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An Evolving Dyke-otomy: Lesbianism and Learning

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by

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<u>**Dedication**</u>

First, I would like to thank Dr. Aziz Talbani for his support and faith in me. I would not have had the courage to do such a project if it wasn't for the opportunity he gave me and the subsequent confidence he showed in my work. Second, I would like to extend great thanks and appreciation to the chair of my thesis committee, Dr. Mahuya Pal, for investing in this project as much as I did. Additionally, great thanks goes out to Dr. Jane Jorgenson and Dr. Kim Golombisky for their dedication to this project. It was the guidance of these three ladies that made this project strong. Enormous gratitude goes out to my students, "family," friends, and in particular Mary Catherine Whitlock, Kristen Blinne, Ashley Gunn, Nakita Kiger, Alicia Rowland, and Ben Sharpe for always supporting me and this project. It was our talks as well as your opinions, affirmation, and questions that gave this project life. Lastly, thank you to the participants of the study, without your contributions, stories, and investment in this project it would not have been possible.

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Abstract

Homophobia and prejudice against the lesbian community have been argued to be consequences of lack of education within academic and non-academic spaces. This study introduces a pedagogical model of gendered lesbian identity that can act as a tool for educators to understand lesbian experiences, and thus contribute to addressing issues related to homophobia and prejudices in the classrooms and beyond. Based on thematic analysis of data generated by a qualitative online survey of 29 participants, this study argues that notions of social norms, individual agency, and importance of advocacy are critical points of emphases in the proposed educational model. Although the model may be seen as a pilot study, its experiential and theoretical foundation should make it a novel and simple pedagogical tool in teaching lesbian identity.

Prologue

In August 2010 I applied for an assistantship with the Office of Multicultural Affairs at the University of South Florida. After completing a phone interview sitting on a curb in the parking lot above the rumble and buzz of the lawn equipment outside of my office, I was offered the assistantship. As exciting as the prospect was of beginning my graduate studies with an accompanying job, I was now in a conundrum.

Although my undergraduate experience proved to be a liberating lesson in my lesbianism, the real word is not as sympathetic. I would be commanded back to the closet. Back to the fictitiously gendered partner, disengaging in relationship discussions with coworkers, wearing stringently feminine clothing, and asserting to others the "dream" of marrying a man. It is unfortunate to have to renegotiate such details. More distressing, however, is finding normality in the renegotiation. Yet there is a comfort in the camouflage. As an assumed heterosexual, I receive privileges of superiority, acceptance, and righteousness, honors appreciated, cherished, and even adored as an "outsider." However, as the new LGBTQ Advisor, I had to unfasten my grip on the safety of heteronormativity. I was now *the* gay on campus.

As I grappled with the fear of being visible, I channeled my energy into cultivating a rich and informed LGBTQ program in the university. As part of the program's success, heterosexual students wanted to know more about LGBTQ issues, identity, and inequities and faculty and staff affirmed the importance the program in their departments. The Safe Zone Ally Training soon became a staple for LGBTQ education for the university. My discomfort in visibility transformed into confidence as I spent most of my first year speaking to classrooms of students in Women's Studies, Education, Communication, Library Sciences, Psychology, and Student Affairs. When I spoke with the professors afterwards, I kept hearing of their difficulty in teaching LGBTQ issues as there were few educational resources, models, or pedagogies available other than my program on campus.

My biggest personal transformation came through my engagement with the LGBTQ students. They now had a space where they could meet, discuss, and confide in someone who was invested in their support, wellbeing, and success. We had conversations about current relationships, responsibilities, and futures, and about more pressing and confidential issues, such as the transition process and coming out for the first time. Feeling particularly comfortable with one another and myself, several lesbian students detailed the intricacies and rationalities related to their identities as well as the social organization that surveys and manages them. These conversations and my simultaneous graduate studies and research confirmed the paucity of LGBTQ pedagogy in the

academy. This dynamic arrangement of experiences provided the impetus for this project, wherein I chose to work on conceptualizing and assessing a model on gendered lesbian identity.

Introduction

"There is no 'normal' visibility for members of oppressed or minority groups; there is only invisibility and hyper-visibility." (Straut & Sapon-Shevin, 2002, p. 33)

"One salient way to combat prejudice and injustice is to educate the broadest possible group of citizens about the ideology or subgroup on whom such shoddy and hurtful attitudes are being visited" (McNaron, 2007, p. 150).

Visibility and the politics of seeing, experiencing, and understanding encapsulates the conundrum of LGBTQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender/transsexual, queer/questioning) education in academic and non-academic spaces. It is commonly believed that there is no need to teach about sexual identity because of the myth that lesbian students are not present in the classroom (Swartz, 2005), that certain groups are not worth studying or are not a priority (Nussbaum, 1997), and to ensure that educators are not encouraging a "gay agenda" (Straut & Sapon-Shevin, 2002). While a lack of creative engagement in lesbian identity education likely contributes to prejudice, ignorance, and intolerance against the lesbian community, it is the relative absence of pedagogical tools to aid educators and teachers such topics that inspired this project. Drawing from my two years of experiences in the Office of Multicultural Affairs as the LGBTQ Advisor and combining literature in

communication, education, and gender studies, this study attempts to conceptualize and evaluate an educational model to advance an understanding about gendered lesbian identity (see Figure 4). Gendered lesbian identity refers to the masculine, feminine, (Butler, 1991; Crawley, Foley & Shehan, 2008; Halberstam, 1998) androgynous, or gender variant intricacies that are socially ingrained in "lesbian" identification. The goal of this study is to demonstrate the complexities in lesbian identities that often are muted by stereotypes, iconic lesbian celebrities such as Ellen DeGeneres, Melissa Etheridge, and Billie Jean King, and lesbian representation on television and in movies. With awareness and knowledge of gendered lesbian identity, I believe it is possible to reduce homophobia and prejudice against lesbians (Birden, 2005; Lipkin, 2004; McNaron, 2007; Straut & Sapon-Shevin, 2002; Swartz, 2005).

To assess the model of *the Visible Lesbian* (see Figure 4), a qualitative online survey was conducted with 29 lesbian participants, where they responded to questions (see Appendix A, Appendix B) about the model. Participant narratives were then analyzed for themes (Lindlof & Taylor, 2005). The goal was twofold: To a) how the proposed model withstands as an educational tool, and b) how lesbians understand their identity that may validate the model. A thematic data analysis reveals that participants point to concepts such as social norms, individual agency, and educational value as critical to what one needs to learn in order to be a responsible and engaged citizen of a diverse world. Further, the educational model that I propose (see Figure 4) was supported by participants as

they were able to locate themselves consistently within its promises and premises of gendered lesbian identity (Butler, 1991; Crawley, Foley, & Shehan, 2008; Halberstam, 1998)

A number of questions related to issues of gendered lesbianism are central to this study. First, based on the feminist assertion of heteronormative gender (Butler, 1990; Halberstam, 1998; Rich, 1980), how is gender constructed within lesbian identity? Second, how, if at all, does agency manifest in lesbian identity? And third, what are some urgencies and implications of teaching lesbian identity in academic and non-academic spaces?

Literature Review

Halberstam (1998), among others, has criticized the mirroring of the gendered binary (masculinity-femininity) within lesbian identity, stating that it is, "a slavish copying of heterosexual roles" (p. 122). The buy into heterosexual "normality" is the reason for Adrienne Rich's (1980) essay detailing *compulsory heterosexuality*, emphasizing the assumption or implication of heterosexual norms. Furthermore, *compulsory heterosexuality,* a smaller sub-theory of the larger theory of *heteronormativity* (Rich, 1980), is the assumption that the world operates in a strictly heterosexual manner.

A revolutionary theoretical understanding of gendered lesbian identity arose with gender performativity. Butler (1990), as well as Rakow (1986), argued that because gender roles are situated within social structure, an essential self—an essence specific to each individual—is nonexistent. However, West and Zimmerman (1987) assert that, "doing gender involves a complex of socially guided perceptual, interactional, and micropolitical activities that cast particular pursuits as expressions of masculine and feminine 'natures'" (p. 126). Similarly, Golombisky (2012) stated that, "gender as performative reminds us that gender and its material effects are produced through embodied agencies enacted within the mis-en-scenes that facilitate and restrain subjective experience and agency"

(p. 24). Halberstam also focused on a more agentic gendered performance posing that the stone butch lesbian—a woman who will perform sexual acts on her partner but does not wish to receive reciprocal pleasure—as a divergent identity from the performance of masculinity. The argument is that the stone butch defies gendered performance because, "butch self-abnegation and femme satisfaction have little if anything to do with 'ancient' heterosexual arrangements" (p. 127). As a lesbian, the conscious identification of "butch" and "femme," although seemingly fulfilling the qualities of hegemonic heterosexist gender, is often not performed to conform or imitate heterosexual gender roles (Butler, 1991), but perhaps to situate one's self within comfort or security of a particular gender identity. This suggests a compromise between performativity and an essential self (Levitt, Gerrish, & Hiestand, 2003; Levitt & Hiestand, 2004; Levitt & Heistand, 2005; Levitt & Horne, 2002; Pearcey, Docherty, & Dabbs, 1996; Singh, Vidaurri, Zambarano, & Dabbs, 1999).

Departing from dichotomous gender of "masculine" and "feminine," the Bem Sex Role Inventory (Bem, 1974) demonstrated how gender norms are in fact less firm than the standards to which we are held accountable, thus introducing the notion of androgyny, or simultaneous exhibition of both masculine and feminine psychological characteristics. Androgyny has also been appropriated in non-academic circles to encompass unidentifiable or both masculine and feminine physical appearance/dress. The number of critiques of the Inventory's validity has increased over the years, noting that social expectations of masculinity and

femininity have evolved. A scathing appraisal of Bem's work came from

Pedhazur and Tetenbaum in 1979. They proclaimed that "Bem's effort to

construct measures of masculinity and femininity was destined to fail" (p. 1012)

citing a lack of theoretical foundation for her delineation between "masculine" and

"feminine." Bem (1979) published a retort in to Pedhazur and Tetenbaum, as well

as to Locksley and Colten (1979), arguing that:

> The distinction between male and female clearly exists 'out there' in
> the real world as a basic and fairly primitive dichotomy. Moreover, it
> is a dichotomy that is important to almost all human cultures in a
> way that extends well beyond basic biological differences in body
> build and reproductive function. (p. 1052)

Thirteen years later Ballard-Reisch and Elton (1992) avowed that the gendered

terms in the Inventory, "may no longer have anything to do with masculinity and

femininity as identified through traditional sex role stereotypes" (p. 304) as there

has been an evolution of gender role and norms. However, Holt and Ellis (1998)

replicated Bem's study and found that it was still a statistically significant

inventory, although not as much as it was in 1974. Regardless, as Hoffman and

Borders (2001) wrote:

> It is certainly largely to Bem's credit that we have been challenged
> to think critically about such constructs. Nevertheless, it is now time
> to build on her work by ceasing to reinforce the dichotomy between
> women and men and by beginning to more fully explore the
> possibilities of the type of society that Bem has supported in her
> writing. (p. 11)

There seems to be a paucity of such an effort—to build on Bern's work—

within the American education and curriculum, where there is a notable

deficiency in social identity lessons and discussion (Birden, 2005; Lipkin, 2004;

McNaron, 2007; Straut & Sapon-Shevin, 2002; Swartz, 2005). It is believed that such a scarcity stems from the fact that pre-service teachers focus mainly on the praxis of teaching, suggesting that social justice issues ought to be taught in "isolation" rather than integrated with other curricula, and that educators have fixed perimeters of what are worthwhile educational topics (Rix, Simmons, Nind, & Sheehy, 2005). "Pre-service teachers demonstrate attitudes that maintain the cycle of homophobia in schools and conform to social stereotypes, rather than examining the discourses operating that perpetuates discrimination and vilification" (Robinson & Ferfolja, 2001, p. 120). Beyond this educational anemia the media outlets remain a key source for the public perception of "lesbianism." Media representation has rendered celebrities such as k.d. lang, Ellen DeGeneres, Wanda Sykes, and Rachel Maddow as the vanguard of lesbian iconography as they are presumed to be model mirrors of the lesbian community. Films such as *Better than Chocolate* (1999), *Boys Don't Cry* (1999), *But I'm a Cheerleader* (1999), *Lost and Delirious* (2001), and *Imagine Me and You* (2005) paint engaging plots that provide lesbian visibility. Likewise, television shows such as *Queer as Folk* (2000), *Degrassi: the Next Generation* (2001), *the L Word* (2004), *Exes & Ohs* (2007), and *Glee* (2009) provide personable lesbian characters as well as experience and identity education, although there is debate on whether such programs are accurate in their representation (McFadden, 2010). Others note that these representations cater to the heterosexual male gaze (Wolfe & Roripaugh, 2006). In recent decades three unfortunately potent

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educational tools for teaching sexual identity have been murder, bullying, and suicide. For example, the explosive media exposure given to the Matthew Shepard murder in 1998 engendered LGBTQ advocacy and public support for hate crime legislation. However, this advocacy waned through the late nineties and early turn of this century. The rash of publicized LGBTQ teen suicides in 2010 provided unfortunate circumstances for a renewed support for the LGBTQ community, especially for youth. Those teens explicitly cited wrenching instances of bullying and harassment for being gay as the motivation to commit suicide. For example, in a more recent case, as Rutger's University student Tyler Clementi engaged in intimate acts with his then boyfriend in the privacy of his dorm room, Clementi's roommate video taped each moment, asserting his disgust and frustration about the occurrence to his online feed's followers as it was happening. Clementi later found out that his encounters had been streamed online more than once (Friedman, 2010), and on Sept. 23, 2010 he jumped off the George Washington Bridge to his death. These and other eerily similar stories once again ignited LGBTQ support and education as organizations such as the Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation (GLAAD), Parents, Family, and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG), the Born This Way Foundation, pro-LGBTQ campaigns (That's So Gay, It Gets Better, We Give A Damn, Think b4 You Speak), the Trevor Project, and the Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Education Network (GLSEN) have become increasingly recognized proponents for those who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, or questioning.

Although these organizations have gained popularity, most of them are still only predominantly used by and within the LGBTQ community. Some universities and colleges have implemented Safe Zone or Safe Space programs as LGBTQ advocacy trainings in order to try to combat the absence of academic sexual identity education (Evans, 2002). But even the outreach of these approaches is restricted since one must be a student, faculty, or staff member within the institution to participate in the training. Within the academy, there are a few educational models of sex, gender, and sexual identity development that deserve mention. In the next few paragraphs, I will address the pedagogical practicality of these models.

Cass' 1984 model "Gay and Lesbian Identity Formation" is an identity acquisition model that sequences how a gay or lesbian person develops her/his comfort in her/his sexual identity. She asserts that there are six stages in the development of a gay/lesbian sexual identity: Identity Confusion, Comparison, Tolerance, Acceptance, Pride, and Synthesis. The Cass model is based on a survey that first described the model's stages of gay/lesbian identity development and then asked participants to choose the stage they felt they were in. For example Stage Six reads: "You are prepared to tell anyone that you are a homosexual. You are happy about the way you are but feel that being a homosexual is not the most important part of you" (Cass, 1984, p. 156). Positive characteristics of this model, I argue, are that Cass received an adequate 178 responses to her survey that emphasized the importance of comfort or being

"out" and not just personal comfort in one's identity as well as the fact that Cass is a self-proclaimed lesbian. However, I critique Cass' model on the following issues. First, Cass' model only follows the participants' identity from recognition through confident "out" identification. Cass does not account for the details of ongoing lesbian identity development after the coming out process. Second, no narrative data were collected to solidify or reinforce her stages. Third, in line with psychological identity development theories, Cass' model asserts a progressive order through and towards an end with strict parameters that may limit flexibility in experience. I do recognize that these critiques were quite possibly outside of the purview of Cass' project. However, I point out these concerns in Cass' model, and in the next two I discuss, in order to justify the necessity of the model I propose in this study.

The second educational model of identity I examine is Peck's (1986) structural model entitled "Women's Self-Definition in Adulthood." Her three-dimensional model is centralized around a funnel-like cone termed "Self-Definition." The cone is perched on top of a disc called the "Sphere of Influence" and surrounded by "Social – Historical Time." The model illustrates that social influence provides the foundation for women's identity and that social and historical effect "spins" around and shapes one's identity. The model, considers the notion of time and social influence as agents of impact on identity, an element not included in Cass' model. Peck also acknowledges that peers, relationships, family, children, etc., play central roles in self-definition. However,

Peck does not evaluate the model with research (qualitative nor quantitative), leaving the reader to believe that this is merely the author's opinion. Additionally, Peck does not address the notion of personal choice, identity commitment, or influence on one's identity.

Another notable educational model of identity is the Chapman and Brannock (1987) model of "Lesbian Identity Awareness and Self-Labeling." The authors administered a quantitative questionnaire to 197 participants asking them to detail their progression through and strengthening of lesbian identity. Five stages were established to better understand the "whys" of lesbian identity, such as: the connection to other women, feeling different from heterosexual peers, negotiating a potential "lesbian" identity, and exploring, identifying, and committing to their identity by engaging with female partners. Like the Cass model, this model was longitudinal in its scope to encompass the coming out process, and it accounts for personal negotiation of lesbian identity development. For example, question 15 asks, "Did you cease sexual contact(s) with men before or after you began to question your sexuality?" Question 19 asks, "Did you know that anyone in your family was homosexual before you discovered that you a lesbian?" However, the model of "Lesbian Identity Awareness and Self-Labeling" is based on limited answer choices, two to four options per question. Further, there was no inquiry of gender or gender influence on participant identity. Again, like Cass' (1984) and Peck's (1986) models, Chapman and Brannock's (1987) model appears limited in its historical progression in that its parameters end at the moment of

identification. Additionally, the influence of environmental/social factors or community rhetoric, communication, or culture on the participants' identities was not analyzed.

Borrowing from tenets present in the models described above and my critiques of them, a survey of existing literature, and my experiences working as the LGBTQ Advisor within the Office Multicultural Affairs, I now present an educational model to advance an understanding about gendered lesbian identity. This effort responds to Halberstam's (1998) call to illustrate how gender is intricately couched within lesbian identity. It should be noted that this project focuses specifically on piloting a model of gendered lesbian identity because of the absence of pedagogical models for the classroom (Birden, 2005; Evans, 2002; Lipkin, 2002; Nussbaum, 1997; Rix, Simmons, Nind, & Sheehy 2005). My goal is to provide personal narratives from those who identify as experiential support for an educational model (Crawley, 2001).

Model

The model I propose addresses three gendered levels within lesbian identity: "appearance," "sex," and "relationships," collectively coined "the Visible Lesbian." Before detailing the model it is important to operationalize and clarify key terms within the model. Each level illustrates the continuum of gender performance (Butler, 1990; Golombisky, 2012; Halberstam, 1998; Rakow, 1986) that considers "masculinity," "femininity," "androgyny" (Bem, 1974), and the variations in between as seen or experienced by the "other." The term *lesbian* will describe a female that self-identifies as such and engages in romantic and sexual relationships with other females. *Appearance* in level one will describe clothing, physical stature, and hairstyle. As noted in level two, *sex* will describe the act of having sexual relations with a partner. The term *relationships* in level three will denote behavior and roles within romantic partnerships.

Level One: *Appearance*

The ways in which lesbians perform and are perceived as gendered are most often through physical appearance. According to Luzzatto and Gvion (2004), the lesbian body is a "descriptive arena" where a specifically adorned lesbian body may act as a lure for prospective partners. "Butch is most usefully understood as a category of lesbian gender that is constituted through a

deployment and manipulation of masculine gender codes and symbols … they prefer masculine signals, physical appearance, and styles" (Rubin, 1992, p. 427). Ciasullo (2001) adds, the "body, unmarked as 'conventionally' female, passes as male … There is a component of unfemininity, non-femaleness that characterizes the butch" (p. 581). Masculine and feminine lesbian bodies have individual ideological functions, one to caution others of the risks of rejecting social norms and the other indicating that all women who abide by social norms could still be lesbians (Creed, 1995; Luzzatto & Gvion, 2004). The feminine lesbian body is treated as though her lesbianism is at most a "passing phase, resulting from seduction by a predatory butch or a temporary retreat from men after some damaging experience" (Ciasullo, 2001, p. 599). Because "femme" lesbians assert their femininity through items such as dresses, make-up, and lingerie they often have to adamantly defend their lesbian identities as their attraction particularly to butch women is prescribed as a misguided attraction to men. As a feminine dressing participant in Levitt and Heistand (2005) notes, "I don't dress like a straight woman, you know, I dress—to turn on butches (p. 44).

Given this foundation, the model presented in this study expands the dichotomy of the terms for the masculine or feminine body (*Butch* and *Femme*) to include an identity of "combination" as well as the variation in between (Rubin, 1992). Thus, the continuum being presented for lesbian "*Appearance*" is *Butch-Androgynous-Femme* (Figure 1) that recognizes the dichotomous social structure but acknowledges gendered variations as well as utilizes community vernacular,

terms used by and within the lesbian community. Below are the definitions I use in this study to describe each of the gendered terms with respect to appearance in Level One of the proposed model:

Butch: An identifying lesbian who wears clothing typically worn by males

Androgynous: An identifying lesbian who wears "gender neutral" clothing worn by both males and females

Femme: An identifying lesbian who wears clothing typically worn by females

The continuum of lesbian *Appearance* is composed on a bar without breaks to assert variability between the foundational dichotomous terms; thus it accounts for those who identify as *Butch-Androgynous, Androgynous-Femme,* and others in between.
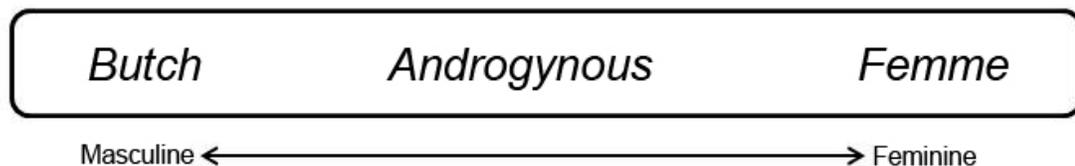

Figure 1: Level One – *Appearance*. This level accounts for the gendered nature of appearance. The bar denotes the gender variance of identity that includes *Butch-Androgynous, Androgynous-Femme,* as well as other variations that range between the current dichotomy of social norms, masculine and feminine.

Level Two: *Sex*

Norms related to the act of sex vary from culture to culture such as ejaculation, the existence of orgasm, abstinence, premarital/extramarital sex, reproduction and parenthood, among other experiences. Although this may be true, fundamentally, "who we are attracted to and what we find sexually satisfying is not just a matter of genital equipment we're born with. … A person's sexuality consists of both behavior and desire" (Schwartz & Rutter, 1998, p. 2). Schwartz and Rutter (1998) emphasize that sexual conduct and desire are gendered processes that hinge on societal expectations of what is masculine and feminine, even within lesbian sex. Newton and Walton (1992) wrote extensively on the gendered nature of sexual relations. "Top" and "bottom," as Newton and Walton describe, evolved from gay male sadism and masochism (S&M) terms that denoted the power play within a sexual encounter. Newton and Walton describe a "top" as the one who controls the encounter and the corresponding "bottom" as the one who is responsive to the partner. The notion of versatility is also articulated in which the authors' state:

> Egalitarian sex assumes functionality, interchangeable partners. … Some people may have very fluid erotic roles. They can top or bottom depending on their partner and the episode. (p. 243)

Aligning with Newton and Walton's (1992) definition of "bottom," Levitt and Heistand (2005) found in their study that femme women, in the case of the sex

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act, are women who "bottom." They enjoyed being the recipient of pleasure and touch from their partners.

Expanding on these ideas, below are the definitions I use in this study to describe each of the gendered terms with respect to sexual intimacy in lesbian relationships in Level Two of the proposed model:

Top: (1) An identifying lesbian who, during sexual activity, predominantly leads the episode or (2) is predominately the "giver" of pleasure

Versatile: An identifying lesbian who, during sexual activity, may consent to retaining or surrendering control of the episode and is open to "receiving" or "giving" pleasure

Bottom: (1) An identifying lesbian who, during sexual activity, predominantly follows her partner's lead or (2) is predominantly the "receiver" of pleasure

The continuum being presented for lesbian "sex" is _Top-Versatile-Bottom_ (Figure 2). This level, like Level One, is composed of the same continuum bar to account for gender norms and variability and includes those who identify as _Top-Versatile, Versatile-Bottom_, etc.

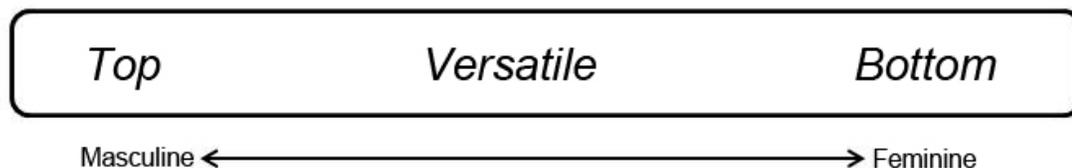**Figure 2: Level Two – _Sex_.** This level accounts for the gendered nature of sexual intercourse in lesbian interaction. Like Level One, the bar denotes the gender variance of identity; this level includes _Top-Versatile, Versatile-Bottom,_ etc.

Level Three: *Relationships*

> My 'type' was something that I only thought about when I was single. …Women who meet our every requirement—on paper or monitor—may not be what we need in real life. (Fisher, 2010, p. 22)

As Fisher casually writes in a 2010 issue of *Curve Magazine*: The fulcrum of personal types is often the compatibility of the individuals within their relationship—similarities and differences, and responsibilities. In an article in the next issue of the magazine, two contributors, comically known as Lipstick and Dipstick, dialogue about gendered responsibilities within relationships and posit that there are behaviors seemingly inherent, or at least expected, of each gendered partner: "(Dipstick) …It still puzzles me that there are 'butches' out there who want their women to stay home, cook, clean, have babies and lay on their backs in bed" (p. 16). The authors also detail the stereotype of masculine women using power tools and fixing cars, all of which have created a perception of gendered roles within lesbian relationships. The television network Showtime released a series in 2009 entitled *the Real L Word*—a reality show about lesbians residing in Los Angeles—that produced one of the first pairs of gendered identities regarding relationships: "pants" and "pumps," masculine and feminine respectively. As described by one of the main characters in the show, the term "pants" references the same examples described in the Dipstick and Lipstick article, the masculine partner uses power tools and takes on responsibilities requiring physical skill or strength. Levitt and Heistand (2004, 2005) would include a strong desire to be chivalrous and the

provider of physical care as well. "Pumps," in contrast, was described in *the Real L Word* as being the make-up wearing, cooking, cleaning, domestic queen of femininity.

Following on, below are the definitions I use in this study to describe each of the gendered terms with respect to lesbian relationships in Level Three of the proposed model:

Pants: An identifying lesbian who performs social roles typically fulfilled by males, such as: physical protection, chivalry, romance, mechanical tasks, or other socially masculine responsibilities

Egalitarian: An identifying lesbian who may perform social roles typically fulfilled by females or males. This may include: physical protection, chivalry, romance, mechanical tasks, domestic duties, emotional care-giving, or any other socially masculine or feminine responsibilities.

Pumps: An identifying lesbian who performs social roles typically fulfilled by females, such as: domestic duties, emotional care-giving, or other socially feminine responsibilities.

Level Three as well takes into consideration combinations of masculine and feminine roles; thus the continuum being presented for lesbian "relationships" is *Pants-Egalitarian-Pumps.*
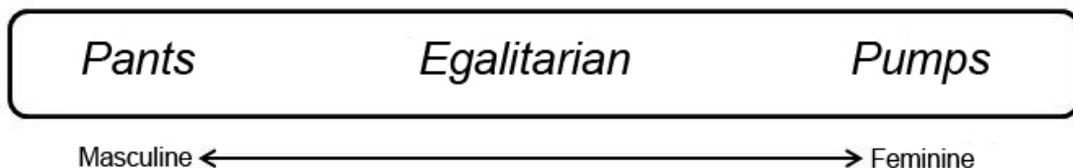

Figure 3: Level Three – *Relationships*. This level accounts for the gendered roles in lesbian relationships. Like the other two levels, the bar denotes the gender variance of identity to include *Pants-Egalitarian, Egalitarian-Pumps*, and other variations of gendered role identity.

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Combination and Variation

Jalas (2005) describes the historical expectation of "gender complementarity," the historical coupling of "Butch-Femme" in lesbian relationships. However, this is often not the case, as Smith and Stillman's (2003) study emphasized. Their study concluded that gendered lesbian identity and partner preference differed from this expectation. Of 388 Women-Seeking-Women personal ads analyzed, Smith and Stillman (2003) found that (1) 56% of self-identified femme ads were seeking other femmes and only 18% were seeking a butch-identified partner, and (2) 74% of the butch-identified ads were seeking femmes and only 7% were seeking other butches. This might be indicative of a potential shift in gendered partner preferences, or at least a confirmation of a variability of gender in partnerships. In keeping with this understanding, the model I propose allows for gendered variability (Bell, 2005; Eves, 2004) with the levels; it illustrates a "fuzzy gender" system that accommodates a continuum rather than binary categories (Tauchert, 2002) and provides a multifaceted vision of gendered lesbian identity (Crawley, 2001).

Figure 4 illustrates the complete model including the three gendered levels and the potential and variable connectivity of identities between them.

The Visible Lesbian

Level One:
Appearance ←

| Butch | Androgynous | Femme |

Level Two: Sex ←

| Top | Versatile | Bottom |

Level Three:
Relationships ←

| Pants | Egalitarian | Pumps |

Masculine ←————————————→ Feminine
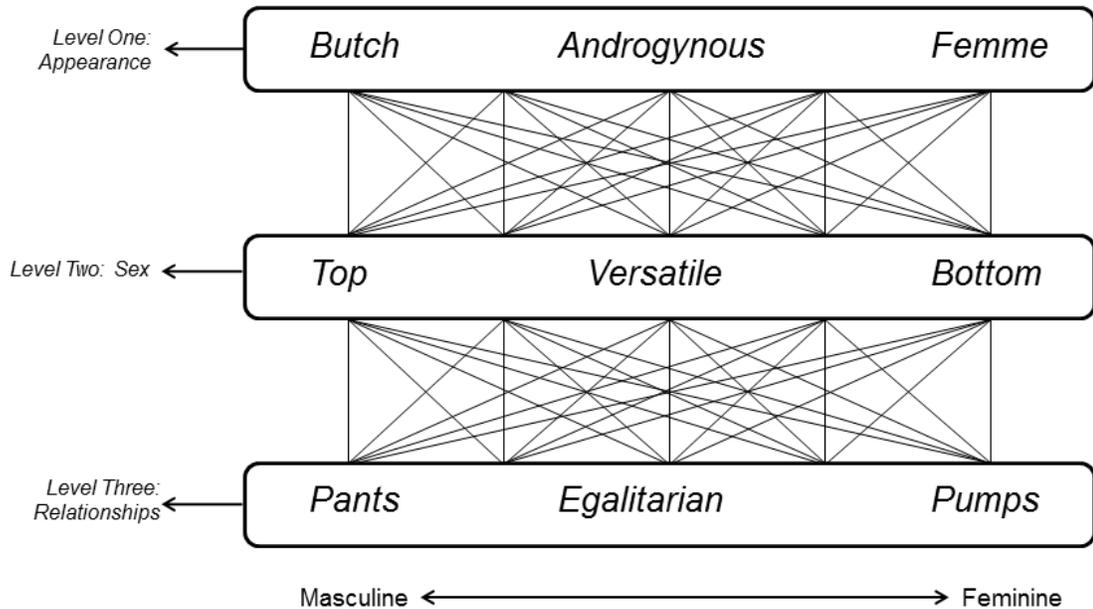
Figure 4: the Visible Lesbian. The figure illustrates not only the variation within each level of identity but also among the three levels.

Having presented a model of gendered lesbian identity, next I will explain the methodological processes I use to assess the viability of this model. The following research question guides the evaluation of the model: How do lesbians negotiate the categories in the model? As mentioned earlier, the primary goals of this study are to explore a) how the proposed model withstands as an educational tool, and b) how lesbians understand their identity that may validate the model.

Methodology

To begin to pilot "the Visible Lesbian" model I queried self-identifying lesbians as to the gendered nature of their lesbian identity to further detail the dynamics of the educational model. I recruited 29 participants for this study. Because of the covert nature of the study "sample" and variability in being "out," a modified snowball sampling strategy was utilized. I prefer to call this a "modified" snowball strategy in the sense that there were no initial contacts that helped to start the snowball-style participant recruitment. Instead, I sent e-mail invitations, along with the qualitative survey questionnaire the participants were asked to respond to (with sanction from the university IRB), to listservs of LGBTQ student organizations such as the P.R.I.D.E. Alliance, Gay-Straight Alliance, the Graduate LGBTQA Network, and GLBTQ Premedical Association and known LGBTQ faculty, staff, and affiliates who were encouraged to share the survey with others who fit the criteria. The only requirements to participate in the study were that the participants were self-identified "lesbians" who were 18 years of age or older. The participants needed access to a computer with an internet connection to retrieve the questionnaire and the provided supplement (see Appendix B).

The electronic invitation was sent to potential participants through GoogleDocs and included the research statement of purpose, summary of

participant expectations, the participation criteria, statement of confidentiality, the link to the survey, the survey supplement (with the pictorial model and definitions for guidance), the deadline for completion, and the contact information of the primary investigator. Twenty-nine participants replied to the invitation by the deadline of January 30, 2012 and because no personally identifying information was ever collected during the study it was exempt from IRB supervision.

The first paragraph of the online survey stated that by completing the questionnaire the participants are consenting to participate in the study. The remaining webpage consisted of questions were designed to test the model and address the research question by utilizing open-ended, qualitative questions on the dynamics, social structure, and empathy of gender within participant lesbian identities (see Appendix A for the questions). The survey also asked participants questions about identity, experience, definitions, and reasoning of lesbian identity.

Once the deadline to complete the questionnaire had passed I aggregated the questionnaires and began a thematic qualitative analysis of the data (Lindlof & Taylor, 2005), coding for the themes, language, and patterns expressed in the participant responses. The responses provided three overarching themes—selective codes—from a set of initial open codes and subsequent axial codes. I elaborate on the themes in the next section of the manuscript. (See Appendix C for a sample set of open, axial, and selective codes).

<u>Findings</u>

The responses to the questionnaire in this study illustrated in great detail how masculinity, femininity, and variations of androgyny appear within lesbian identity. First, the presence of social structure in the management of gendered lesbian identity was prevalent in their establishment of what was deemed "masculine" and "feminine." Second, there erupted a strong commitment to the notion of agency, empathy for identities that elicits belonging and the conscientiousness to identify with their gendered elements. Third, the importance of educational models, such as *the Visible Lesbian* being presented in this study, was addressed and how there are few positive and experiential lessons on L(GBTQ) identity available.

Theme One: Navigating Social Norms

One theme that emerged from the questionnaires points to how participants spoke about an overt navigation of stereotypes and social expectations and how they were burdens to lesbian identity. The participants recognize the imprinting of heterosexual gender norms onto lesbian identity and how they conform to or breach those dominant gender norms.

Words such as "deemed," "stereotypically," "according to," and "considered" were used to legitimize gender rules, and what is socially

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appropriate to be masculine as well as feminine. On the *Appearance* aspect of their identity, the feminine identifying participants (*Femme* or *Androgynous-Femme*), 17% of the sample, affirmed that the clothes they wore was abided by what West & Zimmerman (1987) called sex category, that their sex is perceived as per their style or gendered presentation. They also described their dress as being "girly," attributing emotions such as sensuality, desirability, beauty, and confidence as foundational reasons for their attire. For instance, one participant wrote, "I am female looking and I don't hide that. I enjoy being female and wearing dresses and skirts." Masculine identifying participants (*Butch* or *Butch-Androgynous*), 21% of the sample, in contrast, asserted a comfort in wearing clothing associated with men. They insisted on the strength, confidence, and authoritative effect of their looks, emotions that parallel those socially accorded to males. Such masculine identifying participants generally noted that they engaged in social roles, and appearances, not attributed to their biological sex as a female often, not because they acted for political or radical recognition. Rather, the participants asserted that such choices were merely the consequence of their identity as masculine lesbians. Participants talked about "feeling more comfortable in men's clothes." A few other masculine identifying participants said that men's clothed cover their body better, while some noted that they wear men's clothes to lure partners that, "find masculinity attractive." Additionally, *Androgynous* identifying participants, 62% of the sample including *Butch-Androgynous* and *Androgynous-Femme,* said their clothes are important for their

personal confidence, comfort, and character and that maintaining both masculine and feminine qualities is important to them. For example, "I typically wear clothing that is comfortable rather than particularly stylish. I like to wear tee shirts because they are simple and they help to keep a person's focus on who I am as a person rather than my physical attributes." Another participant stated, "I love jeans, shirts, and heels. I like almost everything, masculine or feminine, because I am very confident and strong as well as very sensual."

Similar to *Appearance* identities, participants asserted the presence of heteronormative gender roles in their *Sex* identities. They spoke about the locus of pleasure and control surrounding the "male" or masculine body. One participant explicitly wrote of the, "social assumptions [of sex dynamics] are based on how the male body experiences sex where 'control' or 'being pleased' is considered male characteristics." Furthermore, participants provided adjectives and incidents to illustrate their understanding of gender roles within sex relations. For example, although the masculine role *Top* made up 7% of the sample, the construction of masculine roles during sexual encounters were made clear by other participants describing it as "dominance," "being in control," "the giver," and "like men." The feminine roles, *Bottom* and *Versatile-Bottom* (13% of the sample), were described as being "yielding," "submissive," "passive," "the receiver," and "like women." *Versatile* identifying participants, 28% of the sample, asserted the prevalence of both a masculine "providing" and feminine "reception" in their sexual encounters, "I can be either. Ideally I like a mix of the two. I'm just

as happy giving [pleasure] as I am receiving." Additionally, "I love being pleasured, and having my sexual desires met, but I also take pride in being able to give pleasure to my partner. Making her feel good brings me happiness." It should also be noted that within the *Sex,* level *Top-Versatile* constituted 52% of the sample. This percentage represents the fondness for maintaining both feminine and masculine gender roles either interchangeably or simultaneously during sexual encounters.

The *Relationship* identities of the participants followed the same expectations and heteronormative descriptions detailed within their *Appearance* and *Sex* identities as the participants clearly detailed the responsibilities attributed to the masculine or feminine roles in lesbian relationships. For instance, one participant wrote: "I'm more of the feminine one. I like to feel protected and I'm more on the quiet and shy side, so I like when my significant other takes control and makes the decisions." Consistent with roles expected of men in heteronormative relationships, common tasks attributed to the masculine role included mechanical work, physical protection, paying, driving, and chivalry; in contrast, child bearing, cleaning, cooking, and emotional caregiving were the notable gendered relational roles linked to "female" partners in the lesbian relationship. Several such participants also conformed to social norms and rituals such as wanting to "be picked up and taken out," loving "flowers bought for me," and wanting "to feel protected."

Within the *Sex* level, the participants expressed submission to being a "giver" or "receiver" of pleasure within their sexual encounters, *Top* and *Bottom* respectively. The more masculine identifying participants positioned themselves as equivalent to heteronormative "male" because, they said, they were the "givers" of sexual pleasure. They proclaimed a sense of providing "selfless service," such as, "I prefer to please my partner over being pleased." Another wrote: "It's very gratifying to fulfill my partner's desires. I suppose I do seek control to complete this which, as a feminist, makes me nervous to seek such a 'male' characteristic." Like *Appearance,* the masculine identifying participants (*Top* or *Top-Versatile*) do not attribute their desire and sexual performance to an active or methodical "breaching" of social norms, but they do actively acknowledge the presence of the gendered social structure that would assume norm "breaching."

Regarding the *Relationship* level, there were significantly fewer masculine, *Pants* identifying, lesbians than were present in the *Sex level*, but these participants, too, recognized the gendered roles they perform in their relationships as aligned with those performed by men: "I prefer to work with my hands, work on cars, or build the furniture rather than decorate it," one participant wrote. Another wrote that, "When we are out in public I always find myself wanting to protect her from harm and making sure everyone knows she's with me."

It also should be noted that the phrase "I am" appeared 98 times in the context of legitimizing their as conforming to or breaching social expectations. By their identity ("I am") they subsequently describe the gendered social structure within which they participate. A few relevant participant quotes to explain this are:

- *"I am somewhat more masculine than the average female, but still retain many of the characteristics that are stereotypically feminine."*
- *"I am ultimately fitting myself into the image of what a woman "should" dress like."*
- *"I am more masculine looking than I have ever been and when I can do [dress masculine] I feel liberated and myself."*
- *"I am not very handy with home repairs or vehicles"*
- *"Sexually I am much more dominant, [and] take charge when it comes to relations with other women."*

The "I am" statements thus presented the reasons for their conforming with or breaching social norms, and the examples and imagery that bolsters their arguments.

Even with the recognition of a gendered social structure several participants expressed distress with heterosexual and fellow lesbians' assumptions that gender identity is segmented into fixed linear "pipes" as well as the notion that gender markers of appearance "must" indicate one's entire gendered character. One participant wrote, "Because of my appearance many [lesbians] think that I am primarily a *Bottom*. However, another participant wrote: "[As Butch] I am expected to identify as *Top*, not identify as versatile sexually and people would be thrown off by the fact that I am actually more *Bottom* with my *Femme* partners." Yet another participant wrote:

Due to my butch-ish appearance, most of my partners have presumed I would take a dominant, *Top* role in sexual relationships. So I have come to

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be very comfortable in that position and usually assume it at the beginning and throughout my relationships. With that being said, I quickly break any presumed gender social norms in bed with my *Versatility*.

To further illustrate the non-linearity of gendered lesbian identity among my research participants, Figure 5 illustrates the spread of the participants' identifications by Level. Because the identities are not identical or even similar in identification count, they illustrate a non-linear pattern of gendered identity in *Appearance, Sex,* and *Relationships* identities. More specifically, if gendered identity was linear then the number of *Butch, Top,* and Pants identifying participants should be the same in each graph. The fact that the top, although different, grossing identities were *Butch-Androgynous, Top-Versatile, and Pants-Egalitarian,* illustrates non-linear gender identity and does not fulfill the autonomous masculine or feminine gender roles or "pipes" of masculinity (*Butch-Top-Pants*) or femininity (*Femme-Bottom-Pumps*). It should be noted that there is a left skew or more masculine leaning majority among the three levels; however, a reason for this skew was not assessed in this study.

Butch — 6
Butch-Androgynous — 9
Androgynous — 5
Androgynous-Femme — 4
Femme — 5

Appearance: Number of Participants

Top — 2
Top-Versatile — 15
Versatile — 8
Versatile-Bottom — 3
Bottom — 1

Sex: Number of Participants

Pants — 1
Pants-Egalitarian — 11
Egalitarian — 9
Egalitarian-Pumps — 6
Pumps — 2

Relationships: Number of Participants
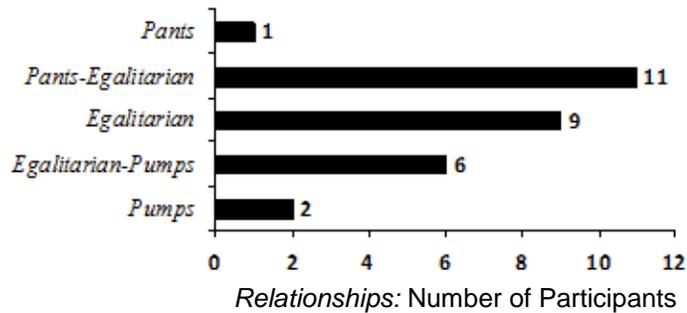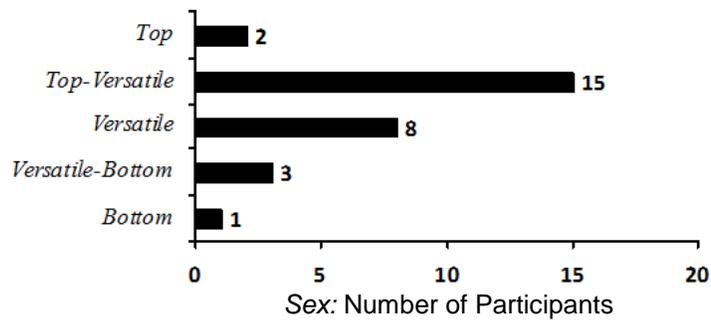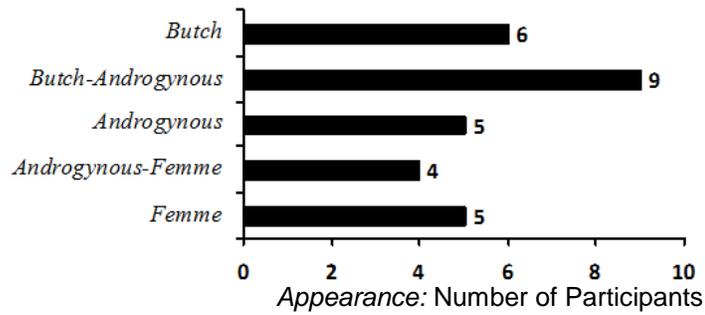
Figure 5: Level Comparison of Participant Identification. Level one: *Appearance* (first), Level two: *Sex (*second), and Level three: *Relationships* (third)

No participant identified within stringent gender norms—completely and strictly masculine or feminine. Only one participant identified herself only on the gendered poles of the Levels (*Femme-Top-Pumps*) with no variation or gendered

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combination. The remaining 28 participants asserted that their gendered lesbian identity was a combination, such as *Butch* and *Androgynous* (*Butch-Androgynous),* or *Androgynous*, *Versatile,* or *Egalitarian*. More specifically, the participants' responses merited 53% hyphenated identities and 25% *Androgynous*, *Versatile,* or *Egalitarian* identities. Table 1 below is the complete list of participant identifications.

Table 1: Participant Identification Data

#	Appearance	Sex	Relationships
1	Androgynous-Femme	Top-Versatile	Egalitarian-Pumps
2	Butch-Androgynous	Top-Versatile	Pants-Egalitarian
3	Femme	Versatile	Egalitarian-Pumps
4	Androgynous	Top-Versatile	Pants
5	Butch-Androgynous	Top-Versatile	Pants-Egalitarian
6	Androgynous	Top-Versatile	Egalitarian
7	Butch	Versatile	Egalitarian
8	Androgynous	Versatile	Egalitarian
9	Androgynous-Femme	Top-Versatile	Egalitarian-Pumps
10	Androgynous-Femme	Top-Versatile	Pants-Egalitarian
11	Androgynous-Femme	Versatile	Egalitarian-Pumps
12	Butch	Top-Versatile	Pants-Egalitarian
13	Androgynous	Versatile	Pants-Egalitarian
14	Butch	Top	Pants-Egalitarian
15	Femme	Top	Pumps
16	Femme	Bottom	Egalitarian-Pumps
17	Androgynous-Femme	Versatile-Bottom	Egalitarian-Pumps
18	Butch	Top-Versatile	Egalitarian
19	Androgynous-Femme	Top-Versatile	Egalitarian
20	Butch	Top-Versatile	Pants-Egalitarian
21	Androgynous	Versatile	Pants-Egalitarian
22	Femme	Top-Versatile	Egalitarian
23	Androgynous-Femme	Versatile	Egalitarian
24	Butch-Androgynous	Top-Versatile	Pants-Egalitarian
25	Androgynous-Femme	Versatile-Bottom	Pants-Egalitarian
26	Butch-Androgynous	Top-Versatile	Pants-Egalitarian
27	Femme	Versatile	Egalitarian
28	Androgynous-Femme	Top-Versatile	Pants-Egalitarian
29	Femme	Versatile-Bottom	Pumps

This table details all of the participants identifications based on the three levels of lesbian gendered identity.

Furthermore, not only were the participants' personal identities non-linear, the characteristics of their ideal partners were significantly non-linear. First, as noted in Table 2 under "Ideal Partner Identification," the preferred characteristics for potential partners, like their identities, also included hyphenated terms or *Androgynous, Versatile,* or *Egalitarian*. Secondly, when each "Participant Identification" was compared with the corresponding "Ideal Partner Identification" nonlinearity again prevailed. Participants suggested that their most desirable and ideal partner would have similar characteristics rather than "opposite" or more symmetrical/linear gender identities compared to the participant paralleling Smith and Stillman's (2003) study stating the same. For instance, Participant 10 identified as *Androgynous-Femme / Top-Versatile / Pants-Egalitarian* yet she identified her ideal partner as *Androgynous-Femme / Versatile / Egalitarian-Pumps* which are the same, similar, and slightly mirrored identity characteristics respective to the participant's identities.

Responses to the questionnaire illustrated how heteronormative gendered social expectations (Rich, 1980) are integrated into homosexual lesbian identity. The responses also agree that lesbian masculinity is not necessarily a performance that breaches social norms (Butler, 1990), but rather it is a consequence of masculine "lesbian" identification. The notion of breaching social norms raises the issues of lesbian identity and decision-making power, identification, and agency.

Table 2: Data Comparison of Participants Identification and their Ideal Partners

#	Participant Identification	Ideal Partner Identification
1	Andro-Femme / Top-Versatile / Egalitarian-Pumps	Butch-Andro / Top-Versatile / Pants-Egalitarian
2	Butch-Andro / Top-Versatile / Pants-Egalitarian	Andros-Femme / Versatile / Egalitarian-Pumps
3	Femme / Versatile / Egalitarian-Pumps	Andro / Versatile / Pants-Egalitarian
4	Andro / Top-Versatile / Pants	Andro / Versatile / Egalitarian
5	Butch-Andro / Top-Versatile / Pants-Egalitarian	Andro / Versatile / Egalitarian
6	Andro / Top-Versatile / Egalitarian	Femme / Versatile-Bottom / Egalitarian
7	Butch / Versatile / Egalitarian	Butch / Top-Versatile / Egalitarian
8	Andro / Versatile / Egalitarian	Femme / Versatile / Egalitarian
9	Andro-Femme / Top-Versatile / Egalitarian-Pumps	Butch-Andro / Versatile / Egalitarian-Pumps
10	Andro-Femme / Top-Versatile / Pants-Egalitarian	Andro-Femme / Versatile / Egalitarian-Pumps
11	Andro-Femme / Versatile / Egalitarian-Pumps	Butch-Andro / Versatile / Pants
12	Butch / Top-Versatile / Pants-Egalitarian	Femme / Versatile / Egalitarian
13	Andro / Versatile / Pants-Egalitarian	Andro-Femme / Versatile / Egalitarian-Pumps
14	Butch / Top / Pants-Egalitarian	Femme / Bottom / Pumps
15	Femme / Top / Pumps	(No Answer)
16	Femme / Bottom / Egalitarian-Pumps	Butch / Top / Egalitarian
17	Andro-Femme / Versatile-Bottom / Egalitarian-Pumps	Andro / Versatile / Pants
18	Butch / Top-Versatile / Egalitarian	Femme / Versatile / Egalitarian
19	Andro-Femme / Top-Versatile /Egalitarian	Andro / Versatile / Egalitarian
20	Butch / Top-Versatile / Pants-Egalitarian	Femme / Versatile-Bottom / Egalitarian-Pumps
21	Andro / Versatile /Pants-Egalitarian	Andro-Femme / Top-Versatile / Egalitarian-Pumps
22	Femme / Top-Versatile / Egalitarian	Femme / Top-Versatile / Egalitarian
23	Andro-Femme / Versatile / Egalitarian	Andro-Femme / Versatile / Pants-Egalitarian
24	Butch-Andro / Top-Versatile / Pants-Egalitarian	Femme / Versatile / Egalitarian
25	Andro-Femme / Versatile-Bottom / Pants-Egalitarian	Andro / Top-Versatile / Egalitarian-Pumps
26	Butch-Andro / Top-Versatile / Pants-Egalitarian	Femme / Versatile / Egalitarian
27	Femme / Versatile / Egalitarian	Butch / Top / Pants
28	Andro-Femme / Top-Versatile / Pants-Egalitarian	Femme / Versatile / Pumps-Egalitarian
29	Femme / Versatile-Bottom / Pumps	Andro / Top / Pants

This table contains the identification of the participants alongside their ideal partner identifications. *Androgynous* was shortened to "Andro" to fit the table on one page.

Theme Two: Agency

The second theme that emerged from the responses was the notion of agency, or having the power to decide, in this case to identify as, one's positionality. McNay (2000) asserts that personal decision making and action, or agency, is the catalyst for gender norm evolution. Ascribing to this notion, the term "agency," as used in this project, emphasizes the moments of decision-making, or gendered lesbian identification which are powerful and important elements to study. As discussed in the previous theme, the participants addressed the ubiquity of social norms and structure as heteronormative expectations and rules are imposed on the lesbian community. For example, by identifying as *Butch,* a participant stated a preference for wearing masculine clothing, which meant she dismissed her participation in wearing feminine clothing. It is within these moments of personal identification that she asserts agency. Although the agency-social structure debate is contentious (Goffman, 1959; Blumer, 1969; Halberstam, 1998; Smith, 1999), the participants—through performativity (Butler, 1990; Golombisky, 2012; Rakow, 1986)—provided many moments of identification within their explanations that would argue for agency, even if agency was limited and constrained within social structures and heteronormative social norms/roles.

Second, the term "comfortable" appeared 71 times in the questionnaires as the motive for the participants' identification. Masculine identifying participants cited their comfortable conditions as bodily and emotional security in wearing

men's clothing, control and eliciting pleasure during sex, and chivalry and mechanical skill in their relationships. Conversely, feminine identifying participants cited their comfortable condition as sensuality and confidence in dressing in women's clothing, being the receiver of pleasure during sex, and emotional care giving and domestic tasks. These seemingly normative actions by the feminine identifying participants demonstrated their agency because they noted that their "choices" were driven by "pleasure" and "comfort" rather than social norms.

Third, the flexibility of the *Androgynous, Versatile,* and *Egalitarian* identities can also be framed as participants enacting agency in that they go against the grain of the dominant and stereotypical dichotomous gendered classifications generally and stereotypically applied to lesbians to identify themselves as in between and/or as a mix. One participant explained: I've always been into "tom boy" clothing for my every day wear. My business and formal clothing is more *Femme.*" Another participant wrote: "Sometimes I wake up and want to dress more feminine and sometimes I just want to be comfortable and dress more masculine. Mainly just depends on my mood." Similarly, other participants made a note of their flexibility or their being able to choose an identity depending on the mood or the contextual dynamic in their relationship. "It honestly depends on who I am with whether or not I'm more of the *Top* or *Bottom*. I can be either but ideally I like a mix of the two. I'm just as happy giving

as I am receiving." Another wrote: "I can do the taking care of things, or let my partner do it. I am flexible depending on the dynamic in the relationship."

Fourth, contrary to social expectation and historical notions of gendered identity (Butler, 1990; Halberstam, 1998; Rich, 1980), when participants were asked to provide the three-Level identity of an ideal partner for the participants, they responded with non-linear, non-dichotomous answers. For example, most participants who identified *Femme* did not want a *Butch* partner. In fact, the majority of participants preferred someone who's gendered *Appearance* was similar to themselves. In the explanatory statements that followed, the participants actively legitimized their ability to choose and stated preference for a partner with asymmetrical characteristics contrary to social expectation that they do the "opposite." A participant explained that she would like her partner to be more her equal than her opposite. Another participant wrote: "Because I tend to fluctuate to both sides I usually pick partners that can change and adapt based on the situation." Others elaborated on why they preferred to choose partners who were almost like them, "yet had enough differences to keep it interesting," and that participants did not want a relationship with someone who is too *Butch* or too feminine: "I want to have an equal opportunity to please her as well as her to please me."

The participants in this study demonstrated agency by actively interpreting their decision-making as the ability to make choices. Within their proclamations of "why" they identified and the structure that manages their identities they declare

an educational importance and utility of understanding lesbian identity which is addressed in theme three.

Theme Three: Importance of Advocacy

The third theme that emerged from the responses was the importance of teaching lesbian identity and models such as the one I propose here within and outside the lesbian community. This, the participants believed, would help to address the complexities of lesbian identity, counter prejudice against the lesbian community, and aide community advocacy.

First, the participants stated a need for those inside the community to be reflexive regarding their own understanding and teaching of lesbian experience. "I don't think people [lesbians] think about it enough and that can let others shape how they feel and act," wrote one participant. Others wrote of their partner's incorrect assumptions about their participants' gendered identity that led to incompatibilities in the bedroom. Participants also detailed the lack of understanding of themselves as they developed their identity: "I had a hard time understanding my identity before, during, and after the coming out process." One participant urged, "Lesbians need to be more comfortable in their individuality," and advocate an effort to "understand who we are before we can ask other [non-lesbians] to understand."

Second, a louder outcry for education and support was centralized around the heterosexual "other" understanding so little about gendered lesbian identity, thus eliciting stereotypes, jokes, and insensitive questions in every day

conversation. One participant wrote: "The average [non-Ally] heterosexual person knows little to nothing about the varying identities of gay women and the stereotypes can be dangerous, damaging, and lead to further discrimination." Another participant wrote, "I want ["other"] people to stop telling me I'm too pretty to be a lesbian." Aligning with the first theme that dwelt on social norms, several participants expressed frustration with the persistence of the "crew cut" *Butch* lesbian archetype and the requisite, "who is the guy in the relationship?" inquiry. Other notable assertions included:

- "Let us define ourselves."
- "Heterosexuals should be challenged to think outside the social norm."
- "They ["others"] should understand the similarities between gay and straight."
- "We have to validate what is not heteronormative."

These statements are great educational standpoints worthy of cultivation within educational pedagogy and lessons and the larger need for community advocacy.

Lesbian identity is indeed gendered and diverse beyond the antiquated *Butch/Femme* dichotomy. Although this project articulates this point, the participants made clear that the community is still seen through an archaic dominant gendered lens. One such participant emphasized:

> Much of the information we [American Society] are fed within our education system comes from white, heterosexual, wealthy men who speak on experiences they are not familiar with. There are educated and articulate lesbians who can speak on the dynamics and intricacies of lesbian identity and gender better than they can.

Furthermore, several participants were of the view that the lack education about lesbian identity led to hate and prejudice against the community. One

participant wrote, "Without education, ignorance feeds hateful misinformation and the inability to advocate adequately for the rights of lesbians." Other participants also cited the lack of education as central to the issues and discrimination they face. Another participant wrote, "Now with globalization and integrated classes we all know people of differing races, sexual identities, diversity, etc. It's important for us to know about them because education helps eradicate ignorance and promotes tolerance."

The participants were also asked where and in what contexts this (the model as proposed in the supplement) and other similar educational tools for lesbian identity should be utilized to promote advocacy for the L(GBTQ) community. Participants wrote about the importance of such resources in both academic and non-academic spaces, particularly in: classrooms, trainings (i.e. Safe Zone Ally Training, in the work place, student leadership, everyday discussions, health care, continuing education classes), supportive centers with limited resources, LGBTQ youth centers, counseling groups, K-12 for diversity inclusion, and LGBT-friendly conferences.

Conclusion

"Is it primarily for gay students that we include these topics? Gay students do of course benefit from any curriculum or program that lessens homophobia and gives them safety and dignity. However, all multicultural education should be undertaken both to protect the oppressed and educate and transform the oppressor." (Lipken, 2004, p. 198)

This study attempts to conceptualize and evaluate an educational model of gendered lesbian identity that can aid educators in teaching lesbian identity and experience with the aim to reduce homophobia and prejudice through knowledge and understanding. I draw from my two years of experiences in the Office of Multicultural Affairs as the LGBTQ Advisor and combine literature in communication, education, and gender studies, to introduce this educational model (see Figure 4) to advance an understanding about gendered lesbian identity. In order to assess the proposed educational model, this research conducted a thematic analysis of the questionnaires generated by an online survey (see Appendix A) completed by 29 lesbian participants. The ultimate goal of this study is to explore a) how the proposed model withstands as an educational tool, and b) how lesbians understand their identity that may validate the model. The evaluation of the model is guided by the research question: How do lesbians negotiate the categories in the model? The answer is that the lesbian participants negotiate the categories in the model by navigating social norms,

demonstrating agency, and indicating importance of advocacy. Additionally, all of them support the model.

Participant responses to the online questionnaire appear to point to these themes as necessary elements of lesbian identity negotiation, thus making them crucial elements to frame the proposed model. More specifically, the thematic analysis of the participant responses reveals that navigating (defiance of or conformity to) social norms, enactment of agency, and highlighting importance of advocacy to teach lesbian identity are central to the lesbian participants as they negotiated the categories in the model. Within their *Appearance* identity node, participants articulated a consciousness about the social structure of gendered identity that monitors, categorizes, and disciplines them. They admitted to being either a compliant, variable, or a divergent member of this structure citing reasons based on the heterosexual, non-Ally "other's" assumptions of the masculine *Butch-Top-Pants* or feminine *Femme-Bottom-Pumps* lesbian. Furthermore, the participants stressed their ability to choose the gendered nature of their identity based on their comfort level of feeling and of belonging. The participants also criticized the absence of positive education—academic and non-academic—about lesbian identity and how it can lead to situations of discrimination, verbal abuse, and misunderstanding of lesbians.

The significance of this model, piloted model, and study is, first, the illustration that lesbian identity is more complex than the historical *Butch*-Femme dichotomy (Butler, 1990; Crawley, Foley, & Shehan, 2008; Halberstam, 1998). Most

participants identified extensively with hyphenated identities (i.e. *Butch-Androgynous*) or *Androgynous, Versatile,* and *Egalitarian*. Second, the participants' assertion of identity decision-making makes an argument for agency at least in the moment of identification. As brief as the moments are, committing to a gendered identity, whether it be for comfort or social obedience, requires one to understand the structure they are couched within and act within in order to defy/change it. Third, this study points to the need for lesbian identity education and how models like the one presented in this study may be used by teachers, educators, and scholars to address intricacies of lesbian identity from lesbians, rather than learning from stereotypes and fear. Finally, the educational model was supported by participants as they were able to locate themselves consistently within its premises of gendered lesbian identity. Hence, this model is presented as a pilot study providing valuable insights into key experiences of gendered lesbian identity that can be important for future research in this area. It is possible that with further administration and assessment this model can evolve and detail gendered lesbian identity further.

There are limitations of this study. First, the population size is limited due to the time constraints of the project. Second, the participants, although composed of 29% were non-Caucasian, were representative of a predominately Caucasian voice and experience. However, it should be noted that this study did not intend to compare racial and gendered identity across participants. Third, the model presented cannot and does not attempt to account for all experiences of lesbian

identity; it does offer generality and a foundation for more specific research. It should be noted that because this is a pilot study these limitations were outside of the purview of this study's focus of the pedagogy of lesbian identity.

Further research on this model should look at the gendered differences between racial and sexual identity as gender norms may be different between races. Second, a statistical and more generalizable sample should be utilized to further asses the validity and reliability of the model. Third, a further development of the model perhaps as a scale may be produced. Also, to illustrate the evolution of gendered experiential lesbian identification, and the evolution of *Butch/Femme*, attention should be paid to how gender roles have changed in lesbian identity over time.

"As long as there are lesbians there remains a need to have lesbian studies and education" (McNaron, 2007, p. 147). In agreement, I would add that as long there are crimes committed against the lesbian community, inequities of privileges and rights based on sexual identity, and ignorance separating the "in" from the "out" there remains an educational necessity to teach "others" and ourselves about gendered lesbian identity and experience. As knowledge is indeed power, education is the key to eradicating hate and prejudice.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Online Questionnaire

1. PLEASE NOTE: this survey is based on your identity. Please do not answer based on your relationship history. First, look over the Model and the provided definitions in the Supplement. In the "Appearance" level, which would you identify yourself as?
2. In the "Sex" level, which would you identify yourself as?
3. In the "Relationship" level, which would you identify yourself as?
4. APPEARANCE: Please explain why you identify as such in 1-3 complete sentences.
5. What articles of clothing do you prefer to wear?
6. What feelings do you attribute to the items you listed? Please respond in 1-3 complete sentences.
7. How are gendered social norms illustrated (or not) by your attire? Please explain in 1-3 complete sentences.
8. Has your "appearance" identity changed over time? Please explain in 1-3 complete sentences.
9. SEX: Please explain why you identify as such in 1-3 complete sentences.
10. How are gendered social norms illustrated (or not) in sexual relations? Please explain in 1-3 complete sentences.
11. Based on the model, has your "sex" identity changed over time? Please explain in 1-3 complete sentences.
12. RELATIONSHIPS: Please explain why you identify as such in 1-3 complete sentences.
13. How are gendered social norms illustrated (or not) in a relationship? Please explain in 1-3 complete sentences.
14. Has your "relationship" identity changed over time? Please explain in 1-3 complete sentences.
15. YOUR IDEAL PARTNER: Based on the model, how would your ideal partner identify? (ex: Butch/Top/Pants)
16. Please explain why this is ideal for you in 1-3 complete sentences.
17. EDUCATIONAL IMPORTANCE: Why it is important to provide education about lesbian identity? Please explain in 1-3 complete sentences.
18. Outside of the classroom, how can this model be used? Please explain in 1-3 complete sentences.
19. DEMOGRAPHICS: What race/ethnicity do you identify with?
20. DEMOGRAPHICS: How old are you?

Appendix B: Questionnaire Supplement

Welcome!
Thank you for your participation in this research. This survey this packet will assist you with the questions in the online survey. Please read through <u>every</u> part of the survey. If you have any questions, please ask the Primary Investigator.
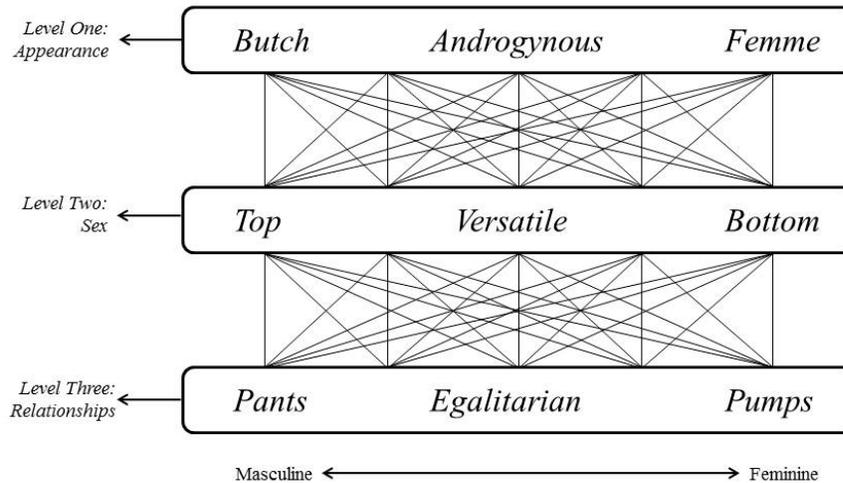
Level One: Appearance
- <u>Butch:</u> An identifying lesbian that wears clothing typically worn by males
- <u>Androgynous:</u> An identifying lesbian that wears 'gender neutral' or clothing worn by both males and females
- <u>Femme:</u> An identifying lesbian that wears clothing that typically worn by females

Level Two: Sex
- <u>Top:</u> (1) An identifying lesbian who, during sexual activity, predominantly leads the episode, or (2) is predominately is the "giver" of pleasure
- <u>Versatile:</u> An identifying lesbian who, during sexual activity, may consent to retaining or surrendering control of the episode and is open to "receiving" or "giving" pleasure
- <u>Bottom:</u> (1) An identifying lesbian who, during sexual activity, predominantly follows her partner's lead or (2) is predominantly is the "receiver" of pleasure

Level Three: Relationships
- <u>Pants:</u> An identifying lesbian who performs social roles typically fulfilled by males, such as: physical protection, chivalry, romance, mechanical tasks, or other socially masculine responsibilities.
- <u>Egalitarian:</u> An identifying lesbian who may perform social roles typically fulfilled by females or males. This may include: physical protection, chivalry, romance, mechanical tasks, emotional care-giving, domestic duties, or any other socially masculine or feminine responsibilities.
- <u>Pumps:</u> An identifying lesbian who performs social roles typically fulfilled by females, such as: domestic duties, emotional care-giving, or other socially feminine responsibilities.

Appendix C: Sample Coding

Open Codes	Axial Codes	Selective Coding
Social deemed appropriate Masculine-Feminine Heteronormativity Masculinity challenges expectations Misuse of male pronouns Discipline with expectation diversion Perception dictates attire Skirts Dresses Heels Make-up Slacks Button-downs Ties Vests Tee shirts Feminine sexuality Feminine strength Masculine confidence Fit lesbian stereotypes Feminine = Female Masculine = Male Feminine caregiving Masculine protection Feminine cooking Masculine chivalry	"Masculine" appearance "Feminine" appearance "Masculine" sex roles "Feminine" sex roles "Masculine" relationship roles "Feminine" relationship roles Butch-Femme	Social Norms
Self-expression Combination of "masc." and "fem." "When I want to" Circumstantial Identification Fluctuation of identities over time Take charge (sex) *Appearance* identity different from *Sex* Like to perform masc. & fem. identities	Comfort Gender Combination Flexibility of identification Elective performance	Agency
"Lesbian" is more complex than Butch/Femme Eradicate hate Eradicate ignorance General public doesn't understand Promote tolerance and understanding No current mass education available Help friends, family, co-workers Challenge "lesbian" stereotypes Let us define ourselves	Education from the Community Education for the Community Education of the Community Advocacy and Support	Educational Importance

Appendix D: Participant Recruitment E-mail

Hello,

You are being contacted to participate in a research study within the University of South Florida. Below is a description of the study, criteria for eligibility, confidentiality clause, and the contact information for the Primary Investigator of the study.

Purpose. The study you are being asked to participate in is entitled Gendered Lesbian Identity as Social Justice Education (IRB 5972). It addresses how gender (masculinity, femininity, and androgyny) interact within lesbian identity, emphasizing how heterosexual social norms are prevalent even in a homosexual community, and also the fluidity and flexibility gender identity. This study requires it's participants to take an anonymous online questionnaire that takes approximately 30-60 minutes to complete. This study is a part of a larger thesis project within the Department of Communication here at USF.

Criteria of Eligibility. To be eligible to participate you must fulfill the following criteria:
- Be a self-identified lesbian or woman who seeks other women
- Be 18 years of age or older

Your participation completely voluntary. You may drop out of the study at any time with no penalty.

Confidentiality. Never will identifying information be collected and your identity be will not be associated with your answers to the survey in any way.

If you are interested in participating in this study, please click here to go to the survey. Please download the attached supplement to complete the survey. The survey must be completed and submitted by January 30th, 2012 to be eligible for collection. If you have and questions or concerns please feel free to contact Megan Pugh at: map1@mail.usf.edu. Thank you!

Megan Pugh (Primary Investigator)
University of South Florida