

LESBIAN GENDER IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT AND GENDER ROLES OF YOUNG
BLACK WOMEN

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ABSTRACT

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While there is a paucity of scientific research that explores the diversity of lesbian existence, even less research focuses on young Black lesbian women and the way these lesbians negotiate their lesbian community. A small body of research suggests that lesbians tend to divide themselves into social groups based on gender identity and expression (e.g., butches and femmes). The research behind this dissertation qualitatively explored lesbian gender identity development, norms, and gender socialization among Black lesbian gender groups. Fourteen interviews with Black young women of low socioeconomic status were conducted (5 “femme,” 4 “stemme,” and 5 “stud”). Analyses followed modified analytic induction procedures. Three a priori propositions that were based on past research literature and theory were modified to fit the data. Another proposition originated from the data and subsequent analyses. Overall, analyses revealed that the experiences of identity development, enactment of gender norms, and gender socialization varied across gender. Enactments of stud and femme gender norms were often extreme, with studs exemplifying heteronormative (hyper)masculinity, and femmes exemplifying femininity. Stemmes, however, alternatively endorsed both masculine and feminine norms, but enacted them to a lesser extreme than did studs and femmes. The gender expression of stemmes changed based on context (e.g., mood state and relationships). Results indicated that the stud participants constituted the only lesbian gender group to endorse being socialized by other members of their own gender group. For most of the young women, socialization occurred through a system of reward and punishment rather than overt mentoring. Analyses also revealed

an imperative for studs and femmes to adhere strictly to their respective gender. Acting outside of those norms was often met with negative repercussions. By extension of this standard, stemmes were often looked upon with disdain, especially by studs. Although all the participants were embedded within a lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) community, they were still influenced to some extent by the gender norms of the broader society. Femmes and stemmes reflected young Black female gender norms, and studs reflected young Black male gender norms. Overall, results revealed the importance of lesbian gender identity for young sexual minority Black women of low socioeconomic status. With regard to future research, the results elucidated the importance of addressing lesbian gender identity as well as sexual orientation identity, because experiences (e.g., identity development, gender role enactment, and socialization) differed based on gender. In addition, future research may benefit from including longitudinal designs with contextual measures, because lesbian gender may be fluid and dependent on context. More dynamic theories allowing for variation and flux could also be instrumental in understanding the complexity of lesbian gender.

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CHAPTER 1

In sexual minority research, lesbians are often treated as a homogenous group and studied in comparison to other sexual minority groups, such as in developmental trajectory research (e.g., Savin-Williams & Diamond, 2000), sexual identity development research (e.g., Bradford, Ryan, Honnold, & Rothblum, 2001), and mental health research (e.g., D'Augelli, Hershberger, & Pilkington, 2001; Lewis, Derlega, Griffin, & Krowinski, 2003; Rutter & Soucar, 2002). Though some empirical studies investigate only lesbians, such as in their identity development process (e.g., Eliason, 1996; Kitzinger & Wilkinson, 1995; Levine, 1997; McCarn & Fassinger, 1996; Parks, 1999; Rust, 1993; Whitman, Cormier, & Boyd, 2000), a paucity of research explores the diversity of lesbian existence. Most research on lesbians includes a predominately White sample (e.g., Diamond, 1998, 2000; Levitt, Gerrish, & Hiestand, 2003; Levitt & Hiestand, 2004), and consequently results may not apply to lesbian women of other races.

Although lesbians are typically defined as constituting one social group, they functionally further divide themselves into social groups based on gender identity and expression. Two gender identities dominate lesbian culture: butch and femme. Each identity anchors a gender continuum that runs from masculine (butch) to feminine (femme). Butches possess more stereotypical “masculine” qualities and femmes more “feminine” qualities (Kennedy & Davis, 1993; Laporte, 1992; Weber, 1996; Wilson, 2005). These gender identifications form social categories or groups that partition the lesbian population. Social categories bring order to social environments and enable an individual to know how to act within given situations. Appropriate intergroup behavior is socially determined in ways that allow each group to differentiate itself from another (Tajfel & Turner, 1986).

This dissertation explores the experiences of young Black lesbian women of low socioeconomic status in order to begin to understand how having multiple identities influence their lesbian experience. More specifically, lesbian gender identity development and the intergroup dynamics among lesbian gender groups of young Black women will be explored. This research adds to what is already known about the diversity of lesbian women, and strives to increase understanding of Black lesbian culture.

In this chapter, I survey the social-historical context of lesbian gender and describe in depth what is known about the concepts of butch and femme. I then provide a general review of the literature on identity, including its function and development, and then segue into a deeper discussion about specific identities (i.e., gender, race, and sexual orientation). In addition, this chapter introduces diversity as an integral component of community psychology work.

Historical Context of Butch-Femme

The butch-femme dyad emerged in the 1940s and 1950s in the United States. During this period, appearance and sexual expression were primary indicators of butch and femme gender identities (Laporte, 1992). The clothing and appearance of two social identities, butch and femme, became important for establishing a social identity. The presence of a butch female or the butch-femme couple announced lesbians to one another and the public. Lesbians were able to recognize one another, which was essential for building a distinct culture and identity as well as for fueling a culture of resistance. During this period, with lesbian women actively desiring other women and not waiting for advances from a man, the butch-femme dyad began to challenge the heterosexual culture's view of women as being passive. Two women visibly together represented an alternative to the heterosexual norm of the male-female relationship in which the typical outcome of heterosexual intercourse is the male's orgasm (Kennedy & Davis, 1993).

Before the 1970s, it was socially important for a lesbian to pick either a butch or femme role in order to gain acceptance into the lesbian community. In addition, once a role was decided upon, the femme generally coupled with a butch. Couplings of butch with butch or femme with femme were rare and not socially accepted within the lesbian community. To be an accepted member of the lesbian community, a woman needed to adhere to the butch-femme rules. Those who did not conform were called “ki-ki” or “AC/DC,” which were pejorative labels. Ki-kis switched roles based on their partner. If their partner was femme, they were butch; if their partner was butch, they were femme. Ki-kis elicited negative comments and were the butt of jokes because they disrupted the butch-femme social order (Kennedy & Davis, 1993).

The rise of the feminist women’s movement in the 1970s led to changes within the lesbian community. Women began to criticize the butch-femme dyad for replicating heterosexual power norms. Women rejected the butch-femme dyad because of its imitation of patriarchy, since in romantic relationships butches played the masculine or dominant role and femmes the feminine or more submissive role. Butches threatened mainstream lesbian culture and feminism because their gender expression was seen as regressive and politically problematic (Roof, 1998). Butch-femme roles began to be seen as artificial, oppressive, and sexist during this period (MacCowan, 1992). The popularity of the butch-femme dyad plummeted and established gendered sex roles changed to those of mutual lovemaking (Kennedy & Davis, 1993; Roof, 1998). Butch-femme couples and their voices were silenced (Nestle, 1992b).

Lesbians began to identify as androgynous instead of butch or femme. Androgyny was popular until about the mid-1980s. In order to be accepted within the feminist-lesbian androgynous community, butches needed to give up their masculine ways because men were seen as oppressors; femmes needed to give up some of their feminine characteristics, such as

using high heels and lipstick, since these were “tools of patriarchy” and bound women to excessive consumerism (Maltry & Tucker, 2002). An androgynous lesbian encompassed positive male and female characteristics. She had a certain look consisting of short hair, jeans, hiking boots, running shoes, Birkenstocks, t-shirts, flannel shirts, baseball jackets, down jackets, baggy walking shorts, and athletic clothes. She avoided adornment, barrettes, jewelry, makeup, hose, high heels, skirts, dresses, and scarves. Sex with men and any confusion or ambivalence about lesbian identity was not tolerated. Many androgynous lesbians wore jewelry and clothing with the image of women’s symbols entwined on them, and listened only to women’s music. It became politically incorrect not to subscribe to the androgynous imperative (Loulán & Thomas, 1990).

In 1988, the butch-femme dyad revived (Roof, 1998) starting in San Francisco (MacCowan, 1992), and since 1990 there has been the reinstitution of butch-femme (Smyth, 1998). Over the last two decades, a plethora of writing and websites (e.g., <http://butch-femme.com>, <http://www.butch-femme.net>, <http://www.butchfemmesociety.com>, and <http://www.butchfemmeworld.com>) has emerged, perhaps indicating the growing popularity of these identities (Hiestand & Levitt, 2005). Many younger lesbians have also started to identify according to their gender expression rather than their sexual orientation identity (Savin-Williams, 2005).

This revival, instead of being seen as replicating heterosexuality, is now viewed as more complex. Butch and femme help code identities and behaviors that are both connected to and distinct from standard male and female societal roles (Rubin, 1992). According to Laporte (1992), the major difference between butch-femme lesbian relationships and male-female heterosexual relationships is that the butch-femme couples do not attach inferior-superior

significance to either role—more equality exists. This assumes, however, that individuals in heterosexual relationships are inherently unequal. In addition, the idea that butches partner exclusively with femmes and vice-versa is an outdated stereotype (Rubin, 1992). The neo-butch/femme of the '90s is more flexible (Inness & Lloyd, 1996) and women are free to switch roles and partners—femmes can go butch and butches can go femme, and butch-but and femme-femme couples are more accepted (Walker, 1998). Choosing butch or femme does not hold the “life and death” necessity it once had in the 1950s. In terms of power and control, the lesbian gendered norms of the past may be less relevant. Recently, butch-femme has become more of an “enjoyable erotic statement and an escape from the boring ‘vanilla sex’ that [was] associated with lesbian-feminism” (Inness & Lloyd, 1996, p. 12). Kennedy and Davis (1993), however, suggest that a debate still exists among lesbians regarding whether butch-femme imitates heterosexuality.

Some lesbians believe that butch-femme erotic attraction never left during the androgynous lesbian-feminist movement. A large segment of the lesbian population never liked or fully subscribed to androgyny (Loulou & Thomas, 1990). As one butch noted during this time period, “Feminism tore apart my butch core” (Cordova, 1992, p. 283). During the androgyny movement, she felt divided between what was socially accepted and what she felt inside, suggesting that many androgynous lesbians just suppressed their innate gender tendencies. Laporte (1992) asserts that lesbians who deny butch-femme attraction “are simply those who either have no experience of this attraction or who are denying it in their fear of being accused of copying heterosexuals” (p. 212). The androgynous movement may have never reached the Black lesbian community, since the feminist movement was seen as a White women’s movement (Moore, 2006).

Black Lesbian Community

Butch-femme distinctions seem to be especially prominent among lesbians of low socioeconomic status (Crawley, 2001; Weber, 1996) and those lacking high levels of education (Weber, 1996). Among low-income and Black lesbian women, the concept of butch-femme may be culturally important. Wilson (2005) conducted a cultural analysis of Black lesbian sexual culture, including the sexual beliefs and attitudes of Black lesbians. She instituted a multiple methods intra-cultural study design using focus groups, individual interviews with community leaders and professionals in sexual health who had worked with Black lesbians, and participant observation of local events. She found that participants used the word “stud” to reference lesbians who dress and appear traditionally masculine and who are expected to take on a traditional American male role in relationships, and the word “femme” to label lesbian women who dress and appear traditionally feminine and who are expected to adopt a traditional female role within relationships. She also found variations on femme and stud, such as “hard studs” (lesbians extremely masculine in dress and manner, who refuse to have any sexual act performed on her), and “pillow princesses” (ultra femmes; they prefer to receive sexual pleasure and acts and are not expected or likely to reciprocate on their partner).

Various rules exist in the Black lesbian community on socially acceptable relationships. Studs and femmes are supposed to date each other, and little tolerance exists for studs who date one another. In Black lesbian bars, not adhering to gender norms led to consequences, such as being bothered, not getting a date, or being beaten up. Even though participants in this study mentioned that stud and femme gender dynamics structured lesbian relationships, Wilson (2005) found that few participants within the focus groups said they adopted a lesbian gender label for themselves. Participants stated that women who were less educated or working class were more

likely to express femme and stud identities, as well as more likely to partner within role expectations. In general, participants reported rejecting a butch/femme label.

Wilson's (2005) results, indicating that some lesbian women reject the lesbian gender label but still state that lesbian gender structures relationships, are interesting. This may mean that although some women are not self-identifying as their lesbian gender, they still notice lesbian gender dynamics in the community and for themselves. When lesbians interact with each other in social environments, they may assign lesbian gender identities to others but not see how the identity fits for them. This changes lesbian gender identity from one that is internalized to an ascribed identity. In addition, upper socioeconomic status lesbians or those who have obtained a high level of education may consider self-identifying as their lesbian gender as taboo. On the other hand, the finding that less educated and working class lesbians were reported to use lesbian gender labels still makes lesbian gender identity particularly relevant for young Black lesbian women of low-socioeconomic status.

Butch/Stud

Appearance and sexual expression have been primary gender expression indicators. The most visible gender identity is butch, because butch women challenge stereotypical female gender norms. Butches are women who are more comfortable with masculine gender codes, styles, and identities than with feminine ones. A broad range of masculine characteristics encompass this lesbian gender identity (Rubin, 1992). Butches physically adopt a masculine style of dress. In the 1940s and '50s, this style included wearing ties, heavily-starched shirts, jackets, pants, and masculine-style shoes that were sensible and sturdy. They also cut their hair extremely short (Kennedy & Davis, 1993). Weber (1996) targeted lesbian venues and administered to predominately White lesbian women and their partners ($n= 235$) questionnaires that consisted of

both closed- and open-ended questions regarding their butch-femme self-identification. The qualitative results indicated that, aesthetically, a butch is exempted from wearing feminine clothes and makeup. Many butches stated that men's clothes are more comfortable. Anecdotally, today butches tend to choose large tattoos that emphasize muscularity. Their piercings include rings or bars through the septum, or a post underneath the bottom lip. They also tend to use larger gauge jewelry in their piercings (Walker, 1998). In the Black lesbian community, butches are referred to as studs (Kennedy & Davis, 1993; Wilson, 2005) and the Black lesbian dress code is generally not radically different from that of White lesbians (Kennedy & Davis, 1993).

Butches and studs visibly express their masculinity through dress. They also act in a distinctive manner. Butches have a masculine swagger, from the way they walk, sit, and hold a drink to their tone of voice and other subtle nonverbal forms of communication (Kennedy & Davis, 1993). Levitt and Hiestand (2004) qualitatively explored the meaning behind being butch. They interviewed 12 butches (11 White, 1 Latina) between the ages of 23 and 62 about what it meant to be butch. The results indicated that most participants strongly believed being butch was an essential aspect of who they were, and that being butch was not located in one trait but encompassed a certain energy or essence commonly associated with masculinity. The thought of being feminine created discomfort for respondents and when pressured to appear feminine, they felt embarrassed, weak, and vulnerable. They were able to enact deliberate gender performances to suit their emotional state or interpersonal interaction. For example, some butches allowed themselves to be more feminine with their partners, or when they wanted to be more spiritual or emotionally vulnerable. They often acted more masculine when they felt more sexual, insecure, or playful. Some identified more with men than women, and typically liked more masculine activities, had traits associated with men, and adopted male gender roles. In general, although

they might have considered doing so in the past, butches stated that they were not trying to be men, even if they often were mistaken for men in public (Levitt & Hiestand, 2004; Weber, 1996).

Regarding development, butches described a very early sense of being different from other children and mentioned conflict with parents who encouraged their gender conformity to societal norms (Levitt & Hiestand, 2004). Many described childhoods filled with confusion and shame. Some believed they were meant to be boys and most described themselves as tomboys. During puberty, menarche seemed like a betrayal. In their late teens or early twenties, most came out to others as lesbian and butch. Coming out signifies the process of disclosing one's sexual orientation to others (Bochenek & Brown, 2001). Coming out was important because it allowed themselves to be more comfortable with being butch. They had to learn the social roles regarding how to be butch in the lesbian community. They also realized they were sexually desirable and attractive to many lesbians because they were butch. Coming out as butch was an important turning point for some women. The participants mentioned experiencing expectations to be tough, to be a leader, to take care of and protect others, to not cry, to not date other butches, to be sexually dominant, and to take care of chores designated as men's responsibilities, all of which they found hard to fulfill. It was a challenge for butches to find a masculine appearance that was comfortable as well as one that they could manage in different social contexts. Ironically, participants mentioned that in one sense butch lesbians do not need to come out because they are visibly lesbian. Being butch made them feel more powerful and assertive, and they enjoyed feelings of strength and confidence, feelings which they could not access if they tried to force themselves into traditional gender roles. Becoming more butch was sometimes described as a way to guard tender emotions from being hurt. Participants reported struggling to reconcile their

tough exterior with a more sensitive caring side. Butches needed to find a balance between being social, sexual, physical, and emotional that felt comfortable and true to themselves across contexts (Levitt & Hiestand, 2004).

Using the same data, Hiestand and Levitt (2005) qualitatively explored the theme “growing up as a butch lesbian” and identified five subthemes. One subtheme, “being a butch child” involved early identity as a tomboy. As children, butches adopted male gender norms and spent time with boys. Participants described that during this time they were confused, afraid, and wondering why their gender seemed wrong, yet they reported that they were simultaneously glad they were developing a self-assurance which many girls lack. Their parents often pressured them to be feminine and forced them to wear feminine clothing, which made them feel as if they were in drag.

A second subtheme involved “specific school experiences.” The participants experienced increased social pressure to conform to feminine norms at school. The participants stated that they often felt alone or different from female peers. A few participants managed to find friends who were also gender nonconforming; however, they were the exception. By the time they were in high school, most participants realized they were lesbian but tried to appear heterosexual by dressing femininely, feigning interest in boys, or dating. A few participants mentioned experiencing pressure from boyfriends to be more feminine. Most participants remember other students harassing them and calling them names, such as “queer.” They were humiliated by the name-calling because often they did not claim a lesbian identity and believed such to be shameful. In addition, during this time, their bodies were changing due to menarche. It became harder to remain faithful to the masculine parts of themselves because the physical differences between themselves and male peers became more pronounced.

A third subtheme involved the participants “coming out as lesbian to themselves and then to other people.” Most participants believed they were butch their whole lives. A fourth subtheme involved “learning about butch-femme by meeting other butches.” They began to realize that being butch was actually sexually desirable, which was important because in the past they were ashamed of and minimized their masculinity. Participants described finding a butch role model who explained butch-femme rules of interaction. The final subtheme was “becoming comfortable being butch.” The participants described integrating their gender presentation with their female body, which helped them feel more sexually attractive and experience greater self-acceptance. The meta-theme encompassing all the categories was “striving to be authentic.” Butches struggled with an internal sense of gender while negotiating developmental experiences that forced them to present their gender in an incongruous manner.

From these data, Hiestand and Levitt (2005) also proposed a model of butch identity development. They suggested the first stage of butch identity development involves butches feeling conflicted about their gender, and isolated from other children. The second stage involves the intersection between gender conformity and sexual orientation. Butch lesbians feel pressure from their peers, teachers, and their parents to be more feminine. Because they do not conform, they are often called lesbians or ostracized from peers. Most butch women know of their own lesbianism by the time of puberty. The third stage, gender awareness and the distinguishing of differences, occurs as butch women begin to seek out other lesbians and embrace their own sexual orientation while not really exploring their gender differences. The fourth stage, acceptance of lesbian identity leading to gender exploration, occurs when butch lesbians begin to actively explore their gender after adopting their lesbian identity. The fifth stage, gender internalization and pride in sexual orientation, happens when the women adopt their butch

identity and appear to become more comfortable as their butch gender expression aligns with their internal sense of gender. The sixth stage, gender affirmation and pride, occurs when participants begin to have pride about their gender instead of shame. Butch women begin to become open about their gender and increasingly comfortable with their butch identity across different contexts. The final stage, integration of sexual orientation and gender difference, happens when both identities, butch and lesbian, become fully integrated into the butch woman's sense of self. By this stage, the women appear to have developed the self-knowledge, lived-experience, social support, and politicized perspective to continue to negotiate their gender development.

It is of interest to note that one research study suggests a certain privilege associated with being butch. Walters (2005) defined butch privilege as “the unearned and unacknowledged privilege experienced by a butch lesbian (perceived or self-identified) due to her occupation of masculinity” (p. 1). Walters surveyed undergraduate students who were shown two pictures of lesbian women displayed side by side (one femme; one butch), and were asked to compare them based on certain characteristics. Results indicated that butch women were seen by the surveyed students as male, having male characteristics and traits, and ultimately as able to obtain more privilege than femme women. These results were especially true for Black female participants.

Femme

Less is known about femmes and how they act as a group. Femme women are characteristically feminine and generally wear what fashionable women wear, including makeup, high heels, and earrings (Laporte, 1992). Femmes, in general, are physically indistinguishable from heterosexual women. Levitt, Gerrish, and Hiestand (2003) qualitatively explored what it meant to be femme from a White adult femme perspective. The results indicated that femmes

have certain aesthetic characteristics, such as using makeup, wearing feminine clothing, and dressing provocatively. Femmes in general enjoy being admired physically. Anecdotal evidence indicates that femmes tend to have fewer “masculine” tattoos, and the tattoos they have emphasize feminine aspects of their body, such as hips, ankles, and breasts. Femmes often describe tattoos as jewelry, and choose nipple, naval, dainty nose studs, and clitoral hood piercings (Walker, 1998). While they adhere to the feminine expressions of gender, femmes possess traits of strength, openness, and honesty that are not necessarily associations with heterosexual femininity. In Weber’s (1996) study, previously described, the author reported that femme women were adamant that being femme does not mean being submissive or passive.

Through a grounded theory analysis of interviews with 12 White femmes between the ages of 21 and 53, Levitt et al. (2003) describe the femme developmental process. They identified four main developmental aspects of femme identity. The first stage included childhood memories that included being a tomboy but then becoming feminine as a teenager, having same-sex feelings or experiences despite dating men, and being athletic but feminine in high school. The second stage involved the process of coming out as lesbian, which was complicated by their femme gender. Being femme conflicted with both butch stereotypes of lesbians and the feminine image of female beauty. Some respondents described struggling to understand their attraction to other women. The third stage involved experiencing a need to come out as lesbian. The respondents received reactions from others ranging from surprise (because their femininity conflicted with lesbian stereotypes) to discomfort. The respondents seemed to exhibit a need for honesty, which was promoted by a strong sense of personal sincerity and integrity. The final stage included coming out as femme. The femmes needed to negotiate acceptance in communities characterized by androgynous and butch identities. Identifying as femme helped the

participants resist the pressure to adopt the socially-dominant gender presentations and accept themselves as both lesbian and feminine.

It is not simple to define a femme appearance and being femme. Femmes are often perceived within the lesbian community as crossing over into “enemy territories” and seen as traitors because they blend in with heterosexual women. Femmes are often not recognizable to other lesbians (Esterberg, 1996; Maltry & Tucker, 2002; Nestle, 1992a; VanNewkirk, 2006). In lesbian communities, femmes are often stripped of power because they are assumed to be bisexual or just dabbling with women—not “true” lesbians (Levitt et al., 2003; Maltry & Tucker, 2002). In Levitt et al.’s (2003)’s research, femme participants discussed having to come out continually because most people would not suspect them to be lesbian. In addition, they often struggled to claim space in lesbian circles where butches are said to have higher value (Loulan & Thomas, 1990; Maltry & Tucker, 2002), which affirms Walters’ (2005) finding that butch lesbians hold privilege.

Femmes often have a past history of heterosexual relationships and male sexual experiences (Kennedy & Davis, 1993). One recent quantitative study found that femmes reported more lifetime male partners and encounters than butches did (Rosario, Schrimshaw, Hunter, & Levy-Warren, 2009). In this research study, researchers longitudinally examined butch/femme differences in sexual identity formation and integration among an ethnically diverse sample of 76 self-identified lesbian and bisexual young women (ages 14 to 21 years). Femmes, in comparison to butches, were less comfortable with others knowing about their homosexuality, were less likely to self-identify as lesbian than bisexual, less comfortable with their sexual identity, and less involved in gay-related activities (Rosario et al., 2009).

The Butch-Femme Dyad

Many people assume and some research supports (e.g., Levitt et al., 2003; Levitt & Hiestand, 2004) that butches and femmes are sexually attracted to one another and engage in romantic relationships with one another. There are certain roles that butches and femmes play in their romantic relationships. According to the qualitative research of Levitt et al. (2003), in a femme-butch dyad, the femme provides emotional care while the butch provides protection and assistance. Sexually, the femmes recognize that their butch partner has vulnerabilities, so they heighten their femme qualities, focus on caressing body parts common to both men and women (e.g., shoulders, arms), or use fantasy or sado-masochism to make touch more comfortable for the butch. The femmes reported that sexuality can be a difficult negotiation process because they do not know how to please their partners sexually without making them feel too feminine, and thus negating their butch identity. Many femmes consciously allow their butch partners to claim symbols of power that affirm the butches' marginalized gender identity.

Loulan and Thomas (1990) conducted an early research study looking at differences in sexual behavior across lesbian genders. Using a mixed method questionnaire, they surveyed 589 lesbians who were mainly White, middle class, Protestant, college graduates, and between the ages of 30 to 39 years old. All lesbian gender groups provided extremely similar answers about sex, including how often they initiated sex, how often they responded to their lover initiating sex, entered their lover's vagina and anus, used a dildo, had orgasms, had lovers who experienced orgasm, and gave and received oral sex. The study indicated, however, that femmes were more likely to have started consensual sex with girls and women earlier in their lives (before the age of 10), and that they were also more likely to enter their lover's vagina during sex than were members of the other gender groups. In addition, androgynous women, when asked about their

understanding of the butch/femme concept, saw butch/femme as “male/female role-playing,” while self-identified femmes and butches both saw butch/femme as being “sexual energy differences.” This suggests that those lesbians who do not self-identify as femme or butch see gender expression as a deliberate action, while self-identified butches and femmes view gender as innate. In addition, it also suggests that perhaps the sexual divisions between butches and femmes are not as distinct as stereotypes suggest; butches and femmes may engage in very similar sexual behavior.

Levitt and Hiestand (2005) qualitatively explored the dynamics of butch-femme relationships and discovered an interaction between lesbian sexuality and gender in physical attraction, flirtation, and sexual activity. The first theme in this interaction was attracting others and attraction was described as an energy exchange. Femmes described using feminine beauty and strength to get the attention of butches and command sexual admiration. Butches enjoyed the power of demonstrating their desire to femmes and having their desire coveted (e.g., a woman wanting to give herself to them).

The second theme involved the risks entailed in gender performance. Femmes risked exposing their feminine beauty, but not getting noticed or not being desired by a butch. A femme also risked not being recognized as lesbian. In addition, butches risked being rejected by a femme as well as having their gender misread as male.

The third theme, agency, involved the act of flirtation where attractiveness is acknowledged and power is exchanged to maintain tension. The femme can choose to accept or reject the butch’s desire. The femme also demonstrates her ability to command desire, as well as her ability to accept or reject desire (often by teasing). As for the butch, she can choose to desire or not desire the femme. She demonstrates that her desire is coveted, often by teasing not to offer

desire, or by not showing her desire for a femme. For both femme and butch, the foundation of attraction is in the expression of sexual confidence.

The fourth theme, sexual performance, involved the femme affirming the butch gender by heightening gender differences. The butch may strap on a dildo and the femme may wear lingerie. The strap-on enhances a butch's sexual self-image and sense of gender. Some butches wear strap-ons on a daily basis under their clothes. The femme tends to be sensitive to butch vulnerabilities in sexuality and careful not to touch a butch where she does not want to be touched. Conversely, the butch tends to be oriented toward pleasing her femme partner and sees some sexual activity as potentially threatening to her gender (e.g., having her breasts touched).

The earlier research of Levitt et al. (2003) found that participants were critical of butch-femme relationships, stating that butch-femme dynamics often constrained social interactions. These participants reported that they were more likely to have friends and deep connections with other femmes and androgynous women while seeing butch friendships as complicated.

In general, currently available research concerning lesbian gender identity describes the butch and femme characteristics with most research focusing on butch lesbians. Only nine empirical articles, one master's thesis, and one dissertation were found that specifically explore lesbian genders. Of these nine articles, four analyzed the data from the same qualitative study. The majority of studies include a predominantly White lesbian sample (e.g., Hiestand & Levitt, 2005; Levitt & Horne, 2002; Levitt et al., 2003; Levitt & Hiestand, 2004, 2005; Loulan & Thomas, 1990), which was not the case with Rosario et al. (2009), Wilson (2005, 2009), and Walters (2005). Rosario et al. (2009) was also the only study found to specifically explore coming out experiences of young lesbian women denoting the differences and similarities across lesbian genders while utilizing quantitative methods. Rosario et al. was also the only study using

young women as participants instead of asking older lesbians to recount retrospectively their coming out experiences. The one dissertation I found (Wilson, 2005) that explored lesbian gender among Black lesbians, however, did not specifically include young adult or low socioeconomic status lesbians. Based on this limited body of research, butch-femme is particularly relevant for Black (Wilson, 2005) and lower socio-economic status lesbians (Crawley, 2001; Weber, 1996). Even though as described previously current knowledge holds that the butch-femme dyadic is relevant, there is still much to be understood about Black young women's definition and expression of butch-femme roles and behavior because of the lack of research on this particular population.

In addition, there is lack of research on lesbians who do not self-identify with the main gender expression identities (butch, femme, androgynous). For example, as described previously, historical literature describes "ki-kis" or "AC/DCs." Yet, no known studies explore this gender or alternatives to butch, femme, and androgynous. Qualities of femininity and masculinity are distributed in varying proportions in all lesbians (Laporte, 1992), implying other possible gender identities. In addition, most lesbian gender identity research includes only adult lesbian women as participants. In such research exploring gender identity development, participants are asked to retrospectively reflect on their coming out experiences. Since adolescence is often considered a time of self-definition (Kroger, 2000), young women may need to internalize both a sexual minority identity and a gender identity. Therefore, an adolescent who is figuring out and understanding her gender expression may differ from an adult woman who has already committed to a role identity. There is also a lack of empirical analyses regarding how gender identities structure relationships among lesbians (Moore, 2006).

Intersectionality Theory

According to intersectionality theory (Crenshaw, 1993), each identity informs another. Joint social positions (e.g., Black lesbian women) create a specific reality that can be distinguished from the realities of people identifying with other group membership combinations (Cole, 2009; Mahalingam, 2007; Settles, 2006; Settles, Pratt-Hyatt, & Buchanan, 2008; West & Fenstermaker, 1996). Therefore, the reality experienced by young Black lesbians of low socioeconomic status is unique and differs from the reality of other, albeit similar, populations, such as older Black lesbians, young White lesbians, young Black heterosexual women, and young Black lesbians of higher socioeconomic status. For this reason, it would be inappropriate to generalize findings about these other groups to young Black lesbians of low socioeconomic status without specifically studying this group.

Hancock (2007) outlines key assumptions defining intersectionality as a body of normative theory and empirical research. One assumption is that more than one category of difference (e.g., race, gender, class) plays a role in complex social issues such as persistent poverty, civil war, and human rights abuses. Each different social category occupies a particular location in a socially stratified political system, and with that comes more or less power. For example, in United States society, people who are gay or lesbian have fewer legal rights in contrast to people who are heterosexual. Gay and lesbian people have lacked the power to obtain a federally recognized marriage in the United States, and in some states cannot obtain health insurance benefits for their same-sex partner.

Another assumption of Hancock's is that various identity roles should be equally attended to in research; however, categorical intersections are more than the sum of their parts. Each identity or category may not play an equal role or may vary with context (Hancock, 2007).

Although all social categories that define a person are important, they may not all have the same impact on the person. One category may be more important or salient to an individual based on their environment. For example, in a White lesbian-only environment, sexual orientation may be less salient than race for a Black lesbian because sexual orientation as a minority identity is shared. Since she is a racial minority in that context, her racial identity may be more salient and noticeable to her than her gender identity. In her family context, however, her race may be less salient to her than sexual orientation, since her racial social category is shared. In her family context, she may feel as if she is discriminated against based on her sexual orientation.

Categories of difference are conceptualized and produced dynamically across ecological levels (Hancock, 2007). Categories of difference, such as race, gender, and sexual orientation, are meaningful across all ecological levels. Categories are also produced as social constructs at each level, and each level affects how categories are (re)produced at the other levels. For example, race as a category of difference exists at the macro level through unfair governmental policies discriminating against racial minorities, which impacts how organizations provide services, which impacts in turn how racial minority families utilize services, which impacts in turn each individual in a family. The macro level encompasses the mechanism (unfair governmental policies) that creates change trickling down to the other levels.

Each category of difference has within-group diversity (Hancock, 2007). For example, all Black lesbians are not the same, but vary based on socioeconomic status, country of origin, age, education, and in other ways. Therefore, the reality for middle-class, educated Black lesbians may be very different from that of Black lesbians who are homeless or illiterate. While their race and sexual orientation are the same for all Black lesbians in the United States, the ways in which they differ can create significant effects on their day-to-day experience.

Intersectionality research should examine categories at multiple levels of analyses — not simply add together mutually-exclusive analyses of the individual and institutional levels, but integrate analysis of the interaction between individual and institutional levels (Hancock, 2007). Analyzing across levels creates a more holistic view of the impact of the category of difference. Analysis should not be additive, whereby each category of difference is looked at independently. When investigating categories of difference using an intersectional framework, the categories should be seen as dependent upon each other and intertwined, making it impractical and not useful to tease apart categorical differences from one another.

Intersectionality as an empirical paradigm requires attention to both empirical and theoretical aspects of the research question; therefore multiple methods of inquiry may be necessary (Hancock, 2007). Since intersection research is more complex than is looking at each category of difference individually, it may be helpful to employ various research methods and theories in order to view the unique category from various angles and perspectives, and thus more holistically. Using multiple theories to explain the phenomena may be helpful. For example, when investigating the young Black lesbian experience, it would be helpful to look at theories pertaining to the various categorical differences, such as adolescent development, sexual orientation, gender, and racial theories, as well as looking at the data during analysis through these categorical lenses.

Intersectional research requires looking at research questions from various angles; therefore, research and theory from the categorical differences held by young Black lesbian women (e.g., age, race, gender, and sexual orientation) will be reviewed. To begin to understand intersecting identities, however, it becomes imperative to understand why identity is important and how it functions.

Function of Identity

Adams and Marshall (1996) describe common functions of identity achievement. Identity provides structure for self-understanding by providing a framework that a person uses to organize how s/he sees her/himself. When a person understands who s/he is, then s/he has the grounding to achieve optimal development (Adams, Abraham, & Markstrom, 1987; O'Connor, 1995; Serafini & Adams, 2002). For example, an adolescent determines she is sexually attracted to other women, and begins to identify as lesbian. She may then use lesbian identity to understand her sexual desire and come to terms with how she differs from heterosexual peers. Through identity, she gains clarity, which grounds her future exploration and allows personal growth.

Identity provides meaning and direction through commitments, values, and goals. People who have achieved identity tend to be goal focused, organized, and have higher levels of stability (Blustein & Palladino, 1991; Serafini & Adams, 2002). Therefore, identity focuses behavior and directs actions (Serafini & Adams, 2002). For example, a woman who self-identifies as lesbian behaves in certain ways and holds certain values. She may exhibit masculine qualities, such as financially providing for her family, dressing in typical male clothing, and pursuing femme women. Her identity provides meaning and guides her behavior and values.

Identity provides a sense of personal control and free will. Adolescents who have achieved identity show increased internal locus of control, which suggests they have greater personal control over their lives (Abraham, 1983; Serafini & Adams, 2002). While identity provides structure behind behavior and values, it also provides a means of self-expression. Identity provides the strength for a person to take ownership over her/his life and express her/himself in a way s/he chooses. For example, once a lesbian self-identifies, she then

independently constructs how she wants to express her lesbianism and what that identification means to her. She may exercise her personal control and choose to custom fit the lesbian identity to her own sense of self.

Identity helps provide consistency, coherence, and harmony among values, beliefs, and commitments, which decreases anxiety (Serafini & Adams, 2002). For example, once a lesbian self-identifies, she may begin to understand why she felt different from peers growing up, and may see patterns from past same-sex relationships. She may also begin to understand and solidify various aspects of herself, such as gender expression, sexual attraction, and sexual behavior, which may guide future behavior and values.

Identity enables recognizing potential through a sense of future, possibilities, and alternative choices (Serafini & Adams, 2002). Identity helps provide future visioning. An adolescent lesbian may envision a future for herself, for example, perhaps having a long-term committed romantic relationship with another woman. She may see this as a valid alternative to normative heterosexual marriage. Therefore, identity opens up avenues of possibilities and assists in justifying new or alternative ways of living.

Identity achievement will eventually assist adolescents in anchoring to social institutions and networks that will provide grounding for future developmental processes (Gecas & Mortimer, 1987). For example, a young woman who identifies herself as lesbian may seek other lesbians or LGBT community centers, and begin to explore that aspect of her identity. By meeting other lesbians, she can perhaps create a supportive network when confronting heterosexism or homophobia. She may also begin to understand what being lesbian means through these networks and institutions, which can then lead to increased self-understanding and grounding for future development.

While identity can provide grounding for personal healthy development, it also brings order to social environments and enables people to know how to act when encountering people with the same identity or other identities. Social Identity Theory (SIT) and Self-Categorization Theory (SCT) explain how identity can structure intergroup interaction.

Social Identity Theory (SIT)

Intergroup behavior is the behavior displayed by one or more people toward others of different social categories based on their self-identification (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Social Identity Theory (SIT; Tajfel & Turner, 1986) attempts to explain how intergroup behavior functions. An in-group is the social group to which an individual feels loyalty, respect, and membership, while the out-group is the social group toward which an individual feels contempt, opposition, or competition.

According to Tajfel and Turner (1986), three processes influence social group formation. In one process, each individual internalizes her/his group membership and integrates it into her/his self-concept. In the second, social situations must allow for comparisons between social groups where evaluation of relevant relational characteristics occur. In the third process, the in-group members do not compare themselves with every cognitively available out-group, but with a perceived relevant group.

Relevance implies that the in-group and out-group must be perceived as similar enough to provide a useful comparison, but not too similar as to threaten each other's social identity (Brewer, 2001; Tesser, 1988). For example butches may develop animosity towards "ki-kis" because ki-kis display both butch and femme appearance and behavior depending on the gender of their partner. If a "ki-ki" dates a femme, she becomes more butch. "Kikis" and butches then both compete for attention from femmes. "Ki-ki" identity threatens butch identity therefore

hostility could develop toward “ki-kis” by butches. In addition, if the out-group’s difference is evaluated negatively, perhaps as a challenge or threat to the in-group, the out-group becomes viewed more negatively and is discriminated against by the in-group. Butches may view the idea of “kikis” switching gender expression as a negative characteristic. Therefore, in a social situation “kikis” may be discriminated against such as being ostracized in a lesbian friendly space. When the out-group difference is evaluated positively, however, then the out-group is treated positively by the in-group. The out-group may be evaluated differently, however, depending on the specific context (Mummendey & Wenzel, 1999).

Social Identity Theory (SIT; Tajfel & Turner, 1986) has been empirically tested and used to explain intergroup behavior. The research supports the relevant conclusion that people do look favorably on their in-group in comparison to their out-group (Ferguson & Kelley, 1964), even when minimal conditions exist in creating groups (see Doise et al., 1972; Ferguson & Kelley, 1964; Gaertner & Insko, 2000; Otten & Moskowitz, 2000; Otten & Wentura, 1999; Rabbie & Horwitz, 1969; Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Minimal conditions occur when even arbitrary conditions, such as random assignment, are used to divide research participants into two groups. Even when minimal conditions exist, the two groups divide themselves into an in-group and out-group where the in-group looks upon its members favorably and with disdain on the out-group.

Research strongly supports the main tenets of Social Identity Theory (SIT; Tajfel & Turner, 1986). In-group bias, however, does not always coincide with out-group discrimination (Brewer, 1979, 1999; Kosterman & Feshbach, 1989; Otten & Moskowitz, 2000). Self-Categorization Theory (SCT), also known as Social Identity Theory of the Group, was developed to begin to fill in holes that the SIT research elicited (Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, & Wetherell, 1987) and attempts to explain how groups form initially.

Self-Categorization Theory (SCT)

Social Identity Theory (SIT; Tajfel & Turner, 1986) and Self-Categorization Theory (SCT; Turner et al., 1987) are process theories that complement each other, and are commonly used conjointly when explaining intergroup dynamics (Turner, 1999; Turner & Reynolds, 2004). SCT (SCT; Turner et al., 1987) elaborates on the role of group identification by specifying how salience of a person's personal or social identity may guide various social perceptions and behaviors. SCT is concerned with psychological group membership where a person depersonalizes and moves from defining her/himself as an individual to defining her/himself as part of a social identity group. When this transition happens, collective group behavior emerges and, psychologically, individuals perceive themselves as more similar to each other, thus developing a "shared cognitive representation of a collective entity which exists reflexively in the minds of individual group members and is structured by the realities of group life in a particular social system" (Turner & Reynolds, 2004, p. 261). The individual no longer sees her/himself psychologically as "me", but as "we." When social identity is enacted, it can be more powerful than individual identity (Hogg & McGarty, 1990).

Group membership causes people to think, feel, behave, and self-define in terms of group norms rather than idiosyncratically (Terry & Hogg, 1996). People are motivated toward group norms "by a need to reduce subjective uncertainty about one's perceptions, attitudes, feelings, and behaviors and, ultimately, one's self-concept and place within the social world" (Hogg & Terry, 2000, p. 124). The term, "uncertainty reduction hypothesis" (Hogg, 2000), occurs when the certainty gained from adhering to group norms creates confidence in how to behave and what to expect from the environment (Hogg & Terry, 2000). Past experimental research does support this hypothesis (e.g., Grieve & Hogg, 1999; Hogg & Grieve, 1999; Mullin & Hogg, 1999).

Specifically, Self-Categorization Theory (SCT; Turner et al., 1987) predicts that people are more inclined to behave in terms of their group membership than idiosyncratically because their common identity as group members is salient. Generally, a person belongs to many social categories, and a person will access a specific social identity as a function of that identity's salience in a particular social context. Salience is determined by the importance or centrality of a group and its emotional significance to that particular person (Deaux & Major, 1987; Oakes, 1987). Research does demonstrate that people will behave in accordance with the group if the category is salient for self-definition (Brewer & Kramer, 1986; Haslam, Turner, Oakes, McGarty, & Reynolds, 1997; Hogg, Turner, & Davidson, 1990; Terry, Hogg, & White, 1999). Salience refers to the degree to which identification with another category is at a higher or lower level. Therefore, depending on the context, a person will choose which category to subscribe to based on a comparison to what fits best in the social context (Ros, Huici, & Gomez, 2000).

Research suggests when members of a subgroup claim their superordinate identity as being more salient than the subgroup identity, they likely view their out-group more positively, and therefore in-group bias does not occur or is diminished. This phenomenon is termed the Common In-group Identity Model (CIIM; Dovidio, Gaertner, & Validzic, 1998; Dovidio et al., 1997; Gaertner & Insko, 2000; Gaertner et al., 1999; Gaertner, Mann, Murrell, & Dovidio, 1989; González & Brown, 2003; Stone & Crisp, 2007).

Social Identity Theory (SIT; Tajfel & Turner, 1986) and Self-Categorization Theory (SCT; Turner et al., 1987) are often conflated even though they are different. SIT posits a more hierarchical view of social groups in which some social groups hold more value than do others. SCT posits that people are motivated toward membership in social groups to reduce ambiguity. Instead of being contradictory, SCT extends SIT in theory and research, and together these

theories create an explanation of group and intergroup dynamics and behavior (Hogg & Terry, 2000). The research supporting these theories, however, generally occurs in laboratory settings using experimental designs (Smith & Long, 2006; Turner, 1999). Turner (1999), in a review of the SIT and SCT literature, suggests that future research should occur in context with real world situations because self-categorization is always determined by an interaction between characteristics of the person and situation.

SIT and SCT may provide structure for understanding intergroup dynamics of young Black lesbian women of varying lesbian gender identities. Studs, femmes, and stemmes may respectively create separate groups in which each group establishes ways of behaving and distinct cultural norms. In addition, SCT helps explain the link from the individual to group level by explaining the collective internalization of group membership. SCT also seems particularly relevant for people identifying with more than one social category, because it acknowledges multiple identities. SCT specifies how salience of a particular identity in a context may guide various social perceptions and behaviors. For example, young Black lesbian women are at the intersection of identities (e.g., race, sexual orientation, and lesbian gender), and in settings where all identities are shared except lesbian gender identity, that identity may become the one most salient and thus used to guide behavior. One aspect that SIT and SCT does not explain, however, is the process of identity development, and how young women develop their lesbian gender identity.

Identity Development Processes

Erikson's Stages of Psychosocial Development.

Identity development becomes important when trying to understand lesbian gender dynamics because identity internalization is a key process in social group formation (Tajfel &

Turner, 1986). Obtaining a sense of identity involves a developmental process. Erikson (1950; 1968) theorized that throughout life, people encounter intrapersonal conflict, and how a person handles conflict determines future identity growth. He determined eight major conflicts that occur during various life stages. The most relevant stage to this dissertation research is identity versus role confusion conflict (stage five), because people theoretically encounter this conflict during adolescence and its resolution implies identity integration or disintegration. It is also the only stage in which identity development is the focus. When encountering this conflict, an adolescent tries to find resolution through the identity formation process, which involves ego synthesizing (integrating important earlier identifications into more unique ones). For example, a heterosexual young woman may become romantically attracted to another woman, thereby challenging her heterosexual identity. She is in conflict if she sees this attraction as a challenge. Before moving onto healthy adulthood she needs to resolve this conflict by integrating her alternative sexuality into her identity and commit to an identity (e.g., lesbian or bisexual), or continue to identify as heterosexual.

Marcia (1966) categorized four different types of identity resolution: identity achievement, foreclosure, moratorium, and diffusion. Identity achievement occurs when an individual encounters identity crisis, questions and explores options and eventually commits to an identity. For example, a heterosexual woman attracted to a woman may begin to question her own heterosexuality, explore alternate lifestyles such as bisexuality or lesbianism, and eventually commit to a lesbian identity.

Foreclosure occurs when an individual commits to an identity, along with the values, and beliefs of her/his childhood without exploring possible alternatives. S/he carries out family obligations and leads the life expected of her/him instead of making her/his own decisions. For

example, a heterosexual woman with same-sex attractions may deny her attractions and commit to a heterosexual identity because her family taught her that homosexuality was immoral. In foreclosure, she does not explore her same-sex attractions or a lesbian or bisexual identity.

An individual in moratorium is in the midst of exploration and has not yet committed to an identity. For example, a heterosexual woman may be in process of exploring alternate identities (e.g., lesbian or bisexual) without yet making a decision or committing to any sexual orientation identity.

Identity diffusion occurs when a person has neither experienced identity crisis nor commitment. S/he has not explored alternate identities and is not concerned about identity. S/he experiences life day-to-day. For example, a young woman may not identify sexually. She may have other priorities, such that identity issues are not explored. If a young woman is worried about physical safety or hunger, identity development may be halted, and she would therefore be considered to be in a state of identity diffusion.

Marcia's (1966) identity resolutions are not considered developmental stages, but rather categories between which people can cycle. This suggests that identity achievement may not be considered a stable state at the end of a defined process, but one state in an on-going process. An identity-achieved person may cycle through the categories again when s/he experiences incongruity between the self-as-known (real self) and the self that could be (ideal self), which creates stress. To reduce stress, an individual will strive for congruity and stability, which may mean identity reconfiguration (Adams & Marshall, 1996). For example, later in life a person may self-identify as sexual minority. They may have committed to a heterosexual identity earlier in life, but experienced an event or situation that challenged their heterosexual identity, which started them in the process of identity formation again.

Gender

Gender is a standard element of human identity. In general, gender identity refers to a person's sense of maleness or femaleness, by which psychological acceptance of gender generally coincides with biological sex (Green, 1974; Katz, 1986; Money & Ehrhardt, 1972; Spence, 1984).

Society dictates what the concepts of masculinity and femininity mean. In the United States, society determines a specific understanding of what social gender roles and expressions belong with masculinity and femininity, respectively. Definitions of masculinity and femininity, and gender identity, become important because they often guide recreational, academic, occupational, and relationship expectations (Stets & Burke, 2000). They also provide an organizational framework for coping with life transitions (Jackson & Warin, 2000). When confronting uncertainty, people theoretically may adhere to their stereotypic gendered traits and use them for stability. For example, a young stud lesbian may adhere more strictly to her masculine ways when confronting adversity (e.g., violence, unemployment) or uncertainty (e.g., a lack of stable housing) in her environment.

Gender Identity Development

Two theories relevant to gender identity development are learning theory (e.g., direct reinforcement and modeling; Mischel, 1966; Weitzman, 1979) and gender schema theory (Bem, 1981). In learning theory, social contexts shape gender identity. For example, a parent or teacher teaches a child about culturally appropriate femininity and masculinity by directly giving out rewards and punishments, or indirectly modeling gendered behavior, which the child imitates. Direct rewards, punishments, and modeling may include clothing (girls in dresses; boys in pants), object choice, such as toy preferences (dolls for girls; trucks for boys), and behavior

(passivity and dependence in girls; aggressiveness and independence in boys). For example, a mother may compliment a girl for wearing a dress and being soft-spoken while criticizing her for getting dirty or raising her voice. Through rewards and punishments, children learn culturally appropriate ways to look and behave based on their gender (Weitzman, 1979). Indirect learning of gender identity comes from imitating same-sex parents, teachers, peers, or famous people. A child imitates a same-sex person's thoughts, feelings, or behavior because s/he anticipates that s/he will receive the same rewards if s/he acts similarly (Mischel, 1966).

Gender schema theory differs from other gender identity theories because it deals less with content and more with the process of learning about what the differences of male/female and masculine/feminine. In this developmental context, a child, while learning about gender, cognitively creates a heterogeneous network of gender-related associations to organize and guide future perceptions. For example, s/he may learn that boys play sports, are competitive and aggressive while girls play with dolls, are soft-spoken, and friendly. S/he learns to associate those attributes with a certain gender (male or female). As a result, s/he applies a label of male or female when confronting a person with those characteristics. While organizing incoming perceptions from the environment, s/he also begins to internalize gender and characterize her/his own attributes; thus, self-concept becomes assimilated into the gender schema. While learning what is male or female, masculine or feminine, s/he also learns which gendered characteristics should be linked to oneself. S/he internalizes gender and becomes motivated to regulate behavior to align and conform to cultural definitions of femaleness and maleness, as appropriate (Bem, 1981).

All lesbians are women; yet it is unknown how learning theory and gender schema theory apply to lesbian gender identity. According to gender identity theories, there should be little

variation among different women's expression of gender because it is presumed that they have all experienced society in similar ways. These theories do not acknowledge variability and diversity of gender identity expression within each sex.

Gender Consistency vs. Inconsistency

Typically, people are assumed to express from birth predominately masculine (male), or feminine (female) characteristics based on their biological sex. It was once thought that gender was innate and that biological sex determined gender expression. Contemporary thinking, however, views gender as socially constructed. An individual receives cultural messages originating from interactions with his/her family and with larger institutions, such as religious groups and schools, on how s/he should express their gender. Societies tend to assign some classes of social roles to "male" individuals, and some classes of social roles to "female" individuals (as society perceives sexes). Individuals, however, vary in how they express and interpret gender. A person could label herself as female, but see herself as stereotypically masculine. An individual could place oneself along a feminine-masculine dimension of meaning; and this meaning is their gender identity, which guides their behavior (Stets & Burke, 2000).

According to Spence (1984), people subconsciously create consistency across their gender. She theorizes that when incongruence exists between someone's gender and their behavior, a person subconsciously weighs their masculine and feminine qualities against each other to make sure their subscribed gender is most salient and "weighs more." She also proposes that what people pick as gender-congruent and -incongruent characteristics varies from person to person and shifts based on age, role responsibilities, and other life circumstances. According to Spence's theory, a person's perception of gender shifts across the lifespan.

Spence (1984) also theorizes that in most cases people are secure about their gender identity except when encountering new developmental tasks, events that challenge their gender, or unfortunate life events (e.g., loss of a spouse, or infertility). She considers adolescence an insecure time of life. According to this theory, when people become gender insecure, they may try to reduce feelings of inadequacy by participating in compensatory activity. For example, unemployed men may abuse their wives to reinstate their masculinity. When unemployed, a man finds that his masculinity is threatened because he is not able to provide monetarily for his family; therefore, a man may demonstrate aggression to reinstate their masculinity. In sum, people tend to protect their sense of masculinity or femininity at a sub-conscious level in order to stay secure in their gender identity (Spence, 1984).

While some theories may imply consistency within gender, research demonstrates that people only modestly exhibit consistency in displaying male-typical or female-typical behavior across domains (e.g., personality traits, activity preferences, relationship partner preferences, academic pursuits, and occupational preferences). Males may demonstrate typical feminine characteristics in some contexts and vice-versa (Aube, Norcliffe, & Koestner, 1995; Egan & Perry, 2001; Spence, 1984, 1993; Spence & Hall, 1996).

Gender inconsistency may be problematic for extremely gender-atypical people, such as people with gender identity disorder. Gender identity disorder exists when a person wishes to be the other sex and experiences distress when s/he is expected to behave similar to same-sex others or is banned from cross-sex activities (Zucker, 1992). Some research suggests that cross-sex-typed children experience negative mental health and behavior outcomes (see Bailey & Zucker, 1995; Cohen-Kettenis, Owen, Kaijser, Bradley, & Zucker, 2003).

Girls who are tomboys (gender atypical females) do not necessarily view themselves as male, but display “masculine” characteristics such as preferring to play with boys and preferring boys’ activities and toys. Research with tomboys suggests they may not experience the negative outcomes that people with gender identity disorder experience. For example, Bailey, Bechtold, and Berenbaum (2002) found that parents of tomboys tended not to report utilizing mental health services, nor were parents reporting concern about their daughters’ “tomboy” status.

Tomboyism, however, may not be a stable identity. Carr (2007) found that heterosexual women were more likely to describe growing out of tomboyism, whereas lesbian women were more likely to describe having grown into their tomboy self. The tomboy label also was not seen as pejorative. The most negative association to tomboyism was lesbianism.

Gender identity, however, may be multidimensional (Aube et al., 1995; Egan & Perry, 2001; Spence, 1984, 1993; Spence & Hall, 1996), and when separated into different parts, gender identity may begin to explain some variations in experience. For example, Egan and Perry (2001) viewed gender identity as encompassing four dimensions: (1) knowledge of membership in a gender category, (2) perceived similarity to others of the same gender (gender typicality), (3) pressure felt to conform to gender stereotypes from parents, peers, and the self (gender conformity), and (4) attitudes toward gender groups. They found that perceptions of gender typicality contributed positively and directly to a healthy sense of self, while pressure to conform to gender norms contributed negatively. The negative effects of felt pressure on adjustment were more evident for girls than for boys. They also found an interaction where the degree to which gender contentedness predicts self-esteem is a direct function of the degree to which children feel pressure for gender conformity. In essence, children who wish they were the other sex or who desire to engage in cross-sex activities are at risk for problematic development (e.g., low self-

esteem) because they perceive their social environment as telling them they are wrong because they behave in gender atypical ways.

Corby et al. (2007) replicated Egan and Perry's (2001) study with Hispanic and with Black children. They found that gender atypical behavior did not cause problematic development, but pressure to conform did. Black children who felt satisfied with their gender (not if they felt gender typical) reported high self-esteem. Very few associations between gender identity and adjustment for Black children were found, though gender contentedness was strongly linked to self-esteem. In addition, Black and Hispanic children reported more pressure for gender conformity than did White children (Corby, Hodges, & Perry, 2007).

Gender is a social construction; therefore a female can embody very masculine characteristics, but still see herself as female (e.g., butch lesbians). No research explores how gender atypical women perceive the congruence or incongruence between their biological sex and their gender.

Sexual Orientation Identity Development

Most sexual orientation identity development research focuses on gay males. Cass (1979) and Troiden (1988; 1989) conceptualize the sexual minority identity development of both males and females using sequential stage models in which successful completion of each consecutive stage leads to an increase in secure identity development. Research on lesbians, however, finds these models do not fit their identity development process (e.g., Degges-White, Rice, & Myers, 2000; Kahn, 1991). Sexual orientation identity development of sexual minority women may be more circular than linear, with no specified end point. Variability in sexual identity development among lesbians is now considered normative rather than exceptional (Parks, Hughes, & Matthews, 2004). Diamond (1998; 2000) conducted a longitudinal study on the sexual minority

identities of non-heterosexual young women. She interviewed women between the ages of 16 and 23, asking them about their sexual identities, attractions, and behaviors. On interviewing them again 2 years later, Diamond discovered that in the interim half of the participants had changed their sexual-minority identity more than once. Changes in attractions were minimal, and most participants pursued sexual behavior consistent with their attractions. It is noteworthy that 25% of lesbians had sexual contact with men between the two interviews. The majority of participants (85%) were White, and therefore the results may not be applicable to women of other races.

Parks, Hughes, and Matthews (2004) demonstrated that lesbians of Color reached some sexual orientation identity development milestones earlier (1 to 3 years younger) than did White lesbians. Women between the ages of 18 to 83 were asked to recount identity milestones (e.g., first wondering, deciding, and disclosure). Lesbians of Color generally were younger than were the White lesbians when they began to question their sexual orientation; however, they took more time to decide that they were lesbian. Once decided, they disclosed (told someone) of their sexual identity more quickly than did White lesbians. This study also found that older Women of Color were more likely than younger Women of Color to be out to their families, whereas the opposite was true for White lesbians. Younger Women of Color may exercise greater restraint in disclosures to family in an effort to avoid conflicts.

Since lesbians often do not follow a stage-sequenced model of sexual orientation identity development, and since historically most research on lesbians has been with White women or with older Black lesbians, these past theories and results may not apply to young Black lesbians. To address this potential void, the research in this dissertation provides an opportunity for gaining further insight into the sexual orientation development of young Black lesbians.

Age: Emerging Adulthood

Adolescence is a time of self-definition when young people begin to internalize role identities; however, research demonstrates that in our society identity achievement has rarely been reached by the end of high school. Identity development actually continues throughout the late teens, 20s, and sometimes into adulthood (Arnett, 2000; Luyckx, Soenens, & Goossens, 2006; Valde, 1996; Whitbourne & Tesch, 1985). The developmental period after adolescence but before adulthood has been called emerging adulthood (Arnett, 2000; Rindfuss, 1991).

Emerging adulthood (ages 18 to 25 years) distinguishes itself from adolescence and adulthood. People experiencing emerging adulthood do not see themselves as either adolescents or adults. They are in a transition period that typically is filled with frequent change and exploration. During this time, a person experiences new independence—legally and socially. With this new independence comes the ability to explore new social roles, occupations, love interests, and worldviews. One goal of identity explorations in emerging adulthood is to obtain a variety of life experiences before taking on adult responsibilities. Life experiences, however, can facilitate either healthy or unhealthy development. For example, unhealthy development includes the findings that emerging adults often engage in high-risk behavior, including unprotected sex, most types of substance use, risky driving behaviors such as driving at high speeds or while intoxicated, and criminal recidivism (Arnett, 2000; Nelson & Barry, 2005; Piquero, Brame, Mazerolle, & Haapanen, 2002; Schulenberg & Maggs, 2002). One potentially healthy life experience, however, includes engaging in a romantic relationship, which can facilitate identity development.

One distinguishing feature of emerging adulthood is experiencing romantic relationships. For adolescents, dating provides companionship, first experiences of romantic love, and sexual

experimentation, but typically these relationships last only a few weeks or months. During emerging adulthood, however, romantic relationships become more intimate and serious with a focus on exploring the potential for emotional and physical intimacy. In emerging adulthood, romantic relationships last longer than in adolescence, are more likely to include sexual intercourse, and may include cohabitation (Arnett, 2000; Michael, Gagnon, Laumann, & Kolata, 1995). Romantic relationships may also influence both current functioning and later psychosocial development, since interactions with romantic partners are more frequent than were interactions with parents, siblings, or friends during earlier development (Feiring, 1999; Smetana, Campione-Barr, & Metzger, 2006). Therefore, it is necessary to understand romantic relationships in order to understand how to gauge their possible influence on identity and psychosocial development.

In the past in United States. society, marriage dictated the beginning of adulthood. In our current society, since many people refrain from marrying until they are older (age 25 or older) and some decide not to marry or may not legally marry (e.g., people who are gay), marriage becomes an insufficient marker. The most important criteria for adulthood include accepting responsibility for one's self, making independent decisions, and becoming financially independent (Arnett, 1998). In addition, becoming a parent is often sufficient to mark a subjective sense of adult status. People who have had a child tend to view becoming a parent as the most important marker of becoming an adult (Arnett, 1998, 2000).

Research on the development, features, and significance of adolescents' romantic relationships has largely focused on middle-class, White, heterosexual youth (Bouchey & Furman, 2005). Very few research studies focus on the characteristics of emerging adult lesbian romantic relationships regardless of race (Diamond & Savin-Williams, 2005). One study (Elze, 2002) investigated the characteristics of young White lesbian and bisexual women's dating

relationships, as well as dating stress, presence of verbal and physical abuse, and psychosocial factors associated with dating. Results of that study indicated that the women engaged in typical adolescent dating activities (e.g., going to the movies, “hanging out” with each other or with friends, and going out to eat). Many participants reported involvement in serious same-sex relationships, and were satisfied with them even though one-third reported verbal or physical abuse. Most participants reported being sexually active, and had experienced a relationship breakup that exerted a negative impact on their lives. Research on romantic relationships of Black, lesbian, and low-income emerging adults, however, is lacking. The research conducted for this dissertation provides an opportunity to learn more about the relationships of Black lesbian adults of low-income status, especially with regard to romantic relationships, which are important for psychosocial and identity development.

Social settings and context can influence the identity development process (Adams & Marshall, 1996; Beyers, 2008; Kroger, 2000; Smetana et al., 2006; Solomontos-Kountouri & Hurry, 2008; Yoder, 2000). Contexts facilitate or create barriers to identity achievement. Multiple socio-cultural and economic boundaries exist that influence ego identity formation, such as geographic isolation, childhood socioeconomic status, parental domination, educational opportunity, physical limitation, political restriction, ethnicity, gender, age, and religion (Yoder, 2000). For example, low socioeconomic status, and poor educational opportunities are barriers to the identity development process (Beyers, 2008). Communities experiencing conflict and poverty, where family, school, and societal institutions do not offer to children and adolescents consistent expectations, tend to cause youth to engage in unconventional behaviors, role confusion, distrust, and identity diffusion (Ianni, 1989).

The social expectations and context surrounding the identity development of young Black lesbians are virtually unknown, since most past identity formation research only includes White, middle- to upper-class adolescents (Kroger, 2000). Hypothetically, young Black lesbians may experience either environmental barriers that stifle identity development or facilitators that enhance development.

Ethnicity and Sexual Orientation

In theory, Black lesbian women face triple discrimination - androcentric, heterocentric, and ethnocentric biases. Black women often view family as the primary social unit and as a major source of emotional and material support, and a buffer against racism (Greene, 1994b). Therefore, Black lesbians may not jeopardize their connections to their families and communities by forming alliances with the broader lesbian community or even by revealing that they are lesbian. If Black lesbians do disclose their sexual orientation to family, tolerance about a family member being lesbian is usually expressed as silence ("don't ask, don't tell" policy; Bennett & Battle, 2001; Bridges, Selvidge, & Matthews, 2003; Greene, 1994b; Hall & Greene, 2002; Miller & Parker, 2009). Serious conflicts between family members may erupt if a family member openly discloses, labels herself, or discusses being lesbian (Greene, 1994b), which could explain Parks, Hughes and Matthews' (2004) finding that young lesbian Women of Color are less likely than White lesbians to be out to their families.

In addition, many gay and lesbian Black, Latino, and Asian Americans experience rejection from the White-dominated gay and lesbian communities, which leaves them with limited social support, few resources, and a lack of role models to assist them in negotiating the complex process of identity development. This adjustment process may even be more difficult for lesbians than for gay males, as these women find themselves at the bottom of the gender

hierarchy (Akerlund & Cheung, 2000). In addition, due to “gay racism” (Luna, 1989), rarely may Black lesbians feel completely accepted by predominately White lesbian communities (Bridges et al., 2003; Mays, Cochran, & Rhue, 1993).

Gender and Race: Black Women

Black lesbians may not feel completely accepted by their White counterparts because of the unique sociopolitical context of the United States. As stated previously, context can facilitate or create barriers to identity development. Therefore, it becomes important to understand the sociopolitical context behind growing up as a Black woman in the United States.

Since the introduction of slavery in the United States, Black women have been subjected to images and stereotypes projected by society that were designed to make racism, sexism, and poverty appear normal. These images convey messages about proper female sexuality, fertility, and Black women’s roles in the political economy (Collins, 2000; Jewell, 1992). Even though slavery has been abolished, such images continue as part of an oppressive system to impact the psychological functioning of Black women (Dugger, 1988; West, 1995). Efforts to combat these negative images with positive ones have been incomplete, impermanent, limited, and not uniform (Jewell, 1992).

Three of the most prominent historical images of Black women are the Mammy, Sapphire, and Jezebel. The Mammy is the image of the overweight, asexual, faithful, obedient domestic servant who is highly maternal, family-oriented, and self-sacrificing. Culturally, the Mammy image reinforces the stereotype that Black women happily seek multiple roles, rather than perform them out of necessity. It reinforces that Black women are caretakers, and selflessly work to meet the needs of others, such as family, friends, and community (Jewell, 1992; West, 1995). The Mammy image aims to shape Black women’s behavior as mothers. Black women

teach their children the deferent behavior needed to survive within White power structures (Collins, 2000). If Black women internalize this Mammy image, they may suffer increased depression, stress, and hypertension due to increased role strain (West, 1995).

The Sapphire image (also known as the matriarch, “the bad black mother”) is the antithesis of the Mammy. She is hostile with a primary purpose of emasculating Black men with loud, animated verbal assaults. Sapphires are working mothers who spend too much time away from their home, do not supervise their children, are overly aggressive, and unfeminine (Jewell, 1992). Black women have reasons to be angry, but this image implies how that anger is managed. For women who exemplify this image, displaying outrage often in this manner becomes problematic when it masks a real vulnerability or when it represents the only way to express dissatisfaction. Also, relationships are negatively impacted when anger is misdirected toward family members and friends instead of to the problem source. Consequently, when Black women internalize this Sapphire image, they may assume responsibility for the discomfort and fear of others or modify their behavior to appear nonthreatening (West, 1995).

The Jezebel is the seductive, hypersexual woman who uses sexuality to exploit and manipulate men. Jezebels are said to be promiscuous, engage in early sexual activity, become sexually aroused with little foreplay, and see their sexuality as a prized asset (Jewell, 1992). Women who internalize this image may see their sexuality as a manipulative tool rather than an expression of pleasure and caring. Conversely, a woman may also repress her sexuality due to shame and wanting to distance herself from the Jezebel image. She may also inadvertently develop sexual performance anxiety; feel inadequate, and become sexually dysfunctional (West, 1995).

Collins (2005) described contemporary images generated by mass media that focus only on working class Black women. The “bitch” seems to be a combination of the Sapphire and Jezebel. She is aggressive, loud, rude, and pushy and manipulates her own sexuality for her own gain by using her body as a weapon. Consequently, the sexualized bitch leads to another representation of working-class Black femininity, images of poor and working class Black women as bad mothers. Poor/Working class Black women are depicted as being bitchy women who are less attractive to men because they are not feminine; therefore to compensate, these women who are classified as less attractive use their sexuality to “catch” men and, they hope, become pregnant so that the men will marry them. The men, in these images described by Collins, see through this game and leave these women as single mothers who often have little option but to try to “catch” another man or “hustle” the government. These representations create a “natural” Black femininity central to an “authentic” Black culture. Within African-American communities, women who fail to negotiate the slippery line distinguishing an independent Black woman from a controlling Black bitch can find themselves ridiculed, isolated, abandoned, and often in physical danger (Collins, 2005).

The Mammy, Sapphire, Jezebel, and Black bitch images were created as a result of racism and oppression. While White women are considered to have a minority status in our country, they do not have the historical background and context of racism and oppression. Therefore, while White and Black women hold gender as a uniting identity, their experiences may be different based on how society has historically treated them due to the color of their skin. White women do not have the same sociopolitical context as do Women of Color, and have not been bombarded with the same negative societal images that Black women may have

internalized. Therefore, Black women's current expression of gender, and their gender roles, may differ from White women's.

Despite differences in race, Black and White women hold similar ideas on conceptualizations of femininity, but express femininity differently. Cole and Zucker (2007) surveyed 1130 women (326 Black; 804 White) regarding feminine appearance, feminine traits or demeanor, and traditional gender role ideology. Results indicated that Black women were more interested than White women in traditionally feminine behaviors (e.g., wearing attractive clothing, decorating their homes), and were more likely to describe themselves as feminists than were White women.

Black and White women also differ on gender role expression. Binion (1990) explored sex role attitudes and the relationship between psychological masculinity and femininity with both Black and White women. In general, she found that Black women were more likely to identify themselves as androgynous (endorsing both high masculine and high feminine traits). Many androgynous women in the study, however, still held traditional beliefs about the female role in the family, and this was especially true for the Black androgynous women. White women were more liberal about the female role in the family than Black women. Black women were also all heavily invested in mothering. The author suggested that Black women, in order to succeed in the work world, endorse androgynous or masculine traits, but conversely need to maintain traditional female role beliefs to sustain meaningful relationships, especially among men.

Settles, Pratt-Hyatt, and Buchanan (2008) examined similarities and differences in perceptions of womanhood for Black and White women. Using focus groups, they identified five primary themes relevant to both Black and White women; however one theme, strength, only emerged from Black women. Black women learned to be strong from their mothers and other

Black women. Strength included having courage to stand up for oneself, persevering, and refusing to be taken advantage of by others (e.g., men and White people). They saw strength as necessary when living in a racist society. They also mentioned an emotional toll of having to be strong all the time. In addition, Black women more than White women described difficulties and challenges with caretaking, such as the stress of multiple roles—such as needing to work outside the home as well as taking care of those in the home.

While theoretical and historical images portray Black women as sexual, feminine, and subjugated, research demonstrates that Black women endorse androgyny often, and see themselves as strong women. The societal view of them and the reality do not necessarily coincide. Therefore, a young Black woman or adolescent attempting to decide who she is may receive conflicting messages, which could make identity development increasingly complex. This may be especially true for young Black lesbian women, who not only have to negotiate their racial gender identity development, but also their sexual minority identity development. They need to figure out who they are within a tangled web, with the broader society projecting sexuality and femininity, the Black female community projecting strength and androgyny, and their inner sexual orientation identity going against the heterosexual norm.

Gender and Race: Black Men

Since butch lesbians express masculine characteristics it therefore becomes important to understand Black male gender norms and expressions as a relevant influence on Black lesbian gender identity. According to Collins (2005), chronic miseducation and unemployment of young Black men created a society in which some young Black men demonstrate masculinity by being aggressive, tough, and street smart. Sexual prowess also has become an important marker of Black masculinity. Black men may be perceived as not being “Black” enough if they do not

demonstrate sexual competence (Collins, 2005; Wallace, 2007). The ability to conquer women sexually may make up for the lack of control and power Black men experience in the larger society (Wallace, 2007). If a Black male lacks resources to maintain his position as head of his family, he may seek authority by using physical force and violent language. He may become involved in a rigid prescription for toughness, sexual promiscuity, manipulation, and thrill-seeking, and be willing to use violence to resolve interpersonal conflict (Majors & Billson, 1993).

In addition to being aggressive and sexually dominant, some young Black men in the United States are socialized to believe that showing emotions equals weakness or femininity. In a male/female dichotomy, for a male to be feminine is to be less than respectable. Men may be called “wimps,” “sissies,” and “girlymen” for displaying feminine behavior. When young Black men show emotion, their masculinity becomes questioned; therefore, they refrain from showing emotion. Some Black men and women have internalized this idea of manhood and masculinity, thus Black men are not expected to have or want to share their feelings, and as a result, are not taught how to do so (Wallace, 2007).

To survive in a society that marginalizes Black males and punishes them for displaying weakness (e.g., showing emotion), some young inner city Black males in the United States have adopted cool masculinity (“cool pose”). Cool pose involves the ability to be poised under pressure and maintain detachment even during intense situations. Cool pose is a ritualized form of masculinity that includes behaviors, scripts, physical posturing, impression management, and carefully constructed performances. A man demonstrating “cool pose” is mysterious, charismatic, suave, and entertaining while at the same time restrained (e.g., emotionless and stoic). Expressing cool pose suggests competence, high self-esteem, and inner strength while at

the same time masking self-doubt, insecurity, and inner turmoil. Most Black men who adopt cool pose learn it from a young age and learn it for survival. Coolness is a valued trait among some adolescents and often necessary for acceptance (Iwamoto, 2003; Lazur & Majors, 1995; Majors & Billson, 1993).

In general, “cool pose” creates a mask. “Masking” originated during periods of slavery and violent race relations to keep White people puzzled about Black men’s true feelings. Some Black males have become so accustomed to racism and social oppression that they act cool most of the time regardless if they are undergoing a direct threat. In this manner, coolness has become a “conditioned strength.” Sometimes, males who do not conform to standards of coolness are rejected, which enforces the value of coolness. Conversely, coolness can have negative ramifications in relationships when masking true feelings interferes with forming strong bonds with family and friends (Majors & Billson, 1993).

Young Black stud-identified lesbians may model male roles and adopt cool pose or other behavioral patterns that are empirically or stereotypically associated with Black men. They may use the cool pose strategically as a defense against the racism, sexism, and homophobia that they encounter in broader society. It may be that those young Black lesbians who have experienced a high level of stress from their environment endorse cool pose masculinity and adopt high masculine characteristics more frequently than do women who have not experienced such stressful events.

Young Black lesbians embody multiple identities (e.g., age, race, gender, and sexual orientation) and are located in a unique social position where their identities are interdependent. Understanding these lesbian gender categories may provide insight into Black lesbian culture. Applying theories may aid in the understanding of Black lesbian identity development and how

lesbian gender categories create roles for structuring relationships among lesbians. This dissertation explores young Black lesbian identity development, as well as how lesbian gender provides structure for the ways by which young Black lesbians interact in their social environment.

Diversity: A Key Tenet of Community Psychology

Diversity is a main tenet of community psychology, and community psychologists should “promote respect and appreciation for diverse social positions and unique oppressions” (Prilleltensky, 2001, p. 754). Through respect for and appreciation of diversity, personal and collective wellness are promoted (Prilleltensky, 2001); therefore, understanding diversity may be an important step towards the community psychologist’s goal of immediately or ultimately improving community life (Trickett, 2011). Young Black lesbian women of low socioeconomic status occupy a distinctive social position, embody multiple identities, and face unique oppressions (e.g., racism, sexism, classism, and heterosexism). This dissertation studies their experience through qualitative methods that “position the researcher quite close to the raw words and real life through which issues of diversity are most directly manifest” (Brotsky & Faryal, 2006, p. 313).

Harrell and Bond (2006) created diversity guidelines derived from narratives of psychologists who were immersed in community research with diverse groups. The guidelines encompass three diversity principles: community culture, community context, and self-in-community. All three principles highlight the overarching concept of “connected disruption”, the tension between having compassion for the community yet being information-seeking and analytical, which is a critical tension that a community psychologist needs to manage.

(1) The Principle of Community Culture

The principle of community culture stems from the assumption that “every community has multilayered cultural characteristics and diversity dynamics” (Harrell & Bond, 2006, p. 366). Applying this principle involves three focus areas: (1) description with a purpose of coming to the understanding of who constitutes the community, (2) developing an understanding of what daily life is like, and (3) developing an understanding of intergroup and intragroup dynamics. This principle attempts to answer the question: “How do dimensions of diversity and their intersections currently affect this community?” (p. 367) With regard to the community psychologist, this principle requires approaching and working with the community from a position of respect and openness (stance of “informed compassion”; Harrell & Bond, 2006). Upon entering a community, a community psychologist needs to be cognizant of how s/he is being perceived by the community, because oppressed communities may be wary and worried about being either exploited or pitied by researchers. A community psychologist needs to be open and willing to put his/her ego aside (Harrell & Bond, 2006).

(2) The Principle of Community Context

The principle of community context assumes that diversity and community dynamics are influenced by outside forces. One focal area therefore is the need to examine historical context. Another focal area is the sociopolitical climate and the local setting which involves identifying the characteristics specific to the local setting. The third focal area for Principle Two involves institutional structures (e.g., schools, and businesses) and looking at these structures to see the available resources and opportunities for the community. This principle goes beyond description into contextual analysis to understand how context affects community dynamics. The core question is: “What past and present contextual forces affect diversity dynamics in this community?” (p. 367) Applying this principle requires the community psychologist to examine

diversity issues at multiple levels for a more “contextualized understanding,” which is its orienting stance (Harrell & Bond, 2006).

(3) The Principle of Self-in-Community

Principle three assumes that the values, culture, and identity statuses held by a person (e.g., a community psychologist) influences how that person works with diverse individuals, groups, and communities. It is impossible to separate oneself from the work. Applying this principle requires self-reflection. Diversity work is enhanced when the community psychologist is self-aware and conscious of how her/his identity, values, and perceptions relate to those of the community. There are three domains to this third principle of diversity. The first domain involves having the community psychologist explore ways that s/he is similar to or different from the target community. The second domain, dynamics of power and privilege, involves having the community psychologist reflect on his/her privilege in a given setting. The third domain, regarding “biases, alliances, and –isms,” involves the community psychologist uncovering his/her stereotypes, and prejudices. Community psychologists need to question alliances that they may build in the community, as well as the assumptions that they have developed about the community. The core question for the community psychologist is: “How do my multiple social locations and the dynamics of power and privilege affect my work with this community?” (p. 367) Addressing this issue requires an “empowered humility” (the orienting stance), which can create positive community engagement based on deep respect for the community (Harrell & Bond, 2006).

The three diversity principles as outlined by Harrell and Bond (2006) can be realized in a community psychologist’s work in various ways. The present dissertation study used the first principle as an orienting perspective on the inquiry purpose. The second principle guided the

approach to the literature and to gaining community entrée and engagement. The third principle was employed by utilizing qualitative methods that required constant self-reflection. In the last chapter of this dissertation, I will discuss application of these principles in further detail.

Current Study

The current study seeks to fill the gap in the research literature on the diversity of lesbian existence by exploring key normative processes that shape the meaning and function of lesbian gender identity in a sample of young Black sexual minority women of low socioeconomic status. Specifically, the current work seeks to clarify how butches (studs), femmes, and ki-kis (stemmes) develop and internalize their lesbian gender identity and come to view themselves as part of a social group. I investigate the ways in which young women learn what it means to enact a stud, femme, or stemme identity. Given how little research has focused on alternatives to butch and femme, the study highlights characteristics associated with the stemme lesbian gender identity.

In light of past research and relevant theory, this dissertation strives to answer these research questions:

- (1) What are the developmental pathways for progressing to a stud/femme/stemme identity? How do the pathways differ (or converge) across genders?
- (2) What is a stemme identity? How is the stemme gender identity expression enacted? What is the community response to the stemme identity?
- (3) What are the relevant comparison group(s) for studs/stemmes/ femmes? How are they used for comparison?
- (4) How do studs, femmes, and stemmes learn about lesbian gender norms and rules for interaction?

To address the proposed research questions, individual interviews with young Black sexual minority women of low socioeconomic status were conducted. To analyze the qualitative data, modified Analytic Induction was employed which required created of propositions based relevant theory and. on past research literature.

A Priori Propositions

While numerous propositions could be proposed, this study focused on propositions that dealt with lesbian gender identity development and enactment of gender roles. Three out of the five propositions were based on past research literature and theory and two originated from the data and subsequent analyses. The three propositions emanating from literature and theory were as follows:

(1) Social Identity Theory (SIT; Tajfel & Turner, 1986) postulates three processes that influence group formation. In the first process, each individual internalizes her group membership as an aspect of her self-concept. Lesbian women must self-define as femme, butch, or ki-ki and internalize this gender into their own self-concept. This developmental process involves integrating one's lesbian gender identification into their sense of identity. It also suggests that an individual cannot claim identity for another person. Therefore, someone can claim that another woman is femme, however if that other woman does not sees herself as a femme and consequently does not internalize that gender, she will not identify as a member of the femme group.

Current research suggests that butch lesbians acknowledge their gender difference earlier in life then do femme lesbians. Butches also seem to recognize their gender difference first and then their sexual orientation difference. Butch women claim that they were tomboys at a young age, and feel that their female gender does not fit their sense of self. They continue to adopt

masculine characteristics as they develop into adult women. Femme lesbians acknowledge their sexual orientation first and then their lesbian gender. While femme women may endorse that they were tomboys growing up, they eventually align with traditional feminine norms as they develop into adults. This suggests distinctly different developmental pathways for progressing to a butch and femme identity. The research alluding to these differences has sampled predominately White, middle-aged, and mid- to high socioeconomic status women. This dissertation research extended understanding of the developmental process of internalizing gender identity by including Black adolescent and young adult women as participants.

Proposition: Black adolescent lesbians internalize their gender identity through distinct developmental experiences; however, the experiences differ across gender. Butches develop awareness of gender differences first, then sexual orientation. Femmes develop awareness of sexual orientation differences first and then lesbian gender awareness.

I also explored the identity development experiences associated with ki-kis (stemmes) and examined how they are like or unlike butches and femmes in their gender and sexual orientation identity development process.

(2) As described in the literature review, femmes and butches have distinct group characteristics, such as in physical appearance and behavior in romantic relationships. According to Social Identity Theory (SIT; Tajfel & Turner, 1986), a social group (in-group) evaluates and compares itself to another group (out-group). When the groups evaluate each other, they must use certain characteristics for evaluation.

An important process in Social Identity Theory (SIT; Tajfel & Turner, 1986) provides that the in-group members do not compare themselves with every cognitively available out-group, but with a group perceived as relevant. Relevance implies that the in-group and out-group

must be perceived as similar in some sense in order for there to be a useful comparison. When the out-group becomes too similar, however, social competition can erupt due to the threat to the group's social identity (Tesser, 1988). When investigating lesbian gender, there are three prominent lesbian gender groups to consider: femmes, ki-kis (stemmes), and butches (studs). Each group may use a different group for relevant comparison.

Proposition: Specific features and behaviors are used by women to evaluate lesbian gender groups. In general, biological and traditionally-gendered "real" males and females serve as relevant comparison groups for femmes, ki-kis (stemmes), and butches. Femmes, butches, and ki-kis (stemmes), however, each refer to different specific gender groups for relevant comparison in romantic situations. In romantic situations, femmes use butches, studs use femmes, and ki-ki (stemmes) use their partner's gender for relevant comparison.

(3) Direct reinforcement and modeling (learning theory; Mischel, 1966; Weitzman, 1979) may occur when young women are integrating lesbian gender identity. While learning, a woman cognitively creates a network of lesbian gender related associations to organize and guide future perceptions (gender schema theory; Bem, 1981). For example, butch lesbians in Hiestand and Levitt's (2005) study described finding a butch role model who explained butch-femme rules of interaction. They learned what characteristics and gender roles are appropriate for a stud and integrated them into who they are and how they act. They then use these groups of characteristics and behaviors to classify other lesbian women based on this grouping.

Proposition: Studs, femmes, and stemmes learn about lesbian gender norms from others who identify with that respective gender. They model how studs, femmes, and stemmes typically act. Studs, femmes, and stemmes learn which characteristics are associated with each gender, and begin to classify other lesbian women based on those classifications. Studs, femmes, and

stemmes are directly and indirectly reinforced for adhering to their respective gender characteristics, and chastised or penalized socially for going against lesbian gender norms.

CHAPTER 2

Method

This dissertation analyzed individual interview data collected for the purpose of adapting an evidence-based HIV prevention curriculum for a population of high-risk adolescent girls. The qualitative interview questions were designed to document information regarding gender identity, messages received about sex and sexuality, past and current male and female relationships, past sexual behavior with males and females, HIV/STI knowledge, and pregnancy. For the purpose of this study, however, lesbian gender identity focused the analysis and discussion. Specific questions regarding gender identity were explored, as well as development and meaning of gender and its intersection with other identifies that surfaced throughout the whole interview.

Participants

Participants were recruited through the Ruth Ellis Center (REC), an organization providing short- and long-term residential safe space and support services for runaway, homeless, and at-risk lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and questioning (LGBTQ) youth, most of whom are Black. To participate in the individual interviews, participants needed to be between the ages of 15 and 24, biologically female, not in foster care, and Black, and must have had consensual sexual contact with both males and females. The women also had to self-identify as femme, stemme (ki-ki), or stud (butch). In total, 14¹ interviews were completed (5 femmes, 4

¹ The target number of participants was 15 (5 femmes; 5 stemmes; 5 studs); however, despite consistent recruitment efforts, we were unable to recruit a fifth stemme. We also started one interview with a femme who decided to withdraw from the study in the middle of the interview.

stemmes, 5 studs). The age range of participants completing the individual interviews was 16 to 24 years old. Four women were under the age of 18 (2 femmes, 1 stemme, 1 stud). The longest interview was 1 hour and 55 minutes and the shortest was 60 minutes. The average length was 1 hour and 26 minutes. Each participant received \$20 for participation.

Procedures

Participants learned about the study by reading recruitment flyers posted at the REC drop-in center (see Appendix A). The flyer listed a phone number that women who were interested in the study could call. In addition, researchers introduced the study at weekly scheduled women's meetings at the REC. After these meetings, researchers completed a pre-screening form (see Appendix B) with interested women to see if they were eligible to participate in the longer individual interview. Snowball sampling was also employed. The people attending the women's meeting were asked to talk to their friends about the study and to encourage them to participate.

Once a woman was determined to be eligible, she was scheduled for an interview within the following two weeks. Each participant under the age of 18 completed an assent form (see Appendix C), using a loco parentis who was present during the assent process to ensure that the participant understood her rights before agreeing to participate. An adult working at the REC fulfilled this role and was present while the research assistant read the assent form to the participant. For participants 18 and older, researchers read a consent form (see Appendix D) to participants explaining their rights, and then participants were asked to sign the form agreeing to participate. In addition, each participant was asked to provide permission to allow the interview

We were able to recruit one more femme, resulting in six recruited and five completed femme interviews.

to be audiotaped. Each participant was given a blank consent/assent form to take with them in case they had future questions regarding the research study.

Measure

A semi-structured interview protocol (see Appendix E) was created to elicit information regarding gender identity, messages received about sex and sexuality, past and current male and female relationships, past sexual behavior with males and females, HIV/STI knowledge, and pregnancy. The specific questions regarding gender included: “When did you first consider yourself to be a [insert gender identification]? Did you do anything different once you started considering yourself a [insert gender identification]? Do you think of yourself as a typical [insert gender identification]? Why? Why not? How would I know that you are a [insert gender identification]? What makes you a [insert gender identification]?” Discussion of gender roles occurred throughout the interview as well, even if the question did not specifically ask for that information. Since the protocol was semi-structured, probing of responses occurred for clarification and further description.

Data Analysis: Modified Analytic Induction

Data were analyzed using modified analytic induction. Modified analytic induction stems from classical analytic induction (AI). While classical analytic induction emphasizes universality and causality, modified AI focuses on developing descriptive hypotheses that identify behavioral patterns, interactions, and perceptions. Hypotheses stem from previous research and theory or predetermined hunches or assumptions. Hypotheses are revised to fit emerging interpretations during analysis (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Gilgun, 1992).

Gilgun (1995), for example, used modified analytic induction to analyze life history interviews with incest perpetrators. Prior to analysis, she created an analytic framework of justice

and care, and formulated hypotheses, which guided the entire analysis. For example, her hypotheses a priori were “(a) Incest perpetrators have special regard for themselves and do not have regard for the impact of incest on their victims, and (b) incest perpetrators are not morally integrated, and, if they have a moral focus, it will be on justice” (p. 268). As a result of her analysis, she reformulated hypotheses and created new ones. After reformulation, her hypotheses were: “(a) Perpetrators have special regard for the deep pleasure they find in incest, (b) concepts of romantic love and mutuality are prominent in many but not all incestuous relationships, (c) many perpetrators interpret their behaviors as promoting children's welfare and not hurting them, and (d) the sense of love and caring that many perpetrators express for the children are contradicted by behaviors which are sometimes unresponsive and cruel” (p. 270). These hypotheses are descriptive and not relational because they do not posit clear and causal relationships between concepts (Gilgun, 1995). This dissertation research followed a modified analytic induction similar to Gilgun’s (1995).

The main goal of this dissertation analysis was to test propositions which derived from identity, identity development, and lesbian gender literature. These hypotheses were then modified to fit the subjective experiences of young Black lesbian women. Concepts and theories from the literature grounded and sensitized analysis to concrete indicators and processes. The concepts and propositions not previously accounted for in the initial propositions were added, thus some propositions emerged from the data directly.

Data analysis proceeded using Cressey’s (1950) detailed six specific steps to classical analytic induction (See Table 1.; Adler, 1990; Hicks, 1994; Jones, 2004; Robinson, 1951).

Table I.

Six Steps of Classical Analytic Induction

1. Formulate rough definition of phenomenon

2. Formulate hypothetical explanation (proposition/assertion)

3. Study one case and ask whether data fits the propositions

4. If proposition does not fit, reformulate proposition or redefine phenomenon so that the case is excluded. Move on to next case. If case fits, move on to next case.

5. Continue Steps 3 and 4. Practical certainty is attained after a small number of cases examined, but discovery of a single negative case requires reformulation of propositions/assertions.

6. Steps 3 through 5 continue until a universal relationship is established and all negative cases accounted for.

To begin modified Analytic Induction, the first step involved a rough definition of the phenomenon to be explained. This involved doing a literature review of what is known about lesbian gender and theories relating to the development and expression of multiple identities. It also involved looking at the interview data.

Second, a hypothetical explanation of the phenomenon was formulated, in the form of propositions (Miles & Huberman, 1994) or assertions (Erickson, 1986). For the current study, initial propositions were created based on theory and the research on lesbian gender, as well as what was learned from the interview data. For example, Social Identity Theory asserts that identity must be internalized. Past qualitative research with White butch and femme lesbians

indicates that identity development experiences differ across lesbian gender. Therefore, these two ideas were combined to create proposition one: *Black adolescent lesbians internalize their gender identity through distinct developmental experiences; however, the experiences differ across gender. Butches develop awareness of gender differences first then sexual orientation. Femmes develop awareness of sexual orientation differences first and then lesbian gender awareness*

Step three of analysis was to study one case and ask whether the data fits the proposition. To test whether a proposition fit or not, I systematically searched for disconfirming and confirming evidence. Evidence included statements from participants describing their thoughts on lesbian gender, as well as their statements describing events that took place between lesbians in the setting, and the significance of these events on broader aspects of meaning and beliefs. I looked for descriptive evidence, such as interview quotes, that supported a proposition, while at the same time I looked for evidence that was inconsistent with the proposition. I started looking at one interview (case), and looked within it for evidence confirming or disconfirming the propositions. Discrepant evidence (Erickson, 1986) was noted.

Step four involved reformulating the propositions to fit the data. Discrepant evidence was useful in illuminating local distinctive subtleties. I went back to the discrepancies for further analysis and asked myself, “What else might explain this?” I looked for key linkages among the discrepant data by looking for patterns, and tried connecting similar data to the same construct (Erickson, 1986). For example, studs and femmes tended to self-identify as lesbian or gay at the same time they self-identified as their lesbian gender, while stemmes identified as their sexual orientation first and then their gender. Therefore, the first proposition did not accurately fit and needed to be changed. The final modified proposition was:

Black femme and stud adolescent women self-identify as their gender identity and their sexual orientation at the same time. Black stemme adolescent women self-identify as their sexual orientation identity before their gender identity. Stud and stemme women begin to express increased masculine traits right after self-identifying, but do not physically want to become men. Femmes express the same level of femininity after self-identifying. Lesbian gender and sexual orientation identities, however, can change over time. Women who have not integrated a gender or sexual orientation identity into their self concept may be exploring identities or resisting a gender or sexual orientation minority identity due to internalized homophobia or biphobia.

Steps five and six involved repeating the last two analytical steps until all negative cases were accounted for and universal solution established. Since analysis was modified Analytic Induction however, descriptive hypotheses were revised until behavioral patterns, interactions, and perceptions were identified. The strongest propositions were the ones that had the most evidence supporting them from the interviews. If the discrepant cases outnumbered those that fit a hypothesis, the proposition was determined to not fit the data, and was eliminated (Erickson, 1986). A new proposition was generated through induction when the data explaining identity development or intergroup behavior was not included in the already established hypotheses. These new propositions were examined against each case. Thus, the analytic process proceeded iteratively until the data pertaining to lesbian gender roles and development were adequately explained. Ideally, the most frequently occurring events and ideas were understood within the framework (Erickson, 1986).

Data Management

All one-on-one interviews were transcribed verbatim in Microsoft Word. The transcripts were then imported into Nvivo 8 and managed using this software. Data analysis proceeded through the methods stated above.

Verification of the Results

Hypothetically, the evidence (i.e., interview transcripts) may not have provided adequate support for propositions in four ways. The first way, inadequate amount of evidence, means that the data collected did not cover the content needed to support the hypotheses. The second way, faulty interpretative status of evidence, occurs when the data were explained incorrectly due to participants lying or stretching the truth because of distrusting the researcher. The third way, inadequate disconfirming evidence, occurs when the data collected do not sufficiently cover the content to disconfirm or bound a proposition. The fourth way, inadequate discrepant case analysis, occurs when none of the cases challenges a key proposition (Erickson, 1986, p. 140). If any of these four inadequacies were encountered during analysis, it was noted.

According to Harrell and Bond's (2006) diversity principles, Principle Three ("The Principle of Self-in-Community") requires self-reflection because my values, culture and identity can influence my work. I clarified my assumptions regarding lesbian gender before analysis, because my assumptions and biases might have influenced the analysis. I wrote a memo to myself describing past experiences and assumptions about lesbian gender and identity (see Appendix F). My doing this had the potential advantage of bringing my biases to a conscious level, thereby enabling me to more easily identify if my assumptions were infiltrating the analysis. In addition, allowing readers to know of my assumptions provides them with the opportunity to understand the role of my perceptions in the study, and draw their own conclusions regarding the results.

A second technique involved using “rich, thick description” when writing, which entailed descriptions of supporting or contradictory evidence for the propositions using the informant’s words verbatim. This allowed readers to make their own decisions regarding the conclusions drawn. In addition, this richness was combined with an interpretive perspective, which helps make the account valid (Erickson, 1986).

Peer review provided an external check of the process, which helped bring about contradictory perspectives and alternative explanations for the data during analysis. I asked colleagues to comment on my coding and evaluate whether the codes were consistent or not consistent with the stated proposition. I also asked if the quotes selected reflect the code meaning. There were also meetings with my dissertation chair to discuss coding procedures.

Writing memos helped to interpret the phenomena. While analyzing data, I tracked personal experiences, as well as key phrases, and statements that spoke directly to the young women’s experiences. Creating memos helped to interpret meanings, thus helping to reveal essential features of the phenomenon being analyzed (Patton, 2002). Writing memos (or “memoing”) also allowed linkage of different data into recognizable clusters. These clusters helped illustrate instances of a concept. I found that this memoing helped me move from the empirical data to a more conceptual level (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

CHAPTER 3

Results

In this chapter, the principal aspects of lesbian gender identity formation and meaning are presented in four conceptual sections: contextual considerations, identity development, lesbian gender norms, and lesbian gender socialization. These sections delineate key normative processes that shape the meaning and function of lesbian gender identity as found in a sample of young Black sexual minority women.

Contextual Considerations

Environment can impact the development and enactment of gender. Principle Two (“The Principle of Community Context”) of Harrell and Bond’s (2006) diversity principles assumes that community dynamics are influenced by outside forces, thus context becomes increasingly imperative to understand and to consider when attempting to understand the identity development and gender enactment of these young women. Gender identity can provide an organizing framework for coping with life transitions (Jackson & Warin, 2000). When confronting uncertainty, people may adhere to their stereotypic gendered traits and use them for stability. For example, experiencing poverty and violence, combined with a lack of role models, influences adherence to culturally defined notions of what it means to be a man. Barker (2005) found through his qualitative work with low-income young men that sustained exposure to poverty and violence increased the perceived need to have multiple sexual partners.

Unstable microsystem. Because the environment can have an impact on the enactment of gender norms, it becomes imperative to investigate the context in which the participants act. For all of the participants in this study, their microsystem had and has elements of instability. Some of the uncertainty emanated from unreliable relationships with family members and romantic

partners. Five participants² described being worried about or having relationship problems with family members. One stud described a contemptuous relationship with her parents because they sell drugs and always ask her for money.

My dad he's on drugs and stuff. You know it's hard for me to cooperate with that. And my mom asking me for money already and she's supposed to be a drug dealer. You supposed to have money (Stud, Age 16).

St2's mom lives in Africa and St2 and her siblings have not heard from her for some time; nobody knows where she is.

My mom lives in Africa, and I haven't heard from her in a while. ... I would just like to hear from her, make sure she's okay... (St2; Stemme, Age 20).

F2 is worried about her brothers, who might retaliate against a neighbor who murdered their cousin.

My little cousin got killed. He was like a brother to me. ...The guy who killed him is actually a neighborhood guy ... My brother is trying to get retaliation. And it worries me because I don't want nothing to happen to my brother... (F2; Femme, Age 20)

F3 discussed being depressed because her daughter was taken by Child Protective Services and she wants to regain custody. She also described having problems with her mother, who offered to help raise F3's daughter while F3 finished her education, but then reneged. F3 then had to drop out of high school.

² All participants were assigned identifiers to help ensure confidentiality and to denote lesbian gender. Femme-identified participants' are identified by the letter "F" and then a number (F#). Stemmes are assigned the letters "St" and then a number (St#). Studs are assigned the letter "S" and then a number (S#).

Somebody told the child services my momma wasn't takin' care of me and my daughter. And me not being 18, I can't get no financial aid and stuff, to take care of my daughter. So, I had to give her-- I gave my daughter up to somebody I knew who could take care of her. ... My momma said she was going to help me with the baby. She was going to watch the baby while I go to school, but then she changed her mind after I had the baby. So I had to drop out of school to take care of my daughter. So now it's hard for me to get back in school (F3; Femme, Age 17).

In addition, St1 (mentioned a contemptuous relationship with her biological father who is serving time in jail. She said, *"My dad not being in my life for so long ... my biological dad didn't care... he in jail now"* (Stemme, Age 18).

Regarding romantic partners, participants expressed worries about their romantic partner being unfaithful (S2 and S3) or not being emotionally supportive (St1). One participant (St4) mentioned that she has an unstable relationship status with her girlfriend. She stated,

She is actually my ex-girlfriend, we do live together, and we still have sex every now and then. So, we're in the future supposed to get together when we get done with school and get everything situated. So I guess I have a girlfriend, and then I don't (Stemme, Age 17).

While these two young women plan to be a couple in the future, at the present time St4's relationship is unstable. In the case of F1, while she stated that she wanted to settle down with her boyfriend, she thinks that *"he's tryin' to get [her] pregnant"* and *"he been tryin' real hard not to use [condoms]..."* F5 also *"had to get a restraining order"* against her ex-boyfriend for being threatening. These contemptuous and unreliable relationships may obviously create or contribute to feelings of instability for these participants.

Poverty. Looking outside the microsystem into the participants' community and macro system, more factors of instability exist. The participants live in a city devastated by the recent economic downturn, where the unemployment rate exceeded 30% at the end of 2009 (Michigan Senate Democrats, 2009). Therefore, finding a job is difficult for most people and even more difficult for people who are young and gender nonconforming. All participants described symptoms of living in poverty (see Reed, 2010). Participants described precarious living situations, such as living in transitional housing (S4), shelters (St2), condemned housing (St4), or by couch surfing (S1). Many participants mentioned having general money problems (F2, S2, S3, and F5). Two participants in particular discussed illicit methods of obtaining money. For example, one participant while pregnant, "*hustled*" and sold drugs to save money to use to care for her baby because she was too young to work legally. She also mentioned having sex with a neighbor so he would buy her food and diapers.

It kind of made me feel kind of funny cuz I had to have sex with somebody just to get somethin'. [It] kind a made me feel like one of these little prostitutes. But then I knew I wasn't. I was just tryin' to-- that's how life is if you need somethin' and that's the only way you can get it. You have to do it just to live. And I needed the stuff so I did it. But it kinda made me feel uncomfortable cuz it made me feel like I'm a prostitute trickin' for money. But I'm not. [I'm] just doin' somethin' to help my daughter and get stuff I need. And people couldn't help me get it so I had to do somethin' to get it. I couldn't work cuz I was too young so I had to do somethin' (Femme, Age 17).

In addition, another participant's parents were drug dealers. The lack of available licit employment, money, and shelter makes it difficult to meet basic needs. This uncertainty of

meeting basic needs may then create an impetus to gravitate towards stability, which for participants may have included adhering to strict gender rules.

Violence and safety. Almost all participants stated they experienced violence perpetrated against them or against people they love. Two participants mentioned robbery. S2's "mom got robbed" and F3's house was broken into and she was afraid to be in the house by herself. Despite being asked to only recall consensual sexual experiences, five participants disclosed experiencing rape, with one recounting parental incest that resulted in pregnancy and abortion, and another recounting a violent gang rape resulting in a sexually transmitted infection. It is possible that even more participants may have experienced rape or incest but may have chosen not to disclose, especially since they were not asked to.

In addition to rape, participants experienced physical violence. One stud (S5) was physically threatened and assaulted for looking like a man. Two participants disclosed being effected by gun violence. One femme's (F3) partner was shot and killed in her home while F3 was pregnant with their child.

[My girlfriend] ... and best friend they was goin' out of town to go to a club, a gay club they heard about and her friend got into [a fight] with somebo-, with some man ... So as they drivin' back after she got into it with the man ... So the next day my girl had just called me, ... "Babe I'm about to come over." And like not even twenty, thirty minutes later her momma called, cryin' and stuff, talkin' about "my baby gone." I'm thinkin' she's talkin' about our baby went somewhere left and stuff. She like "No, my baby dead." So that just shocked me cuz I was like five, six months pregnant with the baby, so it just, shocked me so. Come to find out, her, the guy...found her ID. They came back and shot up

her house. And her best friend didn't get shot. My girl got shot in the heart and died instantly (Femme, Age 17).

Another femme's (F2; Femme, Age 20) cousin was murdered. Such experiences related to poverty and violence compound the experience of living in a heterosexist, homophobic, and racist society. For example, all participants experienced heterocentric or more overtly homophobic remarks and attitudes (see Reed, 2010) in addition to the situational violence. In addition to being on the receiving end of violence, studs in particular may at times be the perpetrators. Two studs specifically mentioned having served time in juvenile detention centers.

An unstable environment of profound poverty coupled with raw violence may impact enactment of lesbian gender. Participants were young adults (16 to 24 years old) grappling with very "adult" problems in a context unsuitable for positive youth development. Problems that accompany violence and poverty combined with the transitions common for emerging adults create instability. Adherence to rigid gender norms may be one way that these young women gain stability.

Identity Development

Social Identity Theory (SIT; Tajfel & Turner, 1986) postulates processes that influence group formation. In one process, each individual internalizes her group membership into her self-concept. It therefore follows that lesbian women must self-define as being members of their lesbian gender (e.g., stud, femme, or stemme) in order to internalize the group membership as part of their self-concept. Once a woman's gender has been internalized, she will begin to enact the behavioral expectations associated with her lesbian gender group. In general, people are more inclined to behave consistent with the norms of their group because their common identity as group members is salient (Deaux & Major, 1987; Oakes, 1987).

I initially proposed that Black adolescent lesbians would internalize their gender identity through distinct developmental experiences, which would differ among these lesbians across gender. I suggested that butches or studs would first develop awareness of their gender and then develop awareness of their sexual orientation. I proposed that femmes would develop awareness of their sexual orientation first and then develop lesbian gender awareness. I found that these propositions were not entirely consistent with the data and therefore required modification (see Table II).

Table II.

A priori and Modified Propositions

A PRIORI PROPOSITION	MODIFIED PROPOSITION
<p>1 Black adolescent lesbians internalize their gender identity through distinct developmental experiences; however, the experiences differ across gender. Studs develop awareness of gender differences first, then sexual orientation. Femmes develop awareness of sexual orientation differences first, and then lesbian gender awareness.</p>	<p>Black adolescent femmes and studs self-identify as their respective gender identity and their sexual orientation at the same time. Black adolescent stemmes self-identify as their sexual orientation identity before their gender identity. Studs and stemmes begin to express increased masculine traits right after self-identifying, but do not physically become males. Femmes express the same level of femininity before and after self-identifying. In general, lesbian gender and sexual orientation identities are fluid and do change over time. The women who do not integrate a gender or sexual orientation identity into their concept of self continue to explore identities and resist a gender and/or sexual orientation minority identity.</p>
<p>2 Biological and traditionally-gendered “real” males and females serve as relevant comparison groups for femmes, ki-kis (stemmes), and butches (or studs). Femmes, butches, and ki-kis (stemmes), however, each refer to different specific gender groups for relevant comparison in romantic situations. In romantic situations, femmes use studs, studs use femmes, and ki-kis (stemmes) use their partner’s gender for relevant comparison.</p>	<p>Studs use males as a reference group for comparison on how they would like to be, and use females for how they would not like to appear and behave. Stemmes use males and females for comparison; however, their frame of reference changes based on context (e.g., mood state and relationships). In romantic relationships, stemmes use the lesbian gender of their partner for relevant comparison and adopt the opposing gender (i.e., femme with stud; stud with femme). They also do not enact extreme feminine and masculine appearance and behavior. In contrast, femmes use females as a reference group for comparison on how to appear and use studs for how not to appear. Studs, femmes, and stemmes do not follow biological and heteronormative male and female gender standards for sexual pleasure.</p>

Table II. (cont'd)

3	<p>Studs, femmes, and stemmes learn about lesbian gender norms from others who identify with that gender. Other studs, femmes, and stemmes model for new incoming women on how they typically act. Studs, femmes, and stemmes therefore learn which characteristics are associated with each gender and begin to classify other lesbian women consistent with those classifications. Studs, femmes, and stemmes are directly and indirectly reinforced for adhering to their respective gender characteristics and chastised or penalized socially for going against lesbian gender norms.</p>	<p>Studs are socialized by other studs in how to enact their gender. Studs learn how to be a stud through interacting with others in their community. The older studs teach the younger studs how they should behave sexually. Studs also learn their role through interacting with older and more experienced femme sexual partners. Femmes do not learn to be femme or act feminine from other femmes. Stemmes are not taught how to be stemme from other stemmes. In general, studs, femmes, and stemmes learn which characteristics are associated with each gender and begin to classify other lesbian women consistent with those classifications. They are directly and indirectly reinforced for adhering to their respective gender characteristics and chastised or penalized socially for going against lesbian gender norms.</p>
<i>Proposition from data & subsequent analyses</i>		
4	<p>Young Black lesbian women reflect the gender norms of their heterosexual counterparts. Femmes and stemmes reflect young Black female gender norms, and studs reflect young Black male gender norms.</p>	

I found that becoming aware of being lesbian or gay and stud or femme seemed to happen simultaneously for nearly all participants. Femmes and studs either equated their lesbian gender with their sexual identity or came out as both at the same time (see Table III).

Table III.

Ages of Gender and Sexual Orientation Self-Identification

ID	Gender ID	Age	Sexual Orientation ID	Age of GI [*]	Age of SO ^{**}
F1	Femme	21	None	14	N/A
F2	Femme	20	Lesbian	15	15
F3	Femme	17	Gay	9	9
F5	Femme	24	Gay/Lesbian	15	15
F6	Femme	16	Lesbian	14	14
St1	Stemme	19	Lesbian	17	16
St2	Stemme	20	Lesbian	14	5
St3	Stemme	22	Lesbian	17	Missing
St4	Stemme	17	Lesbian	15	11
S1	Stud	18	Trans/Lesbian	14	14
S2	Stud	19	Gay	14	14
S3	Stud	24	Lesbian	18	18
S4	Stud	16	Gay/Lesbian	14 [◇]	12
S5	Stud	20	Gay	12	12

^{*} Age of Gender Identity (GI) self-identification; ^{**} Age of Sexual Orientation (SO) self-identification; [◇] S4 switched from femme, stemme, and then stud

Thus, Black adolescent femme and stud women self-identified as their gender identity and their sexual orientation at the same time. Savin-Williams (2005) posits that many younger lesbians start to identify according to their gender expression rather than their sexual orientation identity; for these young women, the two labels may be synonymous. Therefore, calling oneself either stud or femme implies lesbianism, sexual minority status, or engaging in same-sex sexual behavior. For example, when I asked participants about their lesbian gender experience, some participants (F2, F3, and F5) replied with reference to their sexuality, suggesting that part of what defines gender identity is being attracted to women. For example, F2 was asked about her experience coming out as a femme, but talked about discovering her love of women.

I: And what happened to make you come out as a femme- ...

F2: ...So, um it began in choir class I had in high school and it was one of my friends named Brittany. She identified herself as a stud. Ya know we talked and we hung out and we got to hangin' out every day and all this and I was just like "Wow, like I'm so comfortable, ya know, bein' here." So she introduced me to the [name of the Center] and I got to comin' and I'm like "Okay ya know I can be myself." And I tell my momma like, "Ya know, Ma, I think I might like girls...." (Femme, Age 20).

Although the interviewer specifically inquired about her gender identity, F2 immediately began explaining the context surrounding when she started thinking of herself as a woman who likes women.

Just as some femmes conflated their gender identity and sexual identity, when S2 was asked about first considering herself to be stud, she described her behavior as starting to have sex with females. For example, S2 stated that not only did she start dressing like a male, she also started having sex with females:

I: When did you first consider yourself to be a stud?

S2: [phone rings and is turned off by interviewee] Umm, 9th grade. I think I was like 14.

I: Okay. And after that time, did you do anything differently?

S2: Um. Yes.

I: What did you do?

S2: I really started dressin' like a male. Um, started having sex with females... (Stud, Age 19).

For S2, being attracted to and having sex with women constituted considering herself a stud.

Although they did not respond to questions regarding gender in terms of sexuality, three participants (F6, S3, and S5), stated that they came out as their gender and as a sexual minority at

the same time. S3 was asked specifically what she meant by “coming out” and stated that she came out concurrently as a stud and as a person who likes to have sex with women.

S3: ...Like when I started really becoming a stud-stud, when I came out, like I started to be more aggressive, then I started dating a lot of females and that's basically it.

I: Yeah. When did you come out?

S3: Um... I would say when I was 18.

I: When you were 18. And--coming out for you meant coming out as a person who wants to have sex with women or coming out as a stud?

S3: Coming out as a person who likes to have sex with women and a stud (Stud, Age 24).

Both S4 and St4 came out as lesbian and their lesbian gender at the same time; however, each changed their gender identity over time. S4 and St4 self-identified as different gender identities before committing to stud and stemme identities, respectively. From a developmental perspective, Erikson (1950; 1968) would assert that they encountered the identity versus role confusion conflict of development, which involves finding resolution through ego synthesizing (integrating important earlier identifications into unique ones). They could have achieved an identity (e.g., femme), but began to realize that there was incongruity between the self-as-known (real self) and the self that could be (ideal self). To reduce the stress, they switched identities to strive for congruity and stability, thus reconfiguring their identity (Adams & Marshall, 1996). For example, S4 self-identified first as a femme, then a stemme, and then settled into a stud identity. She described this experience:

I was just going through a change and I was kind of confused at the age 13 and 12. So I started, like I found myself looking at girls, ya know what I mean? So when I turned 13, I started datin' girls and boys. And somethin' happened in, in my past, and then I just went

straight girls when I turned 14. I was a femme at first. Then I was a femme and a stud. So I'll dress like a boy. I was a stemme or so they call it. Again when I turned 14, I was like, "Forget it, I might as well dress like a boy and put 'this is me.'" Ya know, I always been boyish all my life, so I was like, "I'm a man" [Laughs]. So that's about it (Stud, Age 16).

S4 stated that an event (“*somethin’ happened in, in my past*³”) triggered her to become only interested in girls. This event could have spurred an identity crisis. She then stated that she first identified as femme then made a stepwise transition toward a more masculine identity. She seemed to experience incongruence between her femme and stemme identities, since she had “*always been boyish.*” Her boyish ways may not have been congruent with a femme or stemme identity, which implies appearing and acting feminine all or part of the time. Therefore, she switched to stud in order to find congruence between her boyishness and her gender identity.

St4 switched from a femme identity to a stemme identity. She stated,

St4: Um, when I first came out and told my mom I was gay, then that's when I considered myself to be a femme.

I: Okay, and did you do anything different when you started calling yourself a femme?

St4: Not really. I had more so um tomboy qualities than female qualities. Because my mom worked a lot, so my big brother raised me. So I would dress as he did, and ya know, be up under him a lot. So that's probably why I was only a femme for a couple years.

I: Mhm. And then what happened to start calling yourself a stemme?

St4: Um, I got into wearing boy clothes more so than girl clothes.

I: So it's about the clothes?

³ The “something in her past” she is referencing may be a sexual assault involving a gang rape.

St4: Yea, and one would say is it's almost always about the clothes. Because I feel more comfortable as a stemme with the clothing. But as far as relationship-wise, I more so meet femmes than I do studs. So when I meet the femmes I have the dominant role, so there be more so the boy side than the girl side (Stemme, Age 17).

St4 thought that she felt more comfortable as stemme because of the masculine clothes that stemmes are permitted to wear socially. A femme identity would not permit the expression of masculine qualities that the stemme identity allows; therefore there was incongruence between her masculine qualities and her femme identity. She stated, *"I had more tomboy qualities than female qualities... so that's probably why I was only a femme for a couple years."* She switched her gender identity to stemme to align her identity with her "real" self (masculine).

Though S4 and St4 each changed their gender identity over time, they both stated that they chose a gender identity at the same time that they came out as a sexual minority. They still equated their gender identity with their sexual minority status, even though it took them a while to settle on the specific gender expressions that fit. For example, S4 stated, *"I found myself looking at girls"* and St4 stated, *"when I first came out and told my mom I was gay, then that's when I considered myself to be a femme."*

Because femme and stud women generally came out as their lesbian gender and sexual orientation identity at the same time, it was impossible to separate 'coming out' experiences to examine them independently. Studs and femmes, however, each noted different experiences associated with coming out as their gender.

Femmes kept the same level of femininity after self-identifying. All femmes stated that they were feminine before identifying as femmes. When they started identifying as femme, they did not change anything about themselves to conform to the femme norm. To be femme,

according to participants, is to be female. As one femme participant mentioned, “*femme means female* (F5; Femme, Age 24).” Therefore, since femmes were born female and expressed feminine traits consistent with their biological gender, they may not have needed to change to fit within the confines of a femme gender label. As one femme asserted, “*Actually I been a femme all my life*” (F2; Femme, Age 20). Femmes already possessed feminine characteristics consistent with the larger society’s expectations of females. They already adhered to conventional female aesthetics, such as getting their “*hair done*,” “*nails done*,” “*eyebrows arched*,” (F2; Femme, Age, 20), as well as wearing “*skirts*,” and “*tight t-shirts*” (F1; Femme, Age 21). They also behaved within traditional female norms (as will be described in more detail later).

Studs began to express increased masculine traits right after self-identifying. Stud participants said they had masculine tendencies from a young age, often describing themselves as “*tomboys*” before identifying as stud (S2, S3, S4, and S5). Tomboys (gender atypical females) display “masculine” characteristics, such as preferring to play with boys and to favor boys’ activities and toys (Hall, 2008). As one stud (S3) mentioned:

I always was a tomboy in my younger childhood days. So I never really was girly-girl.

But we played football in the back with the boys, basketball. Whatever boys did, I wanted to do... (Stud, Age 24).

Stud participants, by describing themselves as childhood tomboys, integrated masculine traits into their self-concept before coming to think of themselves as studs. They “*grew into*” (S3; Stud, Age 24) their stud identity as they aged. Carr (2007) found that heterosexual women were more likely to describe growing out of tomboyism, whereas lesbian women were more likely to describe growing into a tomboy self. Perhaps not all lesbians (e.g., femmes) grow into lesbianism from being a childhood tomboy, although stud-identified lesbians may tend to do so.

All studs described accentuating their masculine traits once they identified as stud, in order to create a male persona. Three out of the five studs described making physical expression changes (e.g., clothing or “swagger”), while one stud described a notable personality change.

I: Okay, and once you started considering yourself to be a stud, what did you do?

S4: ... My whole wardrobe changed. I threw all my girl clothes away. I started to act like a boy. I changed my. Like. I didn't change my voice but my voice got a little deeper as I talked and stuff. Like I really used to have a really girly voice. And I didn't care for it too much and it was too sweet. So I don't know so like I changed my whole swagger. My whole wardrobe, everything was changed.

I: Okay, and did you act differently or behave differently?

S4: Yeah, I act like a boy, everything was boy, I spitted. [Laughs] I used to hang around a lot of boys, lot of females that was like that, was like gay or lesbian or bi.

I: So your behavior changed too.

S4: Uh huh. [Yes] (Stud, Age 16).

The one stud (S3) who did not mention changing her physical expression described becoming “more aggressive” and “started dating a lot of females.” Aggressiveness is a stereotypically masculine trait.

Stud participants mentioned that once they self-identified as such, they transitioned to more masculine appearance and attitude than before self-identifying, which contrasts with the femme's experience of not making any overt changes. Exploring masculinity may be an integral component of stud or butch identity development. Hiestand and Levitt (2005) explored “growing up as a butch lesbian” by analyzing qualitative interviews with 12 butches (11 White, 1 Latina) between the ages of 23 and 62. They found that acceptance of lesbian identity led to active

gender exploration. The butch lesbians began to see that their masculinity was sexually desirable instead of being something to be ashamed of and minimized. Although stud participants in this present dissertation study did not mention being ashamed of their masculinity, we cannot rule out that they might have tempered their masculinity to fit within female norms before identifying as stud. Once self-identified as stud, in essence, they were given permission to display more masculine traits, especially because, as Hiestand and Levitt found, being masculine meant being sexually desirable. The young stud participants in this dissertation study, however, did not mention a link between their masculinity and being sexually attractive.

Stemmes self-identified as their sexual orientation identity before their gender identity.

Stemme participants recounted different self-identification experiences than those of studs and femmes. Stemmes tended to self-identify first as lesbian or gay, and then as stemme (see Table III). St1 recognized she was gay at age 16 and at 17 years old was leaning toward a stemme identity. St2 knew she was gay since she was in kindergarten (around age 5) and adopted a stemme identity at age 14. It is unknown at what age St3 came out as gay, but she came out as stemme at 17 years old. St4 recognized she was gay at age 11 and came out as stemme at age 15. In general, stemmes' realization of their sexual minority identity predated their gender identity.

The stemme identity is a relatively unknown and invisible identity within the broader community and within the lesbian community itself. For example, four out of five of the femme participants and three out of the five studs claimed they did not know a stemme. Additionally, no participant said they ever have dated a stemme. The invisibility of stemmes may be due to the nature of how stemmes present their gender. They present as either femme or stud depending on how they feel that day or in response to the gender of their romantic partner. For example, St1 described how stemmes can dress as either femme or stud:

I: Okay, so say I were to just see you walking down the street, how would I identify you?

St1: I think now you'd probably identify me as a stud, cuz of my loose fitting pants, and my loose fitting shirt....Usually I got my femme wear on. [laughing]

I: How is your femme wear different than your stud wear?

St1: I would wear my casual shoes, my tight pants, my tight shirts, and earrings, or some lip gloss or something like that.

I: So how do you decide which way to dress when you get up in the morning?

St1: The way I'm feelin'. Today I wasn't feelin' like all that...tight clothes stuff like that, just wanted to...relax (Stemme, Age 18).

St1 described how she has “*femme wear*” and “*stud wear*” and she dresses as either based on the way she feels. She also stated that she would probably be identified as a stud by others based on appearance. Stemmes, however, do not change their identity label to match their outward appearance. For example, St1 is a stemme in her “*stud wear*.” Her gender expression changes, but not her gender identity.

Regarding development, stemmes did not describe being “stemme” all their lives; however, they did indicate that being stemme was just being themselves. Being stemme does not seem contrived, but natural. For example, when St3 was asked to compare herself to other stemmes she stated, “*I’m myself*,” and when St2 was asked about her behavior once she considered herself stemme, she stated, “*I had always been that way ... I still dress the same, I still talk the same, act the same, walk the same.*”

Similar to studs, three out of the four stemmes described expressing more masculine traits after self-identifying as stemme. They described expressing their masculinity to less of an extreme than did studs. For instance, they did not take on the male persona per se, only the outer

expression of masculinity through their choice of clothing. Their masculine changes were surface changes. For example, St1 described outerwear changes, but no change in behavior. When she was asked if she did anything different once self-identifying as stemme, she stated:

Probably the way I dressed.... Usually I'm like wear the girly clothes, tight shirt, tight pants, stuff like that. Then I started wearing my loose-fitted shirts, and my baggy pants, or my tight shirt, or my baggy pants, or something like that.

I: Did you change anything about the way you acted?

St1: No (Stemme, Age 18).

The one stemme (St2) who did not mention increasing masculine expression did state that she had tomboy tendencies as a child. She also mentioned that she did not consider herself a typical stemme. She mentioned that she does not express masculinity to the extent of a typical stud through the way she dresses.

I: And are you a typical stemme?

St2: Yea. But I don't think most people would think so, because of how I dress. Like I said, my shirts be tight, and a stud would probably never wear a tight shirt unless it's like a polo. And my shirts be like baby-tees, and jeans (Stemme, Age 19).

St2 recognized that she does not dress completely like a stud because she wears tight shirts that bring attention to a female aspect of her body, her breasts. Wearing tight shirts, however, is not enough to justify calling herself femme. When she dresses as a femme, she does not dress as femininely as a femme would dress because she dresses “*more conservatively.*” She “*wouldn't wear dresses. [She] wouldn't wear heels, [or] booty shorts.*” Even though St2 stated that she does not dress masculine enough to be “stud” or feminine enough to be “femme,” she still

considers herself a stemme. She switches frequently enough between the two genders to consummate a stemme identity.

Fluidity and uncertainty. While the majority of participants ($n = 11$) seemed committed to their sexual orientation and gender identity, three participants (F1, S1, and St1) provided evidence that they were not completely certain of their sexual orientation or lesbian gender identity at the time of the interview. One might assume that those at younger ages would be less certain of their identity; however, that was not the case. The three participants who were uncertain were all 18 years old or older (F1 = 21 years old; S1 = 18 years old; St1 = 19 years old). They also were not new to being sexual minority. F1, while it is unknown when she first self-identified as sexual minority, began to self-identify as femme 7 years before she participated in the interview. In addition, S1 self-identified as lesbian or gay 4 years before the interview, and St1 had self-identified as lesbian 3 years prior to the interview. Therefore, as a person ages, their identity does not necessarily become more stable. Sexual orientation identity may fluctuate at any age. In addition, one might assume that if a person has self-identified as gay or lesbian for many years that they are fairly solidified in their sexual orientation identity; however that may not be true in all cases, because the participants uncertain in their identity had years pass since first self-identifying. Theoretically, a person could have self-identified as gay or lesbian for years and be immersed in the sexual minority community and still question their sexual orientation.

One femme participant (F1) did not self-identify as a sexual minority woman. She stated that she identified as a femme, but did not self-identify as lesbian, gay, or bisexual, even though when we initially interviewed her during the pre-screening recruitment process she stated that she did identify as gay or lesbian. F1 was the only participant to state that she was currently in romantic relationships with both a male and a female.

I: Okay, and some people in addition to calling themselves a femme, a stud, a stemme, versatile, also may use words like gay, lesbian, bisexual, queer, whatever. Do you use any other terms?

F1: No because the way I think, I wouldn't call myself bisexual, so I don't really say it and I wouldn't call myself a lesbian either (Femme, Age 21).

F1 was also integrated into a gay family⁴. During the interview, she said that she would talk to her gay dad about sexuality. She hinted that she might be exploring heterosexuality. She looked to her gay dad for acceptance regarding her choice to live as heterosexual. She stated,

[My gay family] accepted me for who I was. And we all been a family for like 5 years, so I listen to them. They just tell me, like my gay father, he told me because I thought he would be mad, because I made a decision that I would be straight for a while. And he, I thought he was going to be mad at me, so I asked him. And he was like, "No, I love you, no matter what. You still my baby. I love you no matter what. You decide to be straight. You decide to be gay, but whatever it is, I still love you" (Femme, Age 21).

⁴ Historically, Black women have defined family broadly to include extended family, fictive kin, "othermothers," and communities of care (Collins, 1991). In addition, "families of choice" often exist in gay and lesbian communities because some biological families fail to nurture their gay and lesbian members (Dahlheimer & Feigal, 1994). "Chosen families" are used for support otherwise lacking. Using familial language indicates the importance placed on gay and lesbian peers, situates people in the gay world, connotes to others their position in the community, and individuates them on the basis of their gender identity and role within their family (Reed & Valenti, under review).

In addition, when asked about her future, F1 stated that she wanted to become pregnant by her boyfriend and stop having sexual relationships with females, hinting that she may be still exploring her sexual orientation. She saw herself as “*pregnant.... and still with [her] boyfriend and not messin’ with females.*” F1 seemed uncertain of her sexual orientation identity. She first identified herself as femme and lesbian during the pre-screening process, then during the interview she claimed she did not identify as lesbian, hinted toward exploring heterosexuality, and stated that she saw herself as settling down with a man. In addition, F1 has two lesbian sisters (1 stud; 1 femme), and a mother who “*likes females*”⁵. Her family’s openness and acceptance may have created a climate in which she felt comfortable with exploring her attraction to males and females.

Regarding the participants such as F1 who described changing their gender identity over time, Erikson (1950; 1968) would assert that F1 is probably encountering the identity versus role confusion conflict of development. Specifically, F1’s relationship with her boyfriend and the idea that she wants to become pregnant and settle down with a male challenge a sexual minority identity. According to Erikson, before moving onto healthy adulthood, F1 needs to resolve this conflict by integrating her sexuality into her identity and committing to an identity (e.g., lesbian, bisexual, or heterosexual).

Marcia (1966) categorized four different types of identity resolution: identity achievement, foreclosure, diffusion, and moratorium. Identity achievement occurs when an individual encounters identity crisis, questions and explores options and eventually commits to an identity. Foreclosure occurs when an individual commits to an identity, along with the values, and beliefs of her/his childhood without exploring possible alternatives. Identity diffusion occurs

⁵ F1’s mother’s sexual orientation and gender identity are unknown.

when a person has neither experienced identity crisis nor commitment. An individual experiencing moratorium is in the midst of exploration and has not yet committed to an identity. F1 may be in moratorium. She is still figuring out where she belongs in accordance to her sexual orientation identity. She had sexual relationships with males and females, was dating both a male and a female at the time of the interview, but saw her future as being with a male. She perhaps was still making sense of her experiences before she commits (if she commits) to a sexual orientation identity.

Alternatively, Diamond (1998; 2000) demonstrated that sexual orientation identity development of young, predominately White sexual minority women may be more circular than linear, with no specified end point. Although the same may be true for young Black sexual minority women, the majority of participants in the present study did, however, seem committed to their sexual orientation and gender identity at the time of the interview.

Additionally, F1 may actively not want a bisexual identity because of the way bisexuals are treated in her community. According to Reed (2010)⁶, bisexually active women were pejoratively called, “*dick dykes*.” The name-calling is symptomatic of biphobia, which is similar to homophobia except it describes the negativity, prejudice, or discrimination against bisexual people (Eliason, 1997). According to Social Identity Theory (SIT), social identities are evaluative and have self-evaluative consequences. SIT also assumes that people have a need to see themselves in a positive light (Hogg, Terry, & White, 1995). F1 may have rejected the bisexual identity to avoid negativity attached to that identity label. In addition, according to self-categorization theory, people cognitively represent social groups in terms of prototypes. A prototype represents the beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors of a social category. People can assess

⁶ Reed (2010) used the same data for completing her master’s thesis.

how similar they are to the group prototype (Hogg et al., 1995). Because F1 is sexually attracted to females and dates females, she may not see herself as the prototype of a heterosexual woman. She may see herself as more dissimilar to heterosexual women than similar and thus reject a heterosexual identity.

Another participant (S1) initially identified as stud during pre-screening, but during the full interview disclosed that she considered herself transgender (female-to-male; FTM). She stated that *“the community would consider [her] as a stud.”* She, however, did not seem to fully accept it and felt as if she could not contest it. She said, *“I don’t have no choice but to identify as one [be]cause, that’s what they gonna call me, no matter how I feel or not.”* She identified more as a gay male than as a stud lesbian woman. She discussed with the interviewer wanting to have reconstructive surgery in the future in which she would have her breasts removed. She also alluded to wanting genital reconstructive surgery.

I: Okay, what [changed] when you considered yourself to be trans[gender]?

S1: ... I feel more of the fact that I need operations... So the only thing that changed is the fact that like I started like, puttin’ on duct tape, so my breasts would be smaller. And just trying to change my sex completely-

I: Now when you talk about needing an operation, what do you mean by that?

S1: Breast reduction....And I’m still thinking of the process of having, sex change. Down there (Stud, Age 18).

S1 did not choose a stud identity for herself. She saw herself as transgender, rejecting her biological female sex and wanting to become a man physically by undergoing surgery. Being transgender implies gender dysphasia (discontent with biological sex), which is considered a psychiatric classification of gender identity disorder (American Psychiatric Association, 2000).

The other studs, while emulating males, did not want to become male physically. The pathway to integrating a transgender (FTM) identity may be different from the way a woman integrates a sexual minority identity, because becoming transgendered implies rejecting biological gender.

Similar to S4, who transitioned from femme to stemme and then to stud (as described above), St1's experience also displayed fluidity and instability of gender identity. St1 stated during the pre-screening interview that she identified as stemme, but during the full-interview disclosed that she considered herself femme. She also rejected the stemme label and referred to stemmes as "*versatiles*."

St1: Cuz I don't really like... define myself as a versatile or whatever. But as everybody see me --they say I'm versatile because of the way I dress. I don't-- I just dress the way I feel. ...It's not an everyday thing.

I: Okay, so you don't identify as versatile. What do you identify as?

St1: Femme (Stemme, Age 18).

While St1 rejected the stemme identity label in the beginning of the interview, further into the interview she stated:

Sometimes, I don't wanna wear the the baggy clothes. I wanna wear something tight [laughs]. Kinda think I'm a femme. I'm like I'm not a femme. I'm a versatile. And that can like pain me sometimes. Sometimes I feel like I have the best of both worlds. I date both femmes and studs (Stemme, Age 18).

She seemed to be conflicted with her gender because she said that it "*pains*" her sometimes. She thinks of herself as a femme, and would prefer that identity; however, others have labeled her as "stemme." Despite any negativity, however, it seems as if she accepts herself as a stemme or versatile because she "*has the best of both worlds*."

Identity conflict and resistance. Three participants (F3, S5, and St4) demonstrated evidence of internalizing their sexual orientation and lesbian gender identity through self-identification, but also mentioned that they contemplated becoming straight or hoped to “become” heterosexual in the future. They seemed to reconsider their sexual minority status not because it did not “fit them,” but in response to internalizing negative messages about lesbians. Internalized homophobia involves manifesting self-hate based on negative social attitudes and messages received (Malyon, 1982). It also involves an intrapsychic conflict between what people think they should be (i.e., heterosexual) and how they actually experience their sexuality (i.e., as homosexual or bisexual; Herek, 2004). F3 discussed negative messages she heard from her mother and her response thereto.

Last time I had sex with a male was last year and that was just to make my momma happy cuz she was, like, she was complainin’ about me bein’ gay. She was kinda happy. She was like “You can’t get pregnant and this and this.” She was kinda happy, but then she was like “Why don’t you just be with a man?” So it just kept making me upset and I didn’t wanna be gay no more or whatever even though I still like the females. I just wanted to make her happy. I didn’t want to be gay, so I slept with my friend that stayed down the street... (Femme, Age 17).

F3’s mother complained to her about being gay. One reason her mother did not approve of her sexual orientation was because she “*can’t get pregnant.*” F3 seemed to have internalized the negative messages she heard because she became upset and began to not want to be gay anymore, even though she still liked women. She was conflicted between what she “should be” (i.e., heterosexual) and how she experienced her sexuality (i.e., still liking women). In response to this conflict, F3 had sex with a male to make her mother happy and to not be gay anymore.

S5 also gave evidence of being in internal conflict regarding her sexuality. She stated, *It's like something in my mind is telling me that I should change because of the fact that it's hard for me to get a job. Because of you know, it's like, fifty-fifty. And the other half of me, it was like sixty-forty. The other half of me, the sixty percent, is sayin', it has to stay like this because I'm not comfortable wearin' female clothing. I'm comfortable wearin' these clothes. And, I'm comfortable, you know bein' who I am. Like, I feel like this is who I am, but at the same time, I feel like I need to make a change, so I can live a better life. Seem, seem more normal....Be the way that I'm supposed to be. See, people say that females are supposed to be with a man...* (Stud, Age 20).

S5 wanted to change to become heterosexual because that would make for a “better” life and she would be more “normal” and “be the way that I’m supposed to be.” She seemed to have internalized the message that being gay is being abnormal (“people say that females are supposed to be with a man”) and not living to her full potential. She expressed conflict between these negative thoughts and being true to herself (“I feel like this is who I am”).

St4 seemed to view being gay as not a viable lifestyle. She stated:

... Well I made the decision I'll be a straight lesbian for now... I'll get myself together, and then I'll try it again [relationship with a man] maybe, because I do want to have kids so. That's pretty much where I'm at right now.... I'm more so attracted to females than I am males, so I would like, try both (Stemme, Age 17).

Even though St4 is more attracted to females than to males, she wanted to be in a relationship with a male in order to raise a family. She perhaps did not see that it was possible to be gay and raise children. She also seemed to hint that she saw being gay as not being “together,” implying that there is something irresponsible or immature about being gay. She is conflicted about her

sexual attraction (attracted to women primarily) and the way she would be living a “together” life (heterosexual). These three participants aside, the other interviewed participants did not provide evidence of their wanting to change their sexual orientation identity status because of internalized homophobia.

Achieving identity. The data suggest modification of the original proposition that proposed that Black adolescent lesbians would internalize their gender identity through distinct developmental experiences, which would differ among these lesbians across gender. I suggested that butches or studs would first develop awareness of their gender and then develop awareness of their sexual orientation. I proposed that femmes would develop awareness of their sexual orientation first and then develop lesbian gender awareness. Analysis revealed that among the women who had achieved a gender and sexual identity self-concept, Black adolescent femmes and studs self-identified as their respective gender identity and their sexual orientation at the same time. In addition, Black adolescent stemmes self-identified as their sexual orientation identity before their gender identity. Studs and stemmes began to express increased masculine traits right after self-identifying, but did not physically become males. Femmes expressed the same level of femininity before and after self-identifying; however, lesbian gender and sexual orientation identities were fluid and did change over time. The women who had not integrated a gender or sexual orientation identity into their concept of self continued to explore identities and resist a gender and/or sexual orientation minority identity.

Lesbian Gender Norms

According to SIT, a social group (in-group) evaluates and compares itself to another group (out-group) in order to make its own group appear favorable. When the groups evaluate each other, they must use certain characteristics as the basis for evaluation. An important aspect

of this comparison process is that the in-group members do not compare themselves with every cognitively available out-group, but only with a group or groups perceived as relevant.

I proposed initially that specific features and behaviors are used by women to evaluate lesbian gender groups. In general, biological and traditionally gendered “real” males and females would serve as relevant comparison groups for femmes, stemmes, and studs. In reality, however, femmes, studs, and stemmes each refer to different specific gender groups for relevant comparison in romantic situations. In romantic situations, however, femmes compare themselves to studs; studs compare themselves to femmes; and stemmes use their partner’s gender for relevant comparison. Therefore, my initial notions were partially supported by the data (see Table II).

Studs. Biological, heteronormative⁷ males and females serve as studs’ point of reference.

Stud participants, although they still consider themselves women, described becoming more stereotypically masculine once self-identifying. When studs described themselves, biological and heteronormative males were described as a relevant comparison group.

Rejecting a female persona. Studs rejected stereotypically feminine attire and mannerisms. Dressing as stereotypical females went against the stud aesthetic and persona. Studs used biological and heteronormative females as a relevant comparison group in terms of what traits and characteristics they should not possess.

[Studs] shouldn’t put on girl clothes. I feel like even when you going for a job interview, you ain’t gotta girly up and dress all feminine and stuff. I just think it’s like going against

⁷ Heteronormative stems from queer theory and refers to the alignment of biological sex, gender identity and gender roles (Warner, 1991). Therefore, in this case it refers to biological males and females who adhere to a heterosexual sexual orientation and follow conventional gender norms.

what they talk about. That's they own self. You goin' against your own word. It don't make no sense (S1; Stud, Age 18).

Another stud (S4) changed the timbre of her voice because she thought it sounded too feminine. She rejected a characteristic that would align her with biological females:

I really used to have a really girly voice. And I didn't care for it too much and it was too sweet. So I don't know so like I changed my whole swagger. (Stud, Age 16).

Changing her voice because it was “*too sweet*” also speaks to the personality of a stud. A stud with a “sweet” voice would be incongruent with the masculine persona that a stud portrays. A “sweet” voice would not imply or express the masculinity that studs wish to emulate.

One stud recalled never being “*girly-girl*” as a child. She “*kinda grew into*” her stud identity. She did not see being a “*girl*” as applicable to her and rejected that image.

I always was a tomboy in my younger childhood days. So I never really was girly-girl. But when I just got older, it just kinda grew on to me. I kinda grew into it...I mean, hair and I always wore braids, even when I was young. ... I never liked skirts and dresses and makeup or nothin'. I never liked that. I was a tomboy (S3; Stud, Age 24).

Another stud stated, “*I'm not comfortable wearin' female clothing*” (S5; Stud, Age 20). The stereotypic feminine, female clothing and aesthetic did not seem to reflect who they were on the inside. Therefore, they rejected that image of themselves.

Stud participants also mentioned rejecting obvious markers of femininity, such as their breasts. All the stud participants mentioned that they did not allow their sexual partners to touch their breasts for sexual arousal while having sexual intercourse. For example, S2 said, “*I don't like my breasts to be touched. None of that*” (Stud, Age 19). To touch and stimulate their breasts would associate them with biological females.

Studs also rejected their feminine-sounding legal names. Participants did not directly mention that studs use nicknames or male names instead of their legal female names, however, when studs were interviewed, they referred to themselves using a nickname, or just their initials. They also referred to their stud friends using nicknames. S5 described how her friend refers to herself using a male's name because she is a stud. "...*My friend. She's a female. Her name is Sean cuz she's a stud*" (S5; Stud, Age 20). A stud could also have the legal feminine-sounding name of Alisha Joan, but refer to herself by her initials A.J., which does not have a female connotation. Studs could also pick a name not related at all to their given name in order to communicate a sense of toughness, such as "Stone" or "Crash." They may do this because their given names do not correspond with their outward appearance and inward masculine identity. Choosing a nickname may be an historical trend among Black lesbians. According to Thorpe (1996), it was common in Detroit for African-American lesbians, especially studs, during the bar culture of the 1940s to '70s to chose nicknames. They did so in part to protect their real identity, because lesbian bars were often a dangerous place to visit due to the illegal activities occurring there, and the risk of their lesbianism being discovered. Nicknames reinforced stud-femme roles because the names chosen by studs were associated with toughness and masculinity. This dissertation finds that the use of nicknames has remained as an important indicator of adherence to stud-femme roles among young stud-identified women.

Embracing a male persona. Studs projected the stereotypic image of a biological, heteronormative male. According to one stud participant, "[studs] really portray the image of being the guy" (S3; Stud, Age 24). Studs compared themselves to men and saw themselves as similar. "*Studs don't act different than men. Well, it's like we don't act different than men because we act like men...*" (S5; Stud, Age 20). Another stud, who first came out as stud at the

age of 14, said about herself at that time period, *“I was like forget it, I might as well dress like a boy and put ‘this is me.’ Ya know I always been boyish all my life, so I was like, ‘I’m a man’ [Laughs]”* (S4; Stud, Age 16).

Studs stated that they dress as males and compare their appearance to men, such as by wearing stereotypical male clothes. One stud stated, *“We all dress like guys, that’s pretty much it. We all dress like guys”* (S5; Stud, Age 20). Dressing like men includes wearing clothing such as sport shorts, big t-shirts, big baggy pants, sneakers, and sports bras to flatten their breasts. Studs also wore their hair short. Stud participants stated that they lowered their voice to appear more masculine. Studs maintained the masculine persona for job interviews and other important events that might otherwise require acknowledgement of being biologically female (e.g., using their legal feminine sounding name instead of their stud nickname).

Two studs described being mistaken for men in public. As one stud stated:

‘Cause normally, on a normal day, it is very rare that people realize that I am a female. I get mistaken for a man all the time. You know what I’m sayin’? Just, um, the bass of my voice to the way I walk. So, if you just saw me walkin’, you couldn’t tell I’m a girl...Just like every time I get on the bus. They be like, “‘cuse me, sir” (S2; Stud, Age 19).

Another stud mentioned that straight women sometimes approach her because they think that she is a man and a dating prospect. She does not try to pass as a man, so she informs the women that she is a biological female, so as not to be deceptive:

...I’ll just wait for a female to come up to me and talk to me. And that way, and then I tell her that I’m a girl cuz I don’t like to deceive people. And then...straight women approach me too, but once I tell them that I’m not a guy they back off (S5; Stud, Age 20).

Participants S2 and S5 physically resembled biological men; therefore, some people have difficulty recognizing they are women. Each of these women's appearance diverges so much from their female biological gender and they enact masculine tendencies to such an extreme that they blend in with and appear to be biological males.

Studs use biological heteronormative males as a comparison group in more ways than just in their physical presentation. Stud participants stated that they took on the male persona by using male pronouns (i.e., he, him) and nouns (e.g., guys, brother, and son) to describe themselves and other studs. As one stud said, *"I talk [to other studs] like... 'you know, what's up? Let's have guys' night out.' Like I call my stud friends, I call 'em guys"* (S3; Stud, Age 24). Other people, besides studs, use male pronouns when referring to studs. For example, two studs mentioned that their mothers consider them sons and not daughters. As one stud stated:

Even my mamma's friends, she'll introduce me to someone new and they'll be like, "hey, this your son?" ...My mamma calls me her son's brother. ... She's a girl; she lives her life as a boy (S2; Stud, Age 19).

If their biological family accepts their gender identity, their family may also see them as male and consider them to be brothers or sons. Their masculine demeanor does not have the limiting boundaries of the sexual minority community. Studs express their masculinity and male appearance in most (if not all) aspects of their life.

"The baby daddy." Studs often said they wanted to have children to establish a family with their partner. Instead of the studs becoming pregnant themselves, however, their femme partners would become pregnant and give birth. If a stud were to become pregnant, she would be violating stud standards because biological males cannot become pregnant. To remain consistent with the male standard, a stud would consider herself a father to her partner's child. This

conflicts to what can be found in research literature about lesbian parenting. In the literature, terms such as “non-biological mother,” “non-birth mother,” “non-biological parent,” “non-birth parent,” “co-parent,” “co-mother,” “other mother,” “stepmother,” and “stepparent” have been used (Brown & Perlesz, 2008). There is no mention of the non-biological parent being called “daddy” in relation to a lesbian co-parenting. Studs tend to call themselves “daddy” and others refer to them as such, which is another way studs use biological, heteronormative males as standards of comparison.

... [Studs] know that they want to have a child but they don't want to produce a child. So they ask their feminine female who they've been with for a minute, who they know they gonna be with, to have a baby for 'em. ...They just like a man. They don't wanna be walkin' around just a man and pregnant (F3; Femme, Age 17).

Since becoming pregnant would be antithetical to their masculine identity, studs often decide not to become pregnant even if they want to parent.

Instead of becoming pregnant, the stud may request her femme partner to become pregnant in order to keep the stud's masculinity intact (Reed, 2010).

My [stud] friends ...make they girlfriends get pregnant for them to have a family. I mean they think of theyselves as a daddy. ...So it is kind of like a daddy-mother thing. They just care for the child just like the daddy will (S3; Stud, Age 24).

Studs want babies “just to, fill out the rest of the blanks in our fantasies and our dreams and our mentalities of bein' a man. We got a little kid sayin' 'daddy this, daddy that'” (S2; Stud, Age 19). Becoming a “daddy” allows a stud to further consummate a male identity. The studs extend their masculine role from their relationship with their romantic partner to the child(ren) they raise together.

Baby's daddies were also perceived as fulfilling a father's role. F2 described how her stud partner "plays the daddy in [her] daughter's life." She said:

Everything a daddy do, [name of participant's girlfriend] do... The whole little daddy thing, like takin' her out. You know they had a daddy/daughter day where they go out to the movies. They might go out to the carnival... They go to the movies. They go out to eat. Like whatever goin' on. ... They go to the zoo. It's just [name of participant's girlfriend] and the baby. They go out and they spend the day together. ... That's daddy in our house. She come home. She pay the bills. She bring the money home, that's daddy. She take care of both of us. Like, we do 50/50, but she in the long run, she still take care of me and the baby. It's just daddy. Everything a man would do for his daughter, [name of participant's girlfriend] do for [name of participant's child] ... (Femme, Age 20).

While both parents are women, the mother and "daddy" have differing roles. The "daddy" takes care of her partner and the child financially. What seems absent from F2's description of the stud daddy role is the participation in daily care-giving activities. The "daddy" seems to take on the traditional masculine father role as provider and not the more nurturing role descriptive of traditional mothering (Parke & Sawin, 1976).

Embracing hypermasculinity. Studs express hypermasculine characteristics.

Hypermasculinity involves excessive identification with and endorsement of the traditional male role (Mosher, 1991 as cited in Parrott & Zeichner, 2008). The traditional male role is based on hegemonic masculinity that includes being socially dominant, subordinating femininities, and representing power and authority (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Courtenay, 2000). In traditional committed heterosexual relationships, men are afforded more power than women. The

men are the breadwinners and decision-makers (Shearer, Hosterman, Gillen, & Lefkowitz, 2005).

“The aggressor.” Stud participants described fulfilling traditional male gender roles in romantic relationships. As one stud said, *“Cause we have the swag of the male. We the man in the relationship”* (S2; Stud Age 19). A stud is seen as being the provider of the family, and in charge of making money and decisions. Studs often take the initiative in pursuing a romantic partner. They also viewed being the male as being the aggressor and the dominant figure: *“The stud is the one that’s dominant in the relationship and the femme is the other side”* (S5; Stud, Age 20).

One stud (S3) compared her aggressive behavior with how a boyfriend would treat his girlfriend. She stated:

I’m the aggressor in the relationship. Like, I want it my way. I don’t want it her way, you know what I’m sayin’? ... I really, I really check my mate, you know? I’m sayin’ like a guy would do his girlfriend. Far as more as “Where have you been?” Or “What ‘chu done? Or “Why you doin’ that?” You know. Just real hard on ‘em (Stud, Age 24).

S3, by being the aggressor and demanding that she know her girlfriend’s every move, demonstrates that a stud often plays the authoritative figure with power in the relationship. Her partner checks in, with S3 considering her whereabouts as a boss would check up on a subordinate.

Studs are perceived as being physically aggressive with their partners. For example, one stemme (St2) described how a typical stud might react if her girlfriend were irritating her:

... A stud would be like, say their girlfriend’s is getting on their nerves, maybe they’d grab her up, and say “I said stop playin’ with me” or something like that. Choke ‘em

maybe, or just grab them by their arm, and just try to be in control of the relationship.

And they'll be the one to start the argument, or they'll be the one to play rough (Stemme, Age 20).

To get what they want from their partners, studs may use their physical strength to intimidate their partners. Through physical dominance, a stud gains power and control over their partner.

"The player." Stud participants demonstrated the "player" mentality. They often described seducing women as a game and demonstrated their power over female romantic partners by manipulating them to believe the studs were monogamous when they were not. Three studs (S1, S2, and S3) reported sexual partner concurrency in dating relationships, even though monogamy was discussed as a relationship rule. In general, the stud participants described not being worried or concerned about their partners finding out about one another and the ramifications of breaking the monogamy rule. For example, when S2 was asked about her girlfriend, she joked that she currently has one, but considers herself single.

I'm her girlfriend. I let her think that...Yeah, but I'm single to me. And the rest of the girls [giggles] (Stud, Age 19).

S2 manipulates her girlfriend and lets her girlfriend think they are monogamous. Perhaps she does not seem to take the relationship seriously, since she giggles after she claims that she is single. By lying or hiding the truth of her other sexual relations, S2 seems to remain in control, which may give her a sense of power over the relationship with her girlfriend.

Studs were "players" in that they viewed women as sexual conquests. They saw women as easy to manipulate and "win over" in order to have sex. S3 described how her friends socially compete for a greater number of sexual partners:

Well my friends, they just like, [say] “I like did it to this person, did it to that person.” ... They just more worried about how many girls they have sex with... It’s always a competition. Sometimes it’s a competition. I mean why I ain’t gonna lie, when I was 18 and 19-20-21, it was a competition for me too...More is better [laughing] (Stud, Age 24).

For studs, femmes are viewed as a commodity, and dating is a competitive game in which the stud with the most sexual partners wins. This demonstrates that studs imitate a “player” male stereotype in which power and coolness are symbolized by conquests.

Stud participants described filling the male role during sex. Studs wear the strap⁸ during sex (if the strap is used) to penetrate their partner’s vagina. To be penetrated would mean penetration of the vagina and if a stud were penetrated in her vagina, she would then be as a biological female. Being penetrated makes her femininity salient. In addition, if she were penetrated in the anus, she would be emasculated because, among Black males in particular, the receptive partner during anal sex reflects the emasculated position, typically associated with the woman’s role, while the male insertive partner reflects the masculine and dominant role (Malebranche, Fields, Bryant, & Harper, 2009). Therefore, to keep her masculinity intact, the stud must be the insertive partner. S2 reported:

Another thing is, I don’t do, is studs getting, I don’t know how to clean it up, but fucked by a strap, basically. Having, you know, what I’m sayin’, getting sex with a strap. That’s

⁸ “Strap” is the term used by participants to refer to the dildo and harness a woman uses for penetrative sex. While the dildo and harness could be used many ways, the participants used the term to mean that the harness is worn by the partner who is doing the penetrating to keep the dildo in place over her pubic bone or mons pubis, generally where a penis would be on a man (Lotney, 2000).

not in a stud's demeanor because in that case, what, how, what is your role? You feel me? You, you supposed to be doing all the humpin' and all that. You feel me? I don't do that. ... that's how I feel a stud should be.

I: Okay. So, it seems you think studs should not necessarily be fingered or have a strap-on used on them?

S2: Any kind of penetration (Stud, Age 19).

A femme wearing a strap and penetrating her stud partner would violate stud mores because to be in the receptive position would require relinquishing an aspect of control in a sexual situation. According to S2, the stud is “*supposed to be doing all the humpin'.*” Being in the receptive position requires a sense of vulnerability that would be anti-masculine.

“*The identity police.*” One characteristic of a hypermasculine man is that when exposed to male gender role violations, he becomes angry (Parrott & Zeichner, 2008). Hypermasculinity was seen in studs' aggression and animosity toward studs who had vaginal sex with men, or became pregnant. Studs who have had vaginal sex with men were looked upon with disdain to the point of being harassed and possibly physically assaulted. As S1 stated:

Because, look at a stud. Like studs feel they hard body, like a male. And just to have sex with a male, and then that is very like low tolerant in this community. And if you sit up here and you go have sex with a man, you gonna get talked about. You gonna get hurt. ... You gonna get talked about. You gonna get popped (Stud, Age 18).

To have sex with a man would imply vaginal penetration and highlight that a stud has female genitalia, which would undermine a stud's masculinity. A stud engaging in “feminizing” behavior creates discomfort in a hypermasculine stud to the point of possibly inciting violence. This discomfort occurs because a stud engaging in “feminine” behavior creates an inconsistent

stud image. This inconsistency brings the stud identity into question, which is especially problematic for studs who hold rigid gender beliefs. To question a stud's masculinity is to deny a stud's dominance. A stud's position of dominance is maintained by adhering to masculine ideals. To maintain the dominant position, a hypermasculine stud needs to disparage or strongly oppose behavior that questions a stud's position of power.

Whereas a stud having sexual relations with a man would elicit a negative reaction, becoming pregnant because of the sexual act would be looked upon even more negatively “‘Cause they [studs], swag a male mentality and just to picture them layin’ down with a man to make a baby, feel me, is awful” (S2; Stud, Age 19). She also described confronting a stud who had just had a baby:

... I was just like “uggg, you out here tryin’ to play tough or play hard like you a man. And you got. You just had a baby.” Flat out, know what I’m sayin’? So, there was all some beef and stuff, like gettin’ feisty. Don’t come on me like you a nigga, you tough, when you just laid down with a man... (Stud, Age 19).

She equated having a baby to not being “tough.” Having a baby would require not only recognition of having had penile-vaginal intercourse,⁹ but also recognition of having a uterus and desiring a mother role, which would align that person with being female. Being pregnant and having a baby equates a stud to being a “woman” or “feminine,” which is not a valued trait to studs who value masculinity. It automatically lowers a stud's level of “toughness” and negates any masculine authority that is associated with being a stud in the community.

⁹ Due to economic restraints, these lesbians become pregnant via sexual intercourse with males instead of purchasing donor sperm and/or using doctor-assisted fertilization techniques.

One stud (S2) mentioned that gay men are not “real men,” which reflects an anti-gay attitude stereotypic of hypermasculine men. She had sex with a gay man using a strap, but when talking about the incident, she pejoratively called the man a “fag.”

*Now, but I done had sex with a man in another way, as far as **me** doin’ him with a strap.*

It wasn’t a real man. It was a fag. ...A boy. A gay boy (Stud, Age 19).

This stud enacted a hypermasculine attitude typical of a homophobic male. She saw a gay male as less than a man and used pejorative language. She aligned so much with a heteronormative male, she distanced herself from her sexual minority “brother.” No other participant claimed that gay men were less than men.

Because studs express masculine characteristics and think of themselves as possessing male traits, they consequently could be influenced by Black male gender norms and endorse them. In general, males may be socialized to be controlling and dominating and these traits may be intensified at the intersections of race and class. Theoretically, according to Collins (2005), chronic miseducation and unemployment of young, poor Black men has created a society in which some young Black men demonstrate masculinity by being aggressive, tough, and street smart. Sexual prowess also has become an important marker of Black masculinity (Collins, 2005; Wallace, 2007). The ability to conquer women sexually may to some degree compensate for the control and power that poor, Black men lack in the larger society (Wallace, 2007). If a Black male lacks resources to maintain his position as head of his family, he may seek authority by using physical force and violent language. He may conform to a rigid prescription for toughness, sexual promiscuity, manipulation, and thrill-seeking, and be willing to use violence to resolve interpersonal conflict (Majors & Billson, 1993).

“Quadruple” oppression. In addition to the oppression that Black males face, stud lesbians face discrimination based on their gender and sexual orientation non-conformity, which could further compound their oppression. This layering of oppression could contribute to their desire to display power and authority in their relationships. Black studs may face discrimination due to their gender nonconformity, which may create a “quadruple oppression.” For example, some studs worry about and have faced discrimination in finding jobs. S3 and S5 both worried about being judged negatively during job interviews because of their masculine look. *“The problem with the job is, I put female and they think that I’m a male”* (S5; Stud, Age 20). S3 in particular worried that her masculine appearance would be perceived as her being gay and consequently she would not be hired. She stated,

There is this job that I am trying to get at this day care center. And I went in for the interview. And I was scared to go in because I did not want them to look at me like “Oh she look gay, or I don’t want to hire her because she—” But they actually gave me a lot of good responses. And they are supposed to call me in a week but it is already been a week and two days. So I am still waiting for that phone call. So I am really nervous.... I am really trying to get a job (Stud, Age 24).

S3 stated a possibility of being discriminated against, which could compound her feelings of oppression.

S5 discussed a situation at a party, in which she was physically threatened because of her masculine look. She said:

...This girl tried to talk to me at this party and I told her that I was a female. And her brother called her to the stairs cuz he wanted to tell her that I was a girl. And she lied and told her brother that I didn’t tell her. And he hit me in the jaw ... I almost got beat up

by a guy but, luckily somebody had my back and he, grabbed him and broke it up (Stud, Age 20).

S5 was confused for being male. She was physically attacked because of her gender nonconformity and the misperception that she was trying to pass as male.

To further compound society's strictures, studs face discrimination from within the lesbian community because they are bound by lesbian gender norms and would face a negative response if they were to act in opposition to them. Three studs declared they have future hopes of becoming pregnant (S1, S2, and S4) despite perceiving that they would be treated negatively and despite expressing overt negative opinions about other studs who had become pregnant. For example, S1 identified as stud and transgender (FTM) and wants to have a baby, even though to do so conflicts with her masculine identities and intent to pursue gender reassignment surgery. She acknowledged that her pregnancy would elicit a negative reaction.

I: So do you feel like you might try to have a baby again?

S1: Yeah.

I: And how do you think the girls here will treat you if you do?

S1: Uh, the studs will be all talking on that, and talking about me, but, the femmes they be all "Wow you pregnant" and they'd be all excited.

I: And, what about the studs?

S1: They're not gonna like it, they're gonna talk down on me (Stud, Age 18).

S1 perceived that the stud community would have a negative reaction to her pregnancy. This may be in addition to any negative reaction she might receive from the larger society due to her sexual minority status and gender non-conformity.

As originally proposed, studs use biological and traditionally-gendered “real” males and females for comparison. As described above, the data provide strong evidence that studs use “males” as a reference group for how they should appear and behave socially in ubiquitous situations. In contrast, studs use “females” for reference regarding how not to appear and behave. Studs strive to align with “males” and masculinity while they simultaneously avoid enacting “female” or feminine traits.

Femmes. Biological, heteronormative females and studs serve as femmes’ point of reference. As stated previously, “*Femme means female*” (F5; Femme, Age 24). Femme participants referred to women and girls to describe how they present themselves, endorsing the image of a very feminine female as normative; they are “*really girly*” and “*don’t like to get dirty*” (F6; Femme, Age 16).

Embracing a female persona. Being “*girly*,” as described by femme participants, involved engaging in stereotypic feminine beauty practices (F2 and F3). As F3 (Femme, Age 17) mentioned, “*I’m girly. I like to get my nails done, hair done. I always like to wear lip gloss, and all that. That’s why I call myself femme....*” Being girly also involved dressing like girls and stereotypical biological women (F1, F5, and F6), such as by wearing “*skirts, jeans, tight t-shirts, tight jeans, stuff like that*” (F1; Femme, Age 21).

Rejecting a stud persona. Femme participants reject the boyish, masculine characteristics that characterize studs. They use the masculine presentation of the stud as a basis of comparison to determine how not to dress. As F2 discussed her appearance, she described how she differed from a stud and noted her discomfort with dressing like a stud.

... *What’s different from me and a stud is because I like me being me....Okay, when I wear panties I feel secure like okay, boom. But if I was to put on some boxers I would feel*

like I'm just loose like I'm missin' something. '... I'm not more the masculine kind of person. I don't want to wear big clothes and all that extra stuff, nah [no].. To [studs] it might be comfortable. To me, it's the dress that uncomfortable, like uh-nuh [no]. I can't dress like that... (Femme, Age 20).

Being femme means aligning oneself with feminine females through appearance, and rejecting masculine characteristics typical for studs. Femmes in essence use studs as a relevant comparison group to describe what is not characteristic of their gender.

Femme invisibility. The appearance of femmes is indistinguishable from that of heterosexual women who are feminine in style and demeanor. Two femmes (F2 and F3) mentioned blending in with heterosexual women and one said:

... You can look at me and tell that I'm a femme. Just as I can look at you and say, "You feminine." But, you wouldn't know that I was a heterosexual or homosexual or lesbian, or whatever. Just 'cuz like I don't wear all the rainbow head to toe or the "I'm gay" [signs]. I don't gotta wear all that 'cuz I know what I am. So you can look at me and tell I'm feminine. I'm a feminine female, but you wouldn't look at me and say, "She a lesbian" (Femme, Age 20).

In addition to presenting themselves as stereotypical feminine women, femmes described possessing stereotypical feminine personality traits. *"Femmes are emotional... and don't think straight. They think like girls ... Most of them are sensitive, emotional, and all that other stuff"* (F1; Femme, Age 21). Femmes described themselves, and were described by others, as passive for deferring to their stud partners in decision-making. As F2 (Femme, Age 20) stated, *"That's really more of the stud role, the decision-maker. I come with all these ideas and she say 'well yea that sound like a good one.'"*

In addition to allowing her stud to make decisions, during sex the femme enacts a role of allowing her stud partner to take the lead in sex. Studs were reported to initiate sex. An example is the conversation with F6:

I: In general, who initiates sex?

F6: You talkin' about like who initiates between a stud and the femme?

I: M-hm. [Yes]

F6: The stud (Femme, Age 16).

By deferring to the stud partner for decision-making and for initiating sex, femmes relinquish power. Femmes express what Connell (1987) called “emphasized femininity,” which includes practices in which women comply with men's power (or in these cases, studs' power).

“The wife.” Femmes were perceived as fulfilling the role of the stereotypical wife. Femmes take dominion over the home. They take charge of rearing the children, and providing domestically for the immediate family. The stereotypical wife role was especially apparent in F2's interview. She was the only participant who had been in a long-term relationship with her partner for many years. They were raising a child together. She described her role in the family:

I gotta walk around and cook and clean and make sure everything together. And make sure even though you bring the money home, I'm still payin' the bills. I'm still takin' care of everything business-wise. Ya know I couldn't just go to work, come home. I feel like it's my job. Just like I feel like it's my job getting' myself together, gettin' my daughter together, my family together... (Femme, Age 20).

A stud may expect the femme to fill a traditional role and to cater to the stud. For example, S2 stated:

I watch how my mamma treat her men and I feel like, know what I'm sayin'? Like sometimes, that's why I think like I really got the mentality of a man. Because most men want a woman just like their mamma and that's what I want -- a woman that will cater to a man. Woo woo woo. There's stuff I can't get [my girlfriend] to do. Like, you lay up in my bed for a whole week straight with me and why? I'm the man in the relationship. Why I gotta get up and make my own bed? Why I gotta ask you constantly to make me somethin' to eat? Constantly. This you should already automatically do. You feel me? It's just she not fallin' in place of a wife (Stud, Age 19).

S2 expects that her girlfriend will fulfill tasks associated with a traditional wife role, such as completing domestic chores, making the bed, cooking for her, and catering to her needs.

I originally proposed that femmes use biological and traditionally-gendered “real” males and females as comparison groups. Data suggest that femmes use feminine females as a reference group for comparison regarding how they should appear, and studs for how they should not appear. Femmes also enact stereotypic feminine personality characteristics (e.g., being “emotional”) and fulfill traditional female gender roles. Femmes align with “females” and stereotypical feminine traits while simultaneously diverting away from studs and masculine traits.

Stemmes. Biological, heteronormative males and females serve as stemmes' point of reference. In romantic relationships, stemmes use the lesbian gender of their partner for relevant comparison. As is the case for studs, stemmes use biological, heteronormative males and females for comparison; however, their frame of reference changes based on context, such as their mood state and their attractions or relationships.

Embracing male-female and stud-femme. In dress, participants who were stemme switch between dressing as a stud and as a femme. On certain days they present themselves in typical stud clothing, and on other days they present themselves in typical femme clothing. As one participant said, *“I dress as both. Sometimes I dress as a girl. Sometimes I dress as a boy”* (St4; Stemme, Age 17). How stemmes choose to dress is based on their personal preference for that particular day. On a femme day, as one stemme mentioned, she would wear *“tight shirts, tight pants, flip-flops or heels”* (St3; Stemme, Age 24), while on a stud day she would wear *“baggy pants, big shirts, hair braided. Things like that. Hats”* (St3; Stemme, Age 24). She switches between masculine and feminine physical expression.

Stemmes date either studs or femmes and switch roles based on their partner. If stemmes date femmes, they act as studs, and if they date studs, they act as femmes in the relationship. As one stemme said, *“As a stud, you have a certain mentality or role to play ... as a male. So I do that as well as much as I do the female role, so. That’s why I consider myself to be a stemme”* (St4; Stemme, Age 17). Another stemme stated, *“I act more feminine when I’m with a stud. When I’m with a femme, I act more aggressive”* (St3; Stemme, Age 24). Stemmes’ behavior is as fluid as their choice of expression. Stemmes enact stud or femme qualities when such are needed or desirable in relationships.

One stemme (St2) used biological boys and girls as standards of reference to describe herself. She described how she is different from a stud and from a femme. She has stud and femme qualities, but does not adhere to the feminine or masculine extremes. She said:

Okay, to me a stud is when you are always dressed like a boy, and you want to be a boy...You would rather be a boy than a girl, and you consider yourself as a boy. Like femmes say, “Oh, that’s my brother.” I wouldn’t consider myself to be anybody’s

brother...I'm not a boy. I'm a girl. And I still have girly ways about me like; I talk like a girl sometimes. Um I [exhales] I, can't really explain. Like, I'm just me. I still have feminine ways about me. But at the same time I'm a tomboy. That's how I can explain it to the best of my ability (Stemme, Age 19).

While studs tended to identify strongly with boys or men on an everyday basis, stemmes, such as St2, maintain some alliance with their biological gender. St2 used the term “*tomboy*” to describe herself when presenting as stud. The term connotes identification with her biological gender while displaying masculine characteristics.

Because stemmes switch between stud and femme, they do not adhere to a complete male persona, and do not apply male pronouns (e.g., “he”) to themselves or use male labels (e.g., “brother”). When they present as studs, stemmes resemble what participants described as “soft stud.” They are “soft” because there are feminine aspects about them which differ from the image of a hard, masculine stud. Three participants (St2, St4, and S3) specifically mentioned stemme reflecting soft stud. As one participant said, “...*A soft stud is somewhat the same thing as a stemme. ... It's just two different terms*” (St4; Stemme, Age 17).

One stemme (St2), who mentioned that stemmes could be identified as “soft studs,” described the flexibility of roles that stemmes have during sex. Stemmes, since they are not “full” studs when they play the stud role, let themselves receive sexual stimulation. It is within their gender roles to allow their sexual partner to touch them sexually as well as to penetrate or be penetrated using a strap.

... A stemme is identified as soft stud also. Because, they're-- they don't really mind being touched. Most stemmes don't mind being touched, because they still have feminine things about them. Like they would prefer to be touched --they can play either role. They

can play the stud role, or they did play the femme role. Like they can be the ones to strap up, or they can be strapped. Or they can be fingered, or they can be the fingerer. They can perform oral sex. It's like both. They play both roles to me. Sometimes, depends on who the person is. ... Sometimes they will feel like being a femme this day with their femme, or sometimes they would like to be a stud with their studs. Stud with their femme; femme with their stud. (Stemme, Age 19)

Because of the flexibility of their gender expression, stemmes allow themselves to have more options regarding their sexual behavior than do studs or femmes.

Stemmes agreed that stemmes can play “*both roles*” during sex. They can play the femme role and receive sexual stimulation or the stud role and give sexual stimulation.

...if [stemmes] wanted to act like a femme that day they could get pleased [sexually]. If they wanted to act like a stud that day, they can pleasure. They-- got the best of both worlds actually. To me, that's how I see it. (Stemme, Age 18)

St1 described herself as having the “*best of both worlds*” due to the socially acceptable sexual behavior options she is offered because of her stemme identification.

No participant in the study, including stemmes, stated that they had ever dated a stemme. It could be, however, that participants have dated stemmes, but they thought of them as soft studs or aggressive femmes. Only one stemme (St1) mentioned talking to her partner about being stemme.

...I let all my girlfriends know I'm versatile. I date both studs and femmes. And I say “if it's okay with you, I'm sayin if the relationship goin' any further... You not gonna catch me with no tight clothes all the time, I wear it if you want me to if we goin out, but other than that I don't do it.” (Stemme, Age 18)

In general, the stemme participants (besides St1) did not describe revealing their gender identity to their partner. This seems odd, given that stemmes present themselves in varied ways over time. It could be that stemmes' gender may become more static when they are involved in steady romantic relationships. It could also mean that while femme and stud roles entail strict guidelines for acceptable sexual behavior, these guidelines may not actually be followed in reality. A disconnect may exist between what femmes and studs say they do versus what actually happens during sex. Future research could further explore these nuances.

Since stemmes oscillate between femme and stud gender presentations, they do not fit within the strict categories of stud and femme. To be stud means to always present as masculine. To be femme means to always present as feminine. Stemmes present both femme and stud qualities in varying degrees at different times. Because stemmes may not feel tied to being either stud or femme, they may not automatically claim stud or femme identity labels. Stemmes still fit within the framework of femme-stud culture because they date both studs and femmes and adopt the norms of the gender expression opposite their sexual and romantic partner. Perhaps to be true to themselves (wanting to express both femme and stud traits), but yet conforming to the social norms of stud-femme relations, stemmes switch between the two gender presentations.

Although stemme women oscillate between stud and femme expressions, they do not oscillate in their identity.¹⁰ When they present as stud, they do not identify as stud, but as stemme. When they present as femme, they do not identify as femme. It is a stable, but dynamic

¹⁰ As described previously, one stemme did oscillate between femme and stemme, but that was due to being uncertain of her gender identity, not because the stemme identity is unstable. She was still exploring her gender.

gender identity in which gender expression fluctuates. Therefore, the stemme identity could be considered a third lesbian gender that code-switches based on context.

Code-switching is a term often used in linguistics to describe how individuals switch dialect or language depending on their conversation partner (Heller, 1988). What stemmes may do, however, is reminiscent of “cross-cultural code-switching,” which occurs when people purposefully modify behavior to accommodate different cultural norms for appropriate behavior (Molinsky, 2007). Therefore, rather than choosing one group over another, as SIT posits, the stemme identity is an identity in and of itself that encompasses two opposing gender expressions. A stemme woman switches from masculine and feminine gender expressions based on the situation in which she is involved. She may feel comfortable enough playing either the stud or femme role so that she can enact more masculine or feminine traits as needed in a situation. She is “*versatile*” (St1; Stemme, Age 18).

Conversely, if a woman has both masculine and feminine traits, she may present more androgynously and not be switching between femme and stud. Androgyny was popular among predominately White lesbians during the feminist women’s movement and after (Moore, 2006). An androgynous lesbian encompassed positive male and female characteristics including physical expression (e.g., having short hair; wearing jeans, hiking boots, Birkenstocks, flannel shirts, baggy walking shorts, or athletic clothes; and avoiding makeup, hose, high heels, skirts, and dresses). Androgyny was also a political statement against patriarchy (Maltry & Tucker, 2002). Women criticized the butch-femme (or stud-femme) dyad for replicating heterosexual power norms, and rejected butch-femme because of its imitation of patriarchy since butches played the masculine or dominate role and femmes the feminine or more submissive role in romantic relationships (MacCowan, 1992; Roof, 1998).

Historically, a large segment of the lesbian population never respected or fully subscribed to androgyny (Loulán & Thomas, 1990). The androgynous movement may have never reached the Black lesbian community, since the feminist movement was seen as a White women's movement (Moore, 2006; Taylor & Rupp, 1993). Therefore, the Black lesbian community may adhere to gender norms that predate the feminist movement. According to Kennedy and Davis (1993) in their description of the lesbian community before the feminist movement, there existed a third gender, called "ki-kis" or "AC/DCs," in addition to stud and femme. "Ki-kis" did not conform to butch-femme, but switched roles based on their partner. If their partner were femme, they were butch; if their partner were butch, they were femme. Consequently, the community looked upon "ki-kis" with disdain and the label was used pejoratively (Kennedy & Davis, 1993). The stemmes reflect the "ki-ki" gender presentation because they alternate between soft stud and femme. As was true for "ki-kis," stemmes are viewed negatively within the participants' community.

Stemme negativity. Any lesbian gender identity that is not either stud or femme, or a subtle variation of the two (e.g., aggressive femmes) is not socially accepted or understood. Seven participants (F1, F3, St3, St4, S2, S3, and S5) claimed that stemmes are perceived negatively. Among those who did not mention this perception, F5 and F6 stated that they did not know any stemmes or anything about the gender, so they did not discuss stemmes. F2, S1, and S4 discussed how stemmes present themselves and act, but did not mention how stemmes were perceived in the community. St1, when asked whether she experienced any bad treatment because she was stemme, stated that she had not. She had no awareness of negative perceptions of stemmes. St2 did not mention anything negative, but did mention that her friends call her a "fag." She said, "[Friends] kinda tell me that I'm a fag... because I dress like a boy, but I still act

like a girl” (St2; Stemme, Age 19). While she did not mention negative associations with the term, the term “*fag*” has pejorative connotations (Pascoe, 2005; Smith, 1998).

One common negative perception mentioned by participants was that the stemme identity was not a “true” gender; people who claim the stemme identity are “*confused*” (F1, F3, St3, St4, S2, and S3). “[*Stemmes*] need to make up they minds to be a stud or a femme” (S2; Stud, Age 19). Three participants (F1, S2, and S3) believed stemmes’ confusion to be true. The other participants stated that their friends thought stemmes were confused, but did not claim to believe it themselves.

Just as “ki-ki” was a pejorative label, being called a stemme is an insult, especially to studs. F3 stated that some of her stud friends do not like stemmes and would become angry if someone called them a stemme. She mentioned:

...Some of [my stud friends] think that’s like an insult to them. So if somebody like-was to call them a stemme, they would get mad...They argue with you, say “I’m not a stemme, I’m a stud.” They’ll get mad, real upset, like wanna argue -- wanna fight with you
(Femme, Age 17).

When F3 was then questioned as to why she thought her stud friends did not like stemmes, she replied,

I guess because they don’t wanna be caught up. Cuz some stemmes, they do they switch up. Cuz like, my one friend, she was going with this girl, trying to find out, she dress like a boy too. And that studs don’t wanna go with a female that’s like that. Studs wanna go with a femme. There’s some studs that like studs. But it’s studs don’t like stemmes because they get confused. Because if you dress like a girl, they try talk to you, and then

next day they see you dress like a boy, they might get upset, cuz they feel like that's another man, they talkin' to (Femme, Age 17).

Studs and femmes may be threatened by the stemme identity. According to Tajfel and Turner (1986), an in-group does not compare itself with every cognitively available out-group, but with a perceived relevant group. Relevance implies the in-group and out-group must be perceived as similar enough to provide a useful comparison, but not so similar as to threaten each other's social identity (Brewer, 2001; Tesser, 1988). For instance, if a group shares too many characteristics with another group, animosity can be exacerbated. Regarding studs and femmes, they may have developed animosity towards stemmes because stemmes display both stud and femme appearance and behavior. If a stemme dates a femme, the stemme becomes more "stud-like," and if she dates a stud, then the stemme becomes more "femme-like." The stemme identity threatens the studs' and femmes' sense of self. Studs and femmes perceive their gender identity as stable and the divisions between the groups clear. Studs and femmes seem dependent on the absolutism of their respective gender category. Stemmes challenge the category boundaries, giving the impression that that stud and femme boundaries are false and permeable. Hostility develops against stemmes because some people question the validity of having both a femme and stud identity expression. If a stud identity boundary is seen as more permeable and allows for femininity, her power associated with her masculinity is questioned. She may no longer hold the authority that her masculine persona permits.

In addition, according to SIT (Tajfel & Turner, 1986), if the out-group's difference is evaluated negatively, perhaps as a challenge or threat to the in-group, the out-group becomes viewed more negatively and is discriminated against by the in-group. Studs and femmes may view the idea of stemmes switching gender expressions as a negative characteristic. Therefore, in

social situations stemmes may be discriminated against, such as by being made fun of in a lesbian friendly space (Mummendey & Wenzel, 1999).

Stemmes are harassed by others because of their gender identity. The harassment that the participants discussed included being called “*fag*” (as described above), and “*being made fun of*” (S5; Stud, Age 20). One stud (S2) in particular showed aggression when discussing stemmes. She described her reaction when a femme approached her,

I had a stemme come on me before, but my reaction was out of control. Like, you don't know what you wanna be. You wanna wear drawers like me, but then, you wanna wear tight shirts like a girl. You feel me? Now, I don't know what they should be like...Just, all the, 'cause I don't know what to identify you as. I like females and I don't like males. So, me talkin' to you and not, you know what I'm sayin'? I would look at you and you half way dressed like a boy. You wanna act like a boy with a girl's shirt on or somethin' like that. I feel like, you know what I'm sayin'? You silly, you actin' like a nigger to me. You actin' like me and I don't want the same thing as me... [Agitated sounding voice] I'm the dominant one. I'm the one in control. I don't want somebody else to be in control (Stud, Age 19).

S2, while threatened by the stemme identity, may also be showing aggression because she is a hypermasculine person (as described previously) and becomes angry when exposed to male gender violations (Parrott & Zeichner, 2008). If a stemme is perceived as a stud, but allows herself then to express her feminine side and “become femme,” she violates the stud role. She, in essence, threatens the power structure that “naturally” endows studs with authority through its replication of heteronormative relationships. Therefore, a hypermasculine stud may become

angry because the stemme was perceived as stud and then violated the perceived role and deceived the studs.

Though all three groups rely on heteronormative, biological males and females as a standard, their standards shift for sexual pleasure. Studs, femmes, and stemmes do NOT use biological, heteronormative females or males as relevant comparisons regarding sexual pleasure. Studs do use males as their relevant comparison group for determining what they will and will not do, such as they are not to be penetrated vaginally, may not have their breasts touched, and it is they who wear the strap with the dildo to mimic a penis. They also take sexual initiative, which is seen as a heterosexual male norm (Bowleg, Lucas, & Tschann, 2004). The femme-stud sexual dichotomy, however, views femme women as sexual beings who are to be touched and sexually pleased. During sex, the stud touches and sexually arouses her female partner while receiving limited touch and arousal. While all the studs in this research project stated that they receive oral sex, it was often not their main focus during sex. All stud participants stated that they like to “give head” (perform oral sex). S2 stated, *“I just like [oral sex]. I get a thrill out of it. Like, and [my girlfriend] asked me all the time like, ‘Do you ever get tired of givin’ head?’ No. I don’t. I get a thrill out of it.”* (S2; Stud, Age 19) Studs liked giving oral sex and mentioned that giving pleasure to their partner was important. By pleasuring their partner, a stud gets pleasure. As S3 mentioned, *“I think a stud should, far as please they women ... What makes it pleasurable for me is, the um, the noise she make. The noise, it, it makes it pleasurable...”* (S3; Stud, Age 24). The sound of a sexual partner becoming sexually aroused provided her with sexual pleasure. While studs use heteronormative males as their relevant standard for upholding some masculine standards, they differ from stereotypical heteronormative males in that their main role during sex is to give sexual pleasure to their partner, not receive it. This counters traditional male scripted

norms regarding male-female sexual relations. According to heterosexual sexual scripts, male sexual activity is goal-directed with the focus on receiving pleasure with little attention to their partner (Gagnon & Parker, 1995; Wiederman, 2005).

In femme-stud sexual relations, femmes receive the physical attention. They are the sexual receivers “...*who receive everything like the penetration, the fingers in them, like the oral sex, the everything, the kissin’ over the body*” (F2; Femme, Age 20). Two femmes mentioned currently being in relationships with “don’t touch me” studs where the rule was that they were not to touch their stud partner or try to pleasure their stud partner. As F5 stated, “*[During sex] I didn’t do anything to her, she did something to me. It was oral sex and that was it*” (F5; Femme, Age 24). F6 also described the sexual relationship with her “don’t touch me” stud.

I: Okay, so, a stud will do all, will do, um, all the things to you?

F6: Yes

I: Okay and you won’t do anything to them?

F6: [Shakes head no]

I: No? Is that, is that typical for femmes and studs?

F6: Yes, some.

I: Okay and when the stud does things to you, what do, what do they do?

F6: To me, they finger, on me, and she gives me oral sex.

I: Okay and when you say finger, where do you mean finger?

F6: Like put her fingers inside of me.

I: Inside your vagina?

F6: M-hm. [yes]...

I: No? Does she do anything else? [Pause] Do you give oral sex to her?

F6: Uh-uh [no]. No

I: No, just to you? And um, is that how it goes typical for you?

F6: Yeah.

I: Okay. And so, a femme should let the stud please them?

F6: [nods yes] (Femme, Age 16).

Wilson (2009) made a similar observation in her research with African-American lesbian adult women, noting “masculine identified stud women prioritized the feminine partner’s orgasm” (p. 310). The current dissertation study highlights that this phenomenon occurs among young lesbian women as well. Studs receive oral sex from their partners, but in a controlled manner whereby the femme cannot touch or penetrate the stud’s vagina. This sexual behavior contradicts the heteronormative stereotype of a male as focusing on his own sexual climax while putting his female sexual partner’s pleasure as secondary or as not important (Maines, 1999).

Overall, results suggest that studs and stemmes use both biological and heteronormative males and females as relevant comparison groups. Studs use males as a reference group for comparison on how they would like to be, and use females for how they would not like to be in terms of appearance and behavior. Stemmes, as with studs, use males and females for comparison; however, their frame of reference changes based on context (e.g., mood state and relationships). In romantic relationships, stemmes use the lesbian gender of their partner for relevant comparison and adopt the opposing gender (i.e., femme with stud; stud with femme). They also do not enact extreme feminine and masculine appearance and behavior. In contrast, femmes use females as a reference group for comparison on how to appear and use studs for how not to appear. Studs, femmes, and stemmes do not follow biological and heteronormative male and female gender standards for sexual pleasure. Studs oppose traditional “male” standards by

prioritizing their sexual partner's sexual pleasure over their own; femmes are perceived by studs as being sexual beings and are primary recipients of sexual pleasure.

Lesbian Gender Socialization

Though studs, femmes, and stemmes may project images of males and females, the feminine/female traits that a femme expresses, and the masculine/male traits that a stud or stemme expresses may be specific traits valued in the young Black lesbian community. I originally proposed that studs, femmes, and stemmes learn about lesbian gender norms from others who identify with that gender. Other studs, femmes, and stemmes would model for new incoming women how they should act. Studs, femmes, and stemmes would learn which characteristics are associated with each gender, and would begin to classify other lesbian women consistent with those classifications. Studs, femmes, and stemmes would be directly and indirectly reinforced for adhering to their gender characteristics, and chastised or penalized socially for going against lesbian gender norms. These notions were partially supported by the data (see Table II).

Learning to be “stud.” In general, stud participants learned how to be a stud through interacting with others in their community. One stud (S4; Stud, Age 16) stated that after self-identifying as stud, she started “*to hang around a lot of boys, lot of females that was ... like gay or lesbian or bi,*” and another stud (S1; Stud, Age 18) stated, “*all my friends are gay.*” According to learning theories, social contexts shape gender identity. Therefore, S4, who interacted with LGBT peers, may have learned to associate specific behavior and physical expression with stud gender through interacting with and watching those studs. According to gender schema theory (Bem, 1981), while learning about gender, a person cognitively creates a heterogeneous network of gender-related associations to organize and guide future perceptions. For example, S1 and S4

may have learned that studs only dress in boy clothes, and display a certain “swagger.” They then could have learned to associate those attributes with being a stud. Therefore, they organized incoming perceptions from the environment (watching and interacting with studs), began to internalize their own stud gender, characterized their own attributes, and assimilated their self-concept into the gender schema “stud.” While learning what is “stud,” they learned which gendered characteristics should be linked to them. They then became motivated to regulate behavior to align and conform to cultural definitions of stud.

Older stud role models. Two stud participants (S2 and S3) reported being mentored by older studs. The older studs taught the younger studs how they should behave sexually. For example, S2 stated that her best friend taught her about being a stud:

S2: Ummm, sex, we just talk about stuff we do. Sexuality, I think my best friend helped me like with that a little bit. She helped me identify what a stud was and showed me the difference. And just helped me be comfortable.

I: And is she a stud?

S2: Yeah.

I: Is she older than you?

S2: Yeah (Stud, Age 19).

S2’s best friend provided guidance in how to have sex as a stud. Her best friend was passing information onto S2 which helped her become comfortable in her knowledge of how to be a stud. Having a stud mentor was also observed in Hiestand and Levitt’s (2005) qualitative research which explored the meta-theme “growing up as a butch lesbian,” and in which one finding included “learning about butch-femme by meeting other butches.” Their participants described

getting a butch role model who explained butch-femme rules of interaction. This may be true among young Black lesbian women as well.

Older femme sexual teachers. In addition to stud mentors, studs learned their role through interacting with older and more experienced femme sexual partners (S2 and S3). The femmes they learned from were generally their first or one of their first sexual partners. One stud (S2) described her first sexual experience:

...We was talkin' for a little while then I finally went over, spent the night. We had sex and after that we was all right. She moved me in. I dropped out of school, [and] lived with her. She was an older woman. .. At the time I was 15. She was 21. ...She taught me everything [giggles]. ...Oral sex, how to finger, how to play with myself [giggles].

...Everything. How to use a strap on her for the first time...I was a baby [giggles] (Stud, Age 19).

A stud may learn how a stud acts sexually through her femme partner's instruction.

One stud, S5, did not mention specifically how she learned to become a stud. She also seemed less confident in her sexual orientation identity than were the other stud participants. She contemplated becoming heterosexual in the future. She had internalized the message that being lesbian was a phase. She internalized the message that being homosexual is abnormal and associated having "a better life" with heterosexuality (as described previously). Internalized homophobia can affect the quality of LGBT individuals' relationships with family, friends, and others. Szymanski and Chung (2001) found a link between a higher level of internalized homophobia and loneliness. Such internalized homophobia is also associated with less social support in general, and less support specifically from other LGBT people (as a proportion of all support received; Shidlo, 1994). These findings suggest that S5 may not have perceived

receiving support from other LGBT people, and therefore not have had other studs in her life to serve as models and guides.

Learning to be “femme.” Femme participants did not describe being formally taught how to be a femme or act feminine from other femmes. In general, the femme participants did not specifically mention having femme friends or acquaintances that they confided in or went to for advice about being femme. Only one femme mentioned receiving advice about engaging in socially appropriate sexual behavior as a femme, and F1’s mother, who also “*likes females*,”¹¹ taught F1 that “*real studs don’t get oral sex from femmes.*” When F1 was asked why she does not like to give oral sex to studs, she “*kinda still do stick by*” what her mother taught her. She also mentioned that she talks to her mother when she confronts issues related to sex and sexuality.

Femmes did discuss learning how to act sexually from interacting with their stud sexual partners. Femmes were taught to receive sexual pleasure from their sexual partner and to allow studs to initiate the sexual activity. Learning theory suggests that behavior is shaped by reinforcement and punishment (Mischel, 1966; Weitzman, 1979). Femmes described reinforcing and punishing experiences in their sexual encounters, experiences which shaped their understanding of acceptable sexual behavior.

Femme punishment. Femmes experience negative reactions if they act inappropriately during sex, such as by touching their stud sexual partner. For example, F3 stated that she is afraid to ask or suggest sexual behavior and described the precautions she takes during sex with a stud.

... I’m like the person to be scared to say stuff because I don’t know what they’ll think or what they’ll say or they might disagree with it or somethin’. So I just somehow like find a way to rub on them, like touch, rub on they back. Touch where I know that it make them

¹¹ F1’s mother’s sexual orientation and gender identity are unknown.

want to do something, so...Like, there are some studs that don't like to be touched. So a femme gotta be to theyself. Touch theyself, be still, and all that. Can't touch on them, rub on they chest and stuff like that. Make 'em mad, then you just be over with (Femme, Age 17).

Each stud's comfort level with touch is unique. Some studs will receive oral sex and others will not. Therefore, the femmes take a gamble if they venture to sexually arouse their stud partner by touching them. Femmes learn to take a passive role during sex in order to avoid anger from their stud partner and prevent the relationship from ending.

Two studs (S1 and S5) specifically mentioned ending a relationship with their girlfriends because their girlfriends touched them too much or in places they were told not to touch during sex. S1 said:

It was horrible, and she was too touchy-feely, I didn't like her touchin' me...She just kept touching me, period. Touching my arms, trying to put her arm around me, trying to kiss me, and I don't like that. I don't like when people touch me...I dumped her though ...After she keep touching me. (Stud, Age 18)

S5 described a similar situation except S5 warned her girlfriend about not touching her before engaging in the sexual acts. S5 mentioned:

...When this girl tried to finger me. Then she tried to insert her fingers, tried to penetrate me, and I told her that I wasn't cool with that...Previously, before we had got started. And, she tried to do it anyway and I told her to stop, and we ended up breakin' up. Cuz she didn't want to be in my comfort zone (Stud, Age 20).

Femme reinforcement. Femmes covertly reinforce positive sexual interaction with their stud partners. If a femme does not like what the stud has done to her, she will simply stop

reacting to it. Femmes might not state aloud what they like sexually, but they may physically respond to a sexual touch in a certain way to discourage their partner from continuing or move their body in a way to encourage their partner to touch them in a certain area. F2 described how instead of telling her sexual partner what she likes, she will show her partner through “movements.” She stated:

If we was like kissing, [and] I wanted her to like touch my vagina, I'll like slide, like easily just take her hand, slide it down there and move it and then she'll continue with. Basically, I'll do it. ... I don't say anything. I like movements. That's how I tell 'em
(Femme, Age 20).

Femmes take sexual initiative and may communicate their sexual desires through more subtle ways and through ways that are socially acceptable by stud-femme sexual norms.

Femme participants may be reticent about talking about sexual desires as a result of their age as well as their gender. Research suggests that young people often avoid talking openly to partners about sex and rely on deliberate miscommunication and ambiguity (Lear, 1995; Marston & King, 2006). Young women in particular may refrain from mentioning sex or admitting sexual desires (Lear, 1995; Tolman, 2002).

F2 and F6 mentioned that a femme can control sexual encounters by not reacting to a partner's touch. F2 described stud-femme sexual interaction as

The stud would initiate [sex], but if the femme don't follow it, then you know there's something wrong. So it's like 9 times out of 10, you already know what the femme gonna follow and do, so [a stud's] not going to do the total opposite (Femme, Age 20).

F6 described through her own experience how even though the stud partner would initiate sex, the femme can control whether or not sex happens.

I: And what does the femme do [during sex]?

F6: Um, I guess they follow along. They just roll with the flow....If she wants to have sex, but if not, then no.

I: What do you mean no?

F6: It's not gonna happen. It's not goin' no further than us making out (Femme, Age 16).

F2 and F6 seemed to describe femmes as fitting the stereotype of females as “sexual gatekeepers” (Lott, 1987) who follow traditional sexual scripts. Studs take on the traditional assertive male role while the femmes take on the traditional submissive female role. The women respond to male sexual advance by guarding their sexuality. The femmes respond by receiving or rejecting the sexual action rather than taking the active role (Hendrick & Hendrick, 1995; Kiefer & Sanchez, 2007).

“Aggressive femmes.” Two femmes (F1 and F5) were more forthright with their sexual needs than were other femmes. They went against the femme norm of being passive recipients of sex and needing to be covert in getting their sexual desires met. F1 described how she discussed sex with her girlfriend.

...I mean normally like when me and her first started talking about sex, we got to the understanding that I don't give head or oral sex. I don't do it. And she basically was like, “You don't have to. I don't need you to.” So I mean it's pretty much it comes down to, everyone pretty much knows what's gonna happen. So.

I: So you talk about it beforehand?

F1: Yeah. Yeah. (Femme, Age 21)

F5 also takes a proactive approach by telling her sexual partners what she enjoys sexually before having sex.

I: Okay, when are you comfortable telling women what you enjoy sexually?

F5: Either during sex, after sex, before sex. When we on the phone just talking, I tell them... Before, before we have sex. Not like when we about to do it, but when we start getting together and stuff like that, I ask questions about [what] you like. Or they ask me what I like.

I: And when are you comfortable telling women what you're uncomfortable with during sex?

F5: The same time. When I'm telling what I like and don't like. I tell them. (Femme, Age 24)

Both F1 and F5, who take a proactive approach, also stated that they date both femmes and studs which was different from the other femmes. In this study, most femmes dated only studs. F1 described “*think[ing] more like a stud, but... act[ing] like a femme*” (F1; Femme, Age 21). F1 and F5 each described themselves as being different from a typical femme, F1 stated:

I'm different because I don't think like the normal femme...Femmes are emotional...And they don't think straight. They think like girls...most of them are sensitive, emotional, and all that other stuff. I'm not like that. I'm not an emotional crying type person. I'm not saying that I'm not a soft person, but I'm just not the normal femme. (Femme, Age 21)

F5 also stated that she does not act “*wishy washy*” similar to a typical femme, and considers herself to be more emotionally “*stable.*” While F1 and F5 stated that they do not adhere to typical femme norms, they both consider themselves to be femme because they both “*dress like a girl*” (F1; Femme, Age 21).

According to participants, it is socially acceptable for F5 and F1 to deviate from strict femme norms because they fit the socially accepted description of “*aggressive femmes.*”

Aggressive femmes physically present as femme, such that “*an aggressive femme always dresses like a girl*” (St2; Stemme, age 19), however, has personality traits and behavior aligned with typical stud demeanor. An aggressive femme is “*...kinda like a stud, but not. She like to do stuff too. She like to give and receive. And she like sometimes play the role of the man of the relationship, and sometimes want to be the female. That’s the aggressive femme...Like acting kinda tough, like she a man, but she not. But she act girly too sometimes. She act like a boy. Sometimes, she’ll wanna be mean and rough, and all that, and wanna play. Then she wanna be all girly, ‘Don’t touch me, I just got my hair done,’ that’s an aggressive femme*” (F3; Femme, Age 17).

One would think that because F1 and F5 self-identify as femme, but express stud qualities in addition to femme, that they would be stemme. Though stemmes and aggressive femmes are similar, there are some notable differences. For one, aggressive femmes do not change their physical self-presentation; they always present as a feminine female no matter the gender of their partner or the context. Aggressive femmes also do not change their behavior based on their partners’ gender identity. F5’s behavior and physical expression remain consistent regardless of the gender of her partner, which is different from that of stemmes, who oscillate between stud and femme expressions. F1 did admit, however, that when she dates studs, she will not give them oral sex (“*I’m okay with giving oral sex to a femme, but not to a stud*”). That was the only difference she mentioned in her behavior when dating a stud or a femme.

Learning to be “stemme.” Stemmes did not describe being taught formally how to be a stemme from other stemmes. None of the stemmes specifically mentioned interacting with other stemmes. St1 did not identify as stemme, but was called a stemme by “*other women*” and then internalized the identity as she began to see how the identity fit. It is unknown who St1 is

referring to when she says “*other women*,” and whether these women taught her how to be stemme. Similarly, St2 was called a stemme by “*people*” when she “*first came out*.” She had “*always been that way [and]...didn’t know that there was a title with it*.” St3 did not mention any socialization at all regarding her stemme identity. St4 “*thought [stemme] was something that [she] thought of [her]self*.” She did mention that when she “*first started comin’ to [name of LGBT Center] then [she] kinda got a more understanding of it, that there’s other people that are stemmes*.” Stemmes’ socialization into the stemme role may be related to their introduction to the local sexual minority community, because people ascribed to them the label once they came out. Once a person is ascribed a stemme label by others, she may find other people interact with her given stemme expectations, thus reinforcing stemme-like behavior (Hogg & Reid, 2006). Therefore, a stemme might learn stemme appropriate roles implicitly through interaction with others. In addition, the stemme identity is inherently complex because a stemme could present as femme or stud and be ascribed that identity instead of stemme. Other people thus could interact with a stemme as she presents (if she could pass as “true” stud or femme) without realizing that she is a stemme, especially if the stemme does not disclose her identity. Future research could explore stemme identity development and socialization in more depth.

Stemme participants described talking with their partner about sexual expectations before having sex, so the partners learn from each other. Since according to stemme norms, stemmes can play either a femme or stud role during sex, they negotiate their sexual role. Similar to F1 and F5, who typify “*aggressive femmes*,” St1, St3, and St4 described having conversations with their sexual partners about what they like and do not like during sex. St1 stated, “*I tell them straightforward. I’m not going to wait until they come down....I let everybody know. All my girlfriends know what...I like and what I dislike*” (Stemme, Age 18).

St4 described how she likes to be dominant during sex, but will let her girlfriend take control when her girlfriend desires it. She stated,

Normally I'm the dominant one, because I'm the stemme, and she's the femme, [but] I let her take control.. I let her use the strap...it's still um we both decide on what we gonna do, but...We both agree on it before we act on it (Stemme, Age 17).

St4, while she would be more aggressive during sex because she is having sex with a femme, would be willing to let her femme partner “take control” and “use the strap” on her.

St2, in contrast to the rest of the stemme participants, seemed to take more of the “stud” role during sex. She stated that she tended to initiate sex with her partners and liked being “the aggressor” and liked when her partners “just let [her] take charge.” She also did not mention having conversations with her partners before having sex. She stated,

I'm probably more the one to initiate it. But I can tell that they want me to initiate it... By they body language, and by how they touch me, how they look at me, how they kiss me... (Stemme, Age, 19)

She also stated that she would never “receive intercourse with a strap.” Taking initiative, being the aggressor in a relationship, and not liking to be penetrated are characteristics common for studs. She did mention at the time of the interview that she was currently in a relationship, but when asked more detailed questions regarding the relationship, she opted not to answer them. It could be that she had dated femmes and was currently dating femmes; therefore, she was taking on more of the stud role during sex, and had learned from her partners the expectations regarding sexual behavior.

My original proposition regarding learning of lesbian gender norms needed to be modified to fit the data. In general, only studs were socialized by other studs in how to enact

their gender. Analysis revealed that studs learned how to be a stud through interacting with others in their community. The older studs taught the younger studs how they should behave sexually. Studs also learned their role through interacting with older and more experienced femme sexual partners. Femme participants did not describe being taught how to be a femme or act feminine from other femmes. In addition, stemmes did not mention being taught how to be stemme from other stemmes. Instead of directly learning how to enact their gender, participants may pair what society deems as feminine/female with the femme role, and masculine/male with stud role. They may have learned this outside of the gay community. The specific behavior that stud participants learned from the lesbian community had to deal with gender in terms of negotiating sex with a woman, and not necessarily how to enact gender outside of sex (see Table II).

In addition to learning from other studs, studs may have learned about what masculinity entails from males in their life. Only one stud (S2; Stud, Age 19), directly mentioned learning how to be masculine from boys. She stated, *“My cousins, I would say they taught me a lot about boys-- Boys’ things.”* She did not mention exactly what she was taught, however. Two studs (S3 and S5) mentioned interacting with boys. During childhood, S3 *“played football in the back with the boys...”* S5 stated that she prefers male company. She also said,

“I play basketball with guys. I play cards with guys. I gamble with ‘em. I talk to ‘em. I hang out with ‘em. It’s like since I do a lot of things that a guy does, it’s easy for me to get along with them” (Stud, Age 20).

Another stud (S4) did not mention preferring males to “hang out with,” but did state that she *“really don’t have that much female friends,”* which could imply that her friends were predominately male or other studs whom she does not consider female. One stud participant (S1)

did not mention interacting with males, but she was also the participant who desired having genital reconstruction surgery, yet wanted to become pregnant in the future. She may not have been certain of her stud identity.

Even though most stud participants did not discuss being taught how to be “boys,” they interacted with males and through this interaction may have learned to associate certain attributes with being masculine. According to gender schema theory (Bem, 1981), stud participants could apply what they associate with masculinity to themselves because studs possess masculine characteristics. Studs then become motivated to regulate their behavior to align and conform to cultural definitions of masculinity. This process mirrors how studs learn from watching other studs (as previously described).

In general, stemmes did not mention anything that would imply how they learned about what characteristics were feminine or masculine. Only one stemme (St4) attributed learning her masculine and tomboy qualities from her older brother. She stated:

I had more tomboy qualities than female qualities because my mom worked a lot so my big brother raised me. So I would dress as he did. And be up under him a lot (Stemme, Age 17).

In contrast, femme participants did not mention interacting with more females or specifically learning to be feminine. While this shortage of information may be due to a lack of probing by the interviewer, it could also be data in itself. “Silences have meaning, too. ... Absent sounds may, at times, reflect active signals—of meanings, boundaries, and rules” (Devault, 1990 as cited in Charmaz, 2002, p. 303). In general, women may not be cognizant of how they were socialized to be “feminine.” From infancy, individuals are socialized into their gender roles through interaction with their parents and the media (Ruble, Martin, & Berenbaum, 2006).

Femme women possess stereotypical feminine qualities and their biological sex aligns with their gender. People see them as female and interact with them as if they were female. Their everyday interactions reinforce their femme gender; therefore, there is less need to actively learn about femininity. They are implicitly learning it. Their gender is not as challenged as that of studs because their biological sex matches their gender expression which matches their socialization.

Stemmes also were not taught formally by other stemmes how to be stemme. As analysis revealed, stemmes enact both masculine and feminine characteristics and can play both stud and femme roles. Therefore, stemmes at some level needed to learn about how to be feminine and masculine. Past research on Black young women suggests gender roles may be less limiting and restrictive than for White young women (Ashcraft & Belgrave, 2005; Collins, 2009) due to consequences created by racism and discrimination (Dade & Sloan, 2000). Research also suggests that young Black women tend to endorse highly masculine and feminine characteristics (Buckley & Carter, 2005). The stemme participants in this study may have endorsed both high level masculine and feminine characteristics on a gender scale. Stemmes may embody a more prototypical expression of Black female gender than do those who favor gender extreme expression. Their stemme gender expression may be only one way that some lesbian young Black women enact their masculine and feminine characteristics. Future research could investigate this further.

In general, studs and femmes learned gender norms regarding sexual behavior from inside the lesbian and gay community. Their community, however, is embedded within a larger society. Participants could also have learned gender norms from outside the gay community and applied them to their lesbian gender.

Intersectionality posits that identities influence one another and that they work in conjunction. That is to say that participants' lesbian gender identity and expression may be impacted by their racial identity and socioeconomic status. Their lesbian gender identity cannot be explained in isolation without taking into consideration the influences from other identities. It is noteworthy that when participants were asked directly about the messages they received from the Black community regarding sexuality issues, most participants could not articulate how this occurred. They deferred or did not respond to the question. The impact of their race and socioeconomic status may influence their lesbian gender expression, but in ways that these participants could not articulate. Participants are embedded within a community that is predominately Black and poor. Therefore, how their racial identity and socioeconomic status impacts their sexuality and lesbian gender expression may not be obvious to them. Everyone around them is like them, so there is not necessarily a diversity of immediately available groups to compare their experiences against in order to bring about reflection on how their race and socioeconomic status affects their gender expression.

Femmes, as previously discussed, adhere to traditional feminine roles in relationships by appearing physically feminine (e.g., long hair, nails manicured, etc.), birthing and nurturing children, and taking on the role of "wife." These enacted characteristics may be influenced by their racial identity and socioeconomic status. Femmes may reflect femininity similar to others of their same racial and socioeconomic status. Therefore, it becomes important to examine how femme characteristics are similar or different from their heterosexual Black peers.

The femme participants seemed to enact a relationship script similar to that of young adult Black women. Bowleg, Lucas and Tschann (2004) conducted semi-structured qualitative interviews with young adult, heterosexual, African-American women of lower to middle income,

concerning sex, health, and relationship issues in African-American communities. They found that the women endorsed three dominant interpersonal relationship scripts. The first script, “men control relationships,” included traditional heterosexual relationship norms in which men must be the dominant household figure and have authority over finances, major decisions, social activities, and most aspects of relationships. The male partner controlled the relationship in terms of monitoring women’s whereabouts, granting or denying permission to socialize with others, regulating access to spending money, and restricting women’s decision-making about household affairs. The second script, “women sustain relationships,” included the women being tolerant of having emotionally distant partners, workaholic partners, emotionally or verbally abusive partners, and partners who have sex with other women. These women privilege their partners’ need to have sex above their own, and deescalate conflict through self-silencing or acceding to partners’ demands. The third script, “infidelity is normative,” involved a permissive attitude about infidelity in general. Bowleg and colleagues also reported one dominant sexual script, “men control sexual activity,” which meant that the male partners were more likely to initiate or control sexual activities (e.g., initiating sex, deciding sexual positions, and deciding sexual frequency).

The three relationship scripts and the one sexual script as described by Bowleg et al. (2004) were reflected in the femme-stud relationship dynamic norm. For example, studs exemplify the first script, “men control relationships.” Studs have authority over finances, major decisions, and most aspects of relationships. “*The stud is the one that’s dominant in the relationship...*” (S5; Stud, Age 20). They also control the relationship in terms of monitoring women’s whereabouts (“*I really check my mate, you know?... ‘Where have you been?’*” [S3; Stud, Age 24]). Studs make decisions regarding household affairs. “*The stud role [is] the*

decision maker. I come with all these ideas and she say 'well yea that sound like a good one'..." (F2; Femme, Age 20).

Femmes fulfill the second script, "women sustain relationships." Femmes are seen as "emotional," while studs seem to be devoid of emotions and emotionally distant.

"You give sympathy if the other person needs it, that's pretty much what a femme does... Like, sympathy? Like [if studs] want to talk, they have multiple problems, the femme is there to help." (St4; Stemme, Age 17)

In addition, participants (especially studs) seemed nonchalant about having concurrent sexual partners typifying the script, "infidelity is normative." For example, S2 stated, *"...I'm her girlfriend. I let her think that...Yeah, but I'm single to me. And the rest of the girls [giggles]"* (Stud, Age 19)

Studs also initiate and control the sexual activity when having sex with femmes, fulfilling the one dominant sexual script that Bowleg and colleagues (2004) revealed, "men control sexual activity." The stud is *"supposed to be doing all the humpin'"* (S2; Stud, Age 19). Therefore, stud-femme relationship dynamics seem to mirror the dynamics of male-female heterosexual relationships of young adult women of a similar socioeconomic status. Even though sexual minority women date other women, they are not immune from the societal effects that accompany being Black and young. Thus, they are taught their gender role implicitly through interacting with peers.

Studs, in contrast, seem particularly influenced by Black male heterosexual gender norms and expressions. According to Collins (2005), young Black men demonstrate masculinity by being aggressive, tough, and street smart. Sexual prowess also has become an important marker of Black masculinity. In addition to being aggressive and sexually dominant, some young Black

men in the United States are socialized to believe that showing emotions equals weakness or femininity. When young Black men show emotion, their masculinity becomes questioned; therefore, they refrain from showing emotion. Some Black men have internalized this idea of manhood and masculinity, thus Black men are not expected to have or want to share their feelings (Wallace, 2007). This also may be true for studs, as demonstrated through their “player” mentality and hypermasculine attitude and behavior.

Three a priori propositions were modified through the analysis process, and one originated from data and subsequent analyses. Results revealed that regarding lesbian gender identity development, Black adolescent femmes and studs self-identify as their respective gender identity and their sexual orientation at the same time. Black adolescent stemmes self-identify as their sexual orientation identity before their gender identity. Studs and stemmes begin to express increased masculine traits right after self-identifying, but do not physically become males. Femmes express the same level of femininity before and after self-identifying; however, lesbian gender and sexual orientation identities are fluid and do change over time. The women who do not integrate a gender or sexual orientation identity into their concept of self continue to explore identities and resist a gender and/or sexual orientation minority identity. In addition, results revealed that each lesbian gender identity group uses other relevant groups for comparison. Studs use males as a reference group for comparison on how they would like to be in terms of appearance and behavior, and use females for how they would not like to be. Stemmes use males and females for comparison; however, their frame of reference changes based on context (e.g., mood state and relationships). In romantic relationships, stemmes use the lesbian gender of their partner for relevant comparison and adopt the opposing gender (i.e., femme with stud; stud with femme). They also do not enact extreme feminine and masculine appearance and behavior. In

contrast, femmes use females as a reference group for comparison on how to appear, and use studs for how not to appear. Studs, femmes, and stemmes do not follow biological and heteronormative male and female gender standards for sexual pleasure. Studs oppose traditional “male” standards by prioritizing their sexual partner’s sexual pleasure over their own; femmes are perceived by studs as being sexual beings and are primary recipients of sexual pleasure. The results also discussed how each group learns (or does not learn) how to enact their gender. A stud learns how to be a stud through interacting with others in their community. The older studs teach the younger studs how they should behave sexually. Studs also learn their role through interacting with older and more experienced femme sexual partners. Femmes do not learn to be femme or act feminine from other femmes. Stemmes are not taught how to be stemme from other stemmes. Looking outside the lesbian community, young Black lesbian women reflect the gender norms of their heterosexual counterparts. Femmes and stemmes reflect young Black female gender norms, and studs reflect young Black male gender norms.

CHAPTER 4

Discussion

This study investigated lesbian gender identity development and norms among young Black sexual minority women of low socioeconomic status. Through modified Analytic Induction I examined lesbian gender development, lesbian gender roles, and how these structure romantic and sexual relationships. I then explored the community context in which these young women develop their identity and enact their roles. This is the first known study to explore the lesbian gender of this population of women as well as to identify and empirically describe the stemme gender.

Lesbian Gender Identity Development

Identity internalization is a key process in social group formation (Tajfel & Turner, 1986); therefore, understanding how studs, femmes, and stemmes develop and internalize their lesbian gender identity provides insight into how these women come to view themselves as part of a social group. The sexual orientation and gender identity development trajectories varied among the women; stud and femme participants tended to self-identity as their sexual orientation and gender synchronously. Among these women, lesbian gender identity often implied being sexual minority or engaging in same-sex sexual behavior, meaning that gender was often the means by which lesbian or gay identity was labeled and expressed. Synchronous gender and sexual orientation identity may reflect these young women's generational status within the larger LGBTQ community. Other studies suggest that older cohorts of lesbians often formed these identities asynchronously (e.g., Hiestand & Levitt, 2005 and Levitt, Gerrish, & Hiestand, (2003). The upcoming cohort of young sexual minority women may use a gender identity instead of a sexual orientation identity to connote their same-sex attraction and behavior. Lesbian gender

identity may play an increasingly important role in understanding the experience of young sexual minority women.

Diamond (1998; 2000) suggests that lesbian identity is fluid. Consistent with her assertion, though the majority of participants seemed certain of their sexual minority and gender identity at the time of the interview, a few participants reported having had different identities at various points in their lives. The switching principally related to gender and not to sexual minority identification. A minority of women reported moving from one gender identity to another at various points in time, typically progressing from a feminine identity toward a more masculine identity. Because a sexual minority identity is more permissive of masculinity in women, opportunities for gender exploration were opened to these women once they had self-identified as stud. In addition, while participants often equated their lesbian gender identity with sexual minority identity, they may not be entirely merged. For the participants who switched genders, their sexual minority identity remained constant. Future research could look at the intersection of these two identities more in depth to see how they impact each other. For example, if a woman switches from lesbian to bisexual identity, does her gender remain constant? Are there patterns to the gender and sexual orientation variability?

Gender Development Theories

Theoretically, all participants should be similar in gender expression because all were biologically female and should have internalized characteristics associated with “women” as they matured. Femmes and stemmes (when enacting femme) seemed to have internalized a female “feminine” identity, but the studs did not. They internalized characteristics associated with masculinity and “men.” Gender development theories also seem to assume a gender constancy which (as described above) was not the experience of some of the participants because their

gender identity changed over time. Furthermore, traditional theories assume a gender expression that does not change based on context; therefore, they do not account for the stemme experience adequately.

Learning theory (e.g., direct reinforcement and modeling; Mischel, 1966; Weitzman, 1979) was useful in understanding how studs and femmes learned their role once they self-identified. Studs described receiving direct mentorship from other studs and older femme sexual partners. All participants described learning appropriate gender roles through less direct and less formal methods such as through punishment and reinforcement. With a stud being mentored by both another stud and an older femme, the stud directly learns socially appropriate gender norms. Through this interaction, studs learn what it means to be stud, but also what it means to be femme, and how to sexually engage with a femme partner. It is noteworthy that, through learning from the femme partner, the femme gender role may also be reinforced. By teaching the stud, the femme not only directly teaches the stud how to be stud, but also implicitly teaches the stud the appropriate role behavior for a femme. Therefore, the stud learning from the older femme not only takes what she learns about being stud, but also takes what it means to be femme, and transfers this knowledge to her future sexual relationships. Thus, such a stud, when subsequently engaging sexually with a femme partner, will reinforce femme appropriate behavior and punish inappropriate acts. Therefore, femmes learn appropriate femme behavior through punishment and reinforcement by their stud partner, but once learned may also reinforce their role through mentoring younger studs. Additionally, data suggested that in general, studs, femmes, and stemmes learn appropriate gender mores through identity policing. The community reacts disparagingly toward women of ambiguous identities (e.g., bisexuals and stemmes). Bisexuals and stemmes were received with animosity making it known throughout the

community that those identities were not valued or acceptable. Participants also described how acting outside of the rigid gender norms was unacceptable, such as when a stud becomes pregnant. A pregnant stud's physical safety in the community could be threatened. These interactions create dynamic systems of learning – directly and indirectly.

Minority Stress Theory

Context can facilitate or create barriers to identity achievement (Adams & Marshall, 1996; Beyers, 2008; Kroger, 2000; Smetana et al., 2006; Solomontos-Kountouri & Hurry, 2008; Yoder, 2000). For minorities, an important aspect of context that bears on identity is the degree to which they encounter minority stressors in their environment. Minority stress is the psychosocial stress based on being a member of a minority group that is stigmatized and marginalized (Meyer, 2003). Black lesbian young women are at risk for homophobic or heterosexist, racist, and sexist societal messages, which are all forms of minority stress. Research suggests that higher levels of internalized homophobia are more pronounced early in the coming-out process, and lead to less self-disclosure of sexual orientation to others, and more difficulties with various aspects of the coming-out process. Internalized homophobia also is associated with negative health outcomes, such as lower self esteem, psychosocial distress (e.g. demoralization, loneliness and guilt), depression, and lower social support (Szymanski, Kashubeck-West, & Meyer, 2008). Young people struggling with internalized homophobia are at risk for negative mental health outcomes. Internalized homophobia and its negative outcomes may make it increasingly difficult to develop into a healthy adult. Meyer, Schwartz, and Frost (2008) found that Black and Latino sexual minority people experience greater stressors, but have less support and resources than White LGB and heterosexual people. In this dissertation study, all participants endorsed experiencing heterocentric or more overt homophobic remarks and

attitudes (Reed, 2010), and three gave evidence of having these messages impact their identity development negatively. This is consistent with the understanding of minority stress on identity; however, the majority of participants did not mention it as a significant factor in their sexual minority or gender identity development processes. It could be that they endure other negative ramifications of minority stress, but did not mention it in the interview, or it could be that they have resilience factors protecting them from minority stresses' negative impact.

Greene (1994a) theorized that ethnic minority lesbians harbor resources and resiliencies honed from a lifetime of racism and sexism which allow them to cope better than White lesbians with sexual minority oppression. Bowleg, Huang, Brooks, Black, and Burkholder (2003) conducted qualitative interviews with educated Black women between 26 and 68 years old and found that while participants discussed significant stressors as a result of their minority statuses, they also endorsed six predictors of resilience. Additionally, resilience may be one reason that LGB people of color do not have more mental disorders than LGB Whites (Meyer, 2010). Thus, the participants in this dissertation study may have the ability to ward off potential negative outcomes from a homophobic environment. Therefore, it is possible that the participants whose sexual minority identity development did not seem affected by homophobic or heterocentric messages may have had resiliencies buffering the impact of the negative messages. Indeed, research does support that the participants enacted strategies that assisted in buffering against the negative repercussions of receiving heterosexist messages.

Reed and Valenti (in press) specifically explored the resilient factors apparent in these young women's lives. They found that participants cognitively reconstruct the heterosexist messages as well as engage behavioral management strategies (e.g., femmes passing as heterosexual) as mechanisms of self-preservation. Self-selected families within the gay

community also provided social support for some of these women. In addition, participants mentioned having verbally and physically defended themselves in the face of isolated instances of sexual prejudice. Therefore, even though these women face various forms of oppression, they have protective elements in their lives that help shield them from suffering the negative effects of sexual minority stress.

The Stemme Gender Identity

Currently, research suggests that other lesbian gender identities do exist beyond stud/butch and femme (e.g., androgyny, Loulan & Thomas, 1990); however, these identities are not apt descriptions of stemmes. One similar lesbian gender to stemmes was what Moore (2006) described as “gender-blenders.” Gender-blenders combine specific aspects of men and women’s clothing such as baggy men’s pants and tight women’s shirts, and date feminine-looking women. Like stemmes, gender-blenders are outside the stud-femme dichotomy and incorporate both men and women’s aesthetics. Unlike stemmes, the gender-bender’s gender presentation does not change. Stemmes, by contrast, vary their gender presentation with the context, but their identity remains stable. That their gender expression changes, but their identity remains constant makes stemmes unique among the lesbian identities examined in prior research. This suggests that other lesbian genders besides stud (or butch) and femme exist. It also suggests that lesbian gender (and perhaps gender in general) is more fluid than previously conceptualized.

One may question why stemmes do not present as androgynous instead of switching back and forth between femme and stud, especially because they are comfortable with expressing both masculine and feminine gender characteristics. If stemmes were androgynous, they would be able to integrate their masculinity and femininity into one gender expression. Two possible explanations for why androgyny is not valued in this community are related to the historical and

physical context. For one, all participants identified as Black and live in a location where the majority of people are Black (over 90%; U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). This area of the country also was said to experience “White flight” during the 1970s (Farley, Steeh, Krysan, Jackson, & Reeves, 1994) -- the same time period of the feminist movement that instigated the androgyny movement within the feminist lesbian community. Therefore, perhaps racial tensions made it such that the feminist movement did not reach this community. As Moore (2006) suggests, the androgynous movement among lesbians was fueled by the feminist movement, which was seen as a White women’s movement. In addition, predating the feminist movement was the existence of the “ki-ki” gender among lesbians. The “kiki” gender expression is similar to stemmes’ gender expression. Because this community may not have experienced the feminist movement, the “ki-ki” gender might not have disappeared from this community. It just might have been renamed. Second, participants live in an unsafe environment where violent acts such as murder and robbery occur. Perhaps switching between femme and stud is protective. If a person is femme, they can blend in as a heterosexual woman; if they present as a stud they may be able to pass as a man or a tough woman on the streets. They may attract less attention to themselves than if they enacted an ambiguous gender expression. Additionally, as the study results elucidated, stemmes are received negatively within the lesbian community; therefore, presenting as stud or femme makes them able to hide their stemme identity and thus shields them from unwanted negativity.

The stemme (or “ki-ki”) identity undermines the stud-femme dynamic. The stemme identity may even be more threatening than gender-blenders or other genders outside the stud-femme dyad. Gender- blenders have their own look, their own style, and date primarily feminine women. In theory, they would be particularly threatening to studs because of their competing

interest in feminine women. Stemmes, on the other hand, trespass into stud and femme “territories.” They enact roles and presentations particular to stud and femme. Through stemmes being able to successfully enact a femme or stud role at different times, it brings those two disparate identities into a superficial level – into role-playing. Role-playing seems artificial, fake, or pretend. Given the essentialist way in which this community considers gender, stemmes, in essence, strip the validity from a stud or femme identity.

Participants (especially studs) perceived stemmes as being “confused” and that stemmes needed to choose either a stud or femme identity. One may question the stability of a stemme identity because stemmes’ gender expression is fluid. The stemme identity may be seen as a stepping stone to either femme or stud identity. If this were true however, the majority of femmes and studs would have mentioned cycling through a stemme identity before committing to stud or femme identity. This was not the case for the majority of participants.

The stereotype of stemme as not being a stable identity is reminiscent of the stereotype of bisexuals. Bisexual women are open to having relationships with men or women and do not exclude people as prospective partners based on gender (Berenson, 2002; Rust, 1993). Historically bisexuals have been rejected from the greater lesbian community as well as the general public (Ochs, 1996). Bisexuals are seen as a “personal, social, and political threat” to lesbians (Rust, 1992, p. 368). They also are sometimes accused of being “fence sitters” or perceived by others to be “confused” (Ross, Dobinson, & Eady, 2010). Bisexuality is also perceived as an unstable or transitional identity where bisexuals supposedly need to eventually choose between a heterosexual or lesbian identity (Chapman & Brannock, 1987). This is similar to how stemmes are perceived among the participants. Whereas bisexuals may experience

biphobia (Eliason, 1996), stemmes may be experiencing something similar (“stemme-phobia” perhaps).

The stemme identity challenges the essentialist notion of femme and stud. Stemmes enactment of both stud and femme traits suggest that boundaries between stud and femme groups are permeable. It is this awareness of permeability that is the primary basis for the view of stemmes as an identity threat. Stemmes threaten the basic stud-femme power dynamic. If gender boundaries are permeable, the power studs attain through their gender is also permeable. If studs could truly be more “feminine,” and femmes more “masculine” and each still be studs and femmes, then studs can no longer claim power rests on their exclusive claim to masculinity. The studs’ exclusive authority in a relationship and in the community no longer has a basis.

Stemmes not only challenge stud and femme identity, but also hierarchical Western binary thinking and logic (Ochs, 1996). Historically and culturally, any group that resides outside of oppositional categories is subject to boundary policing. For example, parents of a child born with a penis and vagina (intersexed) are often persuaded by doctors to chose a gender for their child (Nagle, 1995). Biracial people breaking the black-white binary were (and still are) often called racial slurs or told that they are not “Black” enough or “White” enough (Myers & Williamson, 2001). Therefore, stemmes because they do not fit within the categories of stud or femme are perceived negatively, and consequently met with suspicion and hostility. They do not fit within the imperative stud-femme binary.

Social Identity Theory (SIT) and Self-Categorization Theory (SCT)

SIT (Tajfel & Turner, 1986) and SCT (Turner et al., 1987) provide a reasonably cogent explanation of how the lesbian gender identities emerge and become a collective group identity; however, these theories are less successful in explaining the intricacies of a stemme identity.

Through identity development, femmes and studs integrated their lesbian gender into their self-concept. Studs incorporate heteronormative biological male characteristics and renounce female traits. Femmes assimilate traditional female traits and reject stereotypical stud characteristics. SCT (Turner et al., 1987) posits that people depersonalize (move from defining oneself as an individual to defining her/himself as part of a social identity group) and collective group behavior emerges. A femme, for example, begins to think, feel, behave, and self-define in terms of femme norms rather than idiosyncratically. She then becomes femme psychologically and is motivated to enact femme group norms. The process for studs is the same.

Stemmes integrate both male and female characteristics; but, enact corresponding traits determined by context and desire. Stemme, in essence, is an identity of resistance largely at the individual level to the rigid dichotomy of stud-femme. For stemmes, both studs and femmes are considered the “outgroup” at all times in term of identity labels. Yet simultaneously, femme or stud may be the “outgroup” or “ingroup” when it comes to momentary gender expression. This also implies that stemmes do not have a relevant ‘in-group’ because no one is visibly recognizable (at any given time) as a stemme. They cannot mobilize or learn codes of behaviors from one another when this is the case. SIT functions well when there are two opposing identities, but once a third is introduced it falters. According to SIT, stemmes would need to switch identities where their gender expression and identity align. SIT may need to be expanded to allow for context dependent identities (Molinsky, 2007).

SIT provides an overly simplistic view of the notion of relevant comparison. Paradoxes were elucidated in the findings. For example, the femme role is one in which the stud leads; however, stud participants mentioned being taught how to please women sexually and being taken care of by older femmes. This violates socially acceptable norms according to participants.

A stud should be sexually dominant and in control. The community has a way of policing transgressions to maintain categorical boundaries (Walker, 1993). The degree of transgression may be important, however. Some “transgressions” were more socially acceptable than others. For example, “aggressive femmes” would be socially accepted whereas a pregnant stud would not. These “exceptions to the rules” are socially negotiated suggesting that categorical boundaries may not be as rigid as assumed. The boundaries may be negotiated, defined, and (re)produced through social interaction inside the community (Nagel, 1994). It is acceptable for a young stud to go outside stud norms by allowing a femme to teach her about sex because of the stud’s young age. It is unacceptable for a grown stud to become pregnant because she breaks too many stud rules in doing so (Reed, Miller, Timm, & Valenti, in press). These rules are continually negotiated within the community. Each community rule may be different; thus, what “exceptions” are allowed in the participant’s community may be different than what are allowed in similar communities. These nuanced identity rules and norms are not considered or explained using SIT.

Intersectionality Theory

Intersectionality theory posits that each identity informs another (Crenshaw, 1993); from this it follows that the specific reality of young Black lesbian women of low socioeconomic status is distinguished from the realities of albeit similar populations (e.g., older Black lesbians, young White lesbians, young Black heterosexual women). Analyses suggested areas of convergence and divergence of experience with similar populations. As was the case with White butches (Hiestand & Levitt, 2005), stud participants in our study mentioned having a stud mentor who taught them how to be stud. Unlike White butches however, the stud participants endorsed hypermasculine tendencies. Moreover, the femme participants, who stated that they looked like

heterosexual women, which is consistent to what was already known about White femme women (Levitt et al., 2003), often conformed to a very traditional female role. In addition, femme participants enacted femininity similar to their heterosexual female peers, whereas stud participants enacted masculinity similar to their male peers. Unlike their heterosexual peers, however, the participants were attracted to, dated, and engaged in sex with same-sex partners, and personally experienced homonegativity. Intersectionality theory is relevant, salient, and applicable to this study because otherwise, to try to simply infer participants' experiences from somewhat similar populations would prove inadequate and pertinent information would be lost. For example, information regarding the femme identity of young Black lesbians of low socioeconomic status would be lacking if researchers only focused on a White lesbian population. The hypermasculine nature of young Black lesbian studs of low socioeconomic status might have been lost if the research only studied lesbians of a high socio-economic status. The impact of experiencing homonegativity would be unfathomed if research addressed only young Black heterosexual women of a low socioeconomic status. The experiences of young Black lesbian women of low socioeconomic status are unique, and intersectionality theory is a useful and relevant tool for studying this population.

Since intersectionality theory holds that each identity informs another, this means that each participant experiences and makes sense of her lesbian gender identity through the lens of her respective other social identities. One's lesbian gender identity is tied to and influenced by one's other identities. In this way, each participant's gender expression would be influenced by her race and socioeconomic status. Femme participants reflected some norms similar to young Black heterosexual women of low socioeconomic status (e.g., traditional role in relationships, and being permissive of partner transgressions), whereas stud participants reflected some norms

enacted by young Black heterosexual men of low socioeconomic status (e.g., “cool pose” masculinity, and “player” mentality). In such ways did participants’ other identities influence their lesbian gender identity expression.

One may wonder why these young Black lesbian women of low socioeconomic status chose their lesbian gender identity to distinguish themselves, instead of their other identities. As stated previously, participants are embedded within a fairly homogenous community where race and socioeconomic status are the similar for all. In general, people belong to many social categories, and a person will access a specific social identity as a function of that identity’s salience in a particular social context (Deaux & Major, 1987; Oakes, 1987). Depending on the context, a person will choose what category to subscribe to based on a comparison of which category fits best in that social context (Ros, Huici, & Gomez, 2000). Participants were recruited from an LGBT community-based organization where their sexual orientation identity was accepted and almost all people utilizing their services, as well as the staff, are LGBT. Therefore, in this context, a participant’s lesbian gender identity would have been particularly salient.

Gender Rigidity & Paradoxes

In these data, a pattern of strict gender roles and role enforcement was clearly evident. Participants really felt themselves to be masculine (“stud”) and feminine (“femme”). The rigidity and policing of their identities, however, hints that this is not always the case. The strict gender rules and their enactment at times were not always aligned. It may be that at some level the femmes really are “feminine” and the studs, “masculine,” but the genders are pulled to the extreme.

Studs. Studs seemed to have internalized some stereotypically conventional Black masculine attributes. Hypermasculinity is one strategy that Black male youth use to negotiate

race-related stress and other perceived stress (Cassidy & Stevenson, 2005; Swanson, Cunningham, & Spencer, 2003). Black males learn from a young age that having a tough exterior makes it easier to avoid threats or attacks. The intensified masculine behavior may also be an attempt to create the impression of toughness or noncompliance; using hypermasculinity as a mask for hiding true feelings. Often hypermasculine reactions are attempts to preserve self-worth and self-respect (Cassidy & Stevenson, 2005). This is similar to Black men's use of "cool pose" (Majors & Billson, 1993). "Coolness" is also a valued trait among some adolescents (Iwamoto, 2003). Therefore, it could be that studs' hypermasculinity is used to give the impression of "toughness." They might be able to ward off any threatening situations or attacks by appearing "strong." Theoretically, studs have society related stress through their sexual minority status, their gender non-conformity, and their racial minority status. Studs may use hypermasculinity to counteract and protect themselves against these stresses.

On the outside, studs appear impenetrable, but on the inside they can be vulnerable. Studs can (as results revealed) let an older femme partner take the lead during sex. In Levitt and Hiestand's (2004) research with older White butches, they found that some butches allowed themselves to be more feminine with their partners. They were able to enact deliberate gender performances to suit interpersonal interactions. Butches also reported struggling to reconcile their tough exterior with a more sensitive caring side - finding a balance between being social, sexual, physical, and emotional that felt comfortable. It could be that due to the young age of the studs' in this dissertation research, the studs are still finding that "balance." They are still figuring out how to enact different aspects of their gender. They enact extreme masculinity because they are still figuring out how to integrate masculinity into their sense of self. As they

get older, they may endorse less extreme (but still masculine) characteristics once a “balance” is reached.

Femmes. Additionally, femmes enacted traditional feminine characteristics. The femmes may heighten their femininity to contrast the stud’s masculinity. According to Levitt et al. (2003), older White femme women heighten their femme qualities during sex. They may caress body parts common to both men and women (e.g., shoulders, arms) to make touch more comfortable for the butch. They also reported not knowing always how to please their partners sexually without making them feel too feminine. Many femmes consciously allowed their butch partners to claim symbols of power that affirmed the butches’ marginalized gender identity. These past research findings suggest it could be that the femme participants in this dissertation study were heightening their femme qualities to counterbalance the studs’ masculinity.

Moreover, femme’s enactment of traditional gender roles may be influenced by their socioeconomic status. Hill (2002) discovered that Black mothers from a low socioeconomic status espoused traditional gender roles in the family while continuing to encourage less traditional career aspirations. Femme participants could have been socialized by their mothers to maintain a traditional role in the family. Another study with minority, economically disadvantaged girls found that rejection sensitivity was related to willingness to do things they would not normally do in order to maintain a relationship (Purdie & Downey, 2000). Therefore, femmes in this study may have been “rejection sensitive” and may have enhanced their feminine qualities in order to keep a relationship and abide by stud-femme sanctions.

Advantages & Disadvantages of Gender Rigidity

Lesbian gender identity provides structure. Strict gender guidelines may provide stability and predictability in a potentially dangerous environment. The results hinted that participants’

context influenced gender enactment. These gender enactments serve a function. There are pros and cons of emerging into adulthood in the context of strict gendered rules however.

Advantages. Studs looking, acting, and being mistaken for men may protect them from assaults due to their gender non-conformity or sexuality. If people interpret them as men on the streets, they may be able to blend in to the environment instead of standing out for being a “manly” woman. They attract less attention and are able to avoid possible harassment that might accompany having their gender not align with their biological sex. In addition, because participants were sometimes homeless or involved in unsafe conditions, being seen as a man might be advantageous. It might be better to be seen as a man walking alone in a dangerous neighborhood instead of a woman. Perhaps people would be less likely to harass or take advantage of a “man.”

In contrast, femmes may be able to maintain their relationships with stud partners because of heightening their femininity. They could make their stud partner feel more masculine and powerful. If femmes are able to maintain stud relationships, they may receive the benefits of protection given by the stud, as well as financial benefits if the stud has a job and can help provide for the family. According to Wingood and DiClemente (2000), unemployment or underemployment may force some women to surrender to the wishes of their partner in order to avoid financial instability. Therefore, they may enact a more feminine traditional role in a relationship with a stud because it may make the stud feel more powerful and validated in the masculine role. In addition, looking traditionally masculine and feminine as a couple may be advantageous. If stud-femme couples are seen on the street, they may be mistaken for heterosexual couples which could therefore limit harassment and other negativity that accompany living in a heterosexist and homophobic society. Historically, this was especially true

during bar raids that occurred pre-Stonewall. It served couples well to look like heterosexual couples because they avoided discrimination and being arrested by police (Kennedy & Davis, 1993).

To claim that femmes are simply the stud's other half or that they attain their identity through enactment with stud devalues their experience and seems too simplistic. A femme identity can exist on its own and is authentic. Femme participants are not immune from homonegativity. Similar to the women who identified as other genders, all femmes described experiencing negative messages regarding their sexuality. Whereas looking traditionally feminine or heterosexual allows femmes to "blend in" and perhaps avoid discrimination, being perceived as heterosexual can be problematic. Femme women are sometimes thought as traitors in the gay community and historically have struggled for legitimacy in lesbian circles (Loulou & Thomas, 1990; Maltry & Tucker, 2002). They are also invisible and as such, femme women need to continually "come out" as gay or lesbian (Levitt et al., 2003) which may become tiresome. According to the research of Levitt et al. (2003) with femme women, femmes often struggle to understand their attraction to other women because being femme conflicted with both butch stereotypes of lesbians and the feminine image of female beauty. The femme identity is also an identity of resistance. As with a stud, a femme lesbian also gives an "outlawed performance," but it is her desire that is outlawed rather than her gender performance. As Haller (2009) stated, "[A femme] gender is read as 'natural' because of her feminine performance. Her desire, however ...should be located ... on a biologically male body. When it is not, the categories of woman and man become destabilized and not-natural based on outlawed gender performances and outlawed desire" (p. 3). A femme like a stud breaks heteronormativity, thus she is an integral component in defying societal sexuality norms.

Disadvantages. Though there are benefits to adhering to strict stud-femme gender roles, there are some disadvantages. Rigid gender norms may negatively impact a youth's development because they can limit opportunities and chances for growth. Although there is no available research on female enactment of hypermasculinity, there has been research conducted with male youth. Because results revealed that studs use male heterosexuals as their comparison group, they may be at similar risk. Black male youth exhibiting hypermasculinity are at increased risk for academic maladjustment (Thomas, Coard, Stevenson, Bentley, & Zamel, 2009), limited quality of friendships (Pleck, Sonenstein, & Ku, 1993), increased incidence of sexually transmitted infections (Duck, 2009; Pleck et al., 1993), antisocial behavior, substance abuse, and a positive attitude toward violence and risk-taking (Kavanaugh, 2010). By enacting hypermasculine attitudes and behavior, studs may be at risk for negative outcomes similar to their male peers. It is noteworthy that two stud participants were in juvenile detention centers, while others had tested positive for sexually transmitted diseases or had been in a physical altercation. Conversely, research supports the notion that a majority of Black young women tend toward androgyny; however, Black girls who endorse a stereotypical feminine gender role also endorse conformity to societal rules and have difficulty in managing anxiety (Buckley & Carter, 2005). In addition, hyperfeminine women, such as femmes, may be more at risk than other lesbian-gendered peers of acquiring HIV/STIs, because their dating/romantic partners are more liable to have concurrent partners (Kerrigan et al., 2007) and inconsistent condom use (Wingood & DiClemente, 1998). Therefore, femmes may be taking greater sexual risks than their other lesbian-gendered peers, but unknowingly.

Furthermore, adhering to strict stud-femme sanctions allows little room for gender expression variability. A lesbian gender identity outside of stud or femme, such as stemme,

would not be socially accepted by this community. Stemmes face discrimination within this community, and the concomitant negativity does not create a welcoming and safe environment. In such circumstances, a young woman coming to terms with her sexual minority identity may turn to the local lesbian community to find acceptance, only to then ironically, or perhaps paradoxically, face discrimination because of her gender identity. Learning to come to terms with being a lesbian can be difficult, but then to be unaccepted by the lesbian community because of gender conflict may be increasingly hurtful.

Diversity Principles in Practice

With diversity understood as a key tenet of community psychology (Prilleltensky, 2001), Harrell and Bond (2006), as discussed in Chapter 1, created three core principles of diversity: community culture, community context, and self-in community. These principles were demonstrated to various extents in this research project.

(1) The Principle of Community Culture

Principle one, “Principle of Community Culture,” involves coming to understand community composition, characteristics, functioning, and interactions. This principle requires a stance of “informed compassion” by the community psychologist. Due to my race, university affiliation, and age, I thought I would be perceived as an outsider to the target community and that they would not trust me. I knew that the youth would need to get used to me being at the Center, get to know me, and trust me to an extent before agreeing to be a part of this research project. Before the research began, I “hung out” at the Center. I played cards with the youths, helped out in the kitchen, and tried to be as useful as possible to the staff and youth. I wanted to be perceived as someone who cares (because I do) and not just as someone who is there to extract data from them and leave. Some of the youths who attended the Center were extremely

good at playing cards, and card-playing was an everyday occurrence. I did not know card games and so I often had to ask questions about why certain cards were played. In essence, they taught me how to play cards. The mainstream society's roles were reversed. They were "in charge" and I took a back seat to learn from them. Because I was an outsider, when I interacted with the youth and staff I was often peppered with questions regarding my sexuality and gender. Some of them were very personal, but I answered them as openly and honestly as I could. In addition, I created a memo making my social position explicit (see Appendix F), so I could become cognizant of my stance toward this community. I know that while the youth and I have our sexual orientation in common, we differ in our social history, our race, and our privilege or lack thereof. By illuminating where I stood, I was able to see my biases and learn where I needed to be more open. I realized how my feminist stance could interfere with acknowledging the stud-femme dynamic. I discuss this more in an upcoming journal article (Reed, Nnawulezi, Miller, & Valenti, in press).

Harrell and Bond's Principle One involves understanding the diversity within the community. This principle also requires giving attention to those marginalized and isolated within the community. Within the broader United States, young Black lesbian women of low socioeconomic status are marginalized and oppressed in various ways. They are marginalized in regard to their age, because people under the age of 18 in this country are not granted legal rights, such as being able to vote, sign contracts, or join the military. With regard to gender, the participants are women and still live in a society where gender-based discrimination occurs (Alksnis, Desmarais, & Curtis, 2008; Cikara, Lee, Fiske, & Glick, 2009). Due to the participants' race, they are marginalized because we live in a racist society where the color of a person's skin still makes a difference. Black people are discriminated against and oppressed (Collins, 2009).

Being sexual minority also marginalizes the participants, because they experience specific sexual minority stressors (Meyer, Schwartz, & Frost, 2008). In addition, the participants occupy a low socioeconomic status, which marginalizes them even further because they have to struggle to pay for basic living necessities, such as food and shelter. Given demographic nature of the participants, this dissertation study has addressed Principle One by focusing attention on a population that is marginalized even among the marginalized. Moreover, I paid particular attention to the most marginalized identity group in this community: stemmes.

After I entered what would eventually become the target community for this study, the importance of lesbian gender became apparent to me (and the research team), which sparked the idea for this dissertation study. Gender seemed to be an important distinguishing marker for this population of women, as it functioned as a way for these women to define, divide, and make sense of themselves. In addition, once entering the community, I (and the research team) learned about the stemme gender identity. Women with this identity tended to be discriminated against; therefore, it became important for this researcher to gain their perspective. They were added into the sampling frame to make sure that their experience was elucidated in order to gain a more comprehensive view of this community.

Additionally, Principle One involves exploring how the community functions and operates (e.g., customs, norms, and cultural expressions). This dissertation study in general highlights their community customs, norms, and expressions as exemplified through gender. This research explored how the participants come to identify as their gender, the norms associated with their gender, and how their gender is expressed. It showcases the diversity of lesbian gender identities and subsequent expressions, which seems to be an identity that helps guide their behavior and interaction with one another. In addition, another important aspect of Principle One

is to understand the intergroup dynamics underlying the community. Lesbian gender identity intergroup dynamics were discussed in this research study. I explained how studs and femmes have certain roles that they play during sex and in romantic relationships with one another, which helps to explain and describe intergroup behavior. This research is limited, though, because it focuses predominately on sexual behavior interaction and romantic relationships. Future research could focus on aspects of gender identity negotiation outside of sex, as well as how the different lesbian gender identity norms impact interaction with groups other than lesbian women (e.g., with gay men or with heterosexual people).

(2) The Principle of Community Context

Principle Two stresses the importance of looking outside the individual level into the other ecological levels (e.g., microsystem, exosystem, and macrosystem) to see how these other levels impact the community. Human behavior is influenced by context; therefore, the community psychologist needs to reflect on how the community's context influences community norms (e.g., regarding gender). The first focus area of this principle involves an examination of the historical context. Historical context was not analyzed directly although it was highlighted in the discussion of the stemme identity and how the "ki-ki" gender (most similar to the stemme identity) was an identity prior to the feminist movement. I suggest that the feminist movement may not have reached the participants' community to the extent it did with the White lesbian community. The historical economic downturn of this community was also discussed as impacting the stud's ability to financially provide for her family, thus influencing studs' masculine expression. The history of this community was not a focal point of this research study; however, history was included in the discussion of why certain cultural characteristics and dynamics may exist.

The sociopolitical climate and the local setting form the second focal area of Principle Two. This involves identifying unique forces within the local setting. In the first section of the Results section, I provide a backdrop of the conditions that existed for participants. This allows the reader to understand various outside forces acting upon the participants and which could influence their gender. I highlight microsystem conflicts of participants, elements of violence, and poverty issues that shape available resources. The issue of diversity may have been better illuminated if contextual factors were included more specifically in the research protocol, which might have resulted in data being available so that contextual factors could be analyzed more in depth.

The third focal area for Principle Two involves institutional structures (e.g., schools, and businesses). It involves looking at these structures to see the available resources and opportunities for the community. This dissertation study did not specifically investigate institutional structures; however, the Center where participants were recruited is an institutional structure which serves as a meeting place for sexual minority individuals to interact together, access resources, and form social support. Additionally, participants made mention of frustrating experiences in the context of settings such as schools, workplaces, health care settings, and church. In addition, the institutional review board of the participating university did acknowledge the danger of attaining parental permission for this population. Attaining parental permission would have required the participants to disclose their sexual minority status to their parent(s), which could have put them at risk for a negative reaction if the parent(s) did not know of or accept their sexual orientation. This aspect of research was highlighted in Harrell and Bond's (2006) article as an element of overcoming obstacles in this focal area. Analyzing institutional structures may be especially important for creating interventions, because investigating existing

community resources may highlight community strengths and deficiencies, which could illuminate where intervention is needed. While this dissertation study was associated with an intervention research project, it did not directly analyze the community's institutional structures.

(3) The Principle of Self-in-Community

Principle Three, self-in-community, involves having the community psychologist personally explore their social location, culture, identity, and privilege in relation to those of the target community. I revealed these aspects of myself in the memo included in this dissertation, as well as in the upcoming journal article described previously.

In order to realize this principle, the community psychologist needs to have “empowered humility,” which involves being willing to experience feelings of vulnerability and tolerate ambiguity. This permits the psychologist to gain greater awareness, insight, and understanding. While I had limited past knowledge of the lesbian gender identities from butch-femme members of the White lesbian community, I was unaware of how these genders were enacted in the young Black lesbian community. While interviewing participants, I consciously attempted to put aside what I knew from White butch-femme culture and to truly listen to how participants were describing gender. I did my best to ask probing questions to ensure that my assumptions were not clouding their perspective. I asked clarifying questions, so I could learn as much as their perspective as possible.

There are three domains to this third principle of diversity. The first domain involves having the community psychologist explore ways that s/he is similar to or different from the target community. In my personal reflection memo (Appendix F), I discuss how I was socialized into a predominately White and androgynous lesbian community and discuss my reaction to butch-femme gender dynamics and expression. The second domain, dynamics of power and

privilege, involves having the community psychologist reflect on his/her privilege in a given setting. I, as the community psychologist, held various privileges in regard to my White race, educational attainment, and socioeconomic status. I do not have to deal with the oppressions that the participants experienced, such as being a racial minority and experiencing racism. I do not need to worry about being discriminated against due to my skin color. I am afforded the privilege of having an opportunity to work towards a doctoral degree, whereas participants in this study described struggling to gain the opportunity to earn their GED. I also am afforded the luxury of knowing that I am going to be able to sleep in a safe place, have food to eat, and have my basic needs met. I can try to visualize how it would be to not have these privileges, but I cannot truly experience it personally because I cannot manipulate my skin color and personal history. What I can attempt to do is to acknowledge my power that comes with my skin color and be sensitive to that as well as acknowledge how my education and money allow me opportunities that other people are not privileged to access. I can also remind myself to notice how my power can influence others and be wary of the control that my position affords. Throughout this dissertation research study I attempted to be conscious of these issues and reign in those influences based on my social position, but I was essentially limited by my own ability. The third domain, regarding “biases, alliances, and –isms,” involves the community psychologist uncovering his/her stereotypes, triggers, hot buttons, and prejudices. Community psychologists need to question alliances that they may build in the community, as well as the assumptions that they have developed about the community. To personally self-reflect, I did not think I felt an alliance toward any one gender group. I did, however, feel more empathy toward the stemme group because of their marginalization in the community and my propensity to advocate for those oppressed. I needed to keep my biases against the strict gender sanctions to myself during the

interviews. I knew that my personal viewpoint was to be put aside. I did that consciously. I decided not to share with anyone in the community besides close colleagues my personal biases against strict stud-femme power and control dynamics, biases that were due to my feminist perspective. As the study progressed, I found myself becoming more open to the concept of lesbian gender and began to understand it and tried to appreciate it as expressed in each respective participant's community.

Harrell and Bond (2006) also described five strategies that people use when encountering difference. One strategy, denial, occurs when a person focuses on how the target community is the same as her/his own community while at the same time minimizing the differences. Defensiveness occurs when a person externalizes any negative action or feeling to maintain her/his sense of self as an ally. Devaluing is when a person does not recognize the value of the target community's experience; thus allowing the power dynamics to maintain the status quo. Distancing occurs when a person separates (physically, intellectually, or emotionally) her/his experience from the experience of the target community. The final strategy, discovery, involves embracing diversity challenges and using them for growth. While it would probably put me in a favorable light to say that I always used discovery as a strategy, such was not always the case. I think that the strategy I used most was distancing. Having participants describe such strict gender sanctions was difficult to hear at times. Studs, in particular, showed hostility towards pregnant studs, and stemmes. Some studs also were appalled by femmes who wanted to physically touch them. The level of anger, as well as the rigidity participants described living by, made me angry and disappointed in them. In a way, I separated myself from them emotionally and intellectually. I almost had to in order to keep interacting with this population while I worked through my emotional responses to this community dynamic. I think that these five strategies (similar to

identity development, perhaps) are dynamic, and community psychologists may use more than one strategy at different points of a project. Arriving at the end of this dissertation process, I see myself as having entered the discovery strategy, but as I continue to work with the data, I leave myself open to perhaps utilize other strategies.

Reflecting overall on the diversity principles outlined by Harrell and Bond (2006), I think it would be difficult for any one project to follow them all completely through the formal research process. These principles would need to be enacted before the research began and would have to be adhered to throughout the project. Additionally, transparency is a necessity in order to see how diversity principles occur in a setting. My personal experience has been that when reading journal articles and books about community psychologists' projects, few authors discuss the process of self-reflection by the community psychologist. Yet, self-reflection is held to be an integral component of how these principles are realized. If self-reflection is not written about in our work, the readers will not know whether diversity of the community was really appreciated. In some cases, self-reflection by the community psychologist may occur, but not be discussed. If it is not discussed, then the reader still may not know if diversity was truly appreciated. Writing honestly about self-reflection requires being vulnerable and community psychologists may be uncomfortable with letting the readers (including colleagues) know about their personal biases and prejudices. If we do not do this, however, the diversity principles as outlined by Harrell and Bond may not be achievable. All three principles highlight the overarching concept of "connected disruption" (the tension between having compassionate for the community, yet being information-seeking and analytical). The tension is not noticeable to the reader if only the information-seeking and analytical role of a community psychologist is

highlighted in the research study presented, which highlights another reason for documenting the self-reflection process.

In addition, in community psychology training programs, most class work focuses attention on learning research methods, statistics, and theory. There is comparatively little attention on learning how to be “compassionate with the community.” This may be a necessary component to community psychology programs in order for community psychologists to learn how to balance the tension associated with “connected disruption.” For me, the self-reflection process seemed developmental and the more I started to self-reflect, the better I became aware of how my own position and biases could infiltrate the research process. Harrell and Bond (2006) also described a similar process when working with authors in their special issue on diversity. In turn, I became better able to put into words the emotional and intellectual reactions I had to my own research, and how I needed to appropriately deal with those reactions. It may be useful for the process of self-reflection to be practiced in training programs in order to help community psychologist’s access within themselves the self-awareness that is needed to better appreciate and understand diversity.

Although in my dissertation project I was able to fulfill the three principles to some extent, I was not able to fulfill *all of them* as theoretically intended. For example, due to data limitations, I did not highlight institutional structures as an element of diversity. A major strength of my project was in the use of qualitative methods to fulfill the diversity guidelines. Qualitative methods (such as the one employed in this study) are inherently conducive to fulfilling the diversity guidelines because of their use of reflexivity as a strategy for enhancing rigor (Creswell & Miller, 2000; Mays & Hope, 2000). By using a qualitative method, I was able to be descriptive with analysis, which allowed me to describe the community context and dynamic interaction to a

greater degree than perhaps would have been possible had I employed a traditional quantitative closed-ended survey method.

Limitations

The findings from this study must be considered in light of key limitations. The scope of the analysis was limited by the available data. Because these data were collected with the intention of creating a safer sex program for young sexual minority Black women, the interview focus was not exclusively on gender. The data provide insight into how lesbian women enact their gender, but more could have been learned about their gendered development. Given that lesbian gender norms seemed to reflect heterosexual male and female norms, more detailed questions to participants could have been asked to elicit additional information regarding the participants' exposure to those gender norms during their childhood. For example, for studs, questions could have been asked about parents or family members encouraging or supporting gender discordant behavior.

Additionally, data analysis occurred after the interview data were collected. It would have been helpful to analyze the data as collection occurred, which might have allowed the researchers to fill in gaps during data collection and analysis. In addition, because the participants were at an age typically filled with frequent change and exploration, it would have been helpful to conduct more than one interview per participant, in order to gain further insight into the fluidity of their gender. In essence, this research provides a snapshot of participants' lives, while a rolling documentary might have produced other or even more relevant information. Future research could be longitudinal, so that possible fluidity (or stability) of lesbian gender could be seen over time. Diamond (1998, 2000) elucidated sexual orientation identity changes through longitudinal work. Researching lesbian gender identity in such a way may be necessary

to answer questions such as: Does the sexual orientation or lesbian gender change for these young women? What happens as adulthood is “achieved?” Do the norms of stud, femme, and stemme change over time?

In addition, it was difficult to find stemme-identified women to interview. A separate study could be conducted focusing on just these women in order to gain a better understanding of this not well-known gender. While this study provides an overview of this gender, future research could explore the stemme gender more in depth. For example, research could explore questions such as: How do stemmes negotiate their gender in a stemme-phobic community? What does the stemme gender look like over a lifetime? Does the stemme gender or other similar genders exist in other locations?

The rigidity that participants described may have been enhanced due to the participants’ perceptions of the interviewers. The two main interviewers were White and one was biracial. We were all older than the participants, from a university, and did not identify as femme, stemme, or stud. We might not have looked as femme, stemme, or stud (although some participants probably categorized us as stemme, femme, or stud anyway). The fact that we appeared White and were older may have been threatening, especially to studs who held power in the community. In reaction to us, the studs may have heightened their masculinity and talk of power. Participants in general may have described very rigid and clear distinctions between the lesbian gender categories in order for us outsiders to better understand the roles and rules. Although the interviewers all had sexual minority statuses in common with the participants, we still may have appeared as outsiders, thereby creating a need for impression management on the part of the interviewees.

In addition, participants may not have readily discussed how their race or socioeconomic status identities impacted their lesbian gender because of the interviewer-participant interaction. Two of the main interviewers were White and from a higher socioeconomic status than were the participants. Participants thus might have felt uncomfortable discussing race and poverty with the interviewers, thereby giving the impression that those identities were not as salient as they actually were.

One criterion for participation in this study required having had past sexual contact with both biological males and females. One may assume that this would lead to a non-normative sample of young lesbian women, due to incongruence between sexual orientation identity and sexual behavior. It is often assumed that identity is aligned with sexual behavior such that a woman with a lesbian identity only engages in same-sex sexual behavior. Research suggests, however, this is not the case. Sexual orientation identity and sexual behavior do not always coincide. Self-identified lesbian women often have a history of sexual contact with males or sometimes engage in sexual contact with males for a variety of reasons (Diamond, 1998, 2000; Rosario et al., 1996). For example, compared to their heterosexual counterparts, lesbian self-identified adolescents are more likely to become pregnant (Forrest & Saewyc, 2004; Saewyc, Pettingell, & Skay, 2004). In addition, young sexual minority females are also at greater sexual risk than are their heterosexual peers because they have a tendency to engage in sexual intercourse with high-risk partners, such as males with concurrent sexual partners or who are themselves gay or bisexual, or who are injection drug users (Bevier, Chiasson, Heffeman, & Castro, 1995; Fethers, Marks, Mindel, & Estcourt, 2000; Lemp et al., 1995; Maguen & Armistead, 2000; Rosario, Meyer-Bahlburg, Hunter, & Gwadz, 1999).

As with all such work, data analysis was filtered through a subjective lens. My social position unconsciously may have influenced the execution of this study. To minimize interpretative biases, I wrote memos describing my perspective on lesbian gender, as well as insights into the data while I was analyzing. I consciously questioned myself regarding what I was finding by asking myself, “What else could explain this finding?” In addition, I tried to utilize participants’ words and terminology as much as possible. I also checked my analysis with people of different social positions to gain their insights into the data. Additionally, throughout the analysis process I tried to connect what the data elucidated with what is known through past historical, theoretical, and empirical literature.

Implications

This research provides insight into a population about which little is known. The findings elucidated the importance of lesbian gender and how each gender has distinct characteristics. Therefore, in future LGBT research with this population, it may be necessary to ask participants their lesbian gender in addition to sexual orientation because experiences differed based on gender. To categorize lesbians as one monolithic group could confound results. In addition, results revealed that lesbian gender is a complex construct that may be fluid and context-dependent. For example, the stemme gender changes expression based on mood changes and romantic partner. Therefore, longitudinal studies and measures incorporating context may be useful to see changes over time.

Gender theories may also need to be expanded to account for possible gender fluctuations and contextual variations. Most gender theories depict identity development as a person developing into a man or woman, with the man internalizing masculine characteristics and the woman internalizing feminine ones. There is, however, great variability within each gender

category. To assume all women develop their gender identity in the same way may be overly simplistic. Gender theories also generally assume gender constancy. A more dynamic gender theory could be more useful in understanding gender variation and flux, as was exemplified by the young women in this dissertation study.

The results from this research could be used to create programs or interventions with this community. For example, results indicated that in stereotypical stud-femme relationships the power resides with the stud, with studs seen as aggressive and femmes as appeasing their stud partners. This stud aggressiveness could hint toward intimate partner violence. Such findings, which help explain relationship and sexual dynamics, may be particularly relevant for safer sex programming or intimate partner violence prevention, programs. For example, in group settings established for programming purposes, it may not be safe to have studs, femmes, and stemmes together to discuss intimate partner issues.

This research also elucidates the importance of context and its influence on identity development. Homophobia and biphobia infiltrate our predominately heterosexist society. People internalize these messages which impact their sense of self and who they strive to be. If the broader society was more gender flexible and valued diversity of sexual orientation, perhaps less animosity would be generated towards those who did not fit within the confines of gender and sexual orientation categories. Additionally, an environment of poverty, violence, and instability not only influences getting basic needs met, but also may impact the attainment of a sense of identity by which youths could feel validated and nurtured. Otherwise, these outside forces may impact youths in negative ways. When working with youths, interventions may need to address contextual concerns in addition to or before tackling personal identity issues.

Future directions

A dearth of research exists on the experiences of Black young lesbian women of low socioeconomic status, and quality empirical work is needed to fill that gap. In particular, future research could explore more in depth the microsystem of such youths to see its impact on young Black lesbians' gender expression and identity. How does biological and/or gay family impact gender identity or expression? Future research could also study the stud-femme and child-family relationships more in depth to help understand the gender dynamics at work in a family setting. How do the children perceive their lesbian-gendered parents? Additionally, future research could explore similarities and differences between lesbian stud-femme gendered families and families in androgynous or non-gendered identified families. Because gender is fluid, it also may be important to follow participants over time to really understand what may spark gender flux or changes in gender expression and identity. Furthermore, it may be beneficial to extend research into multiple levels of social ecology, to be able to understand the intersection of the various identities that young, Black, lesbian-gendered women hold. As intersectionality theory posits, categories of difference are (re)produced dynamically across ecological levels (Hancock, 2007). Through multi-level analyses, a more complete picture could be created to help elucidate the lived experience of a young, Black, lesbian-gendered woman.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Participants Wanted

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What is the project about?

The goal of this research project is to learn more about the sexuality and sexual health of African American/Black young women, aged 15–24, who have sex with both men and women.

Why we want to talk to you?

Your stories are important. Only you can help us understand your lives and help your friends and yourself stay healthy. Help make sure the future is yours!

What you will be asked to do?

If you are able to participate, you will be asked to take part in a confidential, 2 hour, face-to-face interview about how you think and feel about issues related to sex and sexuality. You will be given \$20 for taking part in the interview. Your participation will in no way impact your relationship with the Ruth Ellis Center.

How to sign up?

Please call Maria Valenti at 517–353–9217 at Michigan State University to see if you are eligible to participate. If no one answers, please press 2 and leave a message for the Ruth Ellis Center Future Is Ours project. Maria will return your call as soon as possible. We will then arrange for the interview to occur in a private room at the Ruth Ellis Center at a time that works for you.



APPENDIX B

Prescreening Form

Hi. Ruth Ellis Center and Michigan State University have put together a research project to learn more about the sexuality and sexual health of young women who attend the Center. Part of this project includes a face-to-face interview with a research assistant from Michigan State University.

Can I ask you a few questions to see if you are eligible to participate in the interview? I won't ask your name and all your responses will be kept completely confidential.

☐ Yes
☐ No

If yes, proceed to next question

If no, "Unfortunately, I am unable to determine your eligibility without asking more questions. Thank you for your time."

1) How old are you?

2) How would you describe your racial background? You can choose more than one category.

☐ American Indian or Alaska Native
☐ Asian
☐ Black or African American
☐ Latina or Hispanic
☐ Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander
☐ White
☐ Declined to answer

3) Are you currently in a foster home?

☐ Yes
☐ No
☐ Declined to answer

Now I need to ask you a few questions related to your sexual behavior. I won't ask your name and all your responses will be kept completely confidential. Is it all right if we continue?

☐ Yes
☐ No

If yes, proceed to next question

If no, "Unfortunately, I am unable to determine your eligibility without asking more questions. Thank you for your time."

4) Have you ever had sexual contact with anyone? By sexual contact, I mean vaginal,

oral, or anal sex, or any other physical contact with another person.

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Declined to answer

5) Has this sexual contact been with men, women, or both?

- ☐ Men
- ☐ Women
- ☐ Both
- ☐ Declined to answer

6) Lastly, how would you best describe yourself?

- ☐ Stud
- ☐ Femme
- ☐ Stemme
- ☐ Transgender
- ☐ Other? Please describe _____
- ☐ Declined to answer

Interviewer: Is this person eligible to participate?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Unable to determine due to missing information

For INELIGIBLE (and unable to determine) participants, say:

“Participants for this research project are selected based on the questions you were just asked. Based on your answers, it turns out you’re not eligible to participate in the interview. Thank you for taking the time to speak with me.”

For ELIGIBLE participants, say:

“Thank you very much for the information you provided. Based on your answers to these questions, you are eligible to participate in the interview. Are you interested in setting up a time to meet?”

If yes, set up an interview within the next two weeks.

If no, “Thank you for your time. If you change your mind, please feel free to call back again.”

Name: _____

Phone #: _____

Email: _____

Date of interview: _____

Time of interview: _____

Interviewer assigned: _____

Parent advocate arranged, if required? Yes No

APPENDIX C

Assent Form for Participation of Human Subjects in Research For participants 15 to 17 years of age Michigan State University

Project Title: Adapting FIO to Youth at Risk of HIV

Primary Investigator: Dr. Robin Lin Miller
Associate Professor
Department of Psychology
Michigan State University
East Lansing, MI 48824

What is this Project About?

You are being asked to participate in a research study. The purpose of this research is to learn more about how young African American women who have had sex with both men and women think about their sexuality and sexual health. We are interested in hearing about your sexual experiences and how you think of them. We would like to learn about the role that sex plays in your life and the lives of your peers. We are interested in interviewing you to learn more about these issues. A second purpose of this interview is that we plan to use the information to create a sexual health promotion and HIV prevention project especially designed for sexual minority young women. This research is being performed by researchers at Michigan State University (MSU) in collaboration with the Ruth Ellis Center. We will be interviewing 15 women from the Ruth Ellis Center.

What is Involved in Participating in this Project?

If you volunteer for this research study, you will be asked to participate in one interview. It will take approximately 2 hours to complete. During the interview I will ask you questions about your sexual history and what you think about sex and pregnancy. I will also ask questions about your knowledge of HIV and sexually transmitted disease, as well as how you and your peers think of sexual orientation and gender identity.

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. In other words, it is up to you if you want to participate. If you do want to participate, you can decide not to answer any question and you are free to stop the interview at any time with no penalty or negative consequences. Your participation will not affect your relationship with the Ruth Ellis Center.

At the end of the interview, I will give you \$20 to compensate you for your time. You will still receive the \$20 if you refuse to answer some of the questions or if you decide to stop the interview and end it early.

Also, if it is ok with you, I would like to tape record the interview. We would like to tape record the interview because we will not be able to write down everything you say. The only people

who will listen to the tape are the members of the research staff. To keep the information you tell us private, during the project we will keep the tape in a locked file cabinet in a locked room. You can also have me turn off the tape recorder at any time.

What Are the Potential Risks and Benefits of Participating?

The topic of sex is very sensitive and it may be upsetting for you to talk about your experiences. All of the interviewers in this project have been trained on how to be respectful of individuals' sexual experiences. You may experience some loss of privacy and discomfort in answering questions. A counselor will be available to talk to you after the interview if you would like.

Remember, if there are any questions that you do not want to answer, you do not have to; you can stop the interview at any time or you can request that we do not use some of your answers to certain questions. If you would like to take a break from the interview, you can. You can ask that the tape recorder be turned off at any time. There will not be any negative consequences for these requests. There are no physical or financial risks to you in participating in this study. Choosing not to participate or refusing to answer any questions will not make any difference in the quality of services you receive from the Ruth Ellis Center.

A potential benefit is having the opportunity to share your experiences and opinions. Some people have told us that they appreciate our interest and concern in these issues. Additionally, the valuable information that you share may help us learn about ways in which we may be able to promote the sexual health of sexually active African American young women.

How Will Confidentiality Be Protected?

All information that you give us will be kept strictly confidential and private. Your name or any information that could identify you will not be used. Instead, we will assign you a number that will be used to mark your interview and the interview tape. Your interview will be kept in a locked file cabinet in a locked office. Your identity will not be revealed in any reports of what participants in the interview said; instead, all of your information will be combined with the rest of the participants' information and reported as a group. No one at the Ruth Ellis Center will know what you personally said. Your privacy will be protected to the maximum extent allowable by law.

After the interview, a research assistant will type up a copy of the interview. Until this paper copy is made, the tape will be kept in a locked filing cabinet in a locked room. Once this paper copy is made, the tape will be destroyed. On this paper copy of the interview, you will be given an identification number so that your real name appears nowhere in print other than on this form. In any written reports of the interview data, data from all interviews will be combined and anywhere we use quotes you will be referred to by your identification number. The identities of all research participants will remain anonymous. The data will be kept for 5 years in order to allow time for analysis and report writing. After this time, all records will be destroyed. Only the research staff and the Institutional Review Board (IRB) will have access to the data.

If at any time you indicate to us that you have been a victim of physical or sexual abuse, maltreatment, mental injury and/or neglect by an adult known to you, then we must file a complaint with Child Protective Services. We will only use your name in such a report if you give us permission to do so. Child Protective Services may then investigate the report further.

Who Can Be Contacted With Questions?

If you have any questions as we proceed through the interview, please ask me. If you have concerns or questions about this study, such as scientific issues, how to do any part of it, or to report an injury, please contact Dr. Robin Lin Miller, Department of Psychology, 134A Psychology Building, Michigan State University, East Lansing, MI 48824-1118. Email: mill1493@msu.edu. Phone: (517) 432-3267.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding your rights as a study participant, or are dissatisfied at any time with any aspect of this study, you may contact – anonymously if you wish – the Director of MSU's Human Research Protection Programs, Dr. Peter Vasilenko, at 517-355-2180, FAX 517-432-4503, or e-mail irb@msu.edu, or regular mail at: 202 Olds Hall, MSU, East Lansing, MI 48824

You will receive a copy of this assent form to keep for your records.

Permission to Participate:

I verify that the minor has not been coerced or pressured and understands the assent process and their rights as a human participant.

Counselor signature

Date

Assent to Participate:

I voluntarily agree to participate in this study.

Participant signature

Date

I voluntarily agree to be tape recorded.

Participant signature

Date

APPENDIX D

Consent Form for Participation of Human Subjects in Research For participants 18 years of age or older Michigan State University

Project Title: Adapting FIO to Youth at Risk of HIV

Primary Investigator: Dr. Robin Lin Miller
Associate Professor
Department of Psychology
Michigan State University
East Lansing, MI 48824

What is this Project About?

You are being asked to participate in a research study. The purpose of this research is to learn more about how young African American women who have had sex with both men and women think about their sexuality and sexual health. We are interested in hearing about your sexual experiences and how you think of them. We would like to learn about the role that sex plays in your life and the lives of your peers. We are interested in interviewing you to learn more about these issues. A second purpose of this interview is that we plan to use the information to create a sexual health promotion and HIV prevention project especially designed for sexual minority young women. This research is being performed by researchers at Michigan State University (MSU) in collaboration with the Ruth Ellis Center. We will be interviewing 15 women from the Ruth Ellis Center.

What is Involved in Participating in this Project?

If you volunteer for this research study, you will be asked to participate in one interview. It will take approximately 2 hours to complete. During the interview I will ask you questions about your sexual history and what you think about sex and pregnancy. I will also ask questions about your knowledge of HIV and sexually transmitted disease, as well as how you and your peers think of sexual orientation and gender identity.

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. In other words, it is up to you if you want to participate. If you do want to participate, you can decide not to answer any question and you are free to stop the interview at any time with no penalty or negative consequences. Your participation will not affect your relationship with the Ruth Ellis Center.

At the end of the interview, I will give you \$20 to compensate you for your time. You will still receive the \$20 if you refuse to answer some of the questions or if you decide to stop the interview and end it early.

Also, if it is ok with you, I would like to tape record the interview. We would like to tape record the interview because we will not be able to write down everything you say. The only people

who will listen to the tape are the members of the research staff. To keep the information you tell us private, during the project we will keep the tape in a locked file cabinet in a locked room. You can also have me turn off the tape recorder at any time.

What Are the Potential Risks and Benefits of Participating?

The topic of sex is very sensitive and it may be upsetting for you to talk about your experiences. All of the interviewers in this project have been trained on how to be respectful of individuals' sexual experiences. You may experience some loss of privacy and discomfort in answering questions. A counselor will be available to talk to you after the interview if you would like.

Remember, if there are any questions that you do not want to answer, you do not have to; you can stop the interview at any time or you can request that we do not use some of your answers to certain questions. If you would like to take a break from the interview, you can. You can ask that the tape recorder be turned off at any time. There will not be any negative consequences for these requests. There are no physical or financial risks to you in participating in this study. Choosing not to participate or refusing to answer any questions will not make any difference in the quality of services you receive from the Ruth Ellis Center.

A potential benefit is having the opportunity to share your experiences and opinions. Some people have told us that they appreciate our interest and concern in these issues. Additionally, the valuable information that you share may help us learn about ways in which we may be able to promote the sexual health of sexually active African American young women.

How Will Confidentiality Be Protected?

All information that you give us will be kept strictly confidential and private. Your name or any information that could identify you will not be used. Instead, we will assign you a number that will be used to mark your interview and the interview tape. Your interview will be kept in a locked file cabinet in a locked office. Your identity will not be revealed in any reports of what participants in the interview said; instead, all of your information will be combined with the rest of the participants' information and reported as a group. No one at the Ruth Ellis Center will know what you personally said. Your privacy will be protected to the maximum extent allowable by law.

After the interview, a research assistant will type up a copy of the interview. Until this paper copy is made, the tape will be kept in a locked filing cabinet in a locked room. Once this paper copy is made, the tape will be destroyed. On this paper copy of the interview, you will be given an identification number so that your real name appears nowhere in print other than on this form. In any written reports of the interview data, data from all interviews will be combined and anywhere we use quotes you will be referred to by your identification number. The identities of all research participants will remain anonymous. The data will be kept for 5 years in order to allow time for analysis and report writing. After this time, all records will be destroyed. Only the research staff and the Institutional Review Board (IRB) will have access to the data.

Who Can Be Contacted With Questions?

If you have any questions as we proceed through the interview, please ask me. If you have concerns or questions about this study, such as scientific issues, how to do any part of it, or to report an injury, please contact Dr. Robin Lin Miller, Department of Psychology, 134A Psychology Building, Michigan State University, East Lansing, MI 48824-1118. Email: mill1493@msu.edu. Phone: (517) 432-3267.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding your rights as a study participant, or are dissatisfied at any time with any aspect of this study, you may contact – anonymously if you wish – the Director of MSU’s Human Research Protection Programs, Dr. Peter Vasilenko, at 517-355-2180, FAX 517-432-4503, or e-mail irb@msu.edu, or regular mail at: 202 Olds Hall, MSU, East Lansing, MI 48824

You will receive a copy of this consent form to keep for your records.

Permission to Participate:

I voluntarily agree to participate in this study.

Participant signature

Date

I voluntarily agree to be tape recorded.

Participant signature

Date

APPENDIX E

Interview Protocol

Date:

Interviewer:

Interviewee ID:

Gender Identity:

I will now begin asking you questions. Please ask me at any time if a question is not clear. Remember that you can skip any question that you may be uncomfortable answering. I will first ask you about your sexual involvement with women only and then we will focus on your sexual involvement with men. For the purposes of this interview, sex means any oral, vaginal, anal or any other physical contact with another person.

SECTION 1: NORMS

To begin, I have some questions about what you and your friends think is okay and not okay to talk about or do.

1. Who do you talk to about issues related to sex and sexuality?
2. What about your sexual history would you not tell your female friends?
[Probe:] Why would you be uncomfortable telling them about this?
3. How do you think a stud should act sexually?
[Probe:] What kinds of things should studs not do sexually?
4. How do you think femmes should act sexually?
[Probe:] What kinds of things should femmes not do sexually?
5. How do you think stemmes should act sexually?
[Probe:] What kinds of things should stemmes not do sexually?
6. When we talked to you about getting interviewed, you mentioned that you consider yourself to be a [insert gender id]. Is that right?
7. When did you first consider yourself to be a [insert gender id]?
8. Did you do anything different once you started considering yourself a [insert gender id]?
If yes: What did you do?
If no: Why not?
9. Do you think of yourself as a typical [insert gender id]? Why? Why not?

10. How would I know that you are a [insert gender id]? What makes you a [insert gender id]?

Many times the various messages we receive from the people around us affect how we behave or think. I would now like to ask you about the messages you have received throughout life about sex and sexuality.

11. What messages have you gotten from your family about sex and sexuality?

12. What messages have you gotten from religious sources about sex and sexuality?

13. What messages have you gotten from members of the Black community about sex and sexuality?

14. What messages have you gotten from the Ruth Ellis Center about sex and sexuality?

15. What messages have you gotten from your friends about sex and sexuality?

16. What do your friends think about women at Ruth Ellis Center who are pregnant or who have babies?

SECTION 2: WOMEN

I want to talk about your relationships with women more specifically now. I want you to think only about your sexual experiences with women and only consider those experiences with women when answering the next set of questions.

17. When you think of “sex” between two females, what do you consider sex to include?

18. At what age was your first sexual experience with a woman?

- a. Tell me about this experience.
- b. Where did you meet her?
- c. How did you know her?

19. Now, tell me about your most recent sexual encounter with another female.

- a. Where did you meet her?
- b. How did you know her?
- c. Tell me about your experience with her.
- d. Is this kind of experience typical for you?

If yes: what was typical about it?

If no: what was different from usual about it?

20. Do you have a girlfriend?

If yes: What sort of rules do you and she have about sex?

Is it okay to have sex with other people?

21. In the average week, how many times do you have sex with women?
22. When you are interested in having sex with a woman, how do you find her?
23. When you've had sex with women, how was the activity, meaning oral, anal, vaginal, or some other type of activity decided upon?
24. When having sex with a woman and you grow uncomfortable for some reason, what do you expect will happen?
25. When are you comfortable telling women what you enjoy sexually?
26. What makes having sex with a woman pleasurable?
 [Probe:] When is sex with a woman more pleasurable for you than at other times?
27. Have you and any of your female sexual partners ever discussed HIV or sexually transmitted infections?
- If yes: Tell me about a time you discussed these things with a female sex partner.
 Was this discussion before or after you had sex?
- If no: How likely do you think your female sex partners would be to tell you if they had a sexually transmitted infection?
28. How likely do you think it is that your female sex partners could have a sexually transmitted infection or HIV?
29. Are you aware of ever having sex with a female who has HIV or a sexually transmitted infection?
If yes: How did you find out about her status?
30. Tell me how you know when a woman is safe to have sex with?
- There are certain types of sexual activities that people do not do for many reasons. For example, they may not enjoy it or they may be embarrassed to admit that they enjoy it.
31. What sexual activities would you not be comfortable doing with another female?
 [Probe:] Why would you not be comfortable doing this?
- I am now going to give you a few hypothetical situations. I want you think about how you would react to them before answering.*
32. You know that your female sex partner has a sexually transmitted infection and she wants to have sex. What do you do in this situation?

33. You are about to go down on a woman and you notice she has a strong smelling and strange colored discharge.

34. Your friend comes to you and tells you she is worried that you might get HIV.

35. You know that your female partner gets paid to have sex.

I would now like to talk to you about your safe sex practices with women and your knowledge about safer sex practices. By safer sex, I mean sexual practices that reduce the risk of HIV and sexually transmitted infections during sexual activity.

36. Have you ever been tested for HIV?

If yes: When were you tested?

Why did you decide to get tested?

Where did you get tested?

If no: Why have you not been tested?

Where can you be tested for HIV?

37. Have you ever been tested for other sexually transmitted infections?

If yes: Which sexually transmitted infections were you tested for?

When were you tested?

Why did you decide to get tested?

Where did you go to get tested?

What about being tested at this place made you feel comfortable?

What made you feel uncomfortable?

If no: Why have you not been tested?

Where can you get tested for sexually transmitted infections?

Would you be comfortable going there?

What would make you more comfortable going there?

38. How can sexually transmitted infections be passed from one woman to another?

39. How worried are you that your female friends might get sexually transmitted infections or HIV?

40. When having sex with females, have you ever used any protective barriers in order to reduce the risk of sexually transmitted infections?

If yes: Tell me about the method you used.

Why did you decide on this method?

Where did you learn about this safe sex practice?

Where did you get this barrier?

If no: Do you know of any method that can be used to reduce the risk of sexually

transmitted infections when having sex with women?

41. Tell me what you know about preventing sexually transmitted infections from women.

SECTION 3: MEN

Now, I want to talk about your relationships with men. I want you to think only about your sexual experiences with men and only consider those experiences with men when answering the next questions.

42. When you think of “sex” between a male and a female, what do you consider sex to include?

43. At what age was your first sexual experience with a male?

- a. Tell me about this experience.
- b. Where did you meet him?
- c. How did you know him?

44. Now tell me about your most recent sexual encounter with a male.

Is this kind of experience typical for you?

If yes: what was typical about it?

If no: what was different from usual about it?

45. How do your female friends feel about you having sex with men?

46. Do you have a boyfriend?

If yes: What sort of rules do you and he have about sex?

Is it okay to have sex with other people?

How do your female friends feel about you dating a male?

47. In the average week, how many times do you have sex with men?

48. When you are interested in having sex with a man, how do you find him?

49. When you’ve had sex with men, how was the activity, meaning oral, anal, vaginal, or some other type of activity decided upon?

50. When having sex with a man and you grow uncomfortable for some reason, what do you expect will happen?

51. When are you comfortable telling men what you enjoy sexually?

52. What makes having sex with a man pleasurable?

[Probe:] When is sex with a man more pleasurable for you than at other times?

53. Have you and any of your male sexual partners ever discussed HIV or sexually transmitted diseases?

If yes: Tell me about a time you discussed these things with a male sex partner.

Was this discussion before or after you had sex?

If no: How likely do you think your male sex partners would be to tell you if they had a sexually transmitted infection?

54. Are you aware of ever having sex with a male who has HIV or a sexually transmitted infection?

If yes: How did you find out about his status?

If no: How likely do you think it is that your male sex partners could have a sexually transmitted infection or HIV?

55. Tell me how you know when a man is safe to have sex with?

56. What sexual activities would you not be comfortable doing with a male?

[Probe:] Why would you not be comfortable doing this?

I am now going to give you a few hypothetical situations. I want you think about how you would react to them before answering.

57. A man approaches you and offers to pay you to have anal sex with him. The same man insists on not using a condom and promises to pay you double.

58. A man you know to have sex with both men and women wants to penetrate you vaginally without a condom and promises to pull out before ejaculating.

59. You are really turned on and want to have sex with a guy, but neither of you have a condom.

60. For whatever reason, you decide that you would like to have a baby. How would you find a male partner?

I would now like to talk to you about your safe sex practices with men and your knowledge about safer sex practices. By safer sex, I mean sexual practices that reduce the risk of HIV and sexually transmitted infections during sexual activity.

61. How can HIV be passed from a man to a woman?

62. How can HIV be passed from a woman to a man?

63. How can HIV be passed from a man to a man?

64. How worried are you that your male friends might get HIV?

65. When having sex with males, have you ever used any protective barriers in order to reduce the risk of HIV or STIs?

If yes: Tell me about the method you used.

Why did you decide on this method?

Where did you learn about this safe sex practice?

Where did you get this barrier?

If no: Do you know of any method that can be used to reduce the risk of HIV when having sex with men?

66. Tell me what you know about preventing sexually transmitted infections from men.

67. When do you use condoms?

[Probe:] Which sexual acts do you not use condoms to perform?

SECTION 4: MEN AND WOMEN

These next questions pertain to your experiences with either males or females.

68. Have you ever received money, shelter, clothing, food, drugs, or alcohol in exchange for sex?

If yes: How often do you receive those things in exchange for sex?

Tell me a little about the most recent experience.

How do these sexual experiences differ from those that you do solely for pleasure, fun, or love?

How do these sexual experiences make you feel?

What sorts of situations have you been in that have made you uncomfortable getting paid to have sex?

If no: What concerns do you have for your female friends who have sex in exchange for goods?

69. Have you ever refused to have sex with anyone?

If yes: Why did you refuse?

How did you tell the person that you did not want to have sex with him/her?

70. Have you ever used sex toys such as dildos, vibrators, anal beads, butt plugs or anything else when having sex?

If yes: What have you used?

With whom did you use them?

Have you ever used condoms on these toys?

What do you do with these toys when you are done using them?

How were they cleaned?

How many people would you say have used these toys?

If no: Why have you not used them?

SECTION 5: PREGNANCY INTENT

71. Have you ever been pregnant?

If yes: How many times?

At what age(s)?

What was the result of the pregnancy?

Did you tell your parents/guardians that you were pregnant?

Were you planning on getting pregnant?

If yes: Why did you want to be pregnant?

What did you do to get pregnant?

How did you decide which male would impregnate you?

How did you feel about the pregnancy?

How did your friends feel about it?

How was your life different while pregnant?

If no: How did you feel about the pregnancy?

How did your friends feel about it?

How was your life different while pregnant?

If no: Have you ever wanted to become pregnant?

If yes: What did you do to try to become pregnant?

Why did you want to be pregnant?

If no: Do you have friends who have been pregnant?

If yes: Were they planning on getting pregnant?

How did they feel about the pregnancy?

How did you act when you found out she was pregnant?

72. If one of your female friends wanted to have a baby, what kinds of things would she consider when finding a male partner?

73. How difficult would it be to find a male willing to get a girl pregnant?

74. Thinking about the girls that you know who have children, what sort of roles do fathers play in the baby's life?

75. What roles do the mothers' girlfriends play in the baby's life?

76. What are the reasons that your female friends want to have babies?

77. How are girls at the Center treated that are pregnant?

78. Where do girls from the Center go for pregnancy care?

79. What difficulties would you anticipate facing if you were to have a baby?

SECTION 7: CONCLUSION

Now, we're about to begin the last part of the interview. So far, we've discussed issues around gender, sexual experiences, HIV/STIs, and pregnancy. However, there may be other issues or concerns that you have right now in your life that are important to you. I'd like to learn more about these issues and concerns.

80. I'd like you to think about this past week, meaning today and the prior 6 days. Tell me about the things in your life that have occurred during this time that have caused you to worry.

81. If you imagine your life one year from today, meaning (today's date) in the year 2009, where do you see yourself?

- a. What will you be doing?
- b. Who will be there with you?
- c. How does this future make you feel?

82. If the Ruth Ellis Center offered an HIV prevention program for females, how likely would you be to go?

- a. What would make you more likely to go?
- b. What would make you less likely to go?
- c. What do you think would be important to address in an HIV prevention program?

83. Thinking about this interview, is there anything else that you'd like to tell me or add before we finish?

Thank you for participating!

APPENDIX F

4/17/2009

MEMO 1

I came out as ‘not heterosexual’ in the mid 1990s. Although most people would classify me as lesbian, I was just not comfortable then nor am I completely comfortable with that label presently. It is, however, easier to claim a lesbian label because it makes sense to most people even though it sometimes seems odd to label that for myself. I guess I’m lesbian by default since I have been in a committed relationship with a woman for about the last 9 years. I tend to shy away from labels because I feel like they are too limiting and the lesbian label tends to discount any genuine romantic feelings towards men. Maybe it’s my own definition of lesbian that needs to change. But I find that hard to explain to other people – how can a lesbian ever have been attracted to men? I also do not consider myself bisexual because I don’t feel the same attraction towards men as I do towards women. Perhaps it’s my definition of bisexuality that is erroneous. But my thought is, who cares? It used to be important to me to figure this out, but I don’t have the need anymore. I feel as I become older, I have a less need to adhere to labels. I love who I love and I don’t really care what label people want to place on me. I feel at home in the lesbian women’s community and feel accepted, so there really isn’t a need to re-evaluate my self-identity. Perhaps this is a younger lesbian thing (not necessarily in age). Perhaps for women who first come out, they feel more of an internal pull to self-identify. I understand and respect that it can be disconcerting for a woman to not know how to label herself. A label can provide grounding for discovering who someone truly is, and give a sense of stability in a world of uncertainty. I may have other ways of grounding myself to make me feel at home internally, such as a loving committed partner who I am creating a family with. I also know that if I had to

comment on the need to self-identify a few years ago, my response would be different. Perhaps in times of uncertainty or instable environments, people grasp their self-identified labels as a means to connect to others. I know that when I came out as lesbian, I immediately had a crowd of 'lesbian' sisters who accepted me basically on my declaration of a non-heterosexual sexual orientation.

When I first came out I never heard of butch-femme. I came out to a community that valued androgyny where any replication of heterosexist norms and values was devalued, and resisted. The aim was to rebel and reject traditional feminine ways – no makeup, definitely no high heels, no low cut shirts, and when (and if) men hit on you; you were to reprimand them for thinking they had the right to in the first place. Even though butch-femme dichotomy wasn't in the forefront, masculine women still existed, but they were the pillars of the community. They were the ones that helped when furniture needed to be moved or something tough needed to get done. Instead of perceiving them as having manly qualities, they were seen as tough women who on the outside didn't take shit from anyone, but on the inside were cuddly and affectionate with their partners. They wouldn't hurt a fly, nor attempt to control anyone – especially another woman (or so I thought). Equality in romantic relationships was a value where each partner did not act out particular designated roles. Each partner seemed to give and take in relationships in regard to decision making and power. Perhaps it was my naiveté about lesbian relationships when I first came out. Maybe butch-femme power relations existed beneath the kumbaya of androgynous relationships. The relationships I had during the time right after coming out weren't serious and did not progress to the level of having to negotiate these aspects. I adhered to the androgyny appearance (which didn't take much change from how I was). I stopped shaving, bought Birkenstocks, and thought less about being feminine. If someone was going to like me,

they were going to like me for my internal characteristics instead of socially constructed feminine markers of beauty.

It happened however that my most serious relationships with women were women who did not subscribe to butch-femme. We didn't know we were subscribing to androgyny either. It wasn't discussed. Currently, my partner and I don't really think of ourselves as lesbian-gendered – we're just two women in a relationship. I didn't even think of lesbian relationships as being gendered until we moved to Michigan. In NYS, where we came from, most of our friends were androgynous, thus we were all of the same lesbian gender. However, it became clear from our first invitation to a lesbian gathering in MI that butch-femme or something of that nature exists. Our first MI lesbian gathering involved an invitation to play a game of Pictionary. The host decided that it was best that couples weren't on the same team because couples may be able to give unfair hints to one another. To divide the couples, she said, 'girls' one team and 'boi's' the other. My partner and I just looked at each other wondering what we should do. The host asked us how we were going to split. My partner asked the host, 'which one of us is the boi?' We didn't know. However, it ended with me joining the 'boi' team. After this night, I was frustrated with the MI lesbian community. I immediately thought about how archaic it was to mimic heterosexual relationships. I had read *Stone Butch Blues* and thought that butch-femme or gendered lesbian relationships were in the past. Didn't we ("lesbians") reject gender division? Aren't we more evolved (picture: nose in the air)? After coming down from my high horse, I slowly began to become more open to lesbian gender and understand it a little bit more. After befriending a butch-femme couple and engaging in discussion around gender, my initial reactive thoughts slowly began to dissipate. Butch-femme is more complex than just mimicry of male and female relationship patterns. There are women who feel more comfortable with a masculine

presentation than a traditionally feminine one, who prefer to be in romantic relationships with women who adhere to traditional feminine norms. There are also lesbians who embrace traditional femininity and enjoy wearing makeup, high heels, dresses and other adornments, who are internally content. Some androgynous women frown on the idea of consumer driven femininity, but I don't see the difference between buying high heels and buying Birkenstocks (which can be more expensive) to express gender. There shouldn't be a hierarchy. Also, why should I judge? Their reality is just as valid as mine. We are all women who love women, but simply have different ways of expressing our gender.

Since I tend to reject labels for myself, and was indoctrinated into the androgynous lesbian community, it has been an interesting experience to study women who adhere to gender labels. The discomfort that butch-femme creates in me can be used to my advantage in analysis. Although it's impossible to get rid of my bias entirely, I will need to keep the research questions in mind as well as question my coding by asking myself, 'what else could this mean?' and try to think of alternate perspectives. I am going to have to think outside myself. If I lived a butch-femme existence, I may not have had the ability to distance myself from the phenomena enough to study it adequately (going "native").

In addition, while some people become repelled by difference, I feel drawn to try to understand it. What does it mean for women to be butch/femme/stemme/ androgynous? How does gender create their reality? I also try to accept people for who they are and what place they are in life. Everyone has a perspective based on their past experience and their environment. Although society and researchers tend to homogenize the lesbian population, my life experience and the life experience of the young women interviewed provide anecdotal evidence that there is a diversity of lesbian existence.

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