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Narratives of lesbian transformation: Coming out stories of women who transition from heterosexual marriage to lesbian identity

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Narratives of Lesbian Transformation:

Coming-Out Stories of Women who Transition

from Heterosexual Marriage to Lesbian Identity

by

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Dedication

To the women in this study—
They helped make all women more visible

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ABSTRACT

Women who have transitioned to a lesbian identity from a previously heterosexual one lack a voice in the academic literature. Identity formation in this subset of women, those who chose a heterosexual marriage, had children, and later in life self identify as lesbian, has not been fully investigated. For this project, eight women were asked to answer this question: How have you negotiated the path from heterosexuality to lesbianism? Four main themes were found dealing with heteronormativity and accountability, relationship with children, transition, and acceptance by the lesbian community. Additionally, I introduce a new term—gender-normativity—to describe these women who only after marrying, having children and raising those children, and going through a process of self-reflection, realized they wanted to make a transition and spend the rest of their lives in an intimate relationship with a woman.

Chapter One

Introduction

> The dilemmas of contemporary American life—of finding a sense of belonging and membership in a community that is continually changing, of maintaining stability amid rapid social transformation—are the dilemmas of the late modern world (Stein 4).

> Identity transformation—identity crisis, identity change—is story revision…Identity is a life story (McAdams in Plummer, 172).

"Well, you know you're gay". These were just a few of the last words I heard from my ex-husband as we were divorcing. We had been together 20 years and have two children. His comments took me totally off guard. When I recovered from the shock of his statement, I began to wonder if he might be right. Granted, I love sports; I hate wearing make-up or dresses; I have short hair, I love hanging out with women; but does that make me lesbian? I began a soul-searching journey. I ponder the same question as Nancy Naples when she declares, "My long history as a practicing heterosexual was enough to negate my claim to a lesbian identity. How could someone who was so involved with men for so long really be a lesbian?" (26). And, since I had identified as a lesbian later in my life, I wondered if other lesbians would see me as a "real" lesbian and accept me into the community. After all, Clare Farquhar notes, "despite the increasing precariousness of discrete identity positions in the late modern world, the concept of the 'authentic' lesbian still persists" (226). Kate Bornstein asks, "ever wonder if you fall outside the 'permitted' labels, and maybe you're the only one who knows you do, and so

you feel a bit guilty?" (14). I do feel guilty, first by self-identifying as lesbian, a label that frequently is not socially accepted, then because I have children and had a husband—which may render me "less lesbian" in the eyes of lesbians. I wonder if anyone shares my experience.

An aspect of heteronormativity is the concept that individuals meet a partner of the opposite sex, marry, and have children (Seidman 58). The assumption is often made that if a woman has children, she must be heterosexual. But, is she? What do we know about women who change their sexuality mid-life? As I reviewed the literature of lesbian identity, there is an absent voice—the women who transitioned from socially accepted heterosexuality to socially unacceptable homosexuality—specifically, the voice of women who had children as a result of their heterosexual relationship and then transitioned to a lesbian identity. This project adds to the literature of lesbian identity and collects the narratives of eight women who had children, then later in life transitioned to their lesbian identity; they share my experience.

This thesis will show that heteronormativity often sends individuals on a predictable life path and even those paths perhaps considered socially deviant follow this expected path more closely than might be anticipated. The literature reviewed discusses the way individuals self-identify and are held accountable to their personal life stories. Ultimately, quotes from the participant's life stories will give voice to women who have previously been left out of the discourse in lesbian studies.

Chapter Two

Literature Review

…the incoherences and contradictions of homosexual identity in twentieth-century culture are responsive to and hence evocative of the incoherences and contradictions of compulsory heterosexuality (Sedgwick 54).

A review of the literature for this project exposes five themes: identity, heteronormativity, accountability, lesbian studies and personal narratives. Each is important in its own way to the development of the narratives the participants use to tell their life story. Notions of identity expose how selves are constructed in relation to the individuals with whom we interact. Discourses of heteronormativity and processes of accountability influence the way individuals are allowed to construct themselves. An investigation of lesbian studies helped determine specific areas of focus for this project. Finally, an exploration of the notion of personal narratives showed the importance of life narratives to the telling of who we are.

Identity

Identity helps individuals negotiate culturally. It is a shorthand used to tell who we are to ourselves and to others we may encounter as we move through our lives. An identity forms when the self takes itself as an object and categorizes, classifies, or names itself in particular ways in relation to other social categories or classifications and for particular intents (Stets and Burke 224). Why worry about identity? After all, placing oneself in a category is not very postmodern. As Naples points out categories of

identities “can be comforting and useful at times” (39). Identity categories influence how we react with others and how others react to us. Furthermore, when one identifies with a group, one is also defined socially as an individual, both to themselves and to others. As Wilton notes “it alerts us to our social and cultural *location* on a moment-by-moment basis…what reaction we are likely to meet from others and what elements of our selves need to be emphasized or concealed in particular circumstances” (9). In other words, dispositional identities, like sexuality for example, give clues as to what is expected from a person in terms of their behavior and it also influences how others interact with them based on that identity and the individual is held to a certain level of accountability to that identity. Cahill suggests “the public person is not made in the image of a unique self; rather, an interpretive picture of a unique self is made in the image of the public person” (137). Zerubavel agrees, “we think not only as individuals and as human beings, but also as social beings, products of particular social environments that affect as well as constrain the way we cognitively interact with the world” (6). He further posits, “We *learn* how to focus our attention, frame our experience, generalize, and reason in a socially appropriate manner” (Zerubavel 13). Moreover, “since humans are social animals with needs for attachment that make us dependent on others, we have interests in being acceptable to members of our social group” (Ferguson 114). Knowing what is socially expected and socially acceptable creates comfort and order in everyday life. Identities, such as lesbian or heterosexual, help us feel a sense of order in the world around us.

Heteronormativity

Yet, not all identities are equally accepted and welcomed in US culture today. Heterosexuality is encouraged or enforced in most social settings as *the* normative self. American culture focuses our experience on compulsory heterosexuality and "the heterosexually constituted family is the basic social unit" (Rich 657). Seidman notes heteronormativity is the concept that "individuals marry as virgins for love, where marriage inevitably leads to family, and where men and women occupy different and complementary social and sexual roles" (58). Heterosexuality is "held up as the standard for legitimate and expected social and sexual relations" (Ingraham 2). Jackson adds, "heterosexuality is *an* organizing principle of many aspects of social structure and social life" (179) and "heterosexuals often do not know what they are; they do not need to know; they are simply 'normal'" (Jackson 174). Further, heteronormativity is not widely questioned and "an individual's sexual identity must be fashioned from whatever cultural matter is available if it is to have psychological, social, and cultural utility" (Wilton 25). As such, heteronormativity indicates certain gender identities for men and women. Men are to be the providers for the family and create financial security and women are to raise the children creating a happy and peaceful home life.

Rich discusses heteronormativity in a term she has coined "compulsory heterosexuality", and notes it has an impact for women particularly because it limits their choices. She points out

> Women have married because it was necessary, in order to survive economically, in order to have children who would not suffer economic deprivation or social ostracism, in order to remain respectable, in order to

> do what was expected of women because coming out of 'abnormal' childhoods they wanted to feel 'normal,' and because heterosexual romance has been represented as the great female adventure, duty, and fulfillment. (Rich 654)

If there are no options besides heteronormativity in a culture, is homosexuality even seen as an option? I would say no. Sedgwick notes "most crucial sites for the contestation of meaning in twentieth-century Western culture are consequentially and quite indelibly marked with the historical specificity of homosocial/homosexual definition" (48). Once the notion of homosexuality was defined in the late nineteenth-century, it was placed in opposition to heterosexuality (Katz 257). Furthermore, same-sex desire

> was repressed with increasing energy, and hence increasing visibility, as the nineteenth-century culture of the individual proceeded to elaborate a version of knowledge/sexuality increasingly structured by its pointed cognitive *refusal* of sexuality between women, between men. (Sedgwick 49)

In western society, we learn an identity of heterosexuality is "normal" and an identity of homosexuality is "abnormal". The notion of an identity being viewed as abnormal forces individuals who self-identify with that abnormal identity into hiding. Indeed, Sedgwick argues "the closet" is a social mechanism that not only compels people with same sex attractions into hiding but also compels "heterosexuals" to swear absolute allegiance only to heterosexuality, resulting in our very belief in a binary—the "good" and the "spoiled."

And, as Plummer has noted in Telling Sexual Stories timing is critical, "Indeed, the *notion of gay identity only becomes a possibility once there has been a breakdown in traditional notions of the self. In the past, the possibility to choose to possess a gay identity simply did not exist*" (emphasis in text 93). We are in a period of history when possessing a gay identity does not necessarily mean an individual will lose their jobs, their homes, their family, their friends, or be at risk for losing their life. The discussion of a homosexual identity can finally come out of "the closet" and individuals who self identify as lesbian can more publicly narrate their own life stories.

Accountability

Not only does the notion of heteronormativity force individuals into certain gender identities, but accountability also compels individuals into certain ways of expressing those gender identities to others and ourselves. Women are held accountable to heteronormativity to be "good" wives and mothers. They are expected to prioritize children and home over their own interests. For example, "good" wives and mothers have dinner on the table when their husbands come home. They make sure the kids get to school and to all their extracurricular activities. Generally, women keep life at home running smoothly. Men are held accountable to heteronormativity to be the providers of financial security. They may work long hours each day and when they come home, generally, men are not held accountable to pursuing any activities that will keep the home running smoothly. They may leave the dishes, laundry, and putting the children to bed to their wife. All of these actions are "normal" and unexceptional and reinforce compulsory heteronormativity. As West and Zimmerman argue "the notion of accountability also encompasses those actions undertaken so that they are specifically unremarkable and thus

not worthy of more than a passing remark, because they are seen to be in accord with culturally approved standards" (West and Zimmerman 136).

According to this notion it would be unremarkable for a woman to have children, it would be expected in a heteronormative society. If a woman has children, the assumption is that she is not a lesbian—she has been socially identified as heterosexual. But, what happens when a woman who once was labeled culturally as heterosexual decides that this is no longer appropriate for her? What happens when she self-identifies as lesbian? After all, she has seemingly been held accountable to heteronormativity by marrying and having children, but now she has transitioned into a category of woman that is not suppose to have children. Indeed, same-sex relationships previously could not produce children until technology developed to make it possible and laws changed to allow for adoption by same-sex couples.

Lesbian Studies

Are women who now self-identify as lesbian despite a previous relationship with a man overlooked in either or both the heterosexual and lesbian community? Are they even the subject of study? Karla Jay has offered, "gay women are the 'Other' and one's perception of culture and literature is filtered by sexual behaviors and preferences" (xvii). Butler argues "lesbian appears to be a third gender, a category that radically problematizes both sex and gender as stable political categories of description" (144). Rust addresses the main idea proposed in my project and charges: "the closets are not empty, and not everyone who emerges from them has already been studied and very little research has been done on married women with same-sex attractions" (viii). Rust further summarizes the quandary in Bisexuality and the Challenge to Lesbian Politics

> As individuals and as a historically evolving community, [lesbians] have struggled to form an identity. We have struggled to distinguish ourselves from heterosexuals in order to assert our existence in a society that assumes heterosexuality, and at the same time we have struggled to define ourselves positively in terms of what we have in common as lesbians. (123)

The literature on lesbianism had been largely lacking until the 1990's when, quite literally, an explosion occurred. A recent search of Amazon.com using the key words lesbianism and non-fiction revealed the full extent of this explosion.[1] Few titles are listed before 1980. During the 1980's, sixty-one titles are listed. And during the 1990's, no fewer than *four hundred and fifty-six* titles are found. Topics range from historical accounts, to sexual theory, to experiencing life as a lesbian. The following titles are just some of the examples found in literature of the 90's. In Odd Girls and Twilight Lovers (1992), Lillian Faderman discusses the history of lesbian life in the 20th century. In Queer by Choice (1995), Vera Whisman discusses the sexual theory and the politics of identity for both lesbians and gay men. During the 1990's many collections of essays were published highlighting the experiences of being and living as a lesbian. Collections like Arlene Stein's Sisters, Sexperts, and Queers (1993) and Ellen Lewin's Inventing Lesbian Culture (1996) highlight the variety found in the lesbian community and overview how lesbians deal with their world outside the community. In Sex and

[1] For the purposes of this project, Amazon.com was chosen as an easily accessible and quick method to find representative titles on lesbian studies. However, Amazon.com does not list all literature on any topic. For example, many titles dealing with issues related to lesbianism prior to 1990 may be out of print and were therefore not found in this search. It does suggest that there were many more opportunities to research and claim a lesbian identity from the 1990's to today.

Sensibility (1997), Arlene Stein interviews women who identify as lesbian, these women self-identified at a young age.

Perhaps timing has something to do with this explosion of lesbian literature. Life stories of people with alternative sexualities could not be expressed or even heard until recently. These stories were considered to be from socially unacceptable, deviant individuals who had to maintain their lives in secret or risk loosing their jobs or personal injury. Claassen contends the timing for studying alternative sexualities is now. She notes

> In spite of a feminist movement and lesbian feminism, feminist literature and scholarship has had more interest in other groups of women than it has had in lesbians. Gay and lesbian studies are largely an academic creation of the 1990's and this is the decade in which gay historiography has proliferated. Although still carrying risks, gay/lesbian/bi/trans scholarship is far safer for the scholar than ever before. (19)

But, just as women are the 'other' when compared to men, lesbians are the 'other' when being compared to gay men. As Rich has argued, "to equate lesbian existence with male homosexuality because each is stigmatized is to deny and erase female reality once again" (649). Even though this statement was written in 1980, I feel Rich's point is still valid when she notes "…lesbian existence has been written out of history or catalogued under disease…" (Rich 648). Lewin agrees and proposes there *is* a difference between studies involving lesbians and gay men. She argues, "men's narratives typically illustrate ideas about homosexuality as an innate condition, while women's are often more concerned with choice and the political ramifications of being or becoming lesbian" (6).

Others have noticed this lack of study of lesbians and their self-identity. Karol L. Jensen in Lesbian Epiphanies conducted a similar study to the one I am suggesting of older women who come out as lesbian. Jensen, who conducted a study of lesbians in a heterosexual marriage, observes

> Until the last 10 years, female development was ignored, treated as an after thought, or forced into parallel lines of reasoning with male development. Women's experience did not conform along these parallel lines and was therefore considered abnormal, or not considered at all. I did find studies that address awareness and development of sexual identity—gender identity and orientation—in females. There is ample literature that discusses marriage to a man as the life path for a woman. However, I found little that discussed the intersection of female identity and female gender orientation, and almost nothing that considered the impact of discovering this intersection as a married adult woman. It was clear that a theoretical perspective to explain this process was/is needed. (3)

But, Jensen does not break her group into women who have had a heterosexual relationship before a lesbian sexual identity. She does not focus on women who have had children during their heterosexual relationship as my project does.

Abbott and Farmer edited a collection of stories of women who went From Wedded Wife to Lesbian Life (1995), but most of these women stated they married specifically to hide from their homosexuality and their own homophobia. Hence, they seemed to be aware of their lesbian interests earlier in life. In Whistling Women (2005)

and Lives of Lesbian Elders (2005) the authors interview women about their lesbian life history, not specifically focused on heterosexual women with children who transition to a lesbian identity. And, Karla Jay notes the lesbian experience has been "too often marginalized and restricted" (xvi). Because having children would seem to complicate lesbian identity, this project will add to the literature found based on the lesbian experience as I focus on women who have had a heterosexual relationship that produced children and ask them to share their life stories.

Personal Narratives

Personal narratives or life stories are important ways individuals tell others about themselves and their experiences. These stories also influence the perception of the self for the teller of the story. Narratives construct reality and give clues on how to act and give clues to others on how to react. Riessman notes individuals "construct past events and actions in personal narratives to claim identities and construct lives" (2). So, as people tell their life stories to themselves and others they create their identities. Linde observes the importance of life stories when she states

> Life stories express our sense of self: who we are and how we got that way. They are also one very important means by which we communicate this sense of self and negotiate it with others. Further, we use these stories to claim or negotiate group membership and to demonstrate that we are in fact worthy members of those groups, understanding and properly following their moral standards. Finally, life stories touch on the widest of social constructions, since they make presuppositions about what can be

> taken as expected, what the norms are, and what common or special belief systems can be used to establish coherence. (3)

But, life stories are not constant. They are continually being revised and they are especially revised at moments in life that are important. Linde calls these moments landmark events. She explains these can include

> choice of profession, marriage, divorce, and religious or ideological conversion if any. Both in it's content (the items that it includes and excludes) and its form (the structures that are used to make coherent), it is the product of a member of a particular culture. (11)

Timing of stories plays a key role in what is told to self and others. Berger notes the importance of timing in the telling of life stories. He explains

> A narrative is…a story, and stories tell about things that have happened or are happening to people, animals, aliens from outer space, insects—whatever. That is, a story contains a sequence of events, which means that narratives take place within or over, to be more precise, some kind of time period. (4)

Timing is important not only in an individual's telling of a life story, but also the historical period can determine what story can be told—what story is socially acceptable. Plummer writes of the importance of this time historically and within the life history of the individual,

> …when the new coming out story will become available in any particular life is unpredictable; many find it occurring during their first heterosexual marriage, some may find it taking place in mid-adolescence

> and others can move through it during their retirement. And the times change: in America during the 1970s it seemed to occur most typically somewhere between the twenties and early thirties. More recently, there are clear signs that coming out is happening earlier—and in some ways more easily. (85)

Personal narratives, coming-out stories in particular, have become ways to learn about identity formation. In coming-out stories, heteronormativity is being questioned especially as homophobia becomes less rampant in society and homosexuality is viewed as a more socially acceptable identity. Plummer notes

> Stories come into their time when a community has been fattened up, rendered ripe and willing to hear such stories. Whilst they can be heard amongst isolated individuals, they can gain no momentum if they stay in this privatized mode. Many personal narratives hence remain in the private sphere of dim inarticulateness, having no group to sustain and strengthen them. For stories to flourish there must be social worlds waiting to hear. Social worlds are not like communities of old: no locale is required, only a sense of belonging, sharing traditions, having common memories… For sure, people could come out as gay in the 1960's and before: but then it really meant in isolation, to oneself, a solitary lover or in the disguise, furtive 'twilight' worlds of the secretive homosexual underworld. (121)

Now stories based on alternative sexualities can be heard, not only within the homosexual community, but also in the heterosexual community. A lesbian story is out there and I want to expand on it.

It is time to listen to the personal stories of women who have transitioned from heterosexual marriage to lesbian identity and add to the feminist and queer discourse surrounding identity formation. It is time to add to the mix of stories that are about identities that may have been at one times considered stigmatized, as historically a homosexual identity has been considered. Coming out stories reveal new identities and these "new identities take us beyond the limiting categories of the past, and start forming identities which are forged around relationships and conscious choices over the life one wishes to live and who one wishes to be" (Plummer 160). And as Katz has noted, "Only when we stop assuming an invariable essence of heterosexuality will we begin the research to reveal the full variety of sexual emotions and behaviors" (262).

This project gathers life stories from women who now self-identify with a new identity—a lesbian identity, transitioning from a heterosexual identity. A new identity that socially has been considered deviant and a life story that includes accountability to self and others. The time has come, for not only are theses stories ready to be told, perhaps, more importantly, they are also ready to be heard.

Chapter Three

Methods

…indicating to oneself 'the life', this 'story telling', may be a major clue to understanding identity (Plummer, 172).

This is a feminist project. The reason I call this a feminist project is because it gives voice to women who in general are a segment of the population who "have been left out of or included in demeaning and disfiguring ways in what has been an almost exclusively male account to the world" (Lugones and Spelman 17). Furthermore, it gives voice to a little studied subset of women—(self-identified) lesbians who have children from a heterosexual relationship. Participants create a narrative of their lesbian identity and these narratives become "a strategy for documenting women's accounts of their lives" (Oakley 48). The methodology I used also makes this a feminist project. Fonow and Cook, in Beyond Methodology, suggest four specific requirements are necessary to create a feminist project. These specifics include reflexivity, action-orientation, an affective component, and using the situation-at-hand.

The women in this project all went through many transitions on their way to self-identifying as lesbian. Many became unhappy in their marriage and divorced. Some were so involved with their children's lives that when the children began to move on they noticed a void. For many, a woman filled that void. As they responded to the questions asked in the interview, they reflected on the paths their lives have taken. Fonow and Cook note

> women's lives are examined at 'structural rupture points' in their biographies such as divorce, unemployment, occurrence of rape and physical abuse, coming out, and many other times when social actors commonly forge new aspects of their identities. (4)

This is defined as reflexivity. Feminist research is defined by self-reflexivity for the researcher and the researched. Not only did the women interviewed have the opportunity to reflect on their life stories, but so did I. I found commonalities with the women interviewed in my own life story

Action-orientation is described as "an act of liberation" (Fonow and Cook 6). Feminist research is about the liberation of women. Our goal is to change women's lives—both through the research and with its effects on readers. The chance to tell their stories encouraged participation from many of the women interviewed. This participation was itself a liberating act. And, this project is an act of liberation for women, it helps create an opportunity and allows for stories to be told about women's lives and sexualities.

Unlike positivistic science, feminist knowledge does not separate between logic and emotion. Emotional thought and knowledge is valued as part of the thought and analysis (Tong 39). An affective component is described as an "acknowledgment of the affective dimension of research, but also recognition that emotions serve as a source of insight or a signal of rupture in social reality" (Fonow and Cook 9). When reading over the transcripts, I looked for specific words and ways of expressing that evoked emotion and these are included in Chapter Four. Part of the affective component includes protecting participants from harm and making them feel comfortable with mutual

disclosure (Fonow and Cook 10). This was accomplished with the use of pseudonyms in the final transcript and by revealing parts of my own life story during the interview process.

But, why study this group of women in the first place? As I reflected on the path my own life had taken after my divorce, I realized it was time to meet like-minded women, it was time to meet lesbians. The first place I decided to go was a lesbian bar. Even before I entered the bar, I wondered if these women would take me seriously. I self-identify as a lesbian, but I had been married; I had children. I knew it would be easy to avoid talking about my marriage, but it would be very hard for me to avoid bringing up my children, since they are such a large part of my life. As I introduced myself around the bar, I was very surprised to find out that the majority of the women I spoke with--who were about my age--had themselves been married and had children. As Fonow and Cook point out I had a "situation-in-hand". They describe this more specifically as "once a researcher finds herself in a particular situation and recognizes the research potential in her surroundings, she may decide to make a study of it" (13). After reviewing the literature and finding a gap, I realized I had found my study and reflecting back on the situation found in the bar, I realized it might not be so hard to find a study group and I decided to conduct interviews.

As an interview methodology, I used Holstein and Gubrium's "The Active Interview" for this project when dealing with the actual interviews. As the authors suggest, "an active approach might…be most appropriate in those instances when the researcher is interested in subjective interpretations" (Holstein and Gubrium 73). This active method puts equal value on the information provided by the researcher and on

those who are actually relating their narratives. The active interview was fitting for this study since the general research question asks participants to tell their own story in conversation with the researcher.

In "Interviewing Women: a Contradiction in Terms", Oakley points out "the formulation of the interviewer role has changed dramatically from being a data-collecting for researchers to being a data-collecting instrument for those whose lives are being researched" (49). She observes the need to be "non-hierarchical" (41). The researcher needs to gain a certain level of cooperation and to reassure participants that they will not be mistreated or taken advantage of. She states

> I set out to convey to the people whose cooperation I was seeking the fact that I did not intend to exploit either them or the information they gave me….in mentioning the possibility of publications arising out of the research I told them that their names and personal details would be changed and I would, if they wished, send them details of any such publications, and so forth. (Oakley 47)

The interview becomes a non-judgmental exchange between the researcher and the participant; in essence it is a conversation. This is the strategy used in this study.

Combining ideas from Holstein and Gubrium, Oakley, Fonow and Cook I tried to be the instrument so the participants could tell their own stories. I conducted in-depth interviews with eight women who identify as lesbian after being involved in a heterosexual relationship that produced children. Women were found by personal contact

and through snowball sampling, in which participants helped find other potential narrators.

All participants in this study were white women between the ages of 37 and 69. All had been married at least once with the longest marriage lasting 31 years. All participants have at least one child, with 5 having two children and 2 having three children. Seven members of this study group self-identify as lesbian, with one member self-identifying as bisexual. (See Appendix B). Interviews were one-on-one and generally took place in participant's homes over the course of an hour. Two interviews were conducted in restaurants over a meal and one interview was two-on-one. Two interviews were conducted over the phone due to distance constraints. All but one interview was recorded. Some participants were more talkative and some had to be drawn out. I tried to make them feel comfortable by telling a portion of my own story. Narrators in this project were informed pseudonyms would be used and that a copy of the thesis would be provided upon request.

The one general research question for participants is "How have you negotiated the path from heterosexuality to lesbianism?" Specific research questions guided the interview and were open-ended (See Appendix A). These questions were chosen to aid in discussion and help reveal the process and feelings the women had as they made the transition from a heterosexual identity to a homosexual identity.

I then transcribed the taped interviews, as Riessman notes in Narrative Analysis, there is no way to avoid transcribing and "the task of identifying narrative segments and their representation cannot be delegated" (58). After transcription, the story became the object of investigation (Riessman 1). I began the analysis of the narratives while

transcribing since “analysis cannot be easily distinguished from transcription” (Riessman 60). As the story was transferred from the oral to the written, patterns began to emerge. I included a “systematic method of reduction” of the rough transcription (Riessman 43) in the analysis and during retranscription and analysis “interpretive categories emerge(d)” (Riessman 58) and commonalities were found. These commonalities became the major themes produced by the participants’ life stories and discussed in Chapter Four.

Chapter Four

Findings and Discussion

Three major themes of commonality emerged during analysis of the data. These themes are heteronormativity and accountability, relationship with children, and acceptance by the lesbian community. Each will be discussed in detail with quotes from participant life stories. Direct quotes from the transcript are noted with pseudonyms and line numbers from the transcripts for reference purposes.

Heteronormativity and Accountability

Heteronormativity defines the socially expected life path of meeting "the man of your dreams", marrying him, having and caring for his children, and living happily ever. Many of my narrators spoke of heteronormative expectations early in their lives.

Expected to marry and have children.

Five participants—Katie, Mildred, Lisa, Ellen, and Lacy noted this specifically. Katie stated she

> felt like my life kind of was planned out for me, that I was supposed to go to college, 'cause I was a high achiever in high school, I was suppose to go to college, get married, have kids, I mean it is just what people did, you know. (Katie 275-277)

Mildred was coming of age in the 1950's and brought up how she was "expected to be married with a white picket fence and the apron" (57). Later in the interview, she noted, "we did what was expected of us at that particular time in our society (717). Others noted

similar ideas: "So I met this guy who was a wonderful guy, got married, had great kids, he was a nice guy, he was a great provider" (Lacy 31-32); "[marriage] wasn't bad, but I kind of felt in the end that I was pleasing, I was satisfying my parents" (Lisa 108-109); "Married young; I was 21 years old because that was what you were supposed to do" (Ellen 3).

As part of the expectation to marry young, a majority of the narrators noted marrying by the time they were 21. Erin, Katie and Lacy were 20 years old when they married a man. Ellen was 21 years old and Lia was the youngest at 18 years of age for her first marriage. The other participants—Lisa, Mildred, and Marilyn—were younger than 30 when they married; 25, 26, and 27 years of age respectively.

Lesbian lifestyle not seen as an option.

All participants made statements indicating they felt they were held accountable to heteronormativity. Alternative sexualities were not an option, there were no lesbian role models in their lives.

> I want to have kids, I want to have a quote unquote normal life, so what I thought a normal life was at that time. So it wasn't hard for me at that time, it was easier then to get married at nineteen and I didn't have a problem with it. (Katie 39-42)

Later in the interview she noted

> There weren't a lot of other options and those options looked kind of shady and you know, like any women that I knew that I thought were lesbians were kind of…I didn't really know what they did, and I just saw them kind of come and go and play sports and I didn't really know what

> the options would be for me. Like, oh I could get a job, I could have a career, I could support myself, I could, I mean, I just didn't consider that kind of option. (Katie 281-285).

Marilyn and Mildred, who were married in the early 1960's, both noted the risk of personal safety when self-identifying as lesbian "if we came out in our time, the world looked at lesbians as terrible, I think, homosexuality was still a mental disorder, we stood the big possibility of being thrown out of our houses, of being rejected by our parents" (Marilyn 195-197). And "If I had recognized myself in the early 60's and gone into a lesbian lifestyle it would have been through all the time that there were police raids in New York" (Mildred 61-62).

Mildred added "I was married for 21 ½ years, got a divorce, actually he divorced me, and I had no idea that I had any inkling towards being a lesbian" (85-86). Lacy commented "maybe I always had these feelings, but didn't really know what they were" (161) and "I didn't know anybody who was out. So it never, ever entered my mind" (28-29). And, Erin got straight to the point "[lesbianism] wasn't an option, it was nothing" (454).

Many participants experienced feelings for women that just did not fit in with the feelings they were supposed to have in heteronormativity. Lia explained "When I was married, I met a woman in my class and developed a fondness, a relationship, we didn't actually, it wasn't like I cheated on my husband, but it had introduced something to me that I wasn't aware of was possible" (13-15). Lisa remarked "pretty much I knew from a very young age that I was having feelings, I knew even as a small child what I was attracted to, and thought what was wrong" (76-78). Katie observed "I think I always was

lesbian…but it was vague and I didn't really act on it because I thought it would be just too tough of a life and I'm like yeah, you know, but it is not like I put a lot of thought into it" (28-31).

Unhappy in marriage.

Some participants expressed being unhappy in marriage and perhaps Lisa stated it most succinctly

> I finally knew by the time I had my second child that I was going to be miserable or I was going to do something about it. And so I knew that is not how I wanted to live for the next 30 years—miserable. (Lisa 155-157)

For many, a woman came into their life either near the end of the marriage or soon after the divorce, catalyzing the realization that she might be a lesbian. It is interesting to note that none of the narrators self identified as lesbian without a catalyst—either a particular woman came into their lives or divorce created opportunities. Erin noted "I really didn't know, I just knew at the time that I loved this woman" (24). Lacy felt a similar way, "All I knew I was really attracted to this woman and I didn't know why" (87). And Marilyn reconnected with the woman she had a relationship with before her marriage

> And, I remet her at the time I started going through the divorce. So that helped me, 30 years later, so that's what, you know, got me to look at myself, really evaluate myself and when I remet her and we became lovers it just felt so different that what 30 years in a heterosexual marriage was. And so that is when I identified myself, well this is why I have been unhappy in the marriage, this is why I don't want to stay, but then, she was

in California, I came back to New York and wanted to find other lesbians. (Marilyn 22-31)

Current long-term relationship.

Another interesting finding is that at the time of this project, all the women either are in or recently ended a long-term monogamous relationship. Only one narrator reported being in a relationship for about a year. The others varied in length from five to 15 years (See Appendix B). The heteronormative expectation for both men and women is to maintain a long-term monogamous relationship. Some narrators spoke of taking their relationship to the next level with a commitment ceremony, a civil union, or even calling their relationship a "marriage."

As the narrators were making their transition another important self-identity influenced their decision on whether to come-out or not. This identity was that of mother.

Relationship with Children

One self-identity discussed as critical to all of the narrators was that of mother. They all discussed the relationship to their children as being very important in their lives and this influenced the timing of their coming out. Many did not want to risk losing their children since homophobia from either the father, the children themselves, or the legal system was a main concern. Many were so immersed in their children's lives that they were stay-at-home moms.

Five of the eight women stayed at home with the kids as a full-time mom. Two divorced and raised their children as single mothers. One stayed in the marriage during her transition and took advantage of the opportunity to further her education so she could

support the children when she finally did divorce. All these women were following the path of heteronormativity and their expected gender identity as women and immersing themselves in the lives of their children. In the families for this study where the women stayed home, they all followed this gender-normative path.

Erin worked in the school system so she could have the same schedule as her children.

> I began working as a teacher aide, because I got to be a stay at home mom, which was fun and good that they had that and I had that you know in those first years. (Erin 123-124)

Lia noted if she had identified earlier she would not have her children and being a mother is very important to her.

> I wouldn't have minded coming out earlier, but on the other side of this I wouldn't have my girls…my number one identity is mother. (Lia 303-305)

Lacy observed

> I don't think I would have come out when my kids were little. Nothing would have stood in the way of me losing my children or being involved with them. (Lacy 473-475)

and she further recognized

> had I known or met [current partner] when my children were small, I probably wouldn't of even given her the time of day, because it was not something that was important to me at that time in my life at that time. I would not have done anything to harm my family. (Lacy 163-165)

Lisa showed how important her children are to her when her husband threatened to take custody of the children and she said

> A switch went off in my head and I went from being rather passive to being dominant. And it was more like, it really felt like an instinctual mother instinct because I was going to protect my children. (Lisa 206-207)

Katie recognized that while she was caring for the children and being a full time mom, there was no time to think about her own sexual identity, or any other personal matters.

> As I hit my 30's and I was maturing more, in myself, I felt like…and my kids were getting older where I didn't have to focus so much on them and I could look at myself finally. And I think that I started to feel like these lesbian tendencies that I had ever since I had been in adolescence, I couldn't suppress them forever. It was just becoming impossible and kind of unbearable and I got involved in a couple of relationships with women and then while I was married and then the thing that really tipped it though was that I got involved with a woman that I fell in love with. And I just knew that this is the way I needed to go and this was the person and I didn't want to not take a chance on that and miss out on being with her. So that is probably what tipped it finally, but there were a lot of factors going on for about 10 years. (Katie 62-71)

Many women noted the need to stay with their husbands because they lacked the means to support a family financially. They did not worry about their own situation, but they worried about how a divorce would affect the children.

> I was married for 30 years and I was unhappy in the entire marriage and it was a choice that I made to stay in the marriage because if I had left the marriage I would have been a single mother bringing up two children who were just a year apart, without family support and so I chose to stay. (Marilyn 2-5)

Katie recognized

> I was the person who was staying at home and raising the kids most of my adult life and he has a great job and all that stuff and I thought if he leaves, then the boys and I and especially the boys are screwed. (Katie 213-216)

Many participants noticed the homophobia associated with self-identifying as lesbian and did not divorce until they were sure they would not loose custody of the children. Erin suggested she "had to be in the closet not only to maintain custody of own kids but partner had foster kids and they would have taken those kids away" (Erin 146-147). Lia explained

> Having children I think was the center of all of it because when I started exploring sexually I was like twenty-one and I had several, I had like maybe three sexual encounters with women at the time and I even kissed girls back when I was sixteen, but I think that children was a huge issue with me, when I had the baby, when I had Shane, my ex-husband would hold that over me, he was extremely born again Christian, homophobic, and so even though he liked my brother [who was gay] and tolerated him, um, if I would have done something like that I have a feeling I would have

> lost Shane [daughter], he would have taken me to court. And so, I think that's what kept me in line for a long time there. (Lia 232-237)

Katie emphasized, "I was going to do nothing until my kids left the house because I felt it was really important to follow that through" (181-182).

Many noted they were right to fear loosing the children because their ex-husbands tried to turn the children against their mothers after their lesbian transitions. Marilyn's husband went so far as to say she was always a lesbian

> he told [children] that I was a lesbian, that I was a lesbian throughout the marriage, that I had relationships with every female friend that I had through the marriage, which not of that was true. (Marilyn 141-143)

For Lacy, her husband

> did go through an angry stage and tried to turn the kids against me. He was whining to them about what I had done to him, he was going to be alone, how could she do this to me, and she doesn't love you anymore. The one thing I knew about my children is they love me and we are very close. (Lacy 293-297)

According to my narrators, none wanted to jeopardize the stability the children had at home by coming-out. As a result, many waited until the children were older to finally divorce and self-identify as lesbian. For most, as the children left for college and started living their own lives, the narrator took the opportunity to live her own life as she self identified not only as mother, but as lesbian too. The struggle during the transition from a heterosexual to a homosexual identity was highlighted in the life stories gathered from the participants.

Transition

As the participants began transitioning from a heterosexual to a lesbian identity they spoke of apprehension, as they entered a completely new life. They did not know what to expect, many noted they did research on lesbianism and many sought therapy.

Marilyn elaborated and spotlighted the struggle she had early in her life and noted the struggle for finding a word to name the relationship

> And, well, I was in the Peace Corps in 1963 before I got married. And when I was in the Peace Corps I was 23 years old and I had met another girl, a woman 23, and we fell in love with each other and we had a sexual relationship that was a very rough relationship because we were really afraid of the relationship and afraid of our parents. We did not identify ourselves as lesbian and so it was a real push-pull situation for 2 years. (Marilyn 18-22)

Erin noted the timing of her transition

> if I had come out at a younger time, I would have probably been more questioning because I wasn't strong in my own sense of who I was. So as I matured and I was strong I didn't care what anybody said or what anybody did, I was very strong in my identity as a lesbian. (Erin 625-628)

Pain/reluctance during transition.

Marilyn and Lisa both thought they were the only ones questioning their sexuality.

Marilyn thought

> I was the only one in my later fifties, who had two grown children, who had been in a marriage for thirty years, and then at that point identified

> myself as a lesbian and I met so many other women who were in their, about the same age, and who had gone through the same thing, but I thought I must be the only one. (Marilyn 31-35)

And Lisa maintained "I thought I was the only stupid one that got married" (175) and

> I was feeling like I was a coward and I was really weak and I was ashamed and I began to notice a lot of women who were very obviously gay and had their partners and stuff, so I just thought I am just a coward (Lisa 135-137)

Lisa also spoke of the realization she might be gay, when she states "I came out to my husband. I told him that I was bisexual and I was attracted to women, sort of that transitional bisexual" (121-122) and remarked on a situation where others were surprised she had children because she must be gay.

> When I had my hair pretty short…and it was pretty obvious, right, and I was working at the hospital at one time and I just happened to mention that I had to pick up my kids and the charge nurse looked at me and said you have kids (laughter) and I decided not to say anything and still she was you have kids and yes, yes I do, I have two of them. (Lisa 353-357)

Research into lesbian identity.

Marilyn, Lia, and Mildred researched lesbianism. For Marilyn a "[therapist] recommended I read a book Married Women who Love Women…it was a help, because I realized that I wasn't a freak, that I wasn't weird" (38-44). Lia remarked that since this was such a new identity she had to learn how to practice it—a notion never imagined

with heterosexuality, since being heterosexual just seems to happen, but being homosexual must be researched. She said

> I would go to [the lesbian bookstore] and I would spend my whole day there reading about lesbians. So I studied it and I investigated it, researched it, like a good researcher before I even embraced it. I went to a support group of people coming out and heard horror stores about people loosing their children, so I went back into my little cave, but then I kept researching it. (Lia 17-21)

Lia also contended

> Because I didn't know quite what to do, it was like, I've got to learn everything first, we'll just figure it out as we go along, no, no, I need graphs, I need charts, I need diagrams. Well, I didn't want to do anything wrong, so I'm always afraid with, you know, I've got to learn it all first. (Lia 173)

Mildred found humor in the situation when she said

> [at work] I was making telephone calls to women's bookstores to try to get some information and trying to make it sound like I'm looking for a book, so that was funny. (Mildred 99-100)

Therapy in transition.

Some women took advantage of therapy while making the transition. Marilyn noted that she

> met somebody who introduced me to a therapist who was going to be starting a group of married women who were in lesbian relationships or

were in the process of getting out of marriages, and so I contacted her because I wanted to join the group. (Marilyn 35-38)

Lisa's therapist was concerned about the children. She pointed out "I went to a gay therapist, who was very conservative, and she encouraged me to stay married" (143-144) but the group she joined showed her she was not alone.

> I joined a group, a bisexual group. About half of [the group] had been married, and it was very eye-opening for me to see that, to see that there were others, I didn't know, I just thought I was the only stupid one that got married. (Lisa 167-170)

The therapy seemed to act as a reassurance that the narrator was doing the right thing. The reassurance came when the individuals found others who were transitioning just as they were from a heterosexual to a homosexual identity. It provided relief that they were not the only ones that got married.

Acceptance by Lesbian Community

In their current lives, many of my narrators speak of the strength of their identification with their lesbian identities and that they are currently very active in lesbian-oriented events and groups.

Participation in lesbian community.

Lacy, Erin, Marilyn, and Mildred speak of being active and comfortable in the lesbian community. Marilyn even stated "I am most comfortable within the lesbian community" (727-728). Lacy was active in the town were she was living most recently before moving to Tampa and is now active in Tampa. She explained

> there was a core group of people trying to bring a community together (in the town where she is from). So, we started getting involved in that. They wanted to open a community center. We found a building and got it all ready to go. (Lacy 391-393)

Lacy had also been instrumental in starting a speaking bureau and currently sings with a lesbian chorus "I do love to sing, it is a great release for me, and it is a great way for people to learn about gay people" (455-456).

Erin and her partner, Dotty, started a woman's bookstore and were instrumental in creating a group where lesbians could meet other lesbians.

> You couldn't meet anybody if you were lesbian except in the bar and nobody knew anybody so we used to the bookstore to create that environment. (Erin 310-312)

Mildred, Marilyn, and Erin live in the same retirement community and helped to develop a community group of LGBT individuals.

> It started last year because we felt a big need for something for a gay or lesbian person who moves into town so they would be able to find other people and for us to get to know who else was here. And so, through the social club, we got approval, because we have human rights ordinance in (town they live in), and so they could really not give us approval based upon sexual orientation and so we have an activity (for LGBT residents) and we meet in the clubhouse once a month and we have a pot luck Friday afternoon and it's listed on the bulletin board in the clubhouse along with tai chi, ma jong, and bridge…(Marilyn 758-765)

Not fitting in.

A couple of women noted their children presented a dilemma as they tried to fit into the lesbian community. Lia observed she and perhaps other lesbians with children

> don't fit into the straight community, with soccer moms, we don't fit in the gay community because there's just you know, you've had kids, you've had this previous life as a soccer mom, so we are in this in-between thing where we don't really have an association with a community and I think that it's really a hard place to be. (Lia 490-495)

And Katie commented that she has

> never been ostracized [by the community] because of having kids, but it kind of pisses me off when somebody says you've slept with men, and they act like they are better quote unquote lesbian because they have never slept with men. (Katie 133-147)

Lia also notes her appearance

> I'm extremely feminine and I think that puts people off, you know, or they might think that I'm just out playing or exploring and I'm not serious or anything. (Lia 333-335)

No regrets.

Since accountability to heteronormativity is so prevalent in Western culture I expected some women to have regrets making the transition to a socially stigmatized identity, but none of the women expressed any regrets for making the transition from a heterosexual to a homosexual self-identity. I will let the women speak for themselves with their quotes that express this lack of regret: "I knew I loved women" (Erin 478). "I

got involved with a woman that I fell in love with. And I just knew that this is the way" (Katie 68-69). And, Lacy [in a conversation with her son when he asked if she was transitioning to lesbianism to be trendy] "Do you think I would put all of you and everyone else in my life through this for a trend? I said this is who I really am" (Lacy 321-322). "I really have no desire to be around men, so if that makes me a lesbian then yes, I guess I am" (Lacy 175-176). "I am not ashamed of what I did, I am not ashamed of who I am" (Lacy 385-386). Perhaps the most poignant quotes are expressed by Ellen when she stated "I realize this is where I'm suppose to be" (Ellen 42-43) and "[lesbianism] is what I was looking for all my life" (Ellen 64-65).

Chapter Five

Conclusion

Heteronormativity and gender accountability created only one legitimate life path according to the women interviewed for this project. Women and men in Western culture are expected to be heterosexual and are held accountable to being heteronormative. Women are expected to find "the man of their dreams", marry him, have his children, raise their children, and "live happily ever after" in a content family. Far from being deviant, the women interviewed followed this gender normative path.

I would like to introduce a new term—gender-normativity. While these women finally were not heteronormative in terms of picking a male partner, they were gender normative as women for maintaining relations with their children, seeking long term partnerships, and ultimately fulfilling gender expectations for women. They all married, as expected. The majority stayed home with their children, as expected. They even reflected on their lives as expected when the children began gaining their own independence. In addition, culturally their husbands followed the masculine gender normative path to provide financial support for the family and the women in this study followed that path too and came to rely on their husbands for financial support of the family, as expected. When their children were heading to college or moving out of the house to live on their own, the women in this study examined their situations and most found they were unhappy in their marriages. They felt something was missing and they felt they had the opportunity and autonomy to do something about it because their

children were pursuing their own lives. For many, either before the divorce or after their divorce, a woman came into their lives and the participants realized they wanted to spend their lives with a woman. They recognized a new self-identity of homosexuality. They began to identify as lesbians and most entered into long-term monogamous relationships.

Many feared losing custody of their children, and their children are very important to them. For some, their husbands tried to turn the children against their mothers. Even though, homosexuality is still not very socially acceptable, at this time in history, women now have the opportunity to tell this story—a story of transition.

For many the transition was not easy. The women in this study noted a time of confusion and apprehension as they explored this new self-identity. Many conducted research and many visited therapists to find answers and feel more comfortable with their new identities. Many became active in the lesbian community and acknowledged feeling comfortable there. A minority admitted there was some animosity from a few of the women in the lesbian community who self-identified as lesbian at a younger age. The animosity arose because the participants in the study had children from a heterosexual relationship; they were not seen as lesbian, but bisexual or just curious and could not be depended on to commit to a lesbian self-identity.

Despite this community reaction felt by some of the women, none of them expressed any regrets in making the transition from a heterosexual to a lesbian identity. The majority have found a woman to live happily ever after with. Perhaps Ellen's quote that "[lesbianism] is what I was looking for all my life" (64-65) best characterizes how my narrators expressed their current understandings of their identities.

However, the life stories of my narrators show their experiences do not reflect current trends in either feminist theory or queer theory. The notion that women are still held so closely to the identity of the "good" wife and mother would make theorists in feminism cringe. The narrators were very gender-normative in their lives doing everything a "good" wife and mother would do. But, all women need to have many ways to narrate their lives and not be limited to one or two. The participants in this project now have the opportunity to discuss their life and particularly their sexuality with more agency. Furthermore, this project does not challenge the notion of "mother". After all, not all women are mothers and not all mothers do a good job raising their children. For that matter, some men may be seen as being better mothers than some women would be. Yet, the narrators in this project note how important their children are to them and that the risk of loosing them was unacceptable. For them, the identity "mother" remains quite primary. This may be a reflection on the historical times these women found themselves in; a time when to be a woman was to be a "good" mother. Or, perhaps it reflects how women's relationship to children in our culture remains primary, as each of my narrators elected to understand this connection to children as very important to their self-identity.

Queer theorists would find the whole notion of taking such identities as troubling in the first place. Perhaps even more so than is the case with feminist theory, queer notions of deconstructing identity categories and troubling gender do not seemed to have trickled into the lives of my narrators. They cling to their identities. The identities chosen by the narrators—mother and lesbian—are just a few of the categories queer theorists are working to erase, since any ontological category is objectionable. Yet, for these women these categories are important to their self-identity. These qualifiers help

the narrators negotiate their world, reinforcing the notion that many times theory and reality do not intersect. And, so in the everyday lives of my narrators, choosing an identity seems quite important.

This project compels several future studies. This project highlighted some interesting points as narrators told their life stories. It brings up questions about the life stories of other individuals. How would men relate the story of their transition from a heterosexual to a homosexual identity? What about women of color, how would they respond? Alternatively, how would women who divorce and yet maintain a heterosexual identity respond? These projects could add to the discourse in life span development, just as this project has added to the discourse in lesbian studies.

The narrators in this project highlight the way heteronormativity sends individuals on a predictable life path. They married, had children and were the "good" wife and mother they were expected to be. When the opportunity to reflect on their own lives arose after their children moved on to create their lives, the narrators acquired a new identity. They self-identified as homosexual and transitioned from a heterosexual marriage to a lesbian identity.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Interview Guide

I have one general research question: "How have you negotiated the path from heterosexuality to lesbianism?" Specific research questions will be open-ended and include:

1. How do you currently identify?
2. Tell me your story of coming into your lesbian identity.
3. Did having children from a heterosexual relationship influence the way you might view your sexual orientation?
4. Do you think the age at which you came out influenced your identity or coming-out process?
5. Have you ever been encouraged to call yourself bisexual?
6. Do you feel part of a lesbian or LGBT community?
7. How have lesbians responded to the fact you have children?

Appendix B: Participant Demographics

Ellen (lesbian)[2]: 54 years old; 29 year old daughter; one heterosexual marriage of 7 years when 21 years old; 15 years with current partner.

Erin (old lesbian)[1]: 69 years old; 48, 47, and 45 year old sons; one heterosexual marriage of 17 years when 20 years old; 9 years with current partner, with the last 6 in a civil union.

Katie (lesbian)[1]: 46 years old; 24 and 22 year old sons; one heterosexual marriage of 21 years when 20 years old; 8 years with current partner

Lacy (lesbian)[1]: 55 years old; 30 year old daughter and 27 year old son; one heterosexual marriage of 31 years when 20 years old; married (her words) to current partner for 9 years.

Lia (bisexual, but lesbian emotionally and politically)[1]: 38 years old; 19 and 10 year old daughters; three heterosexual marriages, the first when 18 years old, the longest lasting 3 ½ years; recently ended a 5 year relationship with a woman.

Lisa (lesbian/gay)[1]: 37 years old; 9 and 11 year old sons; one heterosexual marriage of 7 years when 25 years old; 1 year with current partner.

Marilyn (lesbian)[1]: 66 years old; 37 year old son and 36 year old daughter; one heterosexual marriage of 21 ½ years when 27 years old; 5 ½ years with current partner.

Mildred (lesbian)[1]: 67 years old; 40, 35, and 30 year old sons; one heterosexual marriage of 30 years when 26 years old; 5 ½ years with current partner.

[2] self identification