Filipino gay men in heterosexual unions, having no homosexual attractions prior to marriage was commonly expressed. Many admitted that they later developed a same-sex attraction which resulted in sexual contact with men (Lee, 2002). Some of these men indicated that they were equally attracted to women as they were with men and some mentioned they were more attracted to women than men (Lee, 2002). They weren't sure what to make of these differing attractions and some were quick to explore their homosexuality while others were convinced they were primarily heterosexual (Lee, 2002).

In a study of 45 lesbian and bisexual women, 47% of women admitted they were somewhat aware of their same-sex attractions prior to marriage, and 31% were somewhat aware of their lesbian and bisexual identity (Coleman (1985). Wyers (1987) found similar results: most lesbian wives were unaware of their homosexuality prior to their heterosexual marriage. Only one-fourth of the women admitted that they had a slight inclination of their homosexuality prior to marriage (Wyers, 1987). These statistics reveal that a good majority of women who later identify as lesbian were, in fact, unaware of their same-sex attractions for some time. They also show that women are socialized to ignore even the slightest same-sex attractions and focus solely on opposite-sex attractions.

In Love with the Opposite Sex

There are instances of both men and women who were truly satisfied upon entering a heterosexual union prior to leaving for a same-sex relationship. Many admit that it wasn't until later on in their marriage that they discovered any same-sex attractions. Many women reported marrying because they were truly in love with the opposite sex (Green & Clunis, 1989; Reinhardt, 2011). Behind social expectations, the second highest reason for lesbians marrying men was their love of a future spouse (Wyers, 1987; Arendell, 2004).

Most participants in one study by Bates (2010) admitted that they loved their husbands and found sexual intercourse pleasurable, or at least, tolerable. For gay men, this was the number one reason for marrying a woman; they were genuinely in love with a woman (Wyers, 1987; Lee, 2002). For bisexual men, the same seems to be true: they

married for love. Those men who were still heterosexually married disclosed that despite their current same-sex attractions, they still loved their wives very much and enjoyed straight sex (Edser & Shea, 2002).

Coming Out as Lesbian While Heterosexually Married

According to Buxton (2001) more than two million lesbians, bisexuals, and gay men, have been heterosexually married at one point in their lives. These numbers appear to be increasing in recent years and more and more individuals seem to be disclosing their sexual orientations to spouses. The increase of public GLBT figures and gay and lesbian support groups and organizations have encouraged those who are heterosexually married to explore their same-sex attractions and move forward with these desires (Buxton, 2005). This is particularly true for women who, as of recently, seem to be disclosing more than that of husbands (Buxton, 2004). Coming out is a complex process that, as discussed earlier, has both positive and negative influences. Leaving a marriage is rarely seen as a casual decision and many women struggled to pull away from heterosexual ideologies while being pulled into a new, desirable world (Charbonneau & Lander, 1991).

The negative influences play a large role in why women, who may have questioned their heterosexuality, may feel pressured to enter a heterosexual marriage. It is an ongoing experience that is affected greatly by a variety of personal, familial, and social factors. Such factors include heterosexism and homophobia. Heteronormativity creates an invisible barrier and discourages women from entering into same-sex relationship; this behavior is contrary to the heterosexual norm and is often punished

(Thompson, Forsyth, & Langley, 2009). Nearly half of the lesbian wives disclosed that they received some form of discrimination upon exiting the heterosexual world and labeling themselves as a sexual minority (Wyers, 1987).

Leaving the heterosexual social world and coming out as lesbian is especially difficult for women who are currently experiencing, or have previously experienced, a public heterosexual lifestyle (Colucci-Coritt, 2005). For these particular women who have presented themselves heterosexually, including marrying a man and having children, revealing a lesbian identity is an even more difficult task (Colucci-Coritt, 2005).

For married men and women, coming out was described as a roller coaster of emotions (Arendell, 2004; Pearcey, 2005; Fleischer, 2010). They felt overjoyed with their newfound discovery, scared about leaving the familiar, anxious about the future, and worried about the responses of significant others (Pearcey, 2005). Some women described experiencing "great ambivalence and emotional turmoil," feeling guilty for leaving a marriage but relieved to discover their true selves and move on (Arendell, 2004, p. 6).

Many were very aware about the risks they were taking and what they would be giving up. Fear and uncertainly matched the excitement and euphoria they were experiencing (Arendell, 2004). Married lesbians approach numerous dilemmas upon leaving their heterosexual marriage: whether or not to come out or stay closeted, whether or not to preserve particular relationships or let them go, and how to balance old and new social circles (Kitzinger & Wilkinson, 1995).

A married woman has the extra concerns of hurting her husband, children, and family, along with having to face societal judgment and questioning. Was this woman lesbian her whole life? Did she intentionally deceive her husband? Had she been completely faithful to her husband? If she had been, how would she now know she was a lesbian? Were her same-sex attractions to just one particular woman or women in general? (Charbonneau & Lander, 1991). Some women had not been faithful to their husbands while others were. Many women had suspicions or were fully aware of their lesbianism, while others did not.

Some women report they had always been attracted to the same-sex while others make the transition because of one particular, isolated attraction (Fleischer, 2011). The answers to these questions may be quite diverse and may not be clear-cut for all women; this may make it difficult for many to understand women's actions. It may also lead people to believe that these women are confused or immoral.

The woman must weigh the pros and cons on whether or not to save the marriage as she questions her sexual identity (Fleisher, 2011). The very reason why a particular woman married her husband may very well be the deciding factor on whether or not she decides to stay in the marriage (Thompson, Forsyth, & Langley, 2009). Many gay men and lesbian women wait months and even years to come out to their heterosexual partners. Some don't at all. Some deny it to their spouses who may discover clues about their sexuality, such as e-mails or notes from lovers (Buxton, 2005).

About one-third of couples in mixed-orientation marriages (marriages in one spouse claims a homosexual identity and the other claims a heterosexual identity), decide

to break up their marriage immediately, while the other two-thirds attempted to re-examine and work on their marriage (Buxton, 2005). After about two or three years, more than half of these couples who tried to continue their marriage ended up divorcing (Buxton, 2005). Though some lesbian women decide to stay in their heterosexual marriage, many decide it is best to leave the marriage and explore their new sexual identity on their own (Hernandez, Schewnke, & Wilson, 2011; Tornello & Patterson, 2012).

Transitioning to a Lesbian Identity

Transitioning from the heterosexual to the homosexual world requires reorganization and restructuring of one's public and private life. Fleisher (2011) describes this period as a time of rapid change, where one experiences changes in events, people, feelings, beliefs, and lifestyles. Beginning the divorce process, maintaining old relationships while creating new ones, and experiencing either support or rejection for a new lesbian identity, is quite overwhelming all at once (Thompson, Forsyth, & Langley, 2009). In one of study of 30 lesbian women who had once been heterosexually married, the transition required "reorientation and redirection" (Charbonneau & Lander, 1991, p. 37). Despite all the changes, the transition from a heterosexual lifestyle to a lesbian identity is rewarding to many.

Heterosexual Pasts

In about two million marriages in the United States, one of the current or former spouses identifies as gay, lesbian, or bisexual (Buxton, 2004). Exiting the heterosexual world to explore a new sexual minority identity is not uncommon. One study by

Menasche (1999) found that 82% of lesbians had sex with men in their past and about 30% had been married to a man at one time. Of those who gave details about their relationship history, more than half indicated that they had a serious form of heterosexual involvement prior to coming out. Many women indicated they were unaware of their lesbian potential prior to heterosexual marriage (Menasche, 1999). Some reported that they were aware of some same-sex attractions earlier in life but pressures of heterosexuality forced them to conform.

Many years earlier Kinsey (1953) had found similar statistics: more than 30% of white lesbians and approximately 50% of black lesbians had been heterosexually married prior. Half of the White women and a quarter of the Black women did not consider themselves lesbian before their marriage (Kinsey, 1953). In 1978, out of a sample of 229 White lesbians, about a third reported to have been married to men. Out of 64 Black lesbians, about half reported to have been married to men (Bell & Weinberg, 1978). Other studies have shown that 25-35% of their lesbian samples have been married (Saghir & Robins, 1973; Bell & Weinberg, 1978; Kitzinger & Wilkinson, 1995). Rust (1993) suggests a similar statistic: out of the five to seven percent of the population that is lesbian, approximately one-third had been previously married. Etorre (1980) found that out of 201 lesbians in London, England, almost 24% had been married to a man at least once.

Higher numbers of lesbians have not been heterosexually married but have had heterosexual experiences. Bell and Weinberg (1978) report that number as approximately 84%. A more recent study from 1999 demonstrated that out of almost 7,000 lesbians from

50 states in the U.S., 77% reported they had one or more male sexual partners at some point in their lifetime (Diamant, Schuster, McGuigan, & Lever, 1999). In fact, Kitzinger and Wilkinson (1995) found that because past heterosexual experiences of lesbians are assumed, those lesbians who have never been involved with men struggle with the additional stigma. The questions of "how do you know you are really gay then?" create added pressure and confusion for the women.

Questioning the Lesbian Label

A study of 64 lesbian women from the New England area indicated that many were reluctant to take on a public lesbian identity right away after leaving heterosexuality (Arendell, 2004). Most tried to find other words or phrases to describe their new identities and experiences as they were still struggling with the negative connotations and stereotypes associated with homosexuality (Arendell, 2004). Many knew they weren't heterosexual but were not quite ready to label themselves as lesbian. A few said it took over two years with her female partner to be able to say the words "I am a lesbian" (Arendell, 2004, p. 9).

Some women initially described themselves as bisexual. In doing so, some reserved the possibility of another future heterosexual relationship (Arendell, 2004). Many admitted that the bisexual label was out of confusion: all their previous relationships were with men and they weren't even aware of what the term lesbian stood for exactly. Some admitted this label was a form of denial while others used it to avoid the stigmatized lesbian label, even though they were deeply aware that was who they were (Arendell, 2004).

Others believed that publicly announcing a lesbian identity would put them in a box that they didn't believe they were in; they didn't feel exclusively lesbian because of this one relationship with a woman and their definitions of lesbian didn't match who they believed they were. Some preferred the term *woman-identified* to describe themselves as they wanted to avoid the political and feminist connotations of the term lesbian (Arendell, 2004). Being able to come to terms with one's authentic identity takes time and self-awareness. Not every label fits everyone accordingly and in transitioning from a heterosexual identity, this labeling can be even more difficult of a task.

However, despite initial resistances in accepting lesbian identity, a majority of the women were able to recall previous experiences that coincided with this new label. Most were able to describe crushes on girls or women from their pasts, though at the time they may not have understood it (Arendell, 2004). These recalls allowed the women to construct their new identities more clearly; they recognized that their past desires matched their current desires. Putting the two together was significant in creating a whole identity (Arendell, 2004). Being able to move forward in one's authentic desires was the most important part of the process. Creating an appropriate label and choosing who to share that with is part of the transition that often takes months, if not years, to decide on.

Social Context

The transition to a lesbian identity is strongly dependent on the social environment. If the environment is supportive and accepting, the ability to form a new lesbian social identity is significantly easier (Thompson, Forsyth, & Langley, 2009). Unfortunately as discussed in an earlier section, there are many obstacles that stand in the

way of forming healthy, positive sexual minority identities. Women who spent much time immersed in the heterosexual world struggled to fully participate and integrate into the lesbian community (Green & Clunis, 1989; Thompson, Forsyth, & Langley, 2009). For some women, assimilation can be a slow process; it is largely reliant on the social conditions of a particular woman's environment (Thompson, Forsyth, & Langley, 2009). For others, the transition is much faster and assimilation to a lesbian identity occurs very quickly.

Thompson, Forsyth, and Langley (2009) found that feelings, attitudes, and social contexts all played a role in the various degrees of affiliation to the lesbian community. Many women reported that their departure from a heterosexual marriage had continued to cause conflicts with their ex-husbands and other family members (Thompson, Forsyth, & Langley, 2009). Those who have children with their ex-husbands are forced to continue the struggle even beyond the divorce. Many feel threatened by their ex-husbands and do not feel free to be themselves because of their children (Thompson, Forsyth, & Langley, 2009).

Two-thirds of women in one study shared that being in the company of other women assisted in their transition from the heterosexual world to a same-sex relationship (Arendell, 2004). Additionally, for these women, falling in love with another woman who was already comfortable with her lesbian identity, helped facilitate the transition (Arendell, 2004). It allowed for a better understanding of what it meant to be gay, and provided additional support into the community (Arendell, 2004).

Life Events & New Desires

The transition from a heterosexual marriage to a lesbian identity often occurs as a result of particular life events (Bridges & Croteau, 1994). In a sample of midlife once-married lesbians, Charbonneau and Lander (1991) found that five different life events supported their transitions: a serious illness of a parent or oneself, an exit from a heterosexual marriage, a period of celibacy, a period of education and empowerment, and a rethinking of the lesbian stereotype. Through these life events the women were able to focus more clearly on themselves and their true desires, wants, and needs. They re-evaluated their expectations and their identities, and educated themselves on women's rights and lesbianism.

Many specifically remember times and dates of the life events. They became particularly aware of the fragility of life and it was described as a profound awareness (Charbonneau & Lander, 1991). These events were substantial in stimulating and supporting these women's transitions to a lesbian identity (Bridges & Croteau, 1994). Some women associated their rethinking of the lesbian stereotype as the major turning point in their lives. After becoming more educated and more open-minded, many women reported that their distorted views on what it meant to be a lesbian had hindered their understanding for most of their lives (Charbonneau & Lander, 1991). Rewriting the lesbian stereotype assisted in the transition: it was a label they could use because it was now applicable to them (Charbonneau & Lander, 1991).

Significant life events were integral in the lives of married gay men as well (Pearcey, 2005). A death of close friend, a birth of a child, or a divorce of a close friend,

made these men stop to reevaluate their own lives. In that time of introspection, these

men were able to consciously identify their genuine desires: their attractions to men

(Pearcey, 2005).

One man described the exact moment he decided to come out:

I was in the shower. It was the morning of my father-in-law's funeral….[the

death] really affected me. I thought maybe it was grief over my wife's father but I

realized I was crying for all the lost years. I knew that I wouldn't live forever and

at 56 I wasn't getting any younger. It was then that I decided no matter what

happened I had to tell my wife that I was gay. I wanted to live authentically

(Pearcey, 2005, p. 32).

For many gay married men, a significant life event allowed them to stop and

reflect. They had been suppressing their attractions to men for years and they finally felt

that it was time to make that transition, despite the intact lives they had built for

themselves (Pearcey, 2005).

Many women decide to make this transition to lesbianism because of new,

spontaneous same-sex desires. They simply fall in love with another woman and decided

that the relationship is "significant, transforming, and worth pursuing and continuing"

(Arendell, 2004, p. 4). Though they thought they were happy with their husbands and

children, many women in one study, revealed that they became consumed with a friend or

lover, and she became a number one priority (Arendell, 2004). Kitzinger and Wilkinson

(1995) discovered that more than 75% of their sample of lesbians admitted that having

sex with and falling in love with a woman was a major motivation for their transition.

One woman in this study described her experiences meeting a particular woman, Barbara, who she couldn't stop thinking about. She couldn't deny her intense attraction, and that's when she knew she was a lesbian (Kitzinger & Wilkinson, 1995).

Another woman experienced an intense love for another woman. She exclaimed: "How could I *not* be a lesbian after that!" (Kitzinger & Wilkinson, 1995, p. 100). One woman recalled her experience "love at first sight" while another woman explained that she had simply "[fallen] into lesbianism" (Arendell, 2004, p. 4). For some, experiencing sex with another woman wasn't a necessity, whereas for others, the love making was what fueled and confirmed their same-sex desires. Experiencing such powerful passion for another woman and acknowledging and accepting this passion as being a lesbian, is a significant impetus for this transition (Kitzinger & Wilkinson, 1995). In a study of 30 late in life lesbians, a large majority admitted that they never questioned their heterosexuality while married. Many were in fact quite shocked to fall in love with a woman (Charbonneau & Lander, 1991).

A particular moment of recognition was identified by more than one third of the participants in the Kitzinger and Wilkinson (1995) study. This specific moment of labeling oneself as lesbian, appeared to be particularly important to this sample. One woman described this moment as an "essential awakening" (p.100). Another described it as a "metamorphosis," a dramatic transition in personal identity, self-awareness, and world view (Arendell, 2004, p. 5). A sense of self-discovery was identified by these women in which they spoke about feeling reborn, alive, and refreshed (Kitzinger & Wilkinson, 1995).

These women's accounts demonstrated dramatic experiences in their identity shifts. Phrases like a "quantum leap", "it completely changed my life," and "like a conversion experience," were described by these women (Kitzinger & Wilkinson, 1995, p. 99). The changes were considered so intense and significant, participants described them as epiphanies and altered perceptions, like "seeing everything in color after only having seen black and white all my life" (Kitzinger & Wilkinson, 1995, p. 101). One woman summed up her experience with the phrase, "It felt like coming home" (Arendell, p. 5, 2004). This expression was used by several other women (Fleischer, 2010; Walsh & Andre, 2010).

Reconstructing a New Self

The transition to a lesbian identity requires exiting an old social circle and creating a new one. For some, this can be a painful process; a sense of loss and grief may occur (Kitzinger & Wilkinson, 1995). Some women lose family members, children, friends, and lovers as a result of the transition. A concern for the loss of heterosexual privilege, status, safety, and security, may also develop. Some may even grieve the loss of their old selves and struggle to accept a new identity and a new life. Reconstructing a new self may be required to move forward (Kitzinger & Wilkinson, 1995).

For gay men who had left their heterosexual partners, a restructuring of their lives seemed necessary. Formulating a whole new identity was required and many participants in one study admitted that they struggled to label themselves gay or bisexual right away (Pearcey, 2005). Many still held onto negative stereotypes about the gay community and were not yet ready to be associated.

Coming to accept one's gay identity and then proudly entering the gay community was a turning point in this transition. Once acceptance occurred, private transformations had to take place. One man described his transformation after coming out to his wife: "When I finally accepted myself I was able to accept others. My whole life changed. For the first time in my life I was focusing on my needs rather than caring about what everyone else thought" (Pearcey, 2005, p. 30). Ridding oneself of defense mechanisms that had been assisting in the repression of same-sex desires, was also critical for a successful transition (Pearcey, 2005). Developing and maintaining a lesbian self may include an understanding of one's past and creating a plan for the future (Kitzinger & Wilkinson, 1995). Despite the oppression and difficulties in transitioning to a lesbian identity, a sense of excitement, joy, and freedom, are also quite evident (Kitzinger & Wilkinson, 1995).

To Disclose or Not Disclose

At this point, the decision on whether or not to disclose sexual orientation becomes a dilemma. How many people should know and when is it most appropriate? This is particularly challenging for men and women who are still technically married and currently going through a divorce or separation? With children involved, the difficulty increases as most spouses don't want to lose any opportunity to see their children and have custody.

Weighing the potential consequences of revealing a new identity can be intimidating. What will the responses of others be? What will it affect, and how?

(Pearcey, 2005). Fully accepting oneself is included in this task. Having to face reality as a gay man or a lesbian can be more challenging than coming out (Pearcey, 2005).

Whether or not to be private or public in the matter is an individual decision dependent on the context and the persons involved (Pearcey, 2005). Disclosure of sexual orientation can be a slow process, if it happens at all. It does not however mean that if one does not come out to everyone, they have not fully accepted their new label. Coming out is a public matter and many choose very carefully on who needs to know and who doesn't (Pearcey, 2005). Completely shedding a heterosexual identity and fully accepting a new gay or lesbian identity can take some time and many participants in Pearcey's (2005) admitted to that struggle. For many, this transition can take years, if not an entire lifetime.

Adjusting to Same-Sex Partners and Same-Sex Relationships

Gay Adolescence

Because of the years of repressing same-sex attractions, many older gays and lesbians report a *gay adolescence* or *slut phase* shortly after transitioning (Siegel & Lowe, 1995). This is a time where older gays and lesbians frequently explore sex with the same-sex (Siegel & Lowe, 1995; Pearcey, 2005). One gay man admitted that he had "sex in every possible place" after he came out to his wife (Pearcey, p. 33, 2005). He was aware of the risks, but the benefits of finally being free and feeling attractive were much stronger incentives (Pearcey, 2005).

For many gay men, being able to explore sex with other men assists in defining who they are and confirming their new gay identity (Siegel & Lowe, 1995; Pearcey,

2005). Many women admitted to experiencing a series of affairs following their divorce from their husband (Charbonneau & Lander, 1991). A new sexuality had emerged for some. One woman explained how she had never enjoyed sex with her husband and how she had yet to experience an orgasm with a man. This period of sexual experimentation immediately following divorce, seemed necessary for some (Charbonneau & Lander, 1991).

During their transition, gay male participants reported working hard to improve their looks and re-create their self-images. Many explained that they began working out, eating better, losing weight, and changing their wardrobes (Pearcey, 2005). Many admitted they were unsure of how to date men and how to conduct themselves in same-sex relationships. Many weren't even sure of how to have proper sex with a man since all they really knew was sex with a woman (Pearcey, 2005). Learning how to conduct themselves in same-sex relationships, including learning the etiquette of dating the same-sex, took some adjusting (Pearcey, 2005).

This adjustment is applicable to lesbian couples as well. Sexual practices are quite different in heterosexual and lesbian couples and it is significant for the sexual minority to become educated on lesbian lovemaking (Bridges & Croteau, 1994). Therapists can assist in demystifying myths regarding lesbian sexuality (i.e. sex is impossible without a penis) and encouraging exploration of new sexual practices (Bridges & Croteau, 1994).

Challenges of Society and Family

For lesbian women who were once heterosexually married, relationships with women partners require adjusting (Bridges & Croteau, 1994). These new relationships

with women, whether sexual, emotional, short-term, or long-term, will be both similar and different, from relationships with men. One major adjustment a woman will need to make as she transitions from a heterosexual marriage to a same-sex relationship, is the diminished, or completely absent, social validation (Bridges & Croteau, 1994). Lesbian relationships may not always be supported or accepted in the community; whether or not they are is largely dependent on the people and attitudes of the environment (Riddle & Sang, 1978). Lesbians and bisexual women are often victims of harassment and violence because of their sexuality (Boon & Alderson, 2009).

Heterosexism and homophobia were reported as the two biggest challenges faced by lesbian couples in one study of lesbian women once married to men (Boon & Alderson, 2009). However, the intensity and the degree of these challenges varied by couple. Many disclosed that they were saddened by the lack of social validation and acceptance from their families and the larger community (Boon & Alderson, 2009). Lesbians also face social restrictions on physical affection and are not always able to show their love in public (Bridges & Croteau, 1994). The extent to which they can be expressive in public depends strongly on the environment Former lesbians reflected on the intense struggles they had with the social consequences of being physically affectionate with their girlfriends in public (Menasche, 1999).

Many new lesbians reported their intense realization of heterosexism in society. They became fully aware of the oppression that lesbians faced and admitted they were unprepared for what it meant to be a sexual minority in a heterosexually dominant society (Kitzinger & Wilkinson, 1995). One woman stated: "Now that I was excluded from them,

I became acutely conscious of all the goodies you get by being heterosexual" (Kitzinger & Wilkinson, 1995, p. 102). Becoming immersed in the gay and lesbian communities helped make this transition smoother for some. Many were able to discover new values, new attitudes, and new information from joining support groups and LGBT organizations (Kitzinger & Wilkinson, 1995).

For some lesbian women, family and friends may not accept this new same-sex relationship, particularly if they see it as the reason for the breakdown of the heterosexual marriage. Though it has changed for the better in recent years, some do not take a lesbian identity seriously; they see these women as single, lonely, and available for heterosexual dating (Riddle & Sang, 1978). Depending on the comfort level and acceptance of family and friends, lesbian couples may struggle to show their affection towards one another during holidays and social gatherings (Bridges & Croteau, 1994). If the families do not see the lesbian couple as legitimate, their relationship and their needs may be ignored.

Lack of acceptance with one family may require one partner to miss out on certain family gatherings and for the couple to split their time during special events (Bridges & Croteau, 1994). This can put strain on a couple; resentment for particular family members may develop and it may spill over to the relationship. One woman expressed her disappointment that her partner's family never included her in family events, even after 11 years of a relationship (Boon & Alderson, 2009).

Differences from Heterosexual Relationships

Lesbian relationships may differ greatly from heterosexual marriages in the way of balance of connection and independence between the two partners (Pearlman, 1989;

Bridges & Croteau, 1994). One woman described her new lesbian relationship as enriching and mutual. She recalled that in her heterosexual marriage all she did was give up her own needs and everything was external. In her lesbian relationship, she has given up nothing, but in fact, has added on her to the quality of her life. She said she now has the ability to negotiate in her relationship. She hadn't had that with a man (Arendell, 2004). Lesbian couples do indeed achieve and retain more egalitarianism than other couples (Blumstein & Schwartz, 1985).

Gender roles are very different in relationships between two women than they are between a man and a woman, particularly in respect to housekeeping, child rearing, and emotional expectations (Arendell, 2004). Many new lesbians disclosed that they felt coerced to conform to conventional feminist standards and fill the expected female gender stereotype. In their new lesbian relationships, they felt none of that. They were better able to be their *own* individuals (Arendell, 2004). In studying 4500 married women, Hite (1976) found that a majority of women were dissatisfied in their marriages as a result of the way their husbands treated them (i.e. put downs, emotional indifference). Their friendships with women were seen as remarkably different: they were reported to be emotionally closer and more satisfying, even with the love component absent (Hite, 1976).

Due to gender socialization and stigmatization of same-sex relationships, relationships with two women may be at greater risk for difficulty in attaining mature intimacy. A higher level of fusion, or enmeshment, may cause struggles for lesbian couples; a balance of separation and closeness can be difficult because women tend to

look for openness and communication and males generally provide emotional distance. With two women in the relationship, desires for closeness may be intensified making separation harder to create (Bridges & Croteau, 1994).

Women may merge too much emotionally, leading to an unhealthy relationship (Spitalnick & McNair, 2005). Recent research has questioned whether there is really more fusion between lesbian couples or if it is simply just a stereotypical view of non-heterosexual relationships and women in general (Melamed, 1992; Boon & Alderson, 2009). This notion is likely erroneous as it is rooted in a heterocentric view of relationships (Boon & Alderson, 2009).

Internalized homophobia can be an issue for sexual minorities. Societal homophobia and rejection of the LGBT community can become internalized by sexual minorities and can induce feelings of shame, guilt, and depression (Boon & Alderson, 2009). Internalized homophobia can negatively affect the same-sex couple by straining their relationship and interfering with their ability to be intimate (Beals & Peplau, 2001; Spitalnick & McNair, 2005). Additionally, the levels of disclosure and openness about sexuality can differ between the two partners.

Most researchers advocate for being open about one's sexual orientation as it is likely to lead to a healthier and more positive relationship (Beals & Peplau, 2001). Staying in the closet can cause resentment, isolation, and stress for the couple (Spitalnick & McNair, 2005). Discrepancies on self-acceptance and openness between the two partners can put a strain on the relationship (Boon & Alderson, 2009). Whether or not to

disclose one's sexual orientation and private information regarding a lesbian relationship is dependent on the individuals and the context.

In a study of lesbian couples who were once married to men, reports of the benefits of same-sex relationships were discussed (Boon & Alderson, 2009). The women reported that the level of intimacy was significantly higher in their same-sex relationship and that there was more negotiation during conflict than in their previous heterosexual relationship (Boon & Alderson, 2009). The women also reported more flexibility with gender roles and more equality regarding household responsibilities. They appreciated the freedom and independence they experienced in their same-sex relationships (Boon & Alderson, 2009). Emotional connectedness was reported to have increased the intimacy between the two partners, though it did not seem to interfere with individual autonomy. The increased intimacy helped to enhance the sex which was reported to be superior to sex with men; this helped increase relationship satisfaction (Boon & Alderson, 2009).

In a 2004 study, women in new lesbian relationships spoke of very similar experiences. They reported that their sex lives were better than ever, they felt energized, passionate, and liberated (Arendell, 2004). Their partners were described as both lovers and best friends thereby increasing the level of intimacy in the relationship. The quality of the new lesbian relationship was explained by many as significantly better than relationships with men. They felt free in their sexuality and were so deeply in love on all levels, something they admitted they hadn't had with men (Arendell, 2004). Women were reported to be better lovers and were more intimate with their partners than men

(Arendell, 2004). According to Kinsey's reports, lesbians report more orgasms than their heterosexual counterparts (Kinsey, 1953).

Other Internal and External Factors

It is important to acknowledge that like in any relationship, every same-sex couple is different. Each person in a relationship is unique in her personality, communication style, relationship experience, and level of maturity and those differences play significant roles in how a relationship functions (Boon & Alderson, 2009). Individual factors must not be underestimated. Some partners mesh well with their individual differences while others have some extra challenges. External factors are also important to consider. Increasing gay rights and decreasing social homophobia are changing the ways same-sex couples are treated and how they function (Boon & Alderson, 2009). Other variables like socioeconomic status and class are also important in regards to the functioning of same-sex relationships (Boon & Alderson, 2009).

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Same-Sex Marriages

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For many same-sex couples, key markers for further commitment of the relationship involved moving in together and buying a home together (Porche & Purvin, 2008). For those who were unable to legally marry, another step in formalizing commitment included estate planning (Porche & Purvin, 2008).

One partner in a gay male couple explained their attempts to create some binding agreements:

We worked very hard to construct legal instruments to give us the rights of marriage: health care proxies, wills, joint ownership with right of survivorship,

joint ownership with automobiles, insurance where we named each other as

beneficiaries. We constructed as many of those things as we could think of and

could find somebody to help us write to solidify our marriage—our coupledom in

a legal sense and so while it's all rather pragmatic, it was our way of being

married with all of these constructions (Porche & Purvin, 2008, p. 151).

Others formalized their relationships by writing up health care proxies and

creating a trust for their house (Porche & Purvin, 2008). These binding agreements

formulated a marriage-like commitment and created legal protections against outside

threats (Porche & Purvin, 2008).

Society sees marriage as the most formal and traditional form of commitment.

Marriage bestows significant advantages to those who have the opportunity and choose to

marry. Marriage is seen as a legal, social, and spiritual joining of two people in an

intimate relationship (Schecter, Tracy, Page, & Luong, 2008). It is seen as a deeply

personal commitment to another human being. The decision to marry is generally not

taken lightly.

In the United States until 2004, marriage had been the exclusive right of

heterosexual people only. The state of Massachusetts was the first to legalize same-sex

marriage in that year (Schecter et al., 2008). At the time of this writing, approximately

ten years later, 17 out of the 51 states in the United States have officially legalized same-

sex marriage. A good majority of those 17 states have legalized same-sex marriage in the

last two years (Human Rights Campaign, 2014). In June 2013, the Supreme Court of the

United States abolished the federal Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA) that had been in

place since 1996 (Human Rights Campaign, 2014). DOMA defined marriage as a bond between only a man and a woman and it gave each state the right to refuse or recognize same-sex marriages (Human Rights Campaign, 2014).

The end of DOMA meant that the federal government recognized marriage between any loving and committed couple, regardless of sexual orientation (Human Rights Campaign, 2014). However, if the state itself did not recognize same-sex marriage, these rights could not be extended to any same-sex couples. For those whose states legalize same-sex marriage, the end of DOMA created numerous benefits: the ability to file taxes jointly, the ability to collect social security benefits from deceased spouses, and the opportunity to receive health insurance and retirement benefits from spouses (Human Rights Campaign, 2014).

The Netherlands was officially the first country to legalize same-sex marriage in 2001 (Johnson, 2007). Same-sex marriage is legal in all of the following countries: Belgium, Canada, Argentina, Brazil, Uruguay, South Africa, Portugal, Spain, France, Luxembourg, Wales, England, Norway, Sweden, Iceland, Denmark, and New Zealand (Freedom to Marry, 2014). A majority of these countries have legalized same-sex marriages within the past five years. Along with the United States, Mexico, Australia, Colombia, and Scotland, all have regional freedom to marry at this time (Freedom to Marry, 2014).

The United States actually lags behind many of these countries in protecting their sexual minority citizens. However, progress is being made in several areas within the U.S. as well as internationally. It is quite possible that by the time this writing is

published, more countries and more states within the U.S. will have legalized same-sex marriage. The outlook on same-sex marriage and the general understanding of homosexuality is changing drastically in recent years, contributing to increased acceptance and increased rights (Johnson, 2007).

The decision to marry, whether heterosexual or homosexual, varies greatly and is dependent on the level of commitment, desire, and goals of the particular couple. For most of our history (and even presently), a majority of same-sex couples have not been fortunate enough to marry even if they have desired to. Over the years many same-sex couples have created commitment ceremonies which combine the traditions of formal weddings (i.e. exchanging of rings, wearing of gowns and tuxedos), but are not given legal or civil recognition (Schecter et al., 2008). These ceremonies are often deeply personal for the couple and represent the love and commitment the two have for one another.

What's most important about these ceremonies is the public affirmation of the couple's sexual orientation and legitimacy of their relationship (Schecter et al., 2008). Civil unions, or civil partnerships, have also been an option for same-sex couples in some countries and in some states in the U.S. Civil unions do offer some of the legal recognitions and benefits of a marriage but in the United States are only recognized in particular states and are not recognized by the federal government. In some countries the benefits are equal to those who are married (Schecter et al., 2008).

Regardless of the alternatives for same-sex couples, the option to legally marry is important on all levels: socially, emotionally, economically, and politically (Schechter et

al., 2008). There is a large amount of variability among same-sex couples on the timing of monogamy and commitment. This is true for those who engage in commitment ceremonies, civil unions, and legal marriages (Schecter et al., 2008). It has only been recently that research has looked at the timing of legal marriages since in the United States it has only been legalized since 2004. It is also uncertain if the legalization of same-sex marriage will remain in all of the same places in the future (Schecter et al., 2008).

Almost 75% of one sample of married gay and lesbian couples from Massachusetts reported they chose to publicly show their commitment to one another (Schecter et al., 2008). Over 62% of this group decided to legally marry when the option became available (Schecter et al., 2008). Couples who decided to conduct commitment ceremonies or legal marriages did so as a sign of their love for one another and to increase the impact of their relationship in their individual social circles. They expressed these experiences as very meaningful and religious/spiritual. Most importantly, a good majority disclosed that a legal marriage was "largely undertaken for the legal benefits, protection, and recognition…bestowed upon them and their families" (Schecter et al., 2008, p. 411).

Many couples from this Massachusetts sample of gay and lesbian couples explained that they felt an urgency to marry. There had been talk of political efforts to revoke same-sex legalization. Concerned that this might happen, many married as soon as they could (Schecter et al., 2008). Some participated in marriage because of the symbolism of this historical moment. However, many mentioned that despite the

historical moment and legalization, they married because they were ready and marriage seemed to be a next natural step (Schecter et al., 2008). The right to marry in Massachusetts just seemed to coincide with their current level of commitment (Schecter et al., 2008).

The impact of legal marriage for same-sex couples went well beyond the piece of paper they received. For those in this sample, getting married was described as "powerful" and "profound" and it surpassed many of their expectations (Schecter et al., 2008, p. 413).

> One woman, Zelda, who had been with her partner for 3 years, described her feelings:
>
> Since we had our legal marriage, I'd say that actually has an impact on things, and since then we've went to work on conflicts in a deeper way, in a more meaningful way. We come to deeper understanding, we compromise more, I think we're more in love even since then. And um I don't know, it's the sense of commitment which I assumed was there just feels even deeper (Schecter et al., 2008, p. 413).

On a larger scale, same-sex couples believed that their marriage dramatically changed how they felt about their place in society. They felt more confident, more legitimate, and more legitimate as they could use the terms "spouse," "husband," and "wife" (Schecter et al., 2008). They felt entitled to tax, government, medical, and other legal benefits and felt more confident about requesting that employers and other related organizations recognize their legal status (Schecter et al., 2008).

These couples also admitted they felt they were now role models, examples for younger gay and lesbian couples and that their same-sex marriage set a precedent for legalization of same-sex marriages elsewhere (Porche & Purvin, 2008; Schecter et al., 2008). Additionally, they believed their marriages and public affirmations of their love and commitment would help diminish the beliefs that gays and lesbians were incapable of healthy, long-term relationships (Schecter et al., 2008).

The opportunity to be the first cohort of same-sex couples to marry in the United States was described by the sample as a momentous event of social justice and human rights. But, many mentioned that the act of marriage was quite traditional and they were concerned that the gay and lesbian community may lose its distinctiveness in the mainstream experiences of a patriarchal institution (Schecter et al., 2008).

Summary

In Chapter 2 I reviewed the current pertinent literature related to women who have transitioned from heterosexual marriages to same-sex relationships. The information here highlighted the various theories of sexual orientation, the diverse perspectives regarding sexual identity development, and the issues surrounding coming out and disclosure of sexual orientation. I also covered the positive supports and obstacles related to coming out. I discussed transitions from heterosexual marriages to same-sex identity and adapting to lesbian relationships. Finally, in Chapter 2 I covered the decision to commit and the legalization of same-sex marriage.

Further in-depth exploration is needed to examine the experiences of women who have been married to two different genders, previously married to men and now currently

married to women. Understanding the life stories of women who have married men and who have later acknowledged their lesbian identity and married women, has yet to be examined. Research was needed to explore these women's experiences and to deliver data to families of lesbians, therapists, clinicians, and advocates of the GLBT community. In Chapter 3 I will provide information on how this qualitative study will be performed, how participants will be identified, what questions will be asked to participants, and the specific details of the research design and methodology that will be used.

Chapter 3: Research Method

Introduction

The literature review provided an overview of the experiences of women once in heterosexual marriages who transition to lesbian identities and enter into lesbian relationships. Many of these women were always lesbians but felt forced to marry men because of the heteronormative culture and societal homophobia. Others had been happily married to men but spontaneously discovered their same-sex desires later in life. This sexual fluidity is still not understood very well and is often misconstrued as "confusion." Understanding the transitions and processes of previously married lesbian women is important in understanding their past and present experiences and in helping them to develop positive, healthy, lesbian identities (Bridges & Croteau, 1994).

My focus with this study was to look at the complexities and changes of female sexuality, self-chosen identity labels (past and present), and the influences that played a role in their experiences of shifting genders in marriages. It was significant to understand the lived experiences of these women as they are the first of their kind to have the opportunity to re-marry to a member of the same sex, specifically in the United States. Same-sex marriage has only recently been legalized in a majority of the states in the U.S. It has therefore been difficult to conduct research with this population until recently; same-sex marriage was not an option to anyone until 2004 when Massachusetts was the first state to legalize it. For at least a quarter of the United States, it is illegal for gay men and women to marry their spouses.

By allowing these women to share their experiences marrying two different sexes, those who interact with this population can better understand them and the influences that guided their choices. This will result in positive social change as it will open up doors for more effective counseling services and other pertinent programs for women now in same-sex marriages who have had previous relationships, and more specifically, marriages, with men. There is currently no research available that has looked at women who were once married to men and who are now re-married to women.

Chapter 3 is a discussion of the research design used in this study, including the rationale for the design. It discusses the researcher's role in the study and procedures regarding data collection and analysis. Chapter 3 also includes specifics on the methodology, sampling size and strategy, ethical concerns, and a summary.

Research Design and Rationale

Although work has been done with women in same-sex relationships and marriages, as well as those who have been previously married to men, there was a gap in looking at women who have experienced a heterosexual marriage and a same-sex marriage. Since these lived experiences have not been explored, testing a model or hypothesis was irrelevant and a quantitative approach was inappropriate (Creswell, 2013). A certain concept needed in-depth exploration lending itself to a qualitative study (Creswell, 2013). Quantitative measures do not fit the problem at hand; statistical analyses are unable to appreciate the individual differences and uniqueness of these experiences (Creswell, 2013).

Narrative Analysis

Narrative analysis is one of the five major approaches currently used in qualitative research. The other approaches include case study, phenomenology, grounded theory, and ethnography (Creswell, 2013). Narrative research has many forms and is used in many social and humanities disciplines. It has recently become a more popular form of qualitative inquiry due to an increased appreciation of collecting subjective stories and desire to learn from the experiences of participants. The use of narrative research has been seen as more and more valuable in social sciences and education in recent years (Ollerenshaw & Creswell, 2002). A narrative can be spoken or written and an account of a particular event or situation or numerous events and situations (Czarniawska, 2004). Because a narrative approach requires in-depth examination, generally focusing on a small group of individuals is best (Creswell, 2013).

A narrative approach is most fitting for purposes of this study. The intent of this research was to capture the life stories of a small group of individuals who have experienced similar transitions: leaving a heterosexual marriage and entering into a same-sex marriage. Gathering their unique life stories requires considerable time and efforts with each participant. In order to understand their transitions, a researcher must also gather information regarding the social, cultural, and historical context (Creswell, 2013). Understanding the context surrounding the individual's experiences is a significant priority in this study.

Individuals create life stories. The stories themselves are the data. Narratology allows researchers to recognize and respect people's stories of experience as data that can stand on their own (Patton, 2002). The basic premise behind narrative research is the

significance of the story itself and the meaning it holds with the storyteller (Ollerenshaw & Creswell, 2002). It is difficult to understand someone's perceptions, feelings, desires, and behaviors, if those individuals are not allowed to share their stories. Allowing one to share their personal experiences is the central means of understanding that person (Ollerenshaw & Creswell, 2002).

Generally speaking, narrative research is discovered through first-person story telling of relevant personal and social events. Most of the stories have a beginning, middle, and end, a chronological plot, and in some cases, a predicament, dilemma, or turning point that is particularly significant to the story (Ollerenshaw & Creswell, 2002). Narratives can be compared to novels which typically have similar features such as time, place, plot, and scene (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). Studying narratives are influential in understanding how individuals construct themselves. Narrative analysis allows a researcher to carefully examine these life stories and probe into the way these individuals organize their reality and come to understand themselves. Narrative stories not only tell of individual experiences but may also shed light on the identities of individuals. (Tabatabai, 2002). How the individual conceptualizes her life story is the focus of the narrative research (Miller, 2011).

There are different types of narrative approaches used by researchers who utilize this form of analysis. The most popular types include a biographical study, an autoethnography, a life history, and an oral history (Creswell, 2013). A biographical study requires a researcher to report on the experiences of another individual's life. An autoethnography is written by the subject herself and often includes multiple layers of the

individual's consciousness and the larger cultural context (Creswell, 2013). A life history

is a form of narrative analysis that reports on an individual's entire life. Life history

approaches can be more specific and include personal experience stories that highlight

specific personal experiences in single or multiple events (Creswell, 2013). The last

popular type of narrative approach is oral history. This form consists of collecting

personal reflections of events and how and why the events happened according to a group

of individuals (Plummer, 1983).

Life History

The goal of this particular study was to examine the life stories of women who are

currently married to women but who have previously been married to men. The most

logical type of narrative approach for the focus of this study is a life history. The life

history approach gathers information "on the subjective essence of one's entire life that is

transferable across disciplines" (Atkinson, p. 123, 2002). There is no better way to allow

someone to share their life story and gain a unique perspective through her own voice

than by using this method. The life history approach gains data from one's own vantage

point, allowing her to see her life as a whole and make connections through her

experiences. Researchers learn what they want through construction of these subjective

realities. The life history approach gives value and worth to each individual life and story.

A life history is a story from a particular individual told as honestly and thoroughly as

possible. A life history is presented as the individual remembers it and generally in the

context of an interview by a researcher. The result is a narrative of what happened to the

person (Atkinson, 2002).

This is particularly useful for the purposes of my study; these women have experienced a transition that many others have not. There is a small population of women in the United States who have had the opportunity to marry men and re-marry women. Allowing these women to share their stories will allow others to understand their experiences the influences and the contexts surrounding their transitions. There is no better method than the life story narrative for discovering how the self evolves over time (Atkinson, 2002). Understanding how these women transition, change, and discover their true selves, is a major priority of this study. The hope is that in time these stories will become numerous and ordinary and developing healthy lesbian identities will be less challenging and less difficult in a more accepting society. A life history approach will allow us to understand their pasts and their presents more completely. More importantly, sharing their life stories will allow them to leave their personal legacies for the future (Atkinson, 2002).

A narrative story can be analyzed in different ways, through the nature of the study, the themes discovered, or the audience it is directed towards (Creswell, 2013). For purposes of this study, the focus of the analysis is the content of individual's stories (themes). Researchers can narrate these stories, similar to novels, and discover themes and categories that occur (Ollerenshaw & Creswell, 2002). Data analysis may therefore be both rich descriptions of the story as well as themes and categories emerging from the story. A researcher often takes an active role by restorying, or reorganizing the stories into a framework that includes key elements of the story, like time and place (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Creswell, 2013).

A researcher may write up a chronology of events "describing the individual's past, present, and future experiences lodged within specific settings or contexts" (Ollerenshaw & Creswell, p. 332, 2002). Cortazzi (1993) suggested that what makes a narrative approach so unique is the use of chronology and sequence in reporting life stories. Even if the participant does not discuss events sequentially, the researcher will often create a chronology of events to help make sense of the entire story and link ideas together (Creswell, 2013).

Narrative stories are created through collaboration with the participant. The story emerges through interaction of the participant and researcher (Creswell, 2013). By working together, both parties negotiate the material and confirm the accuracy of the interview transcripts. This will occur with a participant transcript review following the initial interview. A researcher takes into consideration participant's remarks after reviewing her own initial remarks. Ultimately, the narrative approach shares the sequential stories of individuals deeply rooted in personal, social, and historical contexts and highlights important themes in those unique lived experiences (Creswell, 2013).

Research Questions

I used a narrative approach in order to capture the life stories of women who transition from heterosexual marriages to same-sex marriages. There are four main research questions:

1. What are the life stories of women in same-sex marriages who were previously married to men?

2. What are the labels these women have given themselves throughout their lives (both past and present)?

3. What are the experiences of transition from being in a heterosexual marriage to a same-sex marriage?

4. What personal and social factors hindered and assisted in this transition?

It was most appropriate to use a narrative analysis in order to shed light on the identities of these women and how they perceive themselves and their experiences (Creswell, 2013). Despite the likely increase of this population, the research is underdeveloped. The hope was that in allowing women to share their life stories, a better understanding of this phenomenon will develop. As same-sex marriage becomes legalized in more states and countries, there will be more opportunities for women to marry other women. All interview questions were structured to answer all research questions adequately. Interview questions can be found in Appendix A.

Role of the Researcher

My objective with the interviews was to form professional and personal rapports with the women. I did not have any professional relationships with these women prior to recruiting them. None of them had worked with me or for me so there was no concern for conflict of interest or issue of power over the participants. There was also no concern for power relationships.

As a result of my personal association with the topic, I was aware of the biases I may have had during data collection and data analysis. I made sure to keep all my personal opinions to myself and not let any of my thoughts affect the way I conducted the

interview or responded to my participant's life stories. I made sure to keep these biases to myself and remain neutral. I made a point to develop warm associations with my participants from the start; I believe it helped them feel more comfortable and open up in sharing their experiences truthfully and honestly.

I wanted my participants to know that my research is not meant to expose them but rather to share their experiences so others can better understand. Interview questions were personal and sensitive; I asked about their sexuality, their identity labels, and their changes in desires, attractions, and behaviors. Some of the questions were material they may talk about on a regular basis and others were material they hadn't discussed, or thought about, in years.

During this research process, I took an active role of engaging with my research participants. I was in charge of participant recruitment, the collection and analysis of data, and in safeguarding the trustworthiness of data. I was also responsible for proper dissemination of study results. I made sure to make the best possible decisions during the research process, specifically in regards to monitoring, documenting and evaluating data. Lastly, I was sure that in all processes of the research study, I maintained rigor, ethics, and trustworthiness.

Methodology

Population

The population of this study was women between the ages of 18 and 65 who are currently in a legal same-sex marriage and who have previously been in a legal heterosexual marriage at some point in their lives.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

All participants had to have been legally married to a man and now currently legally married to a woman. Each participant needed to speak fluent English, be biologically female, and be between 18 and 65 years of age. Individuals who were emotionally and mentally disabled, who were in crisis (i.e. natural disaster victims or those with acute illnesses) were also ineligible to participate in the study. Anyone who was a non-English speaker was also excluded from the study. I am currently a lecturer of psychology at Southern New Hampshire University and an adjunct professor at the University of Massachusetts Lowell. Any individual who was a subordinate, student, client, or potential client, of me at the time, was also ineligible for the study due to potential conflicts of interest. A letter of an explanation of the study was given to potential participants. In that letter, eligibility for criteria was listed. The assumption was that if the individual read that they did not fit criteria, they would let the researcher know and not go any further with the study.

Sampling Strategy

The most appropriate sampling strategy for this population was non-probability snowball (or purposeful, chain referral) sampling (Browne, 2005). Snowball sampling, recruiting participants through social networks and word of mouth, is most often used to gain access to individuals who are hard to reach or limited in scope. LGBT individuals are relatively invisible and may be hidden in society because of social stigma (Browne, 2005). Recruiting participants for a sensitive topic like sexuality can be particularly difficult as well. This is especially true for women "who live outside the boundaries of

normative heterosexuality" (Browne, 2005, p. 49). Additionally, there are low numbers of potential participants for this study. Snowball sampling allows the researchers to get connected to participants who may be relevant to the study via personal networks and friends and acquaintances (Browne, 2005). These relevant networks then reach out to their friends and acquaintances or refer others for the study. It is quite possible that if a research networks with the right people and appropriate groups, she will be able to find an adequate sample size for a particular study (Browne, 2005).

The hope was that by reaching out to enough people via snowball sampling, an adequate sample would be available. I reached out to family, friends, and acquaintances who knew other individuals who fit the study's sample criteria. By using all available outlets, I was able to make contact with networks efficiently and recruit an adequate number of individuals for the sample. I communicated frequently with prospective candidates and provided all relevant details so they were fully aware of the research prior to committing.

Sample Size

An ideal sample size for my study was 12-15 participants. Sample size in qualitative research is generally small but material from participants is often extensive in detail (Creswell, 2013). The motivation is not to generalize to a larger population, but rather to expose particular material (Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007). Huber and Whelan (1999) mentioned that in narrative research, they have found many examples with just one or two participants. There are no regulations for sample size for qualitative research (Patton, 2002). Sample size is determined by "what you want to know, the purpose of the

inquiry, what's at stake, what will be useful, what will have credibility and what can be done with available time and resources" (Patton, 2002, p. 244). The goal of narrative inquiry is to highlight the detailed life stories of either one single individual or a small number of individuals. I believed that 12-15 participants were an adequate sample for a narrative inquiry because of the considerable time needed with each individual to gather their stories.

The concern for an adequate sample size refers to the concept of saturation. Saturation in regards to sample size is "the point at which no new information or themes are observed in the data" (Guest, Bunce, & Johnson, 2006). In other words, saturation has been reached when enough samples have been collected that any more information would be redundant. The issue wasn't how many participants in the sample but rather if the phenomenon or story is well understood with the sample provided. In qualitative studies, especially, it is about quality not quantity (Patton, 2002).

Instrumentation

The data collection technique for this qualitative study was interviews. Interviewing was most appropriate as it allowed me to gain a deeper understanding of these women's transitions from heterosexual marriage to same-sex marriage.

Interviews were semistructured; certain questions were asked but the length of the answers was dependent on each participant (Creswell, 2013). I also probed and asked for further expansion if more information was requested. I was the sole interviewer and interviewed each participant individually and privately. All interview questions were highly representative of the situations these women have experienced in their lives

(transitioning from a heterosexual marriage to a same-sex marriage) thereby

demonstrating a high degree of content validity. Questions pertained to their personal

identity before and after heterosexual marriage, before and during their same-sex

marriage, and their experiences with divorce and entering into a same-sex relationship.

The interview questions also asked for a description of the personal and social influences

that played a role in marrying a man, getting divorced from him, and pursuing desires of

the same sex. For each research question, there were at least two interview questions and

in some cases, two to three additional probes. These interview questions and additional

probes were sufficient enough to cover the three research questions that had been created

for this study.

I created an interview protocol for all interviews. The interview protocol included

all interview questions and my plan for starting and ending my interviews (Creswell,

2013). The only data collection instruments were my small and unobtrusive digital audio

recorders that taped all the conversations between myself and the participants. Two

recorders are suggested as one is used as a backup in case the first fails during an

interview. Interviews generally do not require any other documents. It is the

interviewee's words that are invaluable and need to be documented.

Procedures for Recruitment

The use of snowball sampling as a strategy to recruit participants generally

requires one to reach out to initial research participants who may know of others who

also fit the criteria, like a chain referral. In order to begin recruitment, I needed to gain

Walden's Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval to conduct research. After I was

approved (approval # 08-29-14-0325923), I had permission to contact and recruit prospective participants.

I posted one status on my own personal Facebook page asking my friends, family, and acquaintances to spread the word and reach out to anyone they knew who might fit the criteria. This status was seen by my over 1,400 Facebook friends and the hope was that it would reach at least a few individuals who fit the criteria, or who may know of others who do. I included the purpose of my study, why I was interested, and the criteria that participants needed to be eligible. I also included a sentence on what it required of participants and how they would be compensated. I also spoke in person to acquaintances and friends and asked them to spread the word in case they knew of anyone who might fit the criteria for the study. I sent private Facebook messages to those who I thought may know of an individual who fit the criteria. My message was similar using all outlets. I asked if anyone knew of a woman who was once married to a man but who is now married to a woman. I asked that the women fulfill all required criteria for participation.

Being an individual who is part of the LGBT community, I know a good majority of others who are also a part of the LGBT community in the local area of New Hampshire and Massachusetts. It was possible that a few of these individuals would meet criteria for my study and then know others who would also fit the criteria. Potential participants were friends of friends and friends of family members who I do not currently or personally know myself.

When a prospective participant was identified by name, I reached out to them using the most appropriate tool, whether it was a telephone call, text message, Facebook message, or an e-mail. I made sure that all forms of communication were confidential. I ensured that any form of communication with a particular individual was sent to a private mailbox whether virtual or physical. Which tool was used will depended on the preferred method of the prospective participant. If one form of communication was safer and more private for the participant, I utilized that method to ensure confidentiality.

In my initial contact with prospective participants, I introduced myself, described the study to them, and asked them a question or two to ensure that they fulfilled specific criteria for the population being studied. Before moving any further I asked the participants what their preferred method to communicate was, to ensure confidentiality and comfort for them. If they preferred to speak on the phone, I would do that. If e-mail or text message was safest for them, I would use those means to communicate. I would then explain the study procedure and what would be expected of them. I then let them know that they would be compensated $10 for their participation in my study. I asked them if they have any questions or concerns. I told them I would answer any questions or handle any concerns.

I then sent them a document titled "Explanation of Research" (Appendix C) via e-mail. I then asked that they read the Explanation of Study document and if they were still interested, contact me. This would acknowledge that they understood the basic premise of the study and if they would want to get involved. Following this, I then sent the participant an Informed Consent Form (Appendix B) and a demographic survey

(Appendix D) via e-mail. The Informed Consent Form included details of the study, participation requirements (i.e. approximate duration of interview), an explanation of voluntary participation, issues of confidentiality, and any foreseeable minimal risks. The demographic survey consisted of a brief amount of basic questions about their background. This was important as it ensured that the individual fulfilled certain criteria to participate in this study. Participants were then asked to sign and return these letters to me so that we could begin the interview process.

Once these forms were received, I reached out to the participants to thank them for returning the form and to find out their availability to meet for an interview. I then answered any other questions at that time and after some communication, we found a date, time, and place to meet for the interview. At the start of the interview, I was sure to confirm that they understood what they consented to and I clarified any concerns before the interview began.

Procedures for Data Collection

As the sole researcher for this dissertation, I was the only one collecting data. Data was collected from individuals that resided in New Hampshire and Massachusetts and interviews were conducted within these locations. Interviews with the 15 women took approximately six weeks to conduct.

Data was collected using participant responses to semi-structured interviews. Interviews were personal, one-on-one, and face to face. This required that interviewees were comfortable in my presence and sharing their thoughts with another person. Each interview took between 45 minutes to two hours; much of the variation depended on how

much the participant expanded on each question and how many stories they wanted to share. Interviews were conducted on dates and times that worked for both me and prospective participants and included mornings, afternoons, evenings, and the weekends.

Interviews were conducted in local public libraries that housed private rooms. I reserved these rooms ahead of time so the room would be both safe and private for our interview. The particular location was be agreed upon by both of us prior to meeting.

All interviews were audio-taped using two small, non-obtrusive digital audio recorders. After all interview questions had been asked and the interviewee was finished responding, I began to end the interview. I asked if the participant had any other comments or additional material they wanted to share that may be relevant to their previous responses. At that time the interviewee was allowed to share additional information they believed to be pertinent to the study. I asked if they have any questions or concerns regarding the information they provided. I gave the participant access to a free crisis hot line number for LGBT individuals should they experience any distress from speaking on a topic that may be potentially sensitive and personal. I also reminded them of my name and contact information should they want to speak with me for any reason following the interview. Once all that information had been provided and the interview was over, I provided the participant with their $10 compensation.

To disseminate data, I sent my participants results of the study in a one to two page document once the study and dissertation had been approved. I let them know at the interview that I would be in contact with them to send them this information at that point.

Data Analysis Plan

Data from narrative inquiries are analyzed from each shared story and the linear process of events and turning points in the life of each participant (Creswell, 2013). Managing data is the first step in the process (Creswell, 2013). All data was prepared and organized into files. All data was entered onto my personal password-protected laptop. After data organization, I read over all transcripts in their entirety, taking notes in the margins and helping make sense of the entire interviews. Those notes were words, phrases, and key concepts that occurred in the transcript. Any emails were sent directly to each individual participant to their chosen email addresses. Any online conversations were done with private messages and I asked all social networks to keep any potential participant information confidential by not posting any information but rather sending me private messages so only I had access to them.

The next step of analysis was describing and categorizing data. Forming codes is the highlight of this step and is the most important part of analysis for qualitative data analysis (Creswell, 2013). The process of coding "involves aggregating the text or visual data into small categories of information, seeking evidence for the code from different databases being used in a study, and then assigning a label to the code" (Creswell, p. 184, 2013).

I identified initial codes (over 40) that emerged from the data and that seemed to capture the essence of the text. Preexisting or a priori codes were not used in my coding process. I did not want to limit the amount or type of codes while doing an analysis. Code

labels were based on the researcher; I composed what I believed were the most appropriate names for each code (Creswell, 2013).

These tentative codes are then reduced and combined into a smaller amount of general themes (five or six) (Creswell, 2013). This stage is often called classification (Creswell, 2013). How the themes are created depend upon the type of approach the researcher is taking (i.e. narrative). Specifically with a narrative approach this is the time when "an objective set of experiences" are described and place[d] into a chronology" (Creswell, p. 190, 2013). These sets of experiences are based on the participant's stories. Themes, or categories, are broad units of material that often include several different initial codes (Creswell, 2013). Nonetheless, the themes that were created were the ones that were used when writing my final analysis. I identified stories, located important events and turning points within these stories, and discovered relevant contextual factors (Creswell, 2013). I looked for and interpreted the "larger meaning of the story" (Creswell, p. 191, 2013).

Issues of Trustworthiness

Credibility

To enhance credibility, I utilized an approach that involves looking at data from an alternative view. I organized data in a way "that might lead to different findings" (Patton, p. 553, 2002). I made sure to pay close attention to negative cases, or instances that do not fit within the pattern (Patton, 2002). Considering these exceptions allows the researcher to strengthen the understanding of other themes and patterns (Patton, 2002).

Another technique to ensure credibility is demonstrating value of qualitative methods (Patton, 2002). In the methodology section and introduction I expressed my understanding of qualitative inquiries and establish its strength in my particular study. I discussed general differences between quantitative and qualitative data and demonstrated why a qualitative approach was most appropriate for this study (Patton, 2002).

Transferability

Qualitative studies do not attempt to generalize results from a small sample to a larger population like quantitative studies do (Creswell, 2013). What is important to know about transferability in qualitative studies is that the researcher does not claim to be able to generalize their findings to others.

Certain small samples, particularly those from a purposeful sampling strategy, are selected because "they have broader relevance" (Patton, p. 581, 2002). I used purposeful sampling for this reason; these narratives were small in number but are useful in a larger realm. They have the potential to produce general insights or explanations (Patton, 2002). It is quite possible that the qualitative findings can be transferred to other contexts that are similar in nature (Patton, 2002). Transferability does not equal broad claims of generalizability. Instead, readers can connect information from certain features of a study to their own experiences (Patton, 2002).

I was sure to use thick description in labeling the phenomenon under investigation in my study. Providing sufficient information about the population and the phenomenon will give the reader an accurate understanding (Shenton, 2004). Holloway (1997) refers to thick description as an in-depth explanation of explicit field experiences. The

researcher is in charge of creating patterns of relationships and putting them in the proper

context (Holloway, 1997). Readers themselves can then use their own discretion in

determining whether or not results are transferable to other contexts (Shenton,

2004).Women who transition from heterosexual marriages to same-sex marriages may be

a small population at this time, but the life stories gathered may be transferable to others

in similar situations.

Dependability

The qualitative equivalent of reliability is dependability. To ensure dependability

for a qualitative study, it is recommended that the researcher describe the processes

behind the study in detail so that other researchers can replicate the work or find similar

results (Shenton, 2004). I was sure to provide in-depth coverage for that reason and so

that others can "assess the extent to which proper research practices have been followed"

(Shenton, p. 71, 2004). More specifically to ensure dependability, I was sure to discuss

the research design and its implementation, the processes of gathering data, and the

effectiveness of these processes (Shenton, 2004).

To ensure dependability, I conducted an audit trail. This involved creating a

detailed account of the course of the research. An audit trail demonstrated a step-by-step

process of the research, including all decisions made and all procedures used (Shenton,

2004). Additionally, as part of the audit trail a peer review was be conducted. My

dissertation chair, Dr. Susana Verdinelli, was responsible for this peer review and

checked for researcher bias during data collection and analysis.

Confirmability

An important requirement of the scientific method is objectivity. One barrier to confirmability in qualitative research is researcher bias; this bias may shape the findings of the study (Patton, 2002). Confirmability requires assurance that study findings are solely the result of the participant's responses and not the expectations or preconceptions of the researcher (Shenton, 2004).

To eliminate investigator bias, I discussed my role as a researcher in an above section and explicitly stated my biases towards a particular concept related to the study. I shared my personal connection to the study but discussed how I kept subjective feelings private. I admitted any predispositions I had. Additionally, I engaged in a mental cleansing process to rid myself of subjective feelings (Patton, 2002). Most importantly I was sure to report any personal or professional information that affected the way I collected, analyzed, and interpreted data (Patton, 2002). Developing a reflexive journal helped document biases and how I managed them; a reflexive journal is a type of diary where a researcher regularly documents her research decisions, personal biases and management of those biases (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This process is private, personal, and beneficial for the researcher. Attempting complete neutrality throughout the process will be of utmost importance as the objectivity of the researcher is significant to overall credibility of the research.

Ethical Procedures

Informed Consent

The study was conducted after gaining permission from Walden University's Institutional Review Board. A completed IRB application was required for approval.

I made sure that every individual read and sign an Informed Consent Form prior to collecting data to ensure that they understood all that was involved in the study. The form was simple to read and easy to comprehend for all prospective participants. They were given another overview of the study, including the requirements for participation (i.e. 60-90 minute interviews). They were told that they would be compensated $10 following completion of the interview. They were told that they could leave the study at any time or refuse to answer any questions they were not comfortable answering. They were also given information regarding a free 24/7 LGBT hotline if they needed to speak with someone following the interview due to some sort of distress. If they had any questions or concerns, they were welcome to ask prior to signing the document.

Confidentiality

I made sure to take every precaution to keep participant material confidential. To protect the identities of the participants in the research report, all participants will be known by just a number. I will use the number in which they were interviewed. Therefore, the first person I interviewed was known as P1 and the second person I interviewed was known as P2. None of the participants were aware of the sequence in which they were interviewed so they would be unable to determine which number corresponded to other women. Any communication with the participants was done in a

private manner; messages were sent solely to the participant. All interview transcript files were labeled by their assigned numbers.

To protect all data, material was saved on my computer that is password protected. A back up external hard drive also held information but that was stored in a fire-proof safe in the basement of my house. Only I have a key to this safe. Any printed material will be stored in a locked file cabinet also in the basement of my house. Only I will have a key to this file cabinet as well. I will be the only individual with access to data.

Summary

Chapter 3 reviewed the focus, significance, and rationale for this study. It discussed the research design and rationale for choosing a qualitative study and more specifically for choosing a narrative analysis over other approaches. Research questions were presented as well as a section on the role of the researcher. All personal biases were expressed. Inclusion criteria for the sample as well as the sample size and sampling strategy were discussed in detail. Appropriate instrumentation was presented. In Chapter 3 I discussed the use of interviewing as the form of instrumentation as well as the protocols used during the data collection procedure. Procedures for recruitment, data collection, and data analysis were also covered. In this chapter I covered all issues of trustworthiness for qualitative studies, including credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Finally, in Chapter 3 I discussed ethical procedures that were followed in the study, including keeping participants' names and data anonymous and utilizing Informed Consent forms.

In Chapter 4 I will discuss the setting of the study, the demographics and attributes of the participants and how data will be collected and analyzed, with specific information on codes and discrepant cases. All evidence of trustworthiness will be covered in detail. Finally, in Chapter 4 I will address each research question and summarize results of the study. Relevant tables and figures will also be included in this section.

Chapter 4: Results

Introduction

The purpose of this current study was to examine the life stories of women previously married to men who are now married to women; to understand personal and social factors that were influential in their transitions and their diverse trajectories in sexual identity formation. I sought to fill a gap in the current literature regarding the experiences of women who have been legally married to both sexes. Since the legality of same-sex marriage is fairly recent, particularly in certain states in the United States, this population is fairly small and under researched at this time.

I used narratives to understand the lived experiences and individual feelings of women. Narrative research allowed the researcher to capture the life histories of a small group of women who have experienced similar situations, though their trajectories, in some cases, were dramatically different. Like a novel, narrative research allows for a chronological understanding of an individual's experience as it is able to find a beginning, middle, and end, and often turning points or important highlights that are significant to the whole story (Ollerenshaw & Creswell, 2002).

Individual interviews allowed for exploration of the specific research questions. There were four main research questions that guided this study.

1. What are the life stories of women in same-sex marriages who were previously married to men?

2. What are the labels these women have given themselves throughout their lives (both past and present)?

3. What are the experiences of transition from being in a heterosexual marriage to a same-sex marriage?

4. What personal and social factors hindered and assisted in this transition?

In this chapter I explain the processes of data collection and data analysis. I provide a detailed description of the participants and the setting. This chapter also includes the themes that emerged from the participant's narratives.

Setting

IRB approval was received before any data collection begun. All interviews took place in private rooms located in local public libraries. All participants communicated with me through Facebook that they were interested in participating in the study. Fourteen of the participants acknowledged reading all documents through the exchange of emails. They electronically signed the informed consent form and filled out the demographic survey. Only one participant was unable to view documents electronically so she read and filled out the form and demographic survey in person prior to our interview. She did not have Microsoft Word software to open up the documents I sent her. All participants consulted with me from start to finish using both Facebook and e-mail. All Facebook and e-mail conversations were private. No Facebook communications were public in any way, and all e-mails were sent separately to each participant's desired e-mail address.

Demographics

Fifteen women were interviewed for this study. The ages of the women ranged from 32 to 65 years. The mean was 43 and the standard deviation was 9.01. For

confidentiality purposes, all participant names were replaced with the letter P (for

"participant") and a number (1, 2, 3, etc.). The major demographics of the study are listed

below in Table 1.

Table 1

Main Study Demographics

Age	
Mean	43
Medium	40
Mode	36
Range	32-65

Education	
Master's	1
Bachelor's	4
Associate's	5
Some College	2
High School	3

Employment Status	
Full Time	9
Part Time	3
Unemployed	1

Occupation	
Higher Education	2
Artistic and Creative	2
Customer Service	3
Medical	2
Clerical/Administration	1
Government/Military	2
Transportation	1
Nonprofit	1
Disabled	1

No. of Children	
P1	0
P2	2
P3	1
P4	1
P5	1
P6	2

P7	0
P8	2
P9	2

All of the study participants were Caucasian. All of the study participants resided in northern Massachusetts and southern New Hampshire. Table 2 shows the details of each participant's past and present relationships. It provides the number of years that the participants were together with their husbands, married to their husbands, together with their current wives, and married to their current wives. It is important to note that 6 of the 15 participants were married to one another. This is indicated in the table as well.

Table 2

Details Regarding Past and Present Relationships

Participant	Age	No. of years with man (total)	No. of years with man (married)	No. of years with woman (total)	No. of years with woman (married)
P1	45	10	6	4	1
P2^	36	10	8	6	4
P3^	47	20	18	6	4
P4	36	7	4.5	12.5	6
P5	65	43	39	15	10
P6&	51	9	7	21	10
P7&	52	16	10	21	10
P8+	50	26	23	4	2
P9+	35	14	9	4	2
P10	40	6	1	14	11
P11	38	15	11	5	3
P12	36	18	12	2	<1
P13	36	5	2	4	2
P14	32	7.5	4	7	3
P15	48	17	13	12	<1

Notes. Identical symbols indicate participants are married to one another
P5 was married six times, 5 heterosexual marriages, and 1 current same-sex marriage: 39 years with men is the total range for heterosexual marriages (dates of marriages, including current same-sex marriage: 1965, 1967, 1985, 1990, 1997, & 2004)

Data Collection

To begin data collection, I used snowball sampling through connecting with social media networks. All that was needed was the use of one social media website, Facebook to gather more than the intended sample. I posted a Facebook™ status and sent out a private message asking my contacts for help with participant recruitment (see Appendix A). Contacts messaged me back privately, as requested, to ensure privacy of the potential participants. I then reached out to suggested potential participants in private Facebook™ messages and e-mail. I introduced myself briefly, explained that they had been suggested as a potential participant in my research study and gave them a very brief overview of the study. I received much enthusiasm during my initial contact with all of them, as they were all very eager to share their stories. I then asked for e-mail addresses so that we could easily send documents back and forth.

Once I received an e-mail address, I sent out the Explanation of the Study document (Appendix C) that highlighted who I was, what the purpose of the study was, and what eligibility criteria was needed in order to participate. If they were still interested, they were asked to contact me back so that we could move forward. I was contacted back by all potential participants who then received two more documents, an Informed Consent Form (Appendix B) and a demographic survey (Appendix D). I asked participants to fill out the Informed Consent Form first and gave a brief description of what it was and how to electronically sign it. Next, I asked potential participants to fill out a brief demographic survey and asked that both documents be sent back to me via e-

mail. All but one participant was able to fill out documents electronically. The final

sample consisted of 15 women who met inclusion and exclusion criteria for the study. All

participants were individuals who I did not know personally, but rather were friends of

my social networks with at least one degree of separation.

Data were collected using face to face, semistructured interviews. Interviews were

able to be face-to-face because all participants resided within 30 miles of my location in

southern New Hampshire. All participants were residents of southern New Hampshire

and northern Massachusetts. All interviews took place in the months of September and

October of 2014. Interviews lasted between 35 minutes and 125 minutes. All interviews

were semi-structured; there were a set of questions that were asked but participants were

allowed to veer off and share thoughts indirectly related. They were able to share other

relevant experiences even if they were not specifically asked about them. Though six of

the 15 women were married to one another, all interviews were separate and private.

Interviews were audio taped with two separate audio recorders to ensure that information

did not get lost. All interviews were then transcribed verbatim using Microsoft Word and

labeled appropriately. All data are stored privately on a password-protected laptop.

Following the interviews, all participants' real names were removed from documents and

were replaced with the letter P (for participant) and an assigned number (1-15).

Interview questions are provided in Appendix A.

Data Analysis

Data analysis was done using the three-dimensional space approach constructed

by Clandinin and Connelly (2000). This approach was created based off Dewey's

philosophy of experience, both a social and personal process. Dewey's idea was that in order to understand one's experience, it is important to acknowledge both their personal experiences and their interactions with others (Ollerenshaw & Creswell, 2002). Additionally, one cannot accurately understand how someone learns without considering the continuity of life. Each experience is related to previous experiences and affects future experiences. Considering the context of experiences is also significant (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Using these elements, Clandinin and Connelly developed a three-dimensional space approach particularly applicable to narrative research data analysis. The three important aspects of this approach are: personal and social interactions, continuity, and context (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Reading and re-reading is important in data analysis, particularly with narrative research and extensive field notes. Important categories are noted and discussed using this approach (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

Since I am the primary instrument in this narrative research, it was important that I first acknowledged and effectively dealt with any potential personal biases. The very first step in qualitative research is to identify the personal connection to the topic and figure out how to manage any biases. I made sure to do this prior to data collection. I am personally connected to the research questions and to the LGBT community. I made sure to write down any biases and personal opinions prior to participant recruitment and data collection to ensure data collection and analyses remained objective. I set aside any personal experiences, feelings, and beliefs I may have had regarding specific topics in order to retain the purity of each participant's responses.

The only personal information I shared with participants during the formal interview process was the reason why I was both personally and academically interested in this subject. Much of this information was also explained in two documents presented to potential participants prior to interviewing (Explanation of Research and Informed Consent). When I met with participants I shared briefly that I was married to a woman and that my wife was my inspiration for this study as she had been previously married to a man. I had shared to them that I'd found that there were varying reasons for why women, now with other women, had previously married men.

The first step in data analysis was to transcribe interviews, check all transcripts, and then read them. Interviews were read over twice before coding began so that I could become familiarized with participants' accounts. The first cycle of coding led to 124 codes. Lichtman (2006) suggests that initial codes, particularly in qualitative research, can reach upwards to 100 codes. Though my number was higher than that, I was aware that many of these codes would be quickly condensed upon a second round of coding. The right margin of the transcript was used to code all initial data. Saldaña (2013) describes a code in qualitative data analysis as "a researcher-generated construct that symbolizes and thus attributes interpreted meaning to each individual data for later process of pattern detection, categorization, and theory building, and other analytical process (p. 4). It is important to note that coding is a subjective experience and is not a defined science; there is much room for interpretation during coding in qualitative data analysis (Saldaña, 2013). Table 3 provides a sample of coding from interview transcripts.

Table 3

Sample of Coding From Interview Excerpts

Raw data	Codes
P1 stated:	
"Socially I felt trapped and couldn't get out	Felt Trapped
because he was my best friend and I wanted	
to please my family so badly. We were	Pleasing Family/Society
married as best friends but that was it. I had	
no sexual or romantic feelings for him.	Not a Deep Connection (with ex-husband)
Emotionally I also felt trapped because I didn't	Afraid of Rejection
want to upset or disappoint anyone for coming	
out gay"	
P2 stated:	
"Well, we were best friends and then I started to	Started Off as Friends
realize that I needed to be with her like all the	
time. I never had that with my ex-husband. I	Strong Emotional
wanted to be away from him. With her I had to	Attraction
call her 20 times a day. I wanted to see her	
every day. When we first met we just connected.	Not a Deep Connection
I don't know. It was an automatic connection"	(with ex-husband)

A second round of coding enabled me to reduce to a total of 46 codes. Many

initial codes were similar, if not identical, to others and subsumed by other codes, re-

named under a different code, or dropped completely. These codes were logged in a

codebook which included codes from all interviews. A third round of coding allowed me

to create 7 sequential overarching categories, each with their own number of

subcategories. Codes were then re-named to capture the essence of multiple codes.

Fisher (1993) used categories, instead of themes, to describe the experiences of

older adults over the life span. Since my work is also based on chronological events and

life stories, I chose to use categories and subcategories instead of themes; this made it easier to characterize data in a sequential form and as a function of time and growth.

With line by line coding I discovered data that was irrelevant and did not need to be coded. It was marked as N/A. An example of irrelevant material from one interview is "Apparently I look like a cougar. Meg is taller than me. Meg looks like a teenage boy so she thought Meg was my child. She thought she was my oldest son." This is one excerpt from a story where a participant spoke about her wife's physical appearance and how she was misconstrued as a young male teenager from an elderly neighbor. Because this event did not amount to discrimination or anything significant in her or her wife's life, this material was considered irrelevant to the purpose of this study so it was discarded.

Because interviews were semistructured, I did not stop participants if they wanted to share details or expand on thoughts. Some details and stories were not directly related to the purpose of the study and held no weight in the coding process; this material was discarded appropriately. To indicate that a finding was relevant to more than 12 participants, the terms "most," "often," or "a majority of," will be used. For responses that were relevant to at least half (5-11 participants), the terms "some," or "a number of," will be used. The term "a few" will be used to indicate responses from less than 4 of the participants. These types of notations have been recommended by qualitative researchers for indirectly discussing frequencies (Richie, Fassinger, Linn, Johnson, Prosser, & Robinson, 1997).

Each overarching category has its own subcategories. These subcategories range from three to eight per category. Since interview questions were asked sequentially, data

was reviewed sequentially. It made sense then to categorize data by time and life sequence. The following are the seven overarching categories: (a) Sexual Identity Prior & During Heterosexual Marriage, (b) Heterosexual Marriage (c) Divorce to Husband, (d) Transitional Period Between Divorce and Same-sex Experiences, (e) Experiences With Women, (f) Same-sex Marriage, (g) Sexual Identity Now. As outlined by Saldaña (2013), Table 4 provides an example of classifying codes to categories.

Table 4

Sample of a Category Derived From Coding

First set of codes	Second set of codes	Final Subcategory
Went through the motions of dating men	Wanted to be like everyone else	Pleasing family and fitting into society
Didn't want to disappoint boyfriend	Afraid of hurting boyfriend	
Biggest regret was marrying him	Wanted to please family and boyfriend	
Met through friends—felt obligated to go on a date	Wanted to please friends	
Enjoyed being "straight"	Afraid of not fitting into society	

Evidence of Trustworthiness

Credibility

I utilized techniques as proposed in Chapter 3 to ensure credibility. I utilized my research questions to guide my data analysis. I gathered comprehensive literature to create my conceptual framework and collect background information. Interviews were

conducted to gather direct data from the participants. Interviews were audio taped to ensure that all communications were gathered word for word. All interview data was typed out verbatim from the audio recordings of the interviews. Every single word and utterance was included in interview transcripts to ensure integrity of each participant's responses. Attention was paid to all discrepant cases and data that were different in some capacity. Those differences will be discussed in the results section as they are important to note. They highlight the variations in female sexual fluidity.

To add to credibility, I discussed the appropriateness of qualitative research methods for this study. I explained in detail narrative research and its necessary application in this study.

Transferability

As discussed in Chapter 3, qualitative studies do not attempt to generalize results to larger populations like results from quantitative studies may do (Creswell, 2013). I used purposeful sampling to recruit participants as I planned to. Snowball sampling is a form of purposeful sampling that though the small sample is neither random nor generalizable to a larger population, the data is likely to generate other research and provide education to relevant populations. Narratives have the potential to produce larger and broader insights or explanations that had yet to be discovered. It is possible that their stories are transferable to similar cases in similar contexts and situations. There is a large chance that the patterns and themes revealed from these women's stories are similar, if not identical, to other women who have experienced similar situations.

As discussed, I have also provided thick description; I have included sufficient detail about the participants and their unique experiences. I believe the interview questions asked and the amount of material provided by participants is sufficient enough detail for readers to understand life stories as related to the phenomenon.

Dependability

As mentioned in Chapter 3, to ensure dependability in qualitative research I have included sufficient detail for readers to replicate my work if desired. I have discussed the chosen research design, how it was implemented and how data was gathered, collected, and analyzed. Dr. Susana Verdinelli, my dissertation chair, has peer reviewed all verbatim interview transcripts. This was completed prior to data analysis to ensure that any potential biases were not included in any portion of the interview.

Confirmability

To ensure objectivity in the research I had a peer review conducted on all 15 interview transcripts. Additionally I included a section in Chapter 3 that discussed my role as the researcher and my connection to the topic and any biases I may have. At the very end of Chapter 5 a section on my personal reflections also allowed me to discuss my subjective feelings towards the subject and my reactions after meeting with these women. As promised I did engage in a mental cleansing prior to data collection where I ridded myself of any personal biases towards the subject (Patton, 2002). Starting at the point of participant recruitment, I wrote a reflexive journal where I documented my feelings and thoughts on a daily basis. In doing so, I enabled myself to discuss my subjective feelings

without letting it interfere with any portion of my research. I was able to then remain neutral throughout the entire process.

Results

The research questions drove the formation of both interview questions and analysis of data. Individual responses were carefully recorded and transcribed verbatim into Microsoft Word documents. All 15 participants responded to every interview question and all their responses were documented in separate Word documents. Each document was set up in the same exact order as questions were presented fairly identically to participants. Interview questions 1, 2, and 3 address research question 1 regarding the life stories of women in same-sex marriages who were previously married to men. Interview questions 4, 5, and 6 address research question 2 that asks about the labels these women had given themselves throughout their lives. Research question 3 that looked at the transitions of women between heterosexual marriage and same-sex marriage was answered through the responses to interview questions 7 and 8. A fourth research question looked into the personal and social factors that assisted and hindered this transition. Interview questions 8 and 9 addressed this final question. To ensure confidentiality, all participant names were replaced with the letter P (for "participant") and a number (1, 2, 3, etc.). Any other names mentioned in these narratives have also been changed to protect privacy.

As discussed in the conceptual framework that combines two very distinct and different theoretical perspectives, female sexual fluidity has been demonstrated by the multiple trajectories in the personal lives of women. It appears that the complexity of

female sexuality was apparent in my sample of 15 women. There were some apparent similarities between many of them, but there were vastly more differences, particularly in the area of sexual identity and the labels the women gave themselves both while in a heterosexual marriage and while currently in a same-sex marriage. Table 2 provides demographic characteristics of the 15 women and Table 3 shows the duration of each relationship, including years married. All participants, except one, had been married only once to a man and once to a woman. One participant, P5, had been married six times. She had been married 5 separate times to men and is now currently on her 6th marriage to a woman. P5 was significantly older than all the other participants at the age of 65. Most women were in their mid-30's and early 40's in the sample. See Table 3 for more details.

The results were made up of seven categories, each having their own subcategories. Table 5 below gives a description of the categories and the relevant subcategories (in bulleted points). All categories and subcategories are described in detail below.

Table 5

Categories and Subcategories Derived From the Interviews

Category I: Sexual Identity Prior and During Heterosexual Marriage

- Never Questioned Sexuality
- Uncertain About Sexuality
- "I Knew I Was Gay"
- Bisexual

Category II: Heterosexual Marriage

- Wanted to Please Family and Fit Into Society
- Limited Relationship Experience/Didn't Know Otherwise
- Unhappy
- Did Not Like Him As a Person
- "I Did Everything": No Balance or Equality
- Not a Deep Connection: "Just Friends"
- Threesomes & Extra Marital Affairs
- Living a Double Life

Category III: Divorce to Husband

- Hard Time Leaving
- Reluctant to Start New Relationship
- Started Off Completely As Friends
- Intrigued By "Out" Lesbians

Category IV: Transitional Period between Divorce and Same-sex Experiences

- Being Gay Was Not Talked About and Was Not Understood
- Being Gay is Bad
- Family/Friend Rejection
- Afraid of Being Gay and Being Rejected
- Family/Friend Acceptance

Category V: "Like nothing I had experienced before": Experiences with Women

- "Butterflies"
- Strong Emotional Attraction
- Felt Natural and Easy

Category VI: Same-sex Marriage

- Everything Is Better
- Balance/Equality

Category VII: Sexual Identity Now

- Attracted To The Person, Not The Gender
- Love is Love: Doesn't Need a Label
- Lesbian/Gay
- Bisexual

The larger, overarching categories are merely used to separate different periods of the women's lives in a sequential form. It was found that within each of these periods, important experiences or feelings occurred with all the women. Setting up categories sequentially created an easier way to view the life stories of these women. Thus, it seemed fitting to discuss sexual identity prior and during heterosexual marriage first, include the subcategories for that category, and discuss then heterosexual marriage and the subcategories that resulted there. A third category discusses the participant's experiences with divorce from their husbands and four related subcategories provide more detail. A transitional period between divorce and same-sex experiences came next so it fittingly encompasses the next, fourth category. Five related subcategories discuss this transition in more detail.

Participants then talked about their same-sex experiences and this is included as the fifth category with three subcategories to provide more specifics on patterns discovered. All of the women began relationships with the same sex and were eventually married. The sixth category titled "Same-sex Marriage" discusses the women's accounts of their marriages, particularly in comparison to their heterosexual marriages. Lastly, a discussion about the women's current sexual identities and labels took place. It is fitting to include this as the final seventh category to shed some light on the differences in sexual identity since their heterosexual relationships and marriages.

Subcategories were created to indicate the varying yet important experiences or feelings that took place between all the participants. Subcategories are listed by saturation. Those experiences that were most predominant among the women were listed

first under each category. It is important to note, however, that many women experienced various feelings during each period and that many of them mentioned overlapping feelings and experiences within a period of time and so their results were included in more than one subcategory under the larger category itself. Therefore, subcategories should not be compared in any way as being more or less important than the other.

Sexual Identity Prior and During Heterosexual Marriage

A first major period (labeled as Category 1 in Table 5) derived from the interviews was how each participant identified sexually both prior and during her heterosexual marriage. Sexual identity, sometimes referred to as sexual orientation identity or sexual orientation, refers to the sex of those to whom one is sexually and romantically attracted (APA, 2011). Labeling one's sexual identity is a subjective process as it requires one to pay attention to and interpret what sex one finds sexually attractive to and is romantically interested in.

Participants were asked to share the sexual identities they had for themselves both prior and during their marriage to a man. Results varied dramatically and four major positions were created as a result of this. Some never questioned their sexuality and believed they were heterosexual, others were uncertain about their heterosexuality, some labeled themselves as bisexual, and a few knew they were gay at a young age. It is interesting to note that there was a grading of awareness in regards to sexual identity in these women's lives. Each of these experiences has been identified as separate subcategories in Table 5.

Never Questioned Sexuality

This subcategory refers to the experiences of women in the study who never questioned their heterosexual identity at any point prior or during their heterosexual marriage. This includes all experiences in childhood, adolescence, and any time prior to and while married to their husbands. A heterosexual is generally defined as an individual who is sexually attracted to opposite sex individuals (Rosenthal, 2013). The term "straight" is also used to describe heterosexuals. A majority of the women in the study fell under this subcategory when asked about their sexual identities; they never felt any desires or feelings for women until a certain point in life.

P10 stated that she believed that relationships with women in her past were purely innocent and she never questioned her sexuality for most of her early life. "I was 100% heterosexual." She stated that she felt that label described her well until she met her current wife at the age of 26. "It was until I met her. Absolutely not until then. Never questioned anything ever." She said looking back she had absolutely no idea that she would end up with a woman.

P2 and P3 were two women who never questioned their sexuality until they met one another. P2 stated that she was never attracted to women prior to her wife, P3. When asked when she knew she was attracted to women, she responded, "I didn't. I never had that. I never had that. I never felt that way about women." P3, her wife, also had a similar experience. P3 when describing her feelings towards her ex-husband, stated" Well, I guess I think I thought I loved him." She stated that she didn't know otherwise and never considered women until she met P2. "Growing up I thought I was straight," P2 recalled.

Uncertain About Sexuality

Some women doubted their heterosexual orientation both prior and during their heterosexual marriages. Feelings, desires, and experiences with women appeared to cause uncertainty for some women prior to their same-sex relationships. For these women, something didn't feel right about a heterosexual identity at varying points in their lives. Though they may not have labeled themselves differently during this time, they wondered if another orientation or identity might better fit them. Some women really struggled internally with these feelings and a few shared that they saw therapists or talked to friends and family members about these feelings. For some, questioning occurred early on in life (childhood and adolescence) but for others questioning did not occur until they were heterosexually married; that's when they spontaneously met women or had same-sex experiences that changed their feelings.

P4 admitted that she cheated on her ex-husband with one of her female best friends. In fact, she shared that her bond was so strong with her best friend that when she moved out of state, she was heartbroken. In her heart she considered her "her girlfriend." "She might as well have broken up with me; that's how strongly I felt." She had kissed Jane numerous times. She shared that she constantly thought about wanting to kiss her." P4 stated that because of Jane she never once stopped wondering about what it would be like to have sex with a girl. She shared that if she thought back to junior high school she could remember that there were definitely girls that she liked. There was one particular girl that she had a serious crush on. P4 stated that despite these experiences, she was unable to make sense of it until she met her current wife.

P4 explained her confusion:

I could have known earlier in my life that I was gay but I just didn't put it

together. It's like if you see a really pretty color and it's got a word, it's already

named but you don't know the name of it, you can't call it something. Or a flower

and you are like this is the most gorgeous flower I have ever seen but I don't

know what to call it so I'll just say ""hey that's a pretty flower but I don't know

what to name it so I'll walk away."'

P9 shared that she had "inklings of liking girls" but didn't understand it

completely. She recalled her 8th grade best friend and that even though they were just

friends, they had this bond and she had this liking for her that she didn't have for other

friends.

She stated:

I had a really good best friend. Loved staying over her house. Loved sleeping in

the same bed. Her brother would always say "you two are lesbians" and we would

say "nooo" but I always had the attraction and like physically too. I was very into

looking at girls and enjoying that and always had it in my mind, "what would it

feel like to be with a girl?"

P9 stated that because it wasn't accepted, she pushed it away. She chalked it up to

being a phase and that she would be out of it. She recalled kissing a girl and liking it but

later justifying it by saying "oh well maybe I'm just messing around."

P9 recalled that those feelings for women lingered in her mind during her

heterosexual marriage. She recalled enjoying watching lesbian porn and enjoyed going to

strip clubs because she just enjoyed looking at women. "It was a happy place for me," P9 shared.

"I Knew I Was Gay"

A few women in the study knew from a very young age that they were not interested in men and though the term "gay" wasn't often publicly used, they knew of their same-sex attractions. Though the women in the study referred to themselves as "gay," definitions of "gay" in the literature generally refer to men who are attracted to the same sex (Rosenthal, 2013). However, the terms "lesbian" and "gay" are often used interchangeably by sexual minority women. The term "lesbian" refers to a woman whose sexual and romantic attractions are toward an individual of the same-sex (Rosenthal, 2013). Regardless of the terms used, the women in this subcategory knew that a heterosexual identity did not internally fit them, despite marrying men at one point in their lives. These women had a mismatch in their private and public lives. Internally they knew they weren't heterosexual and that marrying a man was not in line with their genuine desires. However, these women publicly engaged in heterosexual marriages, often for the sake of family and society and fear of rejection (this will be discussed in a later subcategory).

P1 knew that she was attracted to women from the age of 12. She shared that while hanging out with friends as a teenager, she had special butterflies and feelings for these girls more than the boys she was dating. She admitted that from the age of 12 she remembered wanting to kiss girls and that in her teenage years she would check out

women. P1 shared that she definitely had feelings that were deeper than a friendship with some girls.

P1 stated:

My first crush was Cheri from the 7th grade. I was over her house and we were all playing with a Ouija board and I remember looking over to her and thinking that she was so pretty and I had those feelings of liking her, more so than just liking her as a friend. I wanted to kiss her. That never happened but if I had the opportunity I would have. I just remember that unlike girls that were my friends, I wanted to touch and kiss these crushes. It was different. Nothing overly sexual but I just wanted to be near them.

She said that was how she knew she wasn't heterosexual. "I know that I'm gay. I never looked at men in that way." P1 explained that she always knew she was gay but didn't act upon it until her mid 20's. She was 24 when she had her first girlfriend. After having sexual experiences with her, she was certain that she was not heterosexual. P1 even shared that being with her "taught me that I am supposed to be with women as opposed to men." P1 stated "I knew I wasn't attracted to men. I had liked girls my whole life". She shared that in regards to her husband that "there was no sexual or physical connection whatsoever."

P6 was also confident that she was attracted to women from a young age. When asked when she figured out she was not attracted to men, P6 stated that it was in elementary school. P6 shared that she looked at some girls in a way she didn't with others. "With different people I would be like 'whoa' on a physical level." She recalled

her first crush from second grade. She knew she was gay prior to marrying a man. She

admitted that she wasn't sure what she was doing when she married her husband. She

believed that marrying a man was more of an out than anything and that a good reason

for why the marriage failed was "that under current that I was gay."

Bisexual

A few women used the term "bisexual" to describe their sexual identities at some

point prior to and during their heterosexual marriages. A bisexual is defined as an

individual who is sexually attracted to both men and women (Bates, 2010). Two of the

women only briefly used this term to describe themselves when having initial same-sex

feelings and desires, while one another woman used this term most of her life and still

continues to.

P5 used the term "bisexual" to label herself prior to and during her heterosexual

marriages. She stated that as far back as high school she felt she was bisexual. P5 had

been married to five men in her life prior to meeting and marrying her current wife. She

shared that she had been with girls prior to her heterosexual marriages. After her second

marriage, P5 stated that she "stayed single and dated males and females." She truly

believed that she was "just always bisexual." She does believe that using this label could

have been because it was the 1960's and 1970's and she "didn't know what a gay or

lesbian was."

A couple other participants besides P5 used the term bisexual at one point to

describe themselves during their heterosexual marriage. P11 stated that in the beginning

of her divorce, she thought she was bisexual. P14 also shared her thoughts about being sexual.

P14 stated:

I considered myself straight until I started questioning and then I was bi-curious for a little while and then I realized that I did feel that there was an emotional connection, a mental connection, a sexual connection that I did have with women so I kinda shifted over to the idea of bisexual.

Heterosexual Marriage

This second overarching category, "Heterosexual Marriage," includes eight separate subcategories. This category discusses reasons why the women chose to marry heterosexually, more specifically, it discusses their concerns about pleasing family and society and their limited relationship experience up to that point. The two subcategories that cover these ideas are "Wanted to please family and fit into society" and "Limited relationship experience/didn't know otherwise." Additionally this second category of Heterosexual Marriage includes the women's experiences in their heterosexual marriages and their particular feelings about their husbands. The subcategories that discuss this are labeled as "Feeling unhappy," "Didn't like him as a person," "I did everything: No balance or equality," and "Not a deep connection: Just friends." Lastly this category of "Heterosexual Marriage" includes two final subcategories that describe the women's accounts of threesomes, extramarital affairs, and their feelings of living a double life. The subcategories are labeled as "Threesomes & Extramarital affairs" and "Living a double life."

Wanted to Please Family and Fit Into Society

This first subcategory under the category of "Heterosexual Marriage" describes some of the women's desires to please their family and friends and marry heterosexually. Some of the women described feeling lots of pressure from family and friends to marry their boyfriends, and also felt pressure from social norms to "do what everyone else was doing." It is important to consider the ages when these women first had same-sex feelings and experiences which for a few, could have been over 50 years ago. Society was not nearly as accepting of gays and lesbians during the times these women had these feelings and experiences. Opportunities to be "out" and "gay" were very limited, and people often experienced stigma and discrimination. This is still true today, but much less than ever before.

A Gallup Poll from 2012 indicated that 54% of American adults consider the morality of gay and lesbian relations as morally acceptable. This is up 14% from 2001 where only 40% found it morally acceptable. This trend is also applicable to acceptance of gay and lesbian marriages that has risen from 42% to 54% from 2004 to 2012. In 1977, 43% of American adults did not believe gay and lesbian relations should be legal. By 2010, only 31% believed it should be illegal. Research by NORC at the University of Chicago conducted a General Social Survey and found a dramatic increase in acceptance of same-sex marriage from 1988 to 2010. In 1988 it was found that only 10.9% of Americans supported same-sex marriage. In 2010, that number rose to 45.9% (NORC, University of Chicago, 2011).

Many of these women described desires to be seen as "normal" and so living a heterosexual life was much easier for them at the time, even if it wasn't what they truly wanted in their hearts. It is important to note that this subcategory is applicable to the women in the study who knew they were gay and bisexual from a young age as well as those who questioned their sexuality prior to their heterosexual marriage. For those women who did not question their sexuality until after they were heterosexually married or who did not question their sexuality at all until they met a particular woman, this subcategory is not applicable. Wanting to please family, friends, and fit into society is a motivation that was relevant only to those who knew they were not heterosexual or had suspicions that they were not completely heterosexual prior to their heterosexual marriages. Their reason for then marrying men was partly related to a desire to please family and friends and fit into society where being heterosexual was the norm.

P1 knew she was attracted to women when she was in late childhood. She shared that the reason she married a man was simply to please her family and to fit into social norms. She stated that her father was dying of cancer at a young age and he had hoped that she and her boyfriend at the time would eventually marry. She wanted to fulfill that wish for him and she wanted to please the rest of her family, especially her mother who she described as fairly homophobic. P1 stated, "I'm a huge people pleaser and wanted to please society and didn't want to be an outcast coming out gay cause we are talking in the 90's here." She discussed how she didn't want to disappoint her sister who had introduced her to him, and she felt that she had no alternative at the time; there was no opportunity to "be gay."

Additionally, P1 was aware of how in love her boyfriend was with her at the time. "I went through the motions to spare him the heartache but I never worried about myself." So she married him. "It was the biggest regret of my life. I shouldn't have done it because I knew I was gay, but I did." P1 shared that she spent most of her life trying to gain approval of her family that meant so much to her and that she was willing to sacrifice her happiness for theirs. "I felt trapped because I didn't want to upset or disappoint anyone for coming out gay." She liked feeling "normal" with a husband and shared that it was easy to live a heterosexual life because that's what the majority of people did.

P6 experienced a similar situation. She knew of her same-sex attractions, but in the 1970's it wasn't discussed. She stated that her parents were happy that she married a man because they had suspected she was attracted to women from a young age. The decision to marry her ex-husband was "definitely from family pressure." She was well aware that her mother knew of her same-sex attractions, though they never talked about it. She was also aware that her father wouldn't tolerate it if it were discussed. "It was a nice cover that I was marrying a man being that they were Irish Catholic." She stated that an obstacle that kept her from leaving her heterosexual marriage was the "security or normalcy, not being different and just fitting into society. Not making waves." P6 said she felt she was "doing the right thing for society."

Limited Relationship Experience/Married Young

A second subcategory in Heterosexual Marriage describes other reasons for why many women married heterosexually. Whether they had questioned their sexuality or not,

a majority of the women shared that in looking back, their first marriages occurred at a very young age and that because of that, they had very limited relationship experience and not much to compare that relationship with. Many shared that they had immature or inaccurate understandings of love and that marrying was something that "you had to do"; many described it as a "natural progression" and getting married young years ago was commonplace. Additionally, a few women mentioned that because they had children out of wedlock, it was imperative that they got married despite their young age.

Almost all of the women in the study shared that they married young and that they had limited relationship experience prior to their heterosexual marriage. There were no apparent connections to sexual identity with this subcategory. Women who knew they were gay, who were uncertain about their sexuality, bisexual, and who did not question their heterosexuality, discussed marrying their husbands at a young age and having limited relationship experience. Some of the women mentioned "not knowing otherwise" and that marrying heterosexually was the only option and that it was part of life. Many mentioned that had they waited until later that they would have done things differently, whether it be exploring opportunities with women, or not marrying their boyfriends.

P3 shared:

Well I guess I think I thought I loved him. Or what I thought was the ideal. I knew what I wanted in my head. I think I kinda…well, all my friends around me were getting married. I know I think I just kinda settled. It was just kinda the next step I guess. I didn't think I would meet anyone else. I got married to him when I was 23. I didn't have a lot of relationships prior to this relationship.

P5 stated that she experienced her first marriage at a very young age, 16, but that was normal and expected as long as it is was with a man. "Getting married at 16 or 17 was a regular thing, especially in the South." P9 stated that she married her high school sweetheart "or so you think." She worried about doing the right thing but really didn't know otherwise at the time. "I would say when we first got together, it was young. It was high school. It was something that you should do that everyone should do. You marry your high school sweetheart."

Feeling Unhappy

This third subcategory of Heterosexual Marriage describes the women's unhappiness in their heterosexual marriages. A majority of the women shared that they were unhappy in these marriages for a variety of reasons, though most revolved around a disconnect between she and her husband, a lack of emotional connection, a lot of fighting, and very limited sexual activity. A few women shared that they were not in love with their husbands and that made it difficult to be married to them and move forward in their lives authentically. For those women who knew they were gay, all reported that they were unhappy because they were not in love and felt that they were living lies. For those who questioned their sexuality or considered themselves bisexual, there were varying reasons for their unhappiness.

Some of this will be described in later categories and subcategories. Some were unhappy because of the abuse they experienced at the hands of their husbands while others discussed specific personality traits of their husbands that made their marriages difficult. This was true for women who believed they were truly heterosexual; they may

have been in love but they were unhappy with how they were treated or how the marriage was going.

P6 stated that she was not happy in her marriage and that even if she wasn't gay, she doesn't think it would have lasted. She stated that after they had their children they both got busy with that "but it was just I progressively got less and less happy. So why was I going to battle this and try to make this marriage better when I am not going to be happy anyway?"

P11 also shared her unhappiness in her heterosexual marriage. "We were constantly fighting. He was very controlling." P11 shared that she was depressed and jealous of others who were in love because she didn't have that with her husband. "I felt trapped. I felt like I was going to die there. I felt that I couldn't leave him because I had a made a commitment to him." P11 even admitted that she had thoughts of her husband dying because she couldn't see another way out. P11 was aware that she was having stronger feelings for a woman and that led to her unhappiness in the marriage as well.

Did Not Like Him As a Person

Some women shared that their husbands did not treat them well and they didn't like them as people, never mind as spouses. Some women shared that their husbands were physically and verbally abusive, neglectful, and did not give them the support and love they deserved in a marriage. Some did not respect their husbands and did not enjoy spending time with them. Many shared that their husbands had substance abuse issues, issues with the law, and made poor lifestyle choices. Others talked about their husbands

as being unfaithful and not trustworthy. Some described their husbands as "no good," "weak," "manipulative," and "pathological liars."

A few women shared that their husbands were not good choices for them and that even if they did not have the same-sex desires they had had, they probably would not have stayed together with their husbands for these and other reasons. It was apparent that many women did not feel that their needs and wants were met in this marriage and much of that seemed to be due to the mentalities, personalities, and behaviors of their husbands. There did not seem to be any apparent connections to the women's sexuality and whether or not they liked their husbands. In fact, P1 who knew she was attracted to women, really liked her husband and respected him and P14 who truly believed she was heterosexual, did not care for her husband at all because of the way he treated her. This subcategory refers more specifically to the friendship between the husband and the wife as well as the personalities and lifestyles of the husbands. Not liking their husbands as people is a large reason for why the women were unhappy in their marriages.

P3 experienced mental and verbal abuse from her ex-husband. She described him as an alcoholic who would embarrass her and get himself into trouble while intoxicated. He was arrested because of behaviors under the influence. "He was a bad drunk. He degraded me. He would talk about sexual things he would do to me in front of our friends." P3 shared that it was always about money and materialistic items with him and that he was very moody. People would tell P3 that she deserved better. P3's family even said that they didn't like him as a person either. At one point when P3 was about to end the marriage, she feared for her physical safety as she was afraid he would hit her. "I

actually had to get a restraining order against him." P3 experienced mental health issues

because of the mental and physical abuse she experienced. "I was having heart

palpitations and anxiety. I was one big mess. I had been drinking and doing drugs to

escape it."

P14 experienced some serious abuse like P3 but much more physical. P14

discussed scenarios where her husband tried to choke her while she was pregnant with

her second child. "We were oil and water and things got scary for awhile." P14 stated that

the mental, emotional, and physical abuse was a significant reason the relationship did

not work out. P14 shared details about psychological manipulation and other instances

where he would threaten to "fucking bludgeon me to death." He attacked her and chased

after her with her children nearby; she never felt safe at home. She discussed how it made

her a shell of a person and how she avoided going home because of fear of what he would

do to her. P14 stated her husband raped her when she was 9 months pregnant with their

son.

"I Did Everything": No Balance or Equality

This subcategory describes the women's experiences of the marriage itself and the

roles and responsibilities of each spouse within the marriage. A majority of the women

described their heterosexual marriages as unbalanced and unequal, particularly when it

came to housework and taking care of children. Most of the women shared that they did

mostly everything in regards to child care and cleaning of the house. Some women even

shared that they supported their husbands and gave them love and affection but they

never received it back. A few women shared that their marriages were very traditional

and so their husbands were controlling and it was very much "their way or the highway." Some felt that communication was lacking and that concerns were often one-sided. Mostly all felt that they did not receive the same of what they put into the marriage, whether it was physically or emotionally.

This subcategory is unrelated to the women's sexualities during their heterosexual marriages as this specifically refers to the equality and balance of household chores, childcare, and work within the marriage. In fact, some of the unhappiness that was experienced by many of the women (as discussed above) stemmed from the inequality and lack of balance within the marriage.

P2 stated that her ex-husband "never did anything. He never helped with the children. He was very lazy. I did everything." She stated that she was the really the only parent. "In my first marriage it was always about pleasing the other person" P2 stated. P3 shared something similar, "Once we got married it was always about him and he had to worry about himself first and I was kinda left in the dust. So he never put me before him and I always put him before me." P3 stated that in her heterosexual marriage, "I cooked, I cleaned, I took care of the baby, I worked two jobs…I did everything." P3 shared that when she finally asked for a divorce he made it all about him and he admitted to her "You are right. I was never there for you."

P14 shared that her husband's mental abuse carried over to house work:

His attitude was if you see that it needs to be done, why don't you do it yourself? So that would include skidmark stained underwear, that would include plates and forks left out wherever, and if anything needed to get done in the house, I was to

do it. All of the cooking, all of the cleaning. He would make the money. I would

pay the bills.

Threesomes and Extramarital Affairs

A majority of women shared that they had sexual experiences with other women

during their heterosexual marriages. Most women shared that these same-sex experiences

during their marriages were the first experiences they ever had with women. What is

interesting about this subcategory is that at least half of the initiations of same-sex

experiences for these women came from their husbands and not from themselves. In fact,

half of the women shared that their husbands were the ones who encouraged and initiated

threesomes and suggested they sleep with other women, even though they had never

shown prior same-sex desires. For those who did not question their heterosexuality or

who held true to the sanctity of marriage, these same-sex experiences appeared to be

forced upon by their husbands. Some women shared that they were shocked that their

husbands were suggesting they go outside of their marriage, and some clearly knew it

was their husband's fantasy to see or hear about two women together.

Those women who were questioning their sexuality, knew they were attracted to

women, or were bisexual, gladly accepted their husbands' suggestions for same-sex

experiences. All of the women who had husbands who suggested sleeping with women

did eventually have a same-sex experience whether it was with or without their husband's

knowledge. Two women had threesomes with their husbands and shared that they were

very awkward and were significant experiences for them; one woman shared that her

husband knew she had same-sex attractions as a result of that experience and another

woman shared that her husband never felt threatened about her leaving him for a woman but that she enjoyed her time with a woman more than the time with her husband.

Some women initiated same-sex experiences in the context of their heterosexual marriages. They shared their same-sex attractions and sexual desires for women with their husbands; some explicitly asked to have a threesome with him and another woman and some asked if they could have their husband's blessing to sleep with a woman alone.

It is important to note that some of these same-sex sexual experiences were in the context of threesomes with their husbands, while others were one-on-one with another woman, without their husband's knowledge. Some women did not receive their husband's permission to have sex with a woman without their involvement or never had that discussion with their husbands, but they did so anyways because their desires were very strong.

There was a large amount of variance in these experiences and all was very much dependent on whether the woman herself had been questioning her sexuality or knew she was gay. It is also interesting to note that only one husband, P9's, ever suspected that she was attracted to women and that she might leave him for a woman. All other women shared that their husbands saw these same-sex experiences as trivial and non-threatening and were unaware that their wives were enjoying it more than they were.

P14's ex-husband encouraged her to sleep with other women from an early point in their marriage. In fact, P14 recalled not even being interested in women and being appalled that her husband was encouraging her to have an affair and go outside of the marriage. "He would say 'hey if you ever see a girl you like….He didn't necessarily want

to be a part of it." P14 emphasized that she had his blessing and that he didn't see it as cheating as long as it was with a woman and he knew what was going on. P14's ex-husband went as far as creating a Craiglist ad for her to meet women behind her back, pretending he was her. He even wrote to and replied to women for her.

P11 experienced something very similar in her heterosexual marriage. After her twin boys were born, P11 recalled her ex-husband encouraging her to be with a woman. P11 stated that he would say to her, "I want you to be with a woman, I want you to be with a woman." It was his fantasy, she stated. "And he'd see women and even say 'do you find her attractive?' Want to talk to her?" P11 stated that she was not interested at the time. Unlike P14, P11's ex-husband wanted to be involved and was hoping for a threesome ultimately.

P11 did experience sex with a woman but her ex-husband was not involved. He accused her of cheating; "He wanted to be involved or he wanted to watch." P11 stated that her ex-husband persisted and kept trying to find women so that she could have this experience with the two of them. P11 stated that she wouldn't do so if she wasn't attracted to the women he picked out. "If he was involved it was great. If he was not involved that was not so good."

Not a Deep Connection: Just Friends

Some women expressed that their husbands were their friends, even their best friends, but that sexual or physical desires for them were lacking. This was not true for all the women, but certainly for a good majority of the sample studied here. This was

especially true for those women who knew they of their strong same-sex attractions or had been questioning their sexuality for some time.

A few women, as described above, did not like their husbands and did not consider them as their friends. These same women did share that there was also a lack of a deep connection to their husbands and that they did not find them sexually or physically attractive either. Some described it as not being able to have deep emotional and sexual connections with their husbands and that they loved their husbands but it was purely on a friendship level. Many women reported that they enjoyed their time with their husbands and had common interests with them but that everything else was lacking. This was very apparent when details about sex with their husbands came about. Some shared that they slept in separate bedrooms than their husbands and many shared that they avoided sex with their husbands because of the lack of desire.

For the women who knew of their same-sex attractions from a young age, the lack of a deep connection was apparent; they were unable to have a strong emotional, physical, and sexual connection with their husbands because they were men and these women's orientations were towards women. It was apparent that they saw them as friends but nothing more. For those who questioned their sexuality or bisexual, there were mixed results in regards to feeling deep connections with their husbands. Some shared that they were truly in love and saw them as lovers as well as friends, but others felt that the connection was missing with their husbands. For those who were questioning, this lack of connection with their husbands was profound and apparent; when these women were able

to connect deeply with other women but not with their husbands, their sexuality was more deeply examined and explored.

P1 knew from the start that she was unable to have a deep connection with a man, emotionally, physically, and sexually.

P1 explained:

Emotionally I knew I wasn't connected to him on a deeper level. It was more of a friendship. I really enjoyed my time with him but it wasn't in a sexual way by any means. I wasn't physically attracted to him. I enjoyed his company immensely, like a brother, but that was it. I avoided sex whenever I could.

P1 stated that he was her best friend and that she simply went through the motions. "Nothing felt right except that we had a good time together. Everything else felt unnatural." P10 felt very much the same as P1.

P15 shared that her husband was her best friend but that within a year of their marriage she lost all sexual desire for him. "We liked doing things together, we enjoyed parenting, but it was definitely more of a brother/sister relationship. I felt very guilty about my lack of sexual desire. I loved him but not in a sexual way."

Living a Double Life

Because many of the women saw their husbands as just friends, they often felt that they were living double lives, as their feelings and desires didn't match their public lives and outward actions. Some shared that they felt they were "living outside of themselves" or that "something wasn't right." Some of these women had already had their same-sex experiences and those desires and feelings never left their minds. Some

struggled with these new feelings as they experienced their first same-sex experiences;

they realized how significant and exciting these experiences were and they couldn't deny

them, as confusing as they were. This feeling of living a double life is applicable to all of

the women in the study whose feelings, desires, or actions were not completely

heterosexual.

At some point, this mismatch of public heterosexuality and private homosexuality

was true for all the women in the study. It was, however, true for some women longer and

more intensely than for some others, particularly for those who knew they of their same-

sex attractions, were bisexual, or were uncertain about their sexuality; these women knew

that being with a man wasn't going to satisfy all of their desires. For those who didn't

question their heterosexuality until much later, there were still experiences of feeling like

living a double life where they were heterosexually married and moderately satisfied but

yet also had new and spontaneous same-sex desires and feelings that did not correspond

to their public image.

When P4 discovered what it was like to be with a woman while heterosexually

married, "I knew I needed to figure out what it was all about. I was fixated on it. I needed

to explore it further with or without my husband's permission." She and her husband

never had sex and slept in separate bedrooms.

P14 was confused about her feelings when she fell for a woman during her

heterosexual marriage. She tried to reach out for resources to help her make sense of it.

"Here I am married to a man, have a children, pregnant with another, have a woman I

like…am I nuts? Am I thinking about this rationally? This is crazy." Once P14 met this

woman, her current wife, her feelings shifted towards women. "I started realizing things I didn't like about men and things I did like about women. And then there were times when in my private thoughts, I thought about women." P14 started seeing a therapist because of the abuse she experienced at home and because of these newfound feelings for a woman.

Divorce from Husband

This third overarching category describes the transitions the women in the study experienced as they made sense of their feelings, realized the strength of these feelings, and felt the need to end their marriages. Only one woman shared that her husband initiated the divorce because he knew she was more strongly attracted to women and "he wasn't getting what he deserved." The remaining women all initiated their divorces to their husbands; some husbands saw it coming and had seen the signs prior, while others were completely caught off guard. Despite any challenges with the divorce, all of the women eventually transitioned to more same-sex experiences and eventual relationships.

Within this category, 4 subcategories were created, "Hard Time Leaving," "Reluctant to Start New Relationship," "Started Off Completely as Friends," and "Intrigued by 'out' lesbians." The first 2 subcategories demonstrate the obstacles some women experienced in leaving their husbands and in starting new relationships. The latter 2 subcategories demonstrate the experiences the women had in beginning friendships and relationships with the same sex. Some experienced spontaneous friendships that turned into relationships and those spurred their divorce from their husbands. Others became intrigued by women who were "out" as lesbians and those experiences were the impetus for same-sex desires.

Hard Time Leaving

A majority of the women shared that they experienced difficulties, whether financial, personal, social, or physical, in leaving their husbands and their heterosexual marriages. For some, their concerns for leaving revolved around their children and their safety and happiness. Struggling to leave their husbands seemed applicable to those who were afraid to be alone, uncertain how to live the single life, and who worried about their children and their financial status. Sexual identity was unrelated to this difficulty in leaving their husbands.

One woman stayed married for longer than she should have because she was pregnant. For other women, it was fear and uncertainty of the future. P15 shared that it took awhile for her husband to divorce her and that she experienced typical struggles upon the divorce.

> She stated:
>
> The separation took a long time in coming. Both Ned and I were scared of the change, we had been married for so long, we were afraid to hurt our son, and we were nervous about supporting ourselves. Will this cause pain to my child? Will I be able to support myself financially? Where will I

P8 waited years to act on her feelings for women even though she learned of them in her early 20's. She felt guilty for kissing a woman while heterosexually married. "I never left the marriage even though I should have." After meeting a woman and asking for a divorce, P8 stated that her husband asked her not to divorce him. He said "we can stay married. You can do whatever you want but don't leave me." P8 shared that her

concern for her children and their safety and happiness was a priority for her and made it even more difficult to leave. "I'm going to ruin my kid's life and my husband's life," P8 remembered thinking. P8 also shared that concerns of being alone hindered her ability to leave. She knew she could afford to be on her own but "I had never lived out on my own so I wasn't necessarily fearful that I couldn't do it, I just wasn't sure how to do it."

P8 stayed married to her husband for years. Though they were separated they didn't get legally divorced for years.

She stated:

In my mind I had no need to get divorced. I wanted to keep the name for the kids. He said that if I wanted the divorce I would have to pay for it myself. So I just let it sit there.

Reluctant to Start a New Relationship

Some women shared that both prior to their divorce and after their divorce, they feared being alone and were reluctant to start a new relationship. Some were fearful of getting hurt, physically or emotionally, by another person. Some shared their concerns with not being able to find a woman, while others feared commitment and being locked down like they felt they had been in their marriage. A few experienced what is known as a "gay adolescence," a desire to be free and explore all possibilities immediately after discovering one's sexual orientation and coming out (Siegel & Lowe, 1995). Another relationship appeared to be scary and threatening to some because of this.

There were no connections to sexual identity in regards to starting a new relationship. It appeared that personality and self-esteem seemed more related to this

reluctance than anything else. It also appeared that financial status, family situations, and personal stability also played a role in reluctance. Those women who were happy to divorce their husbands were less reluctant to move on to a new relationship and those who had positive experiences coming out were also more enthusiastic about beginning same-sex relationships. It is important to note that a majority of the women in the study divorced their husbands because they had met a particular woman and had already begun a romantic relationship with her. This subcategory is not applicable to those women and is only relevant to those who were starting their experiences dating the same sex or were seeking new relationships with women.

P12 was actually fearful of getting close to women because she reported having been abused by women growing up. Though she knew she was attracted to them, the trust with women had been broken. P12 shared that those experiences made it really confusing for her to understand her feelings. "I thought 'well I really like these women' or 'I'm really attracted to these women' but yet women suck because this is what they are capable of, at least in my experience."

P13 also did not want to rush into things "so that's why we took our time to make sure we were in a good place and it was going to be something serious." P15 stayed single for 5 years after her husband divorced her. She shared that when she was ready she would finally push herself but that for those 5 years she wasn't pushing herself into it. When she met her current wife, "she was very guarded." She stated that she didn't want to give anymore away to anyone if they weren't going to give it back." She had fallen for

a woman prior who did not feel the same way. She was reluctant to get married right away. "If it ain't broke, why fix it?" The word marriage "made me feel smothered."

Started Off As Friends

A majority of the women expressed that their same-sex relationships began as platonic friendships. Many of the women shared that the emotional connections to these female friends were intense and powerful. They saw them as friends but that gradually the friendships turned physical and sexual. They shared that the basis to these relationships were friendships and that emotional attachments came before any other feelings for each other.

Most of the women who started their same-sex relationships as friendships were those who labeled themselves as heterosexual prior and during their heterosexual marriages or were those who questioned their sexuality during their heterosexual marriages. These women were much more likely to have first same-sex experiences beginning as just friends and blossoming into a sexual relationship. In fact, for those who did not question their sexuality, this blossoming was something that they had never had with a woman before and for many it took them by surprise. Most of these women saw these other women as best friends until "feelings developed" and they were unable to deny them no longer.

P2 and P3 started off as best friends. "I don't think I really knew what was happening. It just kinda happened. I hated to be away from her. I kinda figured that I needed to be with her somehow, some way." P2 identified that she never wanted to be away from P3. "In a good way it got worse. I knew I was developing feelings for her." P2

shared that while both still married, P3 expressed her feelings for her. P2's feelings were mutual. P2 shared that she thinks she was always attracted to P3 but "didn't interpret it that way right away." P3 shared that they were always together and had a lot of fun with one another. "In my mind it never crossed that line though." Then P3 shared that she started thinking about what it would be like to kiss P2. She would watch her lips and pay attention to her body. "The more we knew each other, the more I became attracted."

P12 and her current wife started off as classmates. It was through a conversation at school that they became friends. "We started off as just friends and that's all I expected and that's all she expected and one thing led to another." P12 shared that when she first met her now current wife, her feelings towards her were neutral. "We decided to go to a movie together and then right from there that's when feelings started to develop on both sides." P12 said she thought to herself "wait a minute…this isn't just a friendship anymore."

P12 stated that it was symbiotic timing wise, "how they both developed an attraction." P13 shared that although there was a little flirting that went on, "it was definitely just friendship at first because neither of us were looking for anything…and then it just kinda happened." P13 said they took their time getting to know one another. "We became friends before anything romantically so we had a good solid friendship basis."

Intrigued By "Out" Lesbians

Almost half of the women shared their intrigue with women who were "out" lesbians and that these women paved their way for their transitions. All of them shared

that they had their first sexual encounters with these women who were out and proud. This is important to note because it identifies the significance in the curiosity and desire for exploration with a woman who looked like and identified as a lesbian. The women in the study who had these experiences shared that they felt comfortable, excited, and intrigued by these women who came into their lives.

Most of them met these women at work or at a social event and that their sexual orientation was obvious because of the way they dressed and because they were public about their sexuality. Women of all sexual identities had connections to this subcategory, but it appeared that this intrigue was especially true for those women who never questioned their sexuality. In fact for those women who believed they were heterosexual, these "out" lesbians were the first acquaintances and friends that they had who were public about their homosexuality and they were intrigued by many of their physical, social, and emotional characteristics.

Experiences with these "out" lesbians were the turning points for many of the women in the study who had not questioned their sexuality before; there was something about these particular lesbians that intrigued them and had them thinking twice about their sexuality for the first time. This intrigue was also relevant for those who questioned their sexuality and for those who knew they were gay and bisexual. A majority of the women in the study experienced a desire or longing for a particular lesbian who was "out and proud." For some, this intrigue was the beginning of same-sex desires and same-sex experiences. For others it was a reminder of their true sexual identities.

P1 shared that her first experience was with a co-worker at the age of 24 who was out at her work. "She was the only lesbian I knew that was out at my work and I was intrigued by her more than anything. I was jealous that she could be out and with a woman and be happy." P1 shared that this woman hit on her at work. "She must have gotten a gay vibe from me…of course I flirted back." This was P1's first experience sexually with a woman and it was then that she was sure that she was not heterosexual.

P10 was very certain about her intrigue for her now current wife:

I found out she was gay and I was very interested and very curious about her life. Then as I got to know her I started thinking about her all the time. I couldn't get through 5 minutes without thinking about her. She was also having all this fun and I thought that I never had that and I was curious. I was kinda jealous. I wanted what she had and I was also curious about what it would be like to be with her physically.

Transitional Period between Divorce and Same-sex Experiences

All of the women experienced divorce from their husbands whether it was initiated by them, their husbands, or mutually. They all then experienced a transition from heterosexual marriage to same-sex experiences and relationships, though not all experienced things at the same rates and same frequencies. Many left their husbands because of a particular woman and some left because they wanted to pursue women. A few others did not discover serious same-sex relationships until after their divorce. All of the women eventually had same-sex experiences and same-sex relationships. Not all of the women's first same-sex experiences were with the women they are currently married

to. Regardless of the various circumstances, all of the women in the study experienced heterosexual marriage, divorce from that heterosexual marriage, and a transition to same-sex experiences and eventual same-sex relationships.

It is important to acknowledge both internal and external factors that contributed both positively and negatively to these women's understandings of sexuality and homosexuality as they transitioned to these new experiences. Many of these external influences and personal concerns became particularly significant at this time in their lives; this was the first time that they all pursued same-sex desires and relationships in a serious context. It was during this transitional period that the women were faced with the negative influences and external obstacles. However some were fortunate enough to have some positive influences to help in the transition from a heterosexual relationship to a same-sex relationship that would eventually be made public.

Some of these influences did not play a role in some of these women's lives until this particular time; for others, these influences had played a significant role for quite some time, especially for those who knew they were gay from a young age. There are 5 subcategories, 4 of which made things difficult for these women and were perceived generally as negative influences by the women in this study. These subcategories include "Being gay wasn't talked about or understood," "Being gay is bad," "family/friend rejection," and "afraid of being gay and being rejected." The one positive influence that made some of these women's transitions easier is described in the final subcategory, "family/friend acceptance."

Being Gay Was Not Talked About and Was Not Understood

For all of these women, especially those older in age, homosexuality was not discussed much at all when they were children or adolescents. Sexuality was considered a private matter and everyone was assumed to be straight. It was apparent from these women's accounts that homosexuality was also not well understood and that many of their parents and those in their lives were uneducated about how one is gay and their misconceptions and myths made it very difficult for these women to understand and accept their same-sex desires. A few women also shared that because of the lack of knowledge surrounding gays and lesbians, many people were shocked when they came out to them because they "didn't look gay" and didn't fit lesbian stereotypes.

The sexual identity of the women in the study had nothing to do with whether or not being gay was discussed or understood within their family, community, and society. Since all of the women in the study were over the age of 35, all of them experienced a society that was a lot less accepting and knowledgeable about the LGBT community. This was particularly true for the women who were 45 and older and whose childhoods were in the 1970's and 1980's where there was no such talk about homosexuality or any variations from heterosexuality.

P7 shared that there were no concepts or role models of any alternatives outside heterosexuality. "It wasn't an option. I may have heard about gay men but it wasn't out there as an 'oh this is possible." P6, her wife, felt very much the same as she grew up in the same era. "I never talked to anyone about it. This was the early 70's. You just assumed everyone was straight and you would say you were straight just to feel normal." P7 shared that when she came out to friends, they would say "oh we didn't know…you

don't look like you're gay. It was never talked about and if you had a crush, you didn't talk about it."

When P15 shared that she was gay, her biological mother said she was confused and that she was "this way because her parents were alcoholics." P15 stated that at one point her biological mother called her feelings "perverse" and that just because she had fantasies didn't mean she had to act on them. She even stated that if she had raised her (which she didn't), that she wouldn't be gay. P15's biological mother believed that she was doing this because she hated men after her marriage and that this was a form of rebellion.

Being Gay is Bad

Many of the women experienced negativity towards gays and lesbians even before they experienced their own same-sex desires or came out to family. They learned that being gay was bad often from their parents, family members, and the teachings of their religions. Some shared that parents vocalized to them that being gay was unacceptable while others shared that it was just understood that "you don't do that" and that you "don't have those feelings."

P12's family was Catholic so being gay wasn't acceptable and that you were to marry a man. They vocalized it to her and when she was old enough to understand, she got it. Any feelings P12 for girls or women she pushed out of her mind because of this. "At the time I had to because my family said it was wrong. Religion said it was wrong." So P12 said to herself that she wasn't supposed to feel that or do that, so she didn't. Her mother still thinks it's wrong to be with a woman.

P6 shared that she grew up Catholic so being gay was considered "immoral" in according to her family. Her mother once caught her experimenting with another girl and yelled "God does not like gay people. You will not go to heaven if you behave that way." This was the late 70's, P6 recalled so it would not have been accepted back then. P6 shared that she would pretend in her mind that she was a guy so she could justify having feelings for girls. "Cause at the time you didn't think homosexuality was okay so for it to be okay you had to be guy to like a girl." P3 shared that her parents grew up in a religious generation and so you "weren't born that way."

Family/ Friend Rejection

As a result of these negative views, a lot of the women in this study have lost family members and friends as a result of coming out to them and being in same-sex relationships. Much of this was related to religious and traditional, conservative beliefs of others. Some of the women were shunned and rejected from family events, ignored, and others were ridiculed and insulted.

P6 shared that even on her and P7's wedding day, her parents didn't want her to invite the rest of the family because they were ashamed. "I mean everybody knows now but I never talked to my extended family about it. Nobody wanted to talk about it. They like my wife but just don't talk about your relationship."

P10 said her grandmother didn't speak with her when she found out she was leaving her husband for a woman. She did not attend her wedding. "She was pissed…and maybe she thought it was gross or weird or maybe she was embarrassed that her granddaughter was doing this." P10 admitted that it was difficult to get a wedding party

together for her same-sex wedding. She lost a lot of friends when she left her husband; she thought many would stick by with her but they didn't. One of her friends even pulled out of being a bridesmaid because she didn't support it. P10 also shared that she lost a couple close relationships with friends because of their religious beliefs.

Afraid of Being Gay and Being Rejected

A major theme that appeared with most of the women and their personal concerns was a fear of being a sexual minority and being rejected by others. These internal struggles made it difficult for some to accept themselves and to come out to others, particularly if they were certain there would be negative reactions. Because being gay wasn't discussed, was considered bad, or was seen as negative or immoral to many, some women in the study went through internal struggles. They experienced extreme fear or being rejected and losing family and friends. Some also feared being gay and starting a new life with a new identity. Many were uncertain about the future and what would come of it all.

P1 was particularly worried about disappointing her mother when she came out to her. "I feared her rejection and being shunned by my family." P1 feared losing her husband as a best friend and the family she had gained through him. She didn't want to "upset or disappoint anyone for coming out gay." P8 shared that it also took her awhile to feel comfortable telling people because she feared how society would view it. P8 believed that being around more gay people allowed her to realize that "wow there is a whole other world and people are living. This is going to be okay."

P10 feared for the conflict that would arise and what her whole family would think about her. P10 shared that she went to therapy to deal with these personal and external struggles and that she finally realized that what was most important was her happiness, regardless of the outcome.

Family/ Friend Acceptance

One positive influence in most of the women's lives was that at least some of their family members and friends did accept them when they came out to them. Though all women had very different family dynamics, all of the women shared that they had at least one or two people in their lives who accepted them after they came out. There were participants who experienced more rejection than acceptance from family and friends.

However, there were also some participants who had experienced more acceptance than rejection, and that those family members and friends who accepted them were the ones to which they grew close to. Many family members and friends were very supportive and shared that "they didn't care at all" and they were happy for them that they could finally live freely. A few women shared that family and friends had ideas that they were gay and had been waiting for years for the woman herself to accept it.

P1 stated that she was grateful for the support of her aunt and uncle and her sister who were "extremely supportive." They would say things like, "don't be silly, just come out. You are who you are we love you regardless." This family support gave her the courage to come out to others despite rejection and resistance from other family members. P10 had a similar experience and shared that her father and extended family

accepted her from the moment she came out to him. "100% supportive from him. No difficulty with family."

P13 shared that her family suspected she wasn't heterosexual from a young age and that "they didn't care who I liked as long as I was happy." Her mother and sister both said "we all knew" when she came out to them.

"Like Nothing I Had Experienced Before": Experiences with Women

Category 5 involves the descriptions of the same-sex experiences of these women. For some, these experiences were with the women they are currently married to, while for others their first same-sex experiences were powerful but not relationship worthy. All of the women shared that these experiences were significant and profound and that they had experienced feelings that they had not experienced in their heterosexual marriage. Three subcategories make up this category and are sequenced as "Butterflies," "Strong emotional attraction," and "Felt natural and easy."

"Butterflies"

This first subcategory shows how profound and intense many of the connections were that these women had with other women. Many women used the words "butterflies," "chemistry," "fire," and "instant connections," to describe their attachments to other women. Most described these other women (many of whom are now their wives) as soul mates.

Upon meeting her current wife, P14 shared that there was "fire and chemistry right from the beginning." P14 said it was "unexplainable connection." She felt that they had known each other for years. "It was a kindred spirit and soulmate connection

between the two of us. There's no denying that." And in comparison to being with her ex-husband it felt like "a world of a difference." P15 said that she also felt a very strong feeling that was hard to put in words. "It was like a past-life recognition…like I already knew this person. It was very overwhelming. A deep sense of familiarity."

P11 described "chemistry" that she felt with her wife. P10 shared that she felt a spark upon first kissing her even though she was married to her husband at the time. She thought, "This is how love is. This is how it is supposed to feel. This is what everyone is talking about." P10 shared that "she knew right away" that she would marry her current wife. P9 shared that she "would get these butterfly feelings" with her first girlfriend and that her love for her husband did not compare to the love that she has for her wife, P8. "Oh my god. It is totally different with her. There is this total electrical magnetic thing." P9 talked about getting "belly flutters" when her wife looks at her. "It's a different connection. It's a different bond."

Strong Emotional Attraction

A majority of the women discussed a strong emotional attraction to other women. In fact many shared that this is how their friendships turned into relationships. The emotional attractions were so strong that it opened up doors for physical and sexual attractions to these women. Many shared that they didn't have intense emotional attractions to their husbands like they had with these other women. P3 said it was "definitely an emotional attraction" and P5 said that with a woman she is "emotionally in the right place." P4 and P15 both said that there was definitely an emotional connection to their first female crushes. "I think it was mostly an emotional attraction. I was

fascinated by her and attracted to her and she was charismatic." P5 felt that it was the "verbal connection and exchange of emotions" that made experiences with women a "whole different ball game." She discussed how you could "sit and talk and laugh and there was never a limit." P6 also described that her attraction to women was "more of an emotional thing."

P9 talked about wanting to touch and talk and embrace with her wife from the start and that talking was easy. She mentioned that she would wait impatiently for text messages from her wife even at the beginning of their relationship.

Felt Natural and Easy

Many of the women used terms like "natural" and "easy" to describe their relationships and sexual experiences with women. Some shared how much more comfortable and at ease they felt in their same-sex relationship. Many described feeling "free" and "finally able to be me" as part of the experience.

P5 shared that she felt much more comfortable and at ease with women. P7 shared similar sentiments. "Everything felt much better. I felt relief. Felt more comfortable." She shared that she did not have that in her heterosexual marriage. "I always felt like I was looking at it from the outside." P1 said she lived a fake life with her ex-husband. "It wasn't me." Being with a woman "finally felt at home. I can be me and be happy." P1 knew from her first experience with a woman that it felt more natural. P2 discussed a "relief" and "release" that happened when P3 told her she had feelings for her. "I just smile…like finally…ahhh." P2 stated that it is easy with P3; "It's simple and easy. No stress and no worries." P7 stated that being with P6 felt right because "there was a

language that we could speak." P6 felt the same. "It just feels right. It feels much better. A lot more comfortable." P7 feels more true to herself being with a woman. P10 also shared her first experience with a woman as "comfortable" and "safe."

P4 shared:

I don't know if I felt safer with girls or if it felt more natural…I could just breathe easier. I started being attracted and kissing Jess it was just safe. The more that went on, the more I realized this is what I want to do. I realized this is me and I'm happy.

Same-Sex Marriage

All of the women in this study are now legally married to their current wives. Table 2 shows the details on how long these women have known their partners and how long they have been legally married to them. Same-sex marriage was recognized by the state of Massachusetts in 2004 and New Hampshire in 2008. Some of the women in this study first committed to their partners with civil unions because same-sex marriages were not legal yet in their home state. Others went to other states to get legally married even if it wasn't recognized in their home state. This 6th category, "Same-Sex Marriage" discusses the women's experiences in their marriages to their wives. Two subcategories emerged from this larger category, "Everything is better" and "Balance/Equality." The women shared many positive experiences in their same-sex marriages.

Everything is Better

An important general theme that arose from all the women was that everything about their same-sex marriage was better than their heterosexual marriage. The women

discussed better emotional connections, better communication, and better sex, and more compatibility.

A majority of the women shared that sex with women was "better". P14 shared that she felt safe during sex to explore and she was comfortable with her wife; she didn't always have that with her ex-husband who often "pushed her out of her sexual comfort zone." P10 shared that she is completely satisfied in the bedroom with her wife but never was with her ex-husband. P11 agreed that her "sex life is much better" and P2 said she couldn't even stand her ex-husband touching her but that she wants to touch and be with her wife all the time. P9 said that once she had sex with a woman, "I knew I wasn't going back to men."

P10 added that communication is definitely better in her marriage to a woman. She believes that her wife understands her more because she is also a woman. "She talks to me about everything. My ex-husband didn't do that." P2 believed the same: "It's better. It's easier. They think like you think." P2 and P15 shared that she and her wife rarely fight or argue and that they think in the same way. "Everything is much, much better," P15 stated. "I don't have to beg or ask a thousand times," P2 stated. P8 shared that she can talk to her wife but that she couldn't talk to her ex-husband. "There's communication here now. She cares."

P3 and P12 shared that they feel loved, taken care of, and respected in their current marriages and that they didn't have that in their previous marriage. P3 also shares that she laughs a lot more now. "I never laughed like that in my previous marriage." P5 shared that open communication was huge and that they can talk about anything. "The

other marriages were never complete. You never had the open forum to talk about anything."

Balance/Equality

Another important positive that was shared by a majority of the women in this study was that in comparison to their heterosexual marriages, there was more balance and equality in their same-sex marriages.

P5 discussed that her marriage to a woman is much more equal. "It is a shared relationship all the way around. Everything is 50/50." P13 stated that she has a lot less to do in her same-sex marriage because "it's more equal in this one." P6 stated the same thing: "The equality of the relationship with a woman is so much better." P15 stated that she and her wife "make a great team." P9 stated that it is great being with a woman because you can share stuff and that you do things together. P3 laughed that in her previous marriage she "did everything…now I do nothing." P14 stated that her "house is cleaner!" She expressed that she and her wife balance cooking and cleaning. "It's very, very equal and it's like if I don't get something done, she'll get it done and if she doesn't get something done, I'll get it done." P11 stated that they split half of the money they earn and that it is equal financially. P14 stated that their financial situation is also very equal.

P7 discovered that in heterosexual marriages there were very constricted gender roles. In her same-sex marriage, she doesn't experience that. "It is a wonderful opportunity to do things differently in terms of gender roles and who is responsible for what." P7 said she never appreciated traditional gender roles and the fact there is no

expectations for any of that in her marriage feels more true to who she is. "You have to build that."

Sexual Identity Now

The final category of results involves the current sexual identities or sexual orientations of the women in this study. Some of the women kept the same labels and identities as they had prior to and during their heterosexual marriages though now they are also open about it to family, friends, and the public. So, their private and public sexual identities are matching. A few of the women are not fully open to everyone but are particular about the labels they use to describe themselves around those they are open to. Some women have experienced significant shifts in their sexual identities and labels from early in their lives. Those who believed they were truly heterosexual now find themselves using every term but heterosexual to describe themselves. Some do not like labels at all, preferring to be unlabeled; they do not wish to be boxed into a particular category as they feel these labels are too limiting and restrictive.

A good majority of the women do not believe they fit any of the current labels and believe that their attractions are based off non-physical attributes. These women, including those who once called themselves gay and those who once called themselves heterosexual, find that they are not attracted to the gender or sex of a person as much as they are the inner being of that individual. Four subcategories developed from the interviews of these women, "Attracted to the person, not the gender," "Love is love" Doesn't need a label," "Lesbian/gay," and "Bisexual." There were many variations in the women's labeling of their sexual identities now.

Attracted to the Person, Not the Gender

This subcategory describes the women in the study who do not give themselves labels and do not believe they are attracted to only women. Rather they assert that they are attracted to the person and not the gender and that it is the connection that they develop with the person that is most important.

P6 stated that she has no boundaries when it comes to love. "I think I'm on the spectrum." She stated that she can be attracted to men and though it doesn't happen often, she feels she is open minded and wired differently. "It doesn't have to be a man or a woman. It's the person." P7, her wife, feels the same way. "It's really up to the person, not the gender." P7 stated that she is attracted to P6 not because of her gender but because of her as a person. P7 believes there are so many variances and that "people are who they are and I always thought there is a continuum." P7 stated that if something happened in her marriage she wouldn't exclusively seek relationships with women. "I mean, who knows? I can't say. I am more person based."

P15 has a philosophy that all people are bisexual and that some people just have stronger leanings in a certain direction. P15 feels that she is "so open that I could love anyone, that gender or looks made no difference; I only love the person inside the body." She believes that people are more than flesh and bone and that we are spirits in a human body. "As far as I was concerned, spirits have no gender." All that is different is the body parts. P14 believes that "the gender of a person is really less important." P14 is attracted to the person, not the gender. She said that her wife's gender and physical sex doesn't matter.

Love is Love: Doesn't Need a Label

Some of the women really struggled to label themselves when asked. Some refused to identify because they don't believe that labels are necessary or that people need to fit into specific categories created by society. Many of these women believe that "love is love" and that who we love doesn't require an explanation.

P14 and P15 do not care for labels. P14 doesn't believe any sexual orientation out there describes her accurately and P15 believes that labels only focus on the sex part and it creates a divider between gay and straight. P3 doesn't like to label people but is certain that she is labeled "because that's how people think." P7 tends not to use labels to describe herself and prefers to say "this is my wife" or "I'm in a relationship with a woman." P2 said she doesn't care if someone is gay. "To me it's normal. It doesn't matter who you are with."

P2 stated:

I have my gay friends and my straight friends but I don't think of them as my "gay friends" and my "straight" friends. They were just my friends. So their sexuality doesn't matter. I don't look at people like that. I don't' see that. It doesn't matter to me. I see that whole labeling thing in society and I'm not big on labeling people. What right do I have to label people? They are a person and I am a person and we are all people.

P4 stated that although she is with a woman, she doesn't look at her relationship as a "gay or straight relationship." P4 shared that "love is love" and that it shouldn't matter who you fall in love with. P8 and P9 would agree. "We believe that you love who

you love and anybody can fall in love with anybody." P9 does not want to be labeled as being in a "homosexual marriage." To her, if someone is married, they are married and it shouldn't matter to whom they are married.

Lesbian/Gay

A few of the women in the study shared that if asked they would describe themselves as "gay" or "lesbian." Though not all of these women are out to everyone and open about it in public, they believe these two terms best suit them and their feelings.

P10 stated that if she had to label herself she would call herself a lesbian. She stated that she is proud and forthcoming about it. She shared that she sometimes looks at men too but would never consider sleeping with them. P3 would use the term lesbian to describe herself. P12 would describe herself as gay or lesbian and stated that she finds men physically attractive but no longer sexually. "Finding a man attractive? Absolutely. I can do that, but I don't' want to sleep with them."

P4 shared that she will catch herself checking out men every once in awhile but that's it. "If I start to think about it anymore than that I start to freak myself out. God, no." P3 also shared that she is still physically attracted to men but "I wouldn't do anything with them."

P8 would also call herself a lesbian. "I'm not bisexual, I know that. I know that I could never be married to a man now. I couldn't give him completely what he needs and that's completely not what I need." P1, P4, and P13 all prefer to be called gay instead of lesbian but aren't sure why. P9 will use either gay or lesbian to describe herself and doesn't care that people know. "You don't like it? Tough shit. I need to be happy with

who I am. I don't want it to be labeled as a 'homosexual marriage." P9 is not afraid to correct people if they make the assumption she is married to a man. P4 is also open 100% and is very forward about her sexuality.

Bisexual

A few of the women now label themselves as bisexual. None of these women had considered themselves bisexual prior to and during their marriages to men. They believe that they could be open to relationships and sex with either sex if they weren't married.

P2 would describe herself as "bisexual in a lesbian relationship." She stated that she is attracted to a few guys and that there is one in particular with whom she could probably have sex with. She shared that she never had issues with who she was and that she has never hid anything. She had no internal struggles but went from a marriage from a man to a marriage to a woman. "This is me."

P11 would consider herself bisexual. She stated that she is more attracted to women physically and emotionally but she wouldn't rule out being with a man sexually. She said she would never consider a relationship with a man ever again however. P15 also describes herself as bisexual and knew that was the right term for her when she first fell in love with a woman. She doesn't consider herself a lesbian but she doesn't consider herself straight either.

Summary

The purpose of this study was to examine the lived experiences of women who have transitioned from a heterosexual marriage to a same-sex marriage. Using a narrative methodology, appropriate steps were taken to acquire and interpret data. Data was

collected via face to face interviews with 15 women who all fit exclusion and inclusion criteria. The three research questions that were foundational to this study provided the backbone to ask appropriate interview questions to gather relevant data. Interviews provided rich descriptions of the life stories of women who were once married to men and are now married to women. Narrative analyses provided rich details that were read, interpreted, and categorized into sequential categories. These categories provided the true essence of the life stories of these women.

Chapter 5 will present the interpretation of the study findings as well as limitations of the study, recommendations for future research, and implications for social change.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine the life stories of women who were once married to men and who are now re-married to women. I chose this topic because investigating this particular population had yet to be done and with an increase in same-sex marriage legalization both nationally and internationally, this topic seems more important than ever. I interviewed fifteen women who had each experienced this phenomenon of having been once married to at least one man and are currently legally married to a woman.

I gathered data from these 15 women using face to face, semi-structured interviews. All interviews were audiotaped with two devices to ensure the accuracy of interview transcription. I asked each participant a series of questions that pertained to their previous heterosexual marriages and current same-sex marriages, as well as questions about their transitions between the two, personal and public identity shifts, and social and personal influences that may have played a role. Following each interview, I transcribed all material and later identified themes that were common to the experiences of all of the study participants. Since these experiences involved their entire life stories, categories were sequentially formed to highlight progression and forward movement. The results were significant in demonstrating the continuum of female sexuality, external and personal factors, and differences in heterosexual and same-sex marriages.

Interpretation of the Findings

This study has filled the gap in the literature by examining the lives of women who have experienced marriages to both sexes. The experiences of these women have been captured through data and thick descriptions. The specific research questions this study intended to answer included the following:

1. What are the life stories of women in same-sex marriages who were previously married to men?

2. What are the labels these women have given themselves throughout their lives (both past and present)?

3. What are the experiences of transition from being in a heterosexual marriage to a same-sex marriage?

4. What personal and social factors hindered and assisted in this transition?

These questions were addressed in interview questions and will be discussed in their respective categories below.

The participants were all women who had previously been married to men and who are now re-married to women. Fifteen women were interviewed. Twelve of the women were from New Hampshire and three of the women were from Massachusetts. Each participant offered to participate in the study after hearing about it or being recruited from a friend, coworker, family member, or acquaintance. All women were Caucasian and were between the ages of 32 and 65. The mean age was 43. All of the women graduated from high school and 12 of the 15 women had additional education beyond a high school diploma (see Table 2). Nine of the women were employed full-

time. Two women did not have any children from either marriage while 11 women had children with their previous heterosexual marriage. One woman had her child with her wife in her current marriage. All participants were legally divorced from their ex-husbands and were all legally married to their current wives at the time of the interview.

Sexual Identity Formation

Kinsey's 1948 perspective that sexual orientation was not black and white but rather on more of a continuum, seems to be helpful in understanding shifting sexual behaviors but does not describe the women in this study. Rather, Klein's (1985) sexual orientation grid that considers sexual behavior, sexual fantasies, sexual attraction, social preference, emotional preference, lifestyle preference, and self-identity, encompasses these shifts more clearly. With the exception of 3 participants who knew they were gay from childhood, all women experienced some sort of shift in their sexual desires, emotional preferences, and sexual behaviors as well as their own privately held sexual identities.

Many women shared that it was the emotional connection with a woman that created sexual desires and fantasies. Klein et al. (1985) found that for some individuals sexual behavior can change at different times in one's life and one's sexual identity may not correspond to one's sexual behavior. This appeared to be particularly true for a good majority of the women in this study.

Stage models of sexual orientation formation do not account for all the experiences of the women interviewed in this study. Many of these models (i.e. Cass, 1979; Coleman, 1982; Sophie, 1987; Troiden, 1979), including the first and most

influential, Cass's 1979 sexual orientation formation model, do not explain the life trajectories of most of the women in this study. Cass and other stage model theorists believed that identity development occurs in adolescence, if not earlier, and from then on it is a sequential, stage-like process of discovering a homosexual identity. This was not the case for many of the women who shared that they were truly in love with their ex-husbands and considered themselves heterosexual during that time; some did not question their sexuality until in midlife when they connected to a particular woman.

The remaining women who were aware of their same-sex attractions from a young age were also unable to experience the sequential stages at "proper times" because of personal and external obstacles. Most of these stage theorists believe women who claim to be homosexual later in life simply denied their true early feelings and were never really heterosexual (Kitzinger & Wilkinson, 1995). Some also believed historically that women became lesbians for political reasons (Kitzinger & Wilkinson, 1995). From this study, it appears that these statements are not supported at all.

More fluid and multidimensional approaches to sexual identity formation seem to be more applicable to the women in this study. Horowitz and Newcomb (2001) found sexual identity to be much more complex than an early identity label and a specific set of behaviors and sequences. Much like later researchers, they found that sexual identity labels were subject to change as an individual evolved through life. They also felt that certain early sexual behaviors, feelings, and individual expressions, were not always indicative of later sexual behaviors, feelings, and individual expressions. Rather, there was much opportunity for fluid movement and changes in a person's sexuality.

Diamond (2008a) focused her research on females' sexual experiences and found their identity formation to be much more fluid than that of males (Diamond, 2008a). These types of approaches consider the social context, circumstances, family and friend influence, generation, and time (Rosenthal, 2013). Cox and Gallois (1996) considered the impact of various factors in the development of sexual identity in their model. It considers personal and social identity and discusses the importance of emotional attachments, friendship choices, and group membership, in forming sexual identities (Cox & Gallois, 1996). This model seems applicable to the women in the study who found themselves attracted to men and women for very different reasons and who also discussed the importance of coming out publicly because their personal identities had shifted.

Many discovered that there were mismatches in how they personally identified and how they publicly identified, for some, if not all, of their lives. This model emphasizes the importance of considering social identity and belongingness along with acknowledging genuine personal identities. It considered all environmental influences too, which appeared to be quite significant in the lives of the women in this study.

Baumeister (2000) suggested that female sexuality may be more fluid and plastic than male sexuality and that social and situational factors play a large role in this. The women who participated in this study identified numerous social and situational factors that influenced their transitions and same-sex experiences. They discussed both positive and negative influences that both helped and hindered opportunities to experience and be open to intimacy and sex with the same sex.

Baumeister (2000) also suggested that females may be likely to have nonexclusive attractions to men and women for much of their lives. With a couple of exceptions, all participants shared that they had been attracted to men and women physically and emotionally at some point in their lives. Some women even shared that they would be open to sex and an emotional connection with a man if their same-sex marriages ended.

Diamond (2000) found that in her research this was true for many women but not all of them. Some women in this study shared that sex with women was so much better that they would not consider being with a man again. Peplau and Garnets (2000) found that for women identity labels are very much subject to change and that past sexual behaviors and desires may not be accurate in understanding women's present or future sexual desires and behaviors.

Females tend to base desires off emotional connections and relational attachments (Peplau, 2001). Most of the women shared that their attractions were emotional in nature, particularly at the beginning, and that these attachments set the stage for a relationship and eventual marriage. They discussed these emotional connections as powerful and significant and the impetus for exploration of sexual feelings. Many shared that sexual desires and behaviors did not occur until after an emotional connection was formed. According to Peplau and Garnets (2000), emotional intimacy is of significant importance in women's sexual experiences. Many of the women discussed feeling more comfortable and free emotionally and sexually with their wives than they did with their ex-husbands.

An important finding was the large number of women who, despite having been married to a man and a woman, shared that they are "attracted to the person, not the gender" and that it is not the physical body or biological parts that they find attractive. Rather, it is the soul inside that body, or the connection they have, that creates a desire within them. Some of these women labeled themselves as bisexual but some preferred to stay unlabeled because they did not feel that any specific sexual orientation fit them accurately. They felt that they could be open to a relationship with anyone regardless of the sex.

Rust (2000) called this bisexuality while others like Diamond (2008a) call it *person centered attractions*. Diamond (2008) found this to be true in her longitudinal studies. Such individuals assert that they can respond erotically to anyone whom they create a strong emotional connection and that the gender of that individual is irrelevant to their attraction (Diamond, 2008). This was not the first time that person-centered attractions had been discovered in research. Blumstein and Schwartz (1977) and other researchers discovered the same phenomenon in their work with females.

In regards to female sexual fluidity, Diamond's (2000) work proved to be quite consistent with the results of this study. A majority of the women in this study shifted, even slightly, in their sexual identity labels, or sexual orientations. In one of Diamond's studies, approximately 61% of her sample experienced a shift in their sexual orientation or identity label (Diamond, 2000). Her sample was somewhat opposite of the sample in this study. When she first interviewed these women, they all had nonheterosexual orientations. Most of the women in my study described themselves as either bisexual or

heterosexual early on in their lives and have since then, shifted how they describe themselves.

Regardless of the numbers, what is important to note is the significance of sexual fluidity. In another study, Diamond found more than 50% of the women had changed their identity labels. These numbers seem quite fitting to the results of my study. Diamond's use of *stable* versus *fluid lesbians* can also be applied to the women in my study. Three of the women knew they were gay from a young age but married because "it's what they were supposed to do." They knew they were gay and would be considered stable lesbians despite the fact that they did not appear lesbian to the public (because they were involved with men). However, many of the women in the study seemed to fit more of the fluid lesbian term; they were at one point heterosexual or never questioned themselves while with men, but later found themselves having same-sex desires and positive experiences with women. Many of them had these experiences in mid-life, well beyond their teenage years.

The women in my study fit Diamond's descriptions of stable and fluid lesbians quite accurately. Stable lesbians had higher amounts of same-sex attractions than fluid lesbians (Diamond, 2005). Many of the women in my study who were aware of their same-sex attractions from a young age described having many same-sex attractions as far back as elementary school. Those who did not have these experiences and labeled themselves as heterosexual or did not question their sexuality did not describe having same-sex attractions until much later in life. This would make sense; without having those attractions, these women never felt a need to question their sexuality.

Positive Social Influences

Many of the women in this study discussed that coming out and sharing with others that they were romantically involved with the same sex brought both positive and negative results. Research supports that coming out allows an individual to express her true feelings and feel free and genuine (Rosenthal, 2013). Some women in this study did share that they were excited and proud to come out because they had finally felt free and finally made sense of it all.

Many were happy to leave heterosexual marriages that were unhealthy and unhappy and find support and love in another that they had not yet experienced. Many women described family and friends as accepting upon their coming out. In fact, some women even shared that many of their family members and friends said to them that they knew for years that they were gay and that they were waiting for them to come out. Others shared that family and friends just wanted them to be happy and who they were with romantically didn't matter at all. Many had very supportive family and friends who encouraged the pursuit of a same-sex relationship.

Negative Social Influences

A majority of the women in the study described negative social influences and external obstacles that made leaving their husbands, coming out, and transitioning to same-sex experiences, difficult. D'Augelli and Hershberger (1993) found that 46% of sexual minorities lost at least one friend after disclosing their sexual orientation to them. Some of the women in this study shared that they did lose family members and friends

because they came out to them. This appeared to be especially true for those who had family members and friends who were highly religious.

Religious intolerance was a major theme in the external influences in these women's lives. With the exception of one woman, all women in the study were not particularly religious themselves. They did not personally struggle with their own religious identities but rather they found difficulty in acceptance from family and friends who were highly religious. Many shared that their families were Catholic or Baptist and that being gay was shunned by these religions. Some women shared that parents vocalized this early on in their lives, while others just assumed that because of their faith, they would not accept them.

One woman described her internal struggles because she was Baptist and religion was important to her. She found herself having feelings for an out lesbian at her work and she struggled with that so much she saw a therapist for some time before deciding to divorce her husband. Higgins (2002) found that religious fundamentalism in one's family was strongly correlated to negative perceptions towards gays and lesbians. This appeared to be consistent with the details provided by the participants in my study.

The concept of compulsive heterosexuality appeared to have a significant impact on most of the women's lives. Women socialized into a heterosexual society where heterosexuality is the norm and anything different is seen as abnormal and invisible; anything else is not discussed or considered and should be avoided (Kitzinger & Wilkinson, 1995). Bridges and Croteau (1994) added that women are conditioned to

assume they are heterosexual and pay attention only to cues that are consistent with that, disregarding cues that may contribute to emotional attachments to women.

This compulsive heterosexuality played a significant impact on the lives of the women in this study. All of the women shared that they married heterosexually because it was what they were supposed to do and that "girls were supposed to like boys". Even for the 3 women who knew they had same-sex attractions at a young age, all married men because they feared social rejection and didn't want to experience outside of the heterosexual norm. They shared that they also worried about family and friend rejection and discrimination from society.

This compulsive heterosexuality played the biggest role in the lives of women, even those who discovered same-sex attractions later on in life. Many still feared leaving their heterosexual lives because of fear of the unknown and potential social oppression. As seen in Chapter 4, most women shared that being gay wasn't discussed, they had no gay or lesbian role models, and parents and society had clearly expressed disdain for anything outside of the heterosexual norm. Wyers (1987) found that these social and personal expectations were the number one reason for lesbian women decided to marry men.

Related to compulsive heterosexuality is the lack of gay and lesbian role models. Though this may not be as valid for today's youth, a few women did share that in their childhood and adolescence, there were no gay and lesbian role models. Being gay and lesbian was perceived not to be an option and no one publicly discussed it or presented it in a positive light. There were no examples to look up to in their lives. Herek (1994)

found that for gays and lesbians, not having positive examples and role models, makes it difficult to have others to identify to and may increase the likelihood of rejecting one's homosexuality. Pearcey (2005) found that many did not know what being gay meant.

Almost half of the women in my study experienced something quite similar. In fact, a few said very much the same thing and that they didn't know what it meant to be gay or lesbian and did not know anyone that was during their childhood and teenage years. The topic was not discussed. If it was discussed, it was generally negative or it was in the context of stereotypes (Pearcey, 2005). Some of the women shared that their parents provided very negative views of gays and lesbians and only talked negatively about it so that's what they internalized.

Family expectations played a significant role in the lives of the women in this study. Like the study from Bates (2010), many women married men because it was "the natural progression" and what they were supposed to do next. Many women in my study feared upsetting parents and so learned to repress any feelings they had for women because being gay was "bad." Repression often occurs as a result of compulsive heterosexuality; anything but heterosexuality should be avoided and ignored (Bates, 2010). A few women shared that getting married was a requirement in their family and so was expected by everyone. There was no opportunity to do anything but marry a man.

Pleasing family and society was significant to a majority of the women in the study, even if it meant sacrificing their own happiness. The three women in my study who were aware of their same-sex attractions were afraid to disclose their sexual identity for fear of rejection. Thompson, Forsyth, and Langley (2009) found in their studies that

many lesbian women had this exact same fear. All 3 women feared being open about their lesbian identities because of parental and social rejection. Thompson et al. (2009) found identical results in their studies of lesbian women and the coming out process. One participant even shared that she married a man so that her family's suspicions of her same-sex attractions would go away. She felt that if she married a man, they would feel relieved that she was not attracted to women and that any concerns would vanish.

A majority of the women in my study did not experience any personal resistances, such as resisting a lesbian label, after they experienced their most substantial same-sex experiences. Only one woman shared that her daughter said to her "I think you are gay," she immediately denied it and said that it was impossible because she was married to a man. Most women in my study who had experiences early on in life avoided the label because of society; those who experienced same-sex experiences later on in life had to work through their feelings but later embraced their true feelings. It is important to note that many women in my study do not prefer to be called gay or lesbian even in the context of their same-sex relationship. This does not mean that they deny their same-sex marriage but rather it could mean that they did not fit that the lesbian identity labels them accurately. It could also mean that because of the stigma attached to the terms *gay* and *lesbian* that they learned throughout their early lives, these terms are difficult to attach to themselves even still.

One theme that appeared significant to a majority of women in the study was that they were not conscious of same-sex desires for a majority of their lives. Whether this was due to repression, compulsive heterosexuality, or a genuine heterosexuality at the

time, these women did not question their heterosexuality until a particular moment in

their lives. In one study, more than half of females were unaware of bisexual inclinations

before their heterosexual marriage (Coleman, 1985).

A majority of the women in my study acknowledged that they married very young

and had limited relationship experience. Bridges and Croteau (1994) found that women

who married at especially younger ages were more likely to be unaware of their same-sex

preferences until after their heterosexual marriage (Bridges & Croteau, 1994). Part of this

could be due to the fact that almost half of the women despite being unhappy in their

heterosexual marriages, believed they were truly heterosexual. These women shared that

at the time they were "in love" with their husbands and that they never questioned it.

Though there were other issues in their marriage, the women shared that they

never questioned their heterosexual label, nor do they ever think about women. The

second largest reason for lesbians marrying men was their love of a future spouse

(Wyers, 1987; Arendell, 2004). This reason was second to social expectations.

Transitioning to Same-Sex Experiences

Much of the research that describes the experiences of women and men who have

left their heterosexual spouses for same-sex experiences is applicable to the women in

this study. For married men and women, coming out was described as a roller coaster of

emotions (Arendell, 2004; Pearcey, 2005; Fleischer, 2010). This appeared to be true for a

majority of the women in my study who shared that they were excited, relieved, anxious,

and worrisome for the future.

Much like the women in Arendell's (2004) study, the women in my study described feeling ambivalent about it all; thrilled to be free and happy but sad to disappoint others and break apart families. A variety of negative and positive personal, social, and familial factors played a role in women's decisions to leave their husbands (Thompson, Forsyth, & Langley, 2009). These factors are relevant to the women in this study as well. They experienced both positive and negative influences that both helped and hindered their ability to transition to same-sex experiences.

Because all the women in the study had public heterosexual marriages and lives, including children, it was especially harder to leave. Forming a new lesbian identity can then be particularly difficult (Colucci-Coritt, 2005). That appeared true for the women in this study as some feared losing a lot, hurting others, breaking up families and experiencing social judgment and discrimination. Many of the women in the study experienced such things.

The women in the study were not asked specifically about their children's reactions so that data cannot be reported. However, it is important to note that when many of these women divorced their husbands and transitioned to same-sex relationships, their children were young. None of the participants voluntarily shared any information about their children's adjustments in regards to their mother's transitions to same-sex relationships and marriages.

A supportive and healthy social context provided opportunities to transition to same-sex experiences more easily (Thompson, Forsyth, & Langley, 2009). This was certainly true for the women in this study as well. Family and friend acceptance was a

significant aid in helping the women go through divorce and transition to same-sex relationships. Many women in the study shared that they did have at least one family member and friend who supported them and accepted them as they were. Though many did share that they experienced some family and friend rejection, acceptance from some seemed powerful and significant enough to push forward.

In general, life events and new desires paved the way for these women to move forward and start something new. For two women who knew of their same-sex attractions, it was just that one day they had had enough of pretending to be heterosexual; they had built enough courage to leave their husbands and live genuinely. For those who hadn't had previous feelings for women, many left their husbands because they were unhappy or something was missing. Some shared that as their heterosexual marriages were crumbling, they met women, who may have just been friends, but had given them the strength to leave their husbands and explore a new dimension of themselves.

For another woman who knew of her same-sex attractions, it was meeting another woman who was also heterosexually married and building a connection she had not ever had with her husband. For many of these women regardless of their sexual identity at the time, it was an experience or an emotional connection with another woman that created the impetus to leave their heterosexual marriage. More specifically for a majority of the women in my study, it was a spontaneous same-sex desire that spurred this transition.

One study from Kitzinger and Wilkinson (1995) found that 75% of their sample of lesbians admitted that having sex with and falling in love with a woman was a major motivation for their transition. All of the women in this study had that experience despite

initial sexual identities or heterosexual marriage status. Even those who weren't miserable in their heterosexual marriages had these experiences. Though some women had admitted to cheating on their husbands without their knowledge and some did have same-sex experiences with their husbands, it was these experiences that seemed significant for some of the women in the study.

For others, it was the emotional connection they had formed with female best friends that seemed more powerful and significant than anything they had with their husbands. Some women discussed having overwhelming feelings for this woman that they had just met or become friends with (Kitzinger & Wilkinson, 1995). A good majority of the women in this study said very much the same, describing their feelings as "intense," "passionate," and "immediate," even if it was just purely friendship at first. For some, this was the first time they had ever had such an experience with a woman, and for others, particularly those who were aware of their same-sex attractions, this was the opportunity to explore what they had been missing all along.

Charbonneau & Lander (1991) found that with 30 late in life lesbians, many admitted that they never questioned their heterosexuality while married. They were actually surprised to fall in love with a woman (Charbonneau & Lander, 1991). Some of the women in this study had identical feelings. In fact P10 even stated that she never in her wildest dreams would have imagined that she would marry and fall in love with a woman. About 1/3 of the women in this study also never questioned their sexuality prior or during their heterosexual marriages.

One study found that about half of the 45 women studied were somewhat aware of their same-sex attractions prior to heterosexual marriage, and 31% were somewhat aware of their lesbian and bisexual identity (Coleman, 1985). These percentages are somewhat similar to the results revealed in this qualitative study. The one difference is that almost a quarter of the women in this study were fully aware of their lesbian identity prior to marriage.

Transitioning to Same-Sex Relationships

Like previous research (Arendell, 2004), a lot of the women in this study questioned their lesbian label immediately after transitioning to same-sex experiences and relationships. In this study, a majority of the women, even though they are married to other women, do not call themselves "lesbians" or "gay" but prefer to be unlabeled or use other phrases like "in a lesbian relationship" or "married to a woman"; most of the women do not feel that the term lesbian fits them. Some of the women find the term "lesbian" too restricting and that their personal sexuality is not limited to the definitions and ideas of "lesbian." They truly do not believe they are lesbians and that their current relationship does not dictate their overall sexuality.

Some of the women do not care for labels and do not prefer to give themselves or others any labels, particularly in the realm of sexual orientation. It is possible that a few of the women in the study are not entirely comfortable with using the term because of the associated stigma and prefer to remain unlabeled or use more general terms to describe themselves. This might be the reason why a few women prefer the term "gay" over

"lesbian" in that the former is a more general term that encompasses a larger group of people, including males.

It is possible for some that internalized homophobia may have played a role in the questioning of a lesbian label. Potentially, the fear of using the term comes from broader negative social attitudes against gays and lesbians. These negative attitudes became internalized in these women and so using the term "lesbian" to describe oneself is delayed and difficult to do. For others, it may be simply that they do not believe that the current definitions of the term accurately define themselves.

Like Arendell's (2004) research, a lot of the women in this study, even those who experienced spontaneous same-sex desires, were later able to recall other same-sex attractions and desires they may have had earlier in life but were unable to make sense of. Buxton (2005) found that two-thirds of couples in mixed orientation marriages attempted to make things work or continue their marriage, after one spouse revealed same-sex attractions. Unlike this research result and other research on mixed orientation marriages, none of the women in this study decided to stay with their husbands after coming out as gay, or revealing same-sex desires. However some women in the study said that they did not legally divorce until much later because of fear or because they felt it was unnecessary to do so.

None of the women tried to make their marriages work with their husbands. Even for those who didn't leave their husbands for a particular woman, none of the women in this study suggested marriage therapy or attempted to make the heterosexual marriage work. Once they all came out to their husbands, the women began their transitions. The

results of this study are most consistent with the results of research from Hernandez, Schewnke, & Wilson, (2011) and Tornello & Patterson (2012) that revealed that most women decide it best to leave the heterosexual marriage and explore a new identity.

The coming out process also appeared to be difficult for a lot of women in this study. Similar to the results in Pearcey's 2005 study, leaving a heterosexual identity and transitioning to a gay identity can be a struggle. It can take some time to understand and come to terms with (Pearcey, 2005). This is particularly true if children are involved and the individual experiences rejection upon coming out. Some of the women in this study did experience rejection and worried about leaving an identity and transitioning to a new one. Some women in this study were very particular about who they came out to at first, or at all. Some worried about disappointing particular people while others feared the unknown.

Charbonneau & Lander (1991) discussed a period of sexual exploration and freedom for once-married lesbian women. Only a couple of the women in my study disclosed such a desire. Most left their husbands for particular women, many of whom they are now married to. Others did disclose their excitement for experiencing sex with women but this was in the context of women they were currently seeing or interested in. There were really only two women who discussed a desire to date and sleep around with a variety of women following their heterosexual marriage.

In regards to challenges of society and family within a same-sex relationship, the women in this study did discuss lack of acceptance, loss of friends, and lack of social validation. They did share that there were differences in the experience of being a woman

with another woman rather than being a woman with a man. Heterosexism and homophobia have been found to be the biggest challenges for same-sex relationships, especially for women who have left men to be with other women (Boon & Alderson, 2009). Similar to the results of this study, the women in my qualitative study shared that they were disappointed by the lack of acceptance, the loss of friends and family members, and the differential treatment from society.

Some of the women did share that within their same-sex relationships, there are some external difficulties that make life challenging, including not being able to publicly display signs of affection, not being able to talk about their relationship as freely, and feeling isolated from certain family members and friends.

Differences from Heterosexual Relationships

Like previous research on same-sex relationships (i.e. Pearlman, 1989; Bridges & Croteau, 1994), the women in the study found that in comparison to their heterosexual relationships, there was more balance, equality, and interdependence. Gender roles are often traditional in heterosexual relationships particularly in respect to housekeeping, child rearing, and emotional expectations (Arendell, 2004). Many of the women in this study mentioned that they did most of the child rearing and housekeeping and that communication and balance was often non-existent in comparison to their same-sex relationships.

In their same-sex relationships, most shared that things are much more equal and balanced and that communication is stronger. The women also shared that emotional attachment played a larger role in their relationship and that there was respect and

concern for each other in the relationship. Boon and Alderson (2009) found that to be true in their research as well; higher levels of intimacy and better negotiation between two women in a relationship than in heterosexual relationships.

Two of the women in this current study shared that they enjoyed being with other women because there were no traditional gender roles present and that they had to build them and create their own expectations. This was found to be important to women in another study (Boon & Alderson, 2009). Most of the women reported higher levels of emotional attraction to their same-sex partners than their ex-husbands. Bridges and Croteau (1994) found that two women in a relationship may experience more emotional fusion and struggle with emotional distance. None of the women in the study discussed this when asked about differences between their heterosexual and same-sex marriages.

Internalized homophobia is often an obstacle for women and can interfere with intimacy in a same-sex relationship (Beals & Peplau, 2001; Spitalnick & McNair, 2005). None of the women in this study explicitly stated this as an issue in their relationship. For one couple, there were major differences in disclosure of sexuality that appeared to cause conflict particularly during social events and in public situations. But, it is not clear whether these differences in disclosure were due to internalized homophobia or something else.

Arendell (2004) found that women shared that their sex lives were better, as they were more intimate, passionate, and comfortable. The women in this current study shared identical feelings; some of the women shared that sex was different and satisfied them for a variety of reasons because of things like increased intimacy and comfort. Like Kinsey's

reports from 1953, the women in this study shared that they were often satisfied in the

bedroom with another woman and that with men in their previous marriages, they were

not. This dissatisfaction with men could have been for a variety of reasons, including

emotional, physical, and sexual.

Same-Sex Marriages

All of the women in this current study were legally married to their wives at the

time of the interview. Some had been married for over a decade while others had only

been married for two weeks. Some of the women had gone to other states to get legally

married before same-sex marriages were legal in their state while others did civil unions

in their state prior to legalization of same-sex marriage in their state. Once same-sex

marriage became legal in their home state, those who had been in civil unions had the

option to "upgrade" to same-sex marriage. All of those who were in this situation chose

to do so. Others waited to get married until it was legal in their home state and then did

so. Some had large and public weddings while others had small private ceremonies. What

was most significant was their decisions to get married. Some of the women shared that

they had been with their partners for so long and already felt married even if they hadn't

had that piece of paper.

Others shared that they were so in love that they wanted to marry one another

when they had the opportunity. Most shared that their relationships did not change at all

when they became legally married. Unlike previous research by Schecter et al., (2008),

none of the women in the study discussed an urgency to marry. In fact, some shared that

it was more of just a natural progression and that they knew they would eventually marry

one another when the time was right.

Though it wasn't discussed extensively in the interviews, most women shared that

they decided to get legally married for the benefits and to display their commitment to

one another more publicly. Like previous research done by Schecter et al., (2008), these

couples decided to publicly acknowledge their love and commitment to one another by

getting legally married.

A few women shared that getting married to their partners showed their family,

friends, and the world, how deeply they cared for one another. A couple women shared

that they loved being able to say "wife" instead of partner and they appreciate that they

can say they are married to a woman. This is consistent with other research on same-sex

marriages. Couples felt more legitimate as they could use the terms "spouse," "husband,"

and "wife" (Schecter et al., 2008).

Most shared that what was most important was the ability to have the same legal

and financial benefits that heterosexual married couples have, included health insurance

coverage, inheritance rights, and Social Security benefits. One woman specifically shared

how important it was that she could be by her wife in a hospital. Though same-sex

marriage has been legal for 10 and 7 years for Massachusetts and New Hampshire,

respectively, these benefits were not extended to married same-sex couples until the

Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA) was deemed unconstitutional in June of 2013. A few

of the women in the study mentioned the significance of DOMA being struck down as

unconstitutional as it allowed their marriage to be recognized by both the state and the federal government, making their marriage just as equal as any heterosexual marriage.

Theoretical Framework

Two theoretical frameworks were used to explain the variations in sexual identity experiences of women in this study. McCarn and Fassinger (1996)'s lesbian identity formation model is one of the two theoretical frameworks and is the more traditional, stage-like model that consists of the following 4 phases: *Awareness, Exploration, Deepening/Commitment, and Internalization/Synthesis.* The phases are considered sequential and progressive and the final stage is considered to be the most developed. Reaching the final stage according to McCarn and Fassinger allows a woman to be a fully integrated lesbian. This model considers how one's personal identity interacts with group identity and suggests lesbian identity formation is primarily an individual process despite the social contexts and environmental obstacles that may play a role. This model appreciates the significance of homophobia, heterosexism, and marginalization of sexual minorities in society.

McCarn and Fassinger's lesbian identity formation model described the experiences of about half of the women in this current study. The women who knew they were gay or were uncertain about their sexuality and had been questioning themselves, likely experienced these phases despite external obstacles. These women who were either fully or somewhat aware of their same-sex desires were unable to complete all of the phases in the model because of social influences (i.e. family values, social norms).

Whether it was prior or during their heterosexual marriages, these women experienced McCarn and Fassinger's first phase of Awareness of same-sex desires and feelings. All of these women pursued these same-sex feelings, McCarn & Fassinger's second phase of Exploration, whether it was with their husbands in a threesome or privately in an extramarital sexual encounter or emotional affair.

Though some experienced significant obstacles in getting to McCarn and Fassinger's third stage of deepening and commitment, all of the women that fit this model eventually decided that being married heterosexually was not what they wanted; instead they pursued same-sex experiences to further explore these feelings and desires. For some this third phase took place in the context of their heterosexual marriages while for others it was immediately after when they were able to move forward on all levels.

There were a lot of variations in the timing of reaching this third phase but all women who can be described fitting this model, did so eventually. The fourth and final stage occurred for all women once they were able to transition and start new lives with their same-sex partners. For many this transition took some time while for others it was immediately following the divorce.

Despite the fact that most of the women in this study do not choose to label themselves lesbians, this model is still fitting as it describes the processes these women went through in understanding and exploring their genuine desires. It is also fitting as all the women are currently legally married to other women. Despite any obstacles and cons to being a sexual minority, the women were able to fully integrate themselves as members of the lesbian community.

All these women who knew they were gay had married heterosexually to please family and fit into society. Their internal same-sex feelings and desires did not match their public heterosexual behaviors for a part of their lives. For those who questioned their sexuality, similar trajectories occurred. They married men because "it was the right thing to do" and they felt pressured from society and family, or because they feared being different and being discriminated against. Considering the ages of the women in this study, there were major differences in societal perception of gays and lesbians at the time that they were discovering themselves. All of these women reached McCarn and Fassinger's 4 phase model, though later then described by the model's authors.

McCarn and Fassinger's model of lesbian identity formation does not, however, apply to all the women in the study. For those who never questioned their sexuality and never experienced same-sex desires early on in life, this model is unfitting. Lisa Diamond's dynamical systems approach as applied to female same-sex sexuality (2007) makes more sense for the other half of the women in this study. These women were never aware or conscious of same-sex desires or never had any at all. They experienced unplanned same-sex desires while heterosexually married. These women were truly heterosexual and in love with their husbands and had spontaneous feelings for women, desires they had never had before in their lives. Diamond's model is applicable here. It demonstrates that not all women experience stage-like progression of lesbian identity but rather follow very different trajectories.

Very much like the women in Diamond's longitudinal research from 2007, half of the women in this study experienced abrupt same-sex desires and attractions and shifted

almost instantaneously. The ability to experience such strong spontaneous same-sex desires shows the ability of females to be sexually fluid. Diamond coined the term sexual fluidity as it appeared true in her studies.

It seems to be fitting for at least half of the women in this study. Based on the changes in identities, labels, and flexibility in desires and attractions, many of these women should be deemed sexually fluid. In fact, many women shared that they are attracted to the person and not the gender and that they would be open to either sex because it isn't the sex that matters, but rather the emotional and spiritual connection they have with that person.

Additionally, Diamond found that in a 10 year period, women shifted their sexual identity labels quite often. Though this current study wasn't longitudinal, when asked about their previous sexual identities and current sexual identities, there was much change and variability among the 15 women in the sample. Almost all the women shifted in their identity labels or how they understood themselves, even if a label wasn't involved.

The fact that these women feel this way and have the ability to transition from genuine heterosexual feelings to same-sex desires, demonstrates that sexual fluidity in females. It is apparent that Diamond's dynamical systems approach as it applies to female same-sex sexuality is pertinent to at least half of the women in this study and that a stage-like linear model does not describe all women when it comes to their sexuality.

Limitations of the Study

A major limitation of this study is the use of social networking in recruitment of participants. A majority of the participants were recruited through social networking, more specifically Facebook. It is possible that these women who are on a public social networking site are more open about their sexuality and were more willing to share their stories than other women who may be more private and who do not frequent social networks. Also, the women who responded might be those who feel most positively and least conflicted by this transition. They are likely to be more open about their own sexuality and most satisfied by their current same-sex marriage. Additionally because participants were recruited through a mutual contact, someone who knew me and them, there is a possibility that participants felt some pressure to take part in the study. However there were a handful of women who despite being recruited from a mutual contact did not choose to participate and did not write back to either the mutual contact or myself regarding participation.

Another limitation revolves around the data collection method of interviewing. Because interviews were face to face and involved personal and sensitive topics, there is a possibility that the participants did not feel comfortable sharing all details about their lives. This could result in limited or skewed data. Self-reports, including interviews, are likely to result in erroneous material because of memory decay, selective memory, exaggeration, or embarrassment. Particularly because my research involved the life histories of women, there is a heightened possibility of memory decay. I asked questions about their entire lives including the first time in their lives that they remember being

attracted to the same sex. There is a slight possibility that because the participant's knew

of my life experience as a lesbian that they may have influenced their responses.

A major limitation was the lack of diversity amongst the participants. All 15

women were Caucasian and lived in two states, New Hampshire and Massachusetts.

There was also not wide age diversity. Despite these limitations, these findings are

significant and similar questions should be asked of a broader and more diverse sample in

other parts of the country.

Clinical Recommendations

Classes, publications, and presentations are needed to disseminate this data. The

study of women who were once married to men and are now re-married to women, has

now been reported. However, it is imperative that those who do work with LGBT

individuals have access to this data so that they can better educate, counsel, and work

with women who have experienced these transitions. Even those counselors who do not

formally work with the LGBT population should have access to this study because

everyone will work with a parent or a sibling of someone who is gay and may be

struggling with understanding. They are a particular population but they are important to

know about because there are likely many women who share similar experiences to the

women studied. An increase in understanding and education will decrease

marginalization and discrimination against women who transition from marriages with

men to marriages with women.

I plan to publish this information by presenting abstracts to LGBT groups,

organizations, and publications if possible. This should also be presented at conferences

that are both specific to LGBT issues as well as those who reach a broader psychological and health professions audience. I hope to be able to impact the actions, esteem, and lives of this demographic with these shared results. In fact, one participant even thanked me for doing this research. She said that when she was struggling to leave her husband and transition to her same-sex relationship, she was confused and wanted to talk to someone but no one could understand what she was going through. She said she also tried to find books and other resources but at the time, they were very limited. She felt alone. She hopes that disseminating this information will help other women who may be struggling with their feelings or fearful of the transition.

These women's life stories may give other women hope to move forward and to remind them that they are not alone. It will also help them realize that there is nothing atypical about experiencing a sexual shift in midlife. From what has been seen from the participants in this study, women who transition experience a lot of external obstacles; they lose friends, certain family members, and they risk rejection from society. They risk losing their children and the heterosexual lives they may have had beforehand. Many experienced discrimination and hatred from others.

The broader lesbian community may clearly understand many of the struggles, discrimination, and stigma that other lesbians experienced. In fact, many of these stories may parallel many other women's stories. It is possible, though, that providing this study to the lesbian community could help increase understanding of the diversity of sexual identity labels and trajectories among women. Not all women married to women consider themselves lesbians and some women are attracted to the person and not the gender.

Reading this study will allow the LGBT community to understand the scope of sexual identity labels and female sexual fluidity. This study would also be important to provide to the general heterosexual communities, particularly those who lack access to stories about marginalized populations.

It is recommended that clinicians, counselors, educators, and other GLBT providers embrace the women who transition from heterosexual marriages and same-sex marriages. My hope is that they teach tolerance and acceptance and educate others about these transitions and the life stories of women who have experienced this phenomenon.

Recommendations of working with this demographic include an understanding of the client's background, their motivations, goals, and desires, and the impact that family, friends, and personal concerns have on their personal lives. Understanding the impact that both external and internal influences have is helpful in providing assistance to these women. For some, the fear of rejection is quite powerful while for others, it isn't a factor at all.

Many women may experience loss when leaving their husbands and associated families. Their fear may hold them back. They may worry about their lives being torn apart or that the transition isn't worth all the hurt that is involved. They may sacrifice their genuine feelings because of this. Even if they transition successfully, they may still struggle with what they feel they have left behind. They may experience difficulties with the public in being in a same-sex marriage. They may still face discrimination from those they know and those they don't know. They may experience disappointment from family.

Some of the participants may have difficulties in forming positive sexual identities and in creating a sense of well-being because of the rejection and disappointment they have received from others. They may need assistance in working through regrets, fears, and anxieties due to their circumstances. Many people don't understand how it is possible that a person can be married to a man and then later marry a woman.

Recommendations for Future Research

This study has expanded the limited research to date on women who have experienced marriages to both men and women. Future research may want to extend this study and include a more broad and diverse sample, including women from other areas of the United States (not just New England). Considering women from other cultural backgrounds including various races and ethnicities will help in verifying the findings in this study or in developing new areas of inquiry. Additionally, as same-sex marriage is legal in a number of countries outside the United States, international research would be called for as well.

It is possible that cultural and religious differences may have helped or hindered other women of different backgrounds and geographic locations more so than the women sampled here. This is why it is important to consider a more diverse sample, including women of different races, ethnicities, and religious backgrounds. It may be helpful to delve further into the social and personal factors that deemed important to the women in this study. Some of the factors significantly contributed to the decisions of the women.

I recommend that researchers look into the experiences of men who were once married to women and are now re-married to other men to see if their experiences are different or similar to those found in women. It would be interesting to see if social influences play a larger role for them than they do for women. One major area for future research would be to look more into the sexual identity trajectories of women who have been in relationships and marriages with both sexes. There was a wide range of variance in terms of how women labeled their sexual identities prior and during heterosexual marriage and during their same-sex marriages. It would also be beneficial to consider quantitative research on this topic so that we can begin to make broader generalizations with larger numbers of people.

Looking more into the phenomenon of women being attracted to the person and not the gender, may be a fruitful area for future research. This study identified experiences of female sexual fluidity; future research should look into the changing sexual trajectories of women especially those who call themselves "unlabeled" or do not choose to label their sexual identity. Though not one participant used the term "fluid" to describe her sexuality, many of them did share much variability in how they understood and labeled their own sexual orientations. These descriptions would be considered "fluid" in the eyes of research.

Implications for Social Change

This study has the potential to impact social change, for anyone who reads it will gain a better and clearer understanding of same-sex sexual orientation on political, social, and educational levels. Specific training is necessary to educate counselors, therapists,

clinicians, and all individuals who work with this population and their loved ones. Training must include learning about the issues and struggles these women experienced while transitioning from a heterosexual marriage to same-sex relationships. Gaining insight to the common themes in the life stories of women previously married to men and now re-married to women, will allow readers to more deeply explore the personal concerns and external obstacles facing this population.

It is possible that some readers will have an increase in compassion and consideration for this population and that instead of judgment and discrimination, awareness and education will provide others with concern and understanding. It is important to share these results to LGBT organizations and communities so they can help educate their own communities as well as the public, about the issues women face and the varying experiences they have. In doing so, many will come to see that these experiences are far from atypical.

This study also has the potential to debunk stereotypes about lesbian women. For example, if a woman has been married to a man, she must be heterosexual and that if a woman is married to another woman, she must be a lesbian. Additionally this study will help to show the varying sexual identities that women possess and the range of labels that women give themselves.

My hope is that readers will begin to learn about sexual fluidity in women and the obstacles and challenges many women faced as they began to desire and experience other women. It will hopefully also shed some light on the varying ways that women view love, attraction, and sexuality. I hope that readers also see how damaging it can be to hold

tight to stereotypes about lesbians and gays. Most women do not fit those stereotypes nor do they fit those narrowly defined categories that run rampant in society. Sharing these women's stories should help shed light on how limiting and inaccurate stereotypes can be. These women's stories should also help teach others that not all men and women can be boxed in the same categories; in fact there is much fluidity and flexibility in these women's personal lives and that may be true for many others.

All individuals, regardless of their sexual orientation and their personal labels, deserve dignity and respect from others. Educating others from sharing such stories should help in reducing discrimination and marginalization for those who step outside the traditional boundaries.

Conclusion

This study used a qualitative approach to examine the life histories of women who were once married to men and who are now re-married to women. With the exception of one participant who had been married six times, all women had experienced only one heterosexual marriage. They all had been legally divorced from their ex-husbands and were all legally married to women at the time of data collection. For all participants, this was their first marriage to a woman.

Participants were all between the ages of 32 and 65 and all lived in New Hampshire and Massachusetts. Some women knew they were lesbian prior to their heterosexual marriages while others were questioning themselves prior and during their heterosexual marriages. Other women did not question their love for their husbands and did not experience same-sex attractions until later on in life. Many personal concerns and

external factors, both good and bad, helped and hindered the women's abilities to transition to same-sex relationships.

For some, divorce to husbands and transition to same-sex relationships were easy and completely positive. For others, the transition was a bit more difficult because of personal concerns and external obstacles. The participants discussed characteristics of their heterosexual marriages and their same-sex marriages; most shared that their same-sex marriages were much more positive for them on a variety of levels.

Most women described their transitions and their first same-sex experiences as superior to anything they had experienced before. Many shared that it felt natural, easy, and that they could be themselves with a woman. Some women experienced shifts in sexual identity labels from one marriage to the other, while others stayed the same. All of the women reported that they are very happy in their same-sex marriages; despite any difficulties they have experienced since leaving their husbands, all women reported that they are fully satisfied with their wives in a same-sex marriage.

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Appendix A: Interview Questions

1. When did you know you were attracted to women?

    Probes:

    a. Discuss your first experience of same-sex attraction

    b. Describe emotional reaction to this experience

2. Share with me your first same-sex relationship experience

    Probes:

    a. If it is with a different woman from the woman you are with now, what lessons, if any, did you take from that relationship?

    b. If it is with the woman you are with now, what elements do you believe contribute to the fact that you remain together?

3. What factors contributed to your decision to marry the woman you are currently with?

    4. What labels, if any, did you use with regard to your sexual identity prior to your marriage to a man?

    5. What labels, if any, did you use to describe your sexual identity when you were married to a man?

6. When, if at all, did you begin to identify as lesbian?

    a. If the term lesbian isn't fitting, how would you define yourself now?

        i. Why do you use this particular label?

    b. What differences, if any, were there in how you felt internally and how you expressed yourself publicly in regards to your sexual identity?

7. Share with me your experiences of transition from being in a marriage to a man to one with a woman.

8. Probes:

    a. Discuss how you met your ex-husband, how you began dating, and what led to a relationship and eventual marriage

    b. What factors contributed to your decision to marry him?

    c. What factors contributed to your divorce?

9. What are some personal feelings and thoughts that hindered and assisted in the transition?

10. What are some social influences that hindered and assisted in the transition?

Appendix B: Informed Consent Form

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

You are invited to participate in a research study that will explore women's experiences of leaving a heterosexual marriage and entering a same-sex marriage. You were chosen for the study because you are between 18 and 65 years of age, you are female, and you were once married to a man and are now married to a woman. This form is part of the process called "informed consent" that allows you to understand the study before deciding whether to take part in it. This study is being conducted by researcher Krista Butland who is currently a doctoral student at Walden University. It is possible that some of you are aware of my position as a professor of psychology. If you are a current student of mine, you will not be able to participate in the study due to a potential conflict of interest. Your decision to participate in this study does not influence any potential future expectations in my classroom. This research is being done as part of my doctoral degree and is not related to my teaching in any way.

Background Information:

The purpose of this study is to explore the life experiences and transitions of women who were once married to men and who are now re-married to women.

Procedures:

If you agree to be in this study, you will be asked to:

1) Contact the researcher back by email, phone call, text message, or Facebook message, who will then send you an explanation of the research, and later an informed consent form and demographic survey.

2) Provide a hand-written or electronic signature on the informed consent form

3) Schedule a 60-90 minute face-to face interview with the researcher at an agreed upon place

4) Answer interview questions that address the topic at hand (you don't have to answer questions that make you feel uncomfortable)

Nature of the Study:

Your participation in this study is voluntary. This means that you do not have to participate in this study if you do not want to. If you decide to join the study now, you can still change your mind at any point during the study. If you feel stressed or anxious during the study you may stop at any time without any consequences. You may skip any questions that you feel are too personal or sensitive. In the interview you will be asked questions, such as, When did you know you were attracted to women? What led you to marry a man? What outside influences helped you to leave your marriage to a man and pursue a same-sex relationship? What personal obstacles (if any) stood in the way of leaving your marriage to a man?

Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study:

There may be small risks to being in the study. You may feel uncomfortable sharing your experiences with me. You may feel uncomfortable answering certain questions. The study has been created to provide you as much privacy as possible. I will

provide you with a free crisis phone hotline (see below) that you can call if you feel distressed or need to talk to someone after our interview. By participating in this study, you will be adding to my understanding of the experiences of women who transition from heterosexual marriages to same-sex marriages. Your contributions will be greatly appreciated.

Compensation:

You will be given $10 for participating in the study. You will receive this at the end of the interview. You will be paid the same amount of money even if you skip questions or leave the study early.

Confidentiality:

Any information you provide will be kept confidential and private. The researcher will not use your information for any purposes outside of this research project. Also, the researcher will not include your name or anything else that could identify you in any reports of the study. Instead, you will be known by a number (i.e. Participant 1, 2, 3, etc.).

Contacts and Questions:

You may ask any questions you have now. Or if you have questions later, you may contact the researcher via email at: krista.butland@waldenu.edu or her dissertation chair, Dr. Susana Verdinelli at Susana.verdinelli@waldenu.edu. If you want to talk privately about your rights as a participant, you can call Dr. Leilani Endicott. She is the Walden University representative who can discuss this with you. Her phone number is 1-800-925-3368, extension 3121210. The researcher will provide the consent form for this

study by email (or postal mail, if desired) and you may save or print a copy for you to keep. In the instance that you may want to speak with someone as a result of the sensitive and personal topics we discussed, the Gay and Lesbian National Hotline can provide free and immediate 24/7 assistance at 1-888-843-4564.

Statement of Consent:

I have read the above information and I feel I understand the study well enough to make a decision about my involvement. I am aware that I am welcome to make a copy of this Informed Consent form for my personal records. If you have received this document in person and agree to the terms described above, please fill out the information below (hand-written). If you received this document by email and agree to the terms described above, I ask that you type out the information below and e-mail it back to me at your earliest convenience.

Printed Name of Participant

_____

Date of Consent

_____

Participant's Written or Electronic Signature

_____

Researcher's Written or Electronic Signature

_____

Electronic signatures are regulated by the Uniform Electronic Transactions Act. Legally, an "electronic signature" can be a person's typed name, his/her email address, or any other identifying marker. An electronic signature is just as legal as a written signature as long as both parties have agreed to using electronic means of communicating.

Appendix C: Explanation of Study

The Complexities of Female Sexuality: Experiences of women in same-sex

marriages previously married to men

By

Krista A. Butland, MA, A.B.D.

Explanation of the Research Study

You are invited to participate in a research study that will examine the

experiences of women who were once married to men and who are now re-married to

women. You were selected as a potential candidate for this research through social

networking.

Currently, there is no research that examines the experiences of women who are

now re-married to women who had once been married to men. The purpose of this

research study is to gain understanding into the experiences of women who leave

heterosexual marriages and enter same-sex marriages. All women in this study need to be

legally married to another woman, and have to have been legally married to a man at one

point in their lives. All participants need to be between the ages of eighteen and sixty-five

and cannot currently have emotional or mental disabilities that would interfere with their

ability to participate and answer questions. An individual who is currently in crisis and

who is not fluent in English is also ineligible for the study. Any current students of the

researcher are not eligible for participation in this study.

I am interested in hearing about your life story. More specifically, I would love to

know more about why you got married to a man, the changes you experienced in your

sexual identity, and your experience leaving a heterosexual marriage and entering into a same-sex relationship. Lastly, I want to know more about your decision to enter into a same-sex marriage. Your story is significant; as the researcher I hope that you sharing your story will allow me and those who read my research to understand how diverse female sexuality can be, and the social and personal influences that play a role in the decisions women make in certain situations.

All interviews will be confidential and will be kept private by the researcher. I hope you are interested and able to participate in this research study. Please note that participation in this study is completely voluntary. If you are, please contact me back as soon as possible so I can provide you with a demographic survey and an Informed Consent form. If after reading this, you find you are ineligible for this study, I ask that you please contact me and leave the study. If you have any questions or concerns about anything, do not hesitate to contact me. My cell phone number is (603) 370-0473. An alternate home phone number is (603) 974-2326. Thank you for your time.

Best,

Krista Butland

Appendix D: Demographic Survey

Demographic Survey

1. What is your age?

2. What is the highest level of education you have completed?

3. What is your race and ethnicity?

4. Are you employed? How would you classify the type of job you have?

5. What are the dates of your first and second marriages?

6. Did (or do) you have any children from either marriage? If so, how many and

what are their ages and sex?

Appendix E: Message to Contacts for Participant Recruitment

Dear (insert name):

I hope this message finds you well. As you may know, I am currently in the dissertation (research) portion of my doctoral program in social psychology at Walden University. I am currently in the process of recruiting participants for my dissertation and I am hoping you can help me. I am looking to recruit women between the ages of 18 and 65 who were once legally married to men but who are now legally re-married to women. Potential participants must speak fluent English and have been born female. I will be interviewing these women for about 60 to 90 minutes and asking them questions about their sexuality, their experiences with heterosexual marriage, their transitions from heterosexual marriages to same-sex relationships, and about their current same-sex marriage. I am looking to recruit a total of 10 women for this study. If you know of anyone who may fit these criteria and who may be interested in participating, I ask that you contact me back with their contact information. I ask that you do this in a private message or text message so that their privacy is ensured, whether or not they participate. Providing me with their name to contact them via Facebook, or their cell phone number, is fine. Whatever method of communication you believe is best for this individual, is fine for me. There will be $10 compensation for participation in the study. I will give all participants much more information about the study once I speak with them personally.

I appreciate you taking the time to read this message and helping me out if possible. Even if you do not know anyone personally but may know of others who know
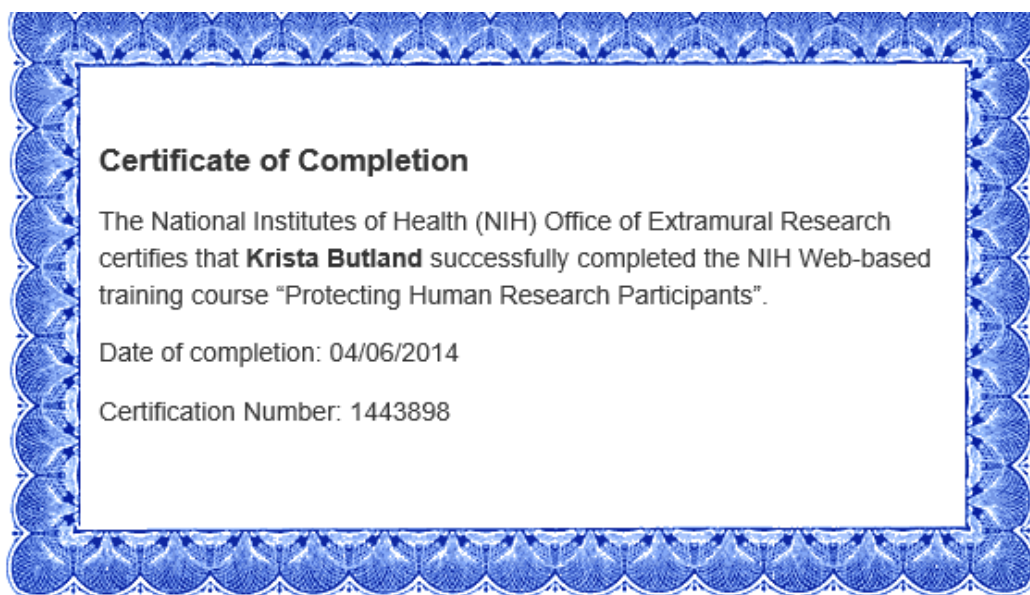
people, I would appreciate it if you could let me know and I will reach out to them as well. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me back.

Thank you so much.

Take care,

Krista A. Butland, M.A.

Appendix F: Certificate of NIH Training Completion

Certificate of Completion

The National Institutes of Health (NIH) Office of Extramural Research certifies that **Krista Butland** successfully completed the NIH Web-based training course "Protecting Human Research Participants".

Date of completion: 04/06/2014

Certification Number: 1443898

Appendix G: Curriculum Vitae

CURRICULUM VITAE

Krista Anne Butland
Department of Psychology
Southern New Hampshire University
Manchester, NH 03106
(603) 626-9100 ext. 2770
K.butland@snhu.edu

Education

Ph.D.   2015   Walden University, Social Psychology (March 2015 completion)

M.A.   2009   University of Massachusetts Lowell, Community Social Psychology

B.A.   2006   Salve Regina University, Psychology (Minor: Special Education)

Teaching Experience

2014-present   Visiting Lecturer of Psychology
Southern New Hampshire University, Manchester, NH

2010-present   Adjunct Professor of Psychology
University of Massachusetts Lowell, Lowell, MA

2012-2014   Adjunct Professor of Psychology
Middlesex Community College, Lowell, MA

2009-2014   Adjunct Professor of Psychology
Northern Essex Community College, Haverhill & Lawrence, MA

2009-2014   Adjunct Professor of Psychology
Mount Washington College (formerly Hesser College), Manchester, NH

2006-2009   In-Home Tutor (K-12)
Club Z Tutoring, Seacoast Area, NH

2008-2009   Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD) Tutor
              Danville Elementary School, Danville, NH

2006-2008   Special Education Aide/Instructional Assistant
              Salisbury Elementary School, Salisbury, MA

Classes Taught

Introduction to Psychology
General Psychology
Introduction to Human Services Methods
Child and Adolescent Growth and Development
Life Span: Human Growth and Development
Issues in Child Development
Issues in Adolescent Development
Human Sexuality
Death & Dying
Social Psychology
Community Psychology
Personality Theory
Psychology of Success
Psychology of Women
Research Methods in the Behavioral Sciences
Social Conflict
Contemporary Social Problems
Race, Gender, and Class

Other Relevant Experiences

2008   Intern (Humane Education Coordinator)
              The Massachusetts Society of Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, Methuen,
              MA

2003-2006   Psychology Club Member
              Salve Regina University, Newport, RI

2000-2006   Camp Counselor
              Southern District YMCA Camp Lincoln, Kingston, NH

2004   Day Habilitation Worker
              C.L.A.S.S. (Citizens League for Adult Special Services) Lawrence, MA

Academic Awards and Honors

2004-present Psi Chi (International Honor Society of Psychology) Member

2004-2006   Salve Regina University Dean's List Recipient

Research Interests

Qualitative research-phenomenology and narrative analyses
Strategic self-presentation
Self-serving beliefs
Self-handicapping
Attraction
Sexuality
Female sexual fluidity
Sexual orientation (LGBT issues)
Intergroup contact

Professional Affiliations

Associate Member, American Psychological Association

Member, Society for Personality and Social Psychology

Member, Eastern Psychological Association

Member, New England Psychological Association

References

Dr. Peter Frost, Department Chair, Associate Professor of Psychology, Southern New
Hampshire University Faculty
Work #: (603)-668-2211 ext. 2249
Email: p.frost@snhu.edu

Dr. Marc Wilson, Assistant Dean/Director of Psychology, COCE, Southern New
Hampshire University
Work #: (603) 502-4936
Email: m.wilson4@snhu.edu

Dr. Richard Siegel, Psychology Department Chair, Professor, UMass Lowell Faculty
Work # (978) 934-3961

Email: Richard_siegel@uml.edu

Dr. Susana Verdinelli, Professor, College of Social and Behavioral Sciences, Walden Faculty
Email: Susana.Verdinelli@waldenu.edu

Dr. Janet King, Senior Records Analyst, Online & Continuing Education, UMass Lowell Staff
Work #: (978) 241-4712
Email: Janet_king@uml.edu

Dr. William Rogers, Associate Professor of Psychology, Mount Washington Faculty
Work #: (603) 296-6310
Email: wrogers@mountwashington.edu

Dr. Carolyn Cohen, Former Dept. Chair of Behavioral Sciences, Acting Asst. Dean, Foundational Studies, Liberal Arts & Sciences, Northern Essex Community College
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