

## AN ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION OF

Kelly L. Reddy-Best for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Design and Human Environment presented on June 10, 2013.

Title: Fashioning Queer Bodies: Intersections of Dress, Identity, and Anxiety in the Queer Women's Community

Abstract approved:

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The purpose of this study was to explore the relationship of dress and queer women and how their sexual identity influences their appearance management behaviors. I answered the following research questions: (1) How is gender identity constructed and negotiated in different spaces for queer? (2) Does sexual identity influence dress choices of queer women? (3) Where do queer women look for fashion styles and trends? (4) What are queer women's experiences with shopping for clothing and accessories? (5) Do queer women feel anxiety, pressure, or discrimination from the fashion system and the appearance management behaviors in which they participate due to their sexual identity?

To answer my research questions I conducted 20 in-depth, semi-structured interviews with 20 queer women living in the United States. After the first interview, each participant completed a short survey and took a picture of their outfit for 14 days. At the end of each week, the participants completed a follow-up interview. I coded the interviews in three phases and looked for emergent themes and patterns.

Based on the results of this study I found that there is not one single way of being or becoming a queer woman. Most women in the sample did not feel a strong connection to masculinity or femininity. Fourteen women explained they felt in-between or androgynous. Four of the women purposefully rejected the terms masculinity and femininity and claimed, "gender queer." Four women felt a strong connection to either the masculine or feminine identity. One of the women indicated a strong connection to or identification with the so-called femme-butch dichotomy. The 17 participants shifted back and forth in their portrayal of masculinity or femininity depending upon the anticipated future context. Ten participants indicated that they experienced stress or anxiety related to a fear of queer invisibility or being mistaken for straight by other members of the queer community. Four women in the sample related anecdotes about times when they felt discriminated against because of their appearance.

Fifteen participants stated that they looked to family members, friends, or people around them for style ideas. Seven of the 15 participants indicated they specifically looked to other queer individuals for inspiration. Eight participants named queer or male celebrities and a ninth identified her father as her style icon. Many participants explained they looked to queer celebrities as style icons. Very few participants reported having ever seen fashion advertisements specifically targeted at queer women. Many of the participants had negative reactions to the queer imagery, or lack thereof in media. Participants described a wide variety of shopping experiences trying to find garments that fit, searching for garments in different gendered sections, and interacting with sales associates on the sales floor and in the fitting room. When

asked what garments are hardest to find, the participants most frequently responded that they felt frustrated finding any clothing that fit at all. Finding garments that fit is a common issue for many women, notably five of the 12 participants who had trouble finding garments that fit experienced this trouble because they often shopped in the men's department and it was hard to determine what size to try on and purchase.

A total of 16 participants said that they experienced stress or anxiety when shopping. Sources of stress included body image and size, malls, determining which department to shop in, shopping in the men's section, asking for different men's sizes, and unavailability of styles. Several participants experienced subtle acts of discrimination when shopping. When asked if the participant would be more likely to shop in a store that does not separate by gender but by body size and lifestyle, 17 said yes without hesitation; two participants said maybe and one said no.

Many queer women in this sample fashioned their bodies by defying gender norms and pushing the boundaries of acceptable appearances in our society. The women in this sample worked each day to showcase their queer identity conspicuously through style and appearance choices or to hide their queer identity by adopting heteronormative styles. For many of the women, managing their queer appearance translated into defying traditional gender identities and expressions. Through this study I brought attention to the multitude of ways queer women experience and navigate the construction of their gender identity and the ways dress is used in this construction. I also highlighted the inequalities in our society for queer individuals and the stress or anxiety this may cause them.

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Fashioning Queer Bodies: Intersections of Dress, Identity, and Anxiety in the Queer Women's Community

by  
Kelly L. Reddy-Best

A DISSERTATION  
submitted to  
Oregon State University

In partial fulfillment of  
the requirements for the  
degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy

Presented June 10, 2013  
Commencement June 2013

Doctor of Philosophy dissertation of Kelly L. Reddy-Best presented on June 10, 2013.

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I understand that my dissertation will become part of the permanent collection of Oregon State University libraries. My signature below authorizes release of my dissertation to any reader upon request.

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Kelly L. Reddy-Best, Author

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank all of the people who helped me form critical ideas and write those ideas on the pages of this dissertation. I want to thank all of the women who participated in this study for opening up their life to me and for trusting me with their personal stories. I thank those who offered grammar advice and I thank the people who gave emotional support during this lengthy process. I especially thank Elaine Pedersen for being my major professor during this process.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter	<u>Page</u>
1. INTRODUCTION.....	1
Purpose of the study.....	3
Definition of Terms.....	3
2. LITERATURE REVIEW.....	5
Identity.....	5
Symbolic Interaction Theory.....	7
Self, Identity, Dress, and the Visual Sign.....	12
Sex, Sexuality, Sexual Orientation, and Sexual Identity: Defining Terms and Usage.....	15
Sexual Orientations and Lesbian Identities: Language and Defining Terms.....	17
Gender and Performance.....	19
Queer Women's Gender Identities.....	21
Intersections of Queer Women's Gender Identities and Appearance.....	25
Queer Women in Market Research and the Media.....	29
The Queer Community.....	33
A Brief History of the Gay and Lesbian Movement in the United States.....	34
Attitudes Towards the Queer Community: Heterosexism, Discrimination, and Acceptance.....	36
Chapter Summary.....	42
3. METHOD.....	43
Paradigm and Research Assumptions.....	43
Research Procedures.....	44
Sample.....	44
Data Collection .....	44
Semi-structured interviews.....	44
Daily diary.....	45
Data Analysis.....	45
Validity and Reliability.....	46
Limitations of the Method.....	46
4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION.....	48
Participant Summary.....	48
Research Question 1.....	51
Connection or Rejection of Masculine and Feminine Identities.....	51
Reflection of Masculinity and Femininity in Dress.....	52

Discussion of Gender and Sexual Identity.....	54
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## TABLE OF CONTENTS (Continued)

	<u>Page</u>
Research Question 2.....	56
Self-Presentation After Coming “Out” .....	57
Self-Presentation and Queer Appearance.....	62
Romantic Relationships and Clothing Style.....	67
Anxiety and Stress Related to Appearance.....	69
Discrimination Related to Appearance.....	78
Discussion of Sexual Identity Influences on Clothing Style and Appearance.....	80
Discussion of Stress, Anxiety, and Discrimination Related to Clothing.....	83
Research Question 3.....	84
Identifying and Adopting Styles and Fashion Trends .....	84
Perceptions of Queer Fashion Advertisements.....	85
Discussion of Identifying and Adopting Styles and Fashion Trends and Perceptions of Queerness in Fashion Advertisements.....	87
Research Question 4.....	88
Shopping Experiences.....	88
The Future of Queerness in Apparel Shopping.....	93
Discussion of Shopping Experiences and the Future of Queerness in Apparel Shopping .....	93
Summary of Results.....	94
5. CONCLUSION.....	98
Implications for the Fashion Industry.....	100
Implications for Work Environments.....	101
Recommendations for Future Research.....	102
6. BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	103
7. APPENDICES.....	115
Appendix A Interview Questions.....	116
Appendix B Daily Diary.....	118
Appendix C Follow-Up Interview Questions.....	119



## LIST OF FIGURES

<u>Figure</u>	<u>Page</u>
1. Alexa wore what she described as a “stereotypical lesbian flannel shirt” to create a safe space for other queer individuals who have not begun sharing their queer identity with others.....	53
2. An example of a look, which Melissa feels pressure to wear at work to appear more feminine. ....	54
3. An example of a masculine look Melissa wears to counteract pressure felt at work to appear feminine. ....	54
4. Two shirts a participant added to her wardrobe after she came out as queer.....	58
5. Two shirts a participant added to her wardrobe after she came out as queer.....	58
6. Rainbow bracelets purposefully worn to express queer identity in dress.....	58
7. Rainbow bracelets purposefully worn to express queer identity in dress.....	58
8. A pair of men’s jeans Logan added to her wardrobe after she came out as queer. ....	59
9. An example of a men’s sweater that was added to Debbie’s wardrobe once she began sharing her sexual identity.....	60
10. Kai cut her hair extremely short after she began sharing her sexual identity.....	61
11. Asymmetrical haircuts that were typical for many queer women.....	61
12. Asymmetrical haircuts that were typical for many queer women.....	61
13. Asymmetrical haircuts that were typical for many queer women.....	61
14. Kayden cut her hair extremely short after she began sharing her sexual identity to signify to other queer women she was interested in them.....	61
15. A sweater vest worn by a participant that she feels identifies her as queer.....	63
16. A rainbow fan hairpiece worn by a participant to signal to others her queer identity.....	63
17. The Doc Martins worn by a participant that make her feel visibly queer.....	64
18. T-shirt worn by participant with blatant queer signifiers.....	65
19. T-shirt with “Queer” printed on front in rainbow lettering. The participant wore this shirt to counterbalance her queer invisibility.....	66
20. The participant felt uncomfortable and “out of body” in the outfit on the left and therefore increased the masculinity in her appearance the next day with a men’s button up shirt. ....	66

## LIST OF FIGURES (Continued)

<u>Figure</u>	<u>Page</u>
21. The participant felt uncomfortable and “out of body” in the outfit on the left and therefore increased the masculinity in her appearance the next day with a men’s button up shirt. ....	66
22. Feminine outfit worn by participant who actively tried to remain invisible.....	67
23. Kai felt new freedoms after she came out. She wore edgier and more artistic clothing combinations in addition to juxtaposing feminine with masculine pieces such as the fedora. ....	68
24. A feminine outfit worn to work by a participant that made her feel extremely anxious. ....	70
25. A “queer outfit” that Debbie felt comfortable wearing on the weekend with friends. ....	71
26. Kayla felt anxiety when wearing her rainbow cuff to work.....	71
27. A shirt worn by a participant that she changed out of because she felt she was not queer enough to wear it. ....	72
28. Debbie wore this outfit and felt extremely anxious when she ran into an old friend whom she had not seen since she began dressing queerer. ....	74
29. Outfits worn by a participant, which give her anxiety because she feels straight.....	75
30. Outfits worn by a participant, which give her anxiety because she feels straight.....	75
31. Participant bound breasts in outfit to appear more masculine.....	75
32. Mary ads men’s shorts to her outfit sometimes when she is not feeling queer enough.....	76
33. A participant wearing a queer pride shirt that made her feel empowered and not anxious or stressed. ....	78
34. An outfit that a participant’s mother did not approve of her wearing and made her change into something girlier. ....	79
35. Kayden wearing an overly feminine outfit with her short haircut. ....	81

## LIST OF TABLES

<u>Table</u>	<u>Page</u>
4.1 Summary of each participant's participation in the study.....	49
4.2 Age breakdown of sample.....	50
4.3 List of queer and alternative fashion magazines and blogs read by participants. ....	85
4.4 Retail stores frequented by participants. ....	89
4.5 Breakdown of the departments in which the participants shop. ....	90

## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

The 1994 comedy, *It's Pat*, captures the fascination and obsession many people have with those who choose to reject traditional expressions of gender identity. The star of the film, Pat, is a gender-neutral individual who falls in love with Chris, another gender ambiguous character. The *entire* storyline revolves around other characters' preoccupation with revealing Pat's sex so they can then assign Pat the correct gender. The movie pokes fun at stereotypes of androgynous individuals and the romantic relationships they enter into, yet the hardships felt by Pat and Chris are a reality for many people who are not gender conforming. Gender neutrality outside of the movie industry receives the same reaction. Baby Storm, born to two Canadian parents, sparked an immense amount of controversy and attention when the parents withheld their baby's sex from everyone except a few close family members. In the birth announcement they stated, "We've decided not to share Storm's sex for now – a tribute to freedom and choice in place of limitation, a stand up to what the world could become in Storm's life (a more progressive place?)" (Weeks, 2011, para. 1). These kinds of examples draw national attention and highlight the importance of the binary gender system present in our society that many conventional individuals do not wish to disrupt.

After advancements in equal rights for queer individuals in the 1960s and 70s, more research surfaced on appearance, gender, and sexuality.<sup>1</sup> According to the latest United States Census Bureau, over 300 million people reside in the U.S. (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012), and roughly four million of those Americans identify as gay or lesbian (Gates & Ost, 2002). Identity, dress, anxieties, and discrimination against the marginal group of queer individuals have been examined from various perspectives. Many researchers have developed theoretical models to explain homosexual identity formation (Cass, 1979, 1983/1984; Coleman, 1982; Dank, 1971; De Monteflores & Schultz, 1978; Gonsiorek & Rudolph, 1991; Hencken & O'Dowd, 1977; Jenness, 1992; Kitzinger, 1987; Lee, 1977; McIntosh, 1981; Minton & McDonald 1983/1984; Plummer, 1981; Rust, 1992a, 1992b, 1993; Simon & Gagnon, 1967; Sophie 1985/1986; Troiden, 1988; Weeks, 1981, 1987). Researchers also sought to understand how different lesbian gender identities such as butch and femme are located, negotiated, and maintained in the complex social world (Cooper, 1990; Faderman, 1992; Harris & Crocker, 1997; Hiestand & Levitt, 2005; Singh, Vidaurri, Zambarano, & Dabbs, 1999; Weber, 1996). Also addressed in discussions in scholarly work on the queer community are appearance and clothing styles; scholars found that the women in those studies

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<sup>1</sup> The term 'queer' or 'queer community' is not used here to indicate a homogenous group. I use this term throughout my dissertation when referring to all spectrums of people who desire or choose sex partners or sexual relationships of the same sex or gender. I use this term in place of homosexual for purposes of recognizing transgendered individuals, although I acknowledge and respect each individual's choice of language to describe their sexual identity. However, when an author used the term homosexual, lesbian, gay, or other self-identifying terms, I will also use that term. For reasons of simplicity I will use the terms queer men or queer women to describe men who desire men and women who desire women, respectively. Again, I do not assume sameness in any of the groups.

each fashioned the body differently regardless of their lesbian identity (Levitt, Gerrish, & Hiestand, 2003; Ponse, 1978).

Recently there has been much discussion and scholarly activity regarding anxiety and discrimination in the queer women's community. When companies advertise in mainstream media to gays and lesbians, they almost always receive a backlash of hate mail from anti-gay organizations (Oakenfull & Greenlee, 2004). While the LGBT community has enormous buying power at about \$790 billion a year in the US (WiG, 2012), many mainstream advertisers fear a risk of losing the majority heterosexual market if they become associated with pro-homosexuality beliefs by using queer imagery in advertisements or by placing ads in queer publications (Sender, 2003). Most companies steer clear of the controversial topic; however, some companies take action on their belief in equality, despite the financial risks.

In May 2012, anti-homophobic groups attacked JCPenney for their Father's Day advertisement that depicted a same-sex couple playing with their children with the caption "What makes Dad so cool? He's the swim coach, tent maker, best friend, bike fixer and hug giver – all rolled into one. Or two" (Zimmerman, 2012). In February of the same year, JCPenney hired the openly self-identifying gay spokesperson, Ellen DeGeneres ("JCPenney CEO," 2012). JCPenney's Mother's Day catalog also featured two female models, labeled as partners in the caption, along with their daughter ("J.C. Penney and," 2012). After the advertisements for JCPenney went into circulation, One Million Moms, an anti-gay organization, posted about the ads featuring queer imagery on their web page because they wanted to warn their members "so they are able to make educated decisions when shopping" ("One Million Moms, n.d.). Discrimination against the queer community from groups like One Million Moms is not a new phenomenon. In a survey of over 30,000 people in the United States in the 1970s, over 80 percent of the sample stated they preferred not to associate with homosexuals of any kind (Levitt & Klassen, 1974). Herek (1989) found that several heterosexuals openly discussed their hate and discrimination towards the homosexual community. Swim, Pearson, and Johnson (2007) reported that experiences of verbal abuse and hostile environments were common for homosexual individuals, and in 2010, the FBI ranked hate crimes against homosexuals third on their list of hate-related crimes following race and religion.

Researchers have studied attitudes towards homosexuality (Levitt & Klassen, 1974), homosexuals' experiences with everyday heterosexism (Swim, Pearson, & Johnston, 2007), homosexuals' experiences with overt acts of discrimination (Herek, 1989), and sources of stress for homosexuals (Lewis, Derlega, Bennett, Morris, & Rose, 2001). Attractiveness and likeability of lesbian women based upon appearance was investigated in three studies (Dew, 1985; Dunkle & Francis, 1996; Laner & Laner, 1980); in all three studies, lesbians were rated the least attractive and likeable compared to heterosexual women (Dew, 1985; Dunkle & Francis, 1996; Laner & Laner, 1980). Questions related to stress, discrimination, and the fashion system for queer women were largely absent. If dress is a tool used to communicate different aspects of self, then how does the fashion system affect queer women's experiences with appearance management behaviors? Researchers have not focused on the intersections of appearance

management behaviors, the fashion system, gender and queer women's identity, and anxiety. Investigating the complex experiences of appearance management behaviors of queer women sheds light on possible anxieties and discriminations from the fashion system. As a scholar in the dress discipline and a person who strongly believes in equality for all humans, I aimed to bring awareness to marginalized individuals in the queer community and how they understand and navigate their gender and sexual identity through appearance management behaviors.

### Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this research was to understand the relationship of dress and queer women and how their sexual identity influences their appearance management behaviors without ignoring other subject positions such as class, race, ethnicity, location, age, and religion. I aimed to bring awareness to a group stigmatized by mainstream society in hopes of contributing to the reduction of discrimination. I was interested in understanding the experiences queer women feel when "minding appearances" (Kaiser, 2001, p. 79) or seeking truth about who they are through fashioning the body and navigating one's multiple and conflicting identities (Kaiser). The research questions of my study were:

1. How is gender identity constructed and negotiated in different spaces for queer?
2. Does sexual identity influence dress choices of queer women?
3. Where do queer women look for fashion styles and trends?
4. What are queer women's experiences with shopping for clothing and accessories?
5. Do queer women feel anxiety, pressure, or discrimination from the fashion system and the appearance management behaviors in which they participate due to their sexual identity?

### Definition of Terms

Appearance is defined as the "composite image created not only by clothing, but also by the human body and any modifications to the body that are visually perceived" (Kaiser, 1990, p. 5). Modifications include but are not limited to dieting, hairstyling, coloring and piercing skin, and use of cosmetics. Supplements to the body include but are not limited to clothing and accessories.

Appearance management behavior is defined as "all attention, decisions, and acts related to one's personal appearance (that is, the process of thinking about and actually carrying out activities pertaining to the way one looks)" (Kaiser, 1990, p. 5).

Binary gender system is defined as the language used to describe gender in only two opposite categories including heterosexuality and homosexuality. The binary gender system does not take into account deviations from the norm such as transgendered individuals.

Clothing is defined as the tangible garments or apparel items.

Fashion is "a style of consumer product or way of behaving that is temporarily adopted by a discernable proportion of members of a social group because that chosen style or behavior is perceived to be socially appropriate for the time and situation" (Sproles & Burns, 1994, p. 4).

Fashion system is defined as a complex industry that includes “a market economy that provides wealth, adequate technology to make apparel items, a distribution system that disseminates both ideas about fashion and the products themselves, and a system of fashion innovation and adoption” (Welters & Lillethun, 2007, p. xxi).

Gay is defined as a man who desires a man.

Gender is the characteristics of males and females that are influenced by cultural surroundings and factors.

Gender identity is defined as an individual’s inner sense and self-awareness of their characteristics of maleness and femaleness.

Heterosexism is defined as a “reasoned system of bias regarding sexual orientation. It denotes prejudice in favor of heterosexual people and connotes prejudice against bisexual and, especially, homosexual people” (Jung & Smith, 1993, p. 13).

Heterosexuality is defined as the choice of sex partner or sexual relationship between two individuals of the opposite sex.

Homosexuality is defined as the choice of sex partner or sexual relationship between two individuals of the same sex.

Lesbian is defined as a woman who desires a woman.

Queer is defined as all spectrums of people who desire or choose sex partners or sexual relationships of the same sex or gender.

Sex is defined as the biological “anatomical differences between males and females” (Rosen, 1984, p. 6).

Sexual identity is defined as the label applied to oneself in regards to their sexual orientation.

Sexual orientation is defined as “an inborn, innate predisposition for gender of sexual or affectional partners” (Eliason, 1996, p. 34)

## CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter contains an overview of scholarly literature related to the topic of my dissertation, gender identity construction and negotiation amongst queer women and possible anxiety and discrimination felt by queer women from the fashion system. I begin with a broad overview of identity and then give a detailed overview of symbolic interaction theory and its relationship and contribution to work on identity. I then review more defined areas of identity including sexuality and gender. A discussion of the intersections of queer women's gender identity and appearance follows along with research on queer women in market research and the media. I then review literature on the queer community and conclude with a review of literature on heterosexism, discrimination, and acceptance of members of the queer community.

### Identity

Identity is a complex and convoluted concept that scholars have conceptualized in a variety of ways (Esterberg, 1997, p. 14). In trying to convey the amount of literature on the topic of identity in recent years, Esterberg (1997) stated, "the body of academic and popular literature on identity is so large that it nearly defies categorization" (p. 14). Rosenberg (1987) described at least ten different meanings used by scholars to understand identity ranging from the sense of oneself to the sense of self in relation to a group. Many scholars developed theories to explain the concept while others built upon those theories to explain and understand the phenomena and its multifarious nature. Some scholars interchange the concept with different terms and explain its existence in an abstract way, while others conceptualize the term in an absolute and apparent manner (Esterberg, 1997, p. 14). Navigating the labyrinth of identity leads to many different epistemologies of the term and sheds light on the multifaceted and tangled definition of the concept.

In the simplest terms, identity is "the total conception that people have of who they are" (Yorburg, 1974, p. 1). Other scholars also kept the definition simple, for example Deaux (1993) defined identity by in-group and out-group memberships such as black or white and Nazis versus Jew (p. 4). Deaux (1993) also used identity to refer to different categories individuals can claim membership to such as gender, race, and different ethnicities (p. 4).

Some scholars define identity in the form of an ever-changing negotiation process as opposed to Deaux's (1993) approach. Nealon and Giroux (2012) stated that identity relates to a process (or negotiation) of recognition and that recognition takes place among various differences: "straight, gay, white, black, thin, republican, cute" (p. 51); they are all categories of recognition within which our specific identities are located and negotiated. Nealon and Giroux (2012) also stated the process of locating and negotiating identity is context bound and culturally produced (p. 51). Kaiser (1990) described identity negotiation as the idea that the individual and perceiver come to a shared understanding of the individual's identity through a fluid process of "interpretation and reinterpretation" (p. 188). She also stated, "identity is constructed and used to negotiate desired impressions for one's self and/or for others" (p. 188).



Hogg and Abrams (1988) used Turner's definition of the social group to further understanding of the concept of social identity. Turner (1982) defined the social group as "two or more individuals who share a common social identification of themselves or, which is nearly the same thing, perceive themselves to be members of the same social category" (p. 15). Hogg and Abrams (1988) stated, "social identity, and group belongingness are inextricably linked in the sense that one's conception or definition of who one is is largely composed of self-descriptions in terms of the defining characteristics of social groups to which one belongs (p. 7). They recognized that

Groups have a profound impact on individuals' identity. That is, people's concepts of who they are, of what sort of people they are, and how they relate to others, is largely determined by the groups to which they feel they belong (p. 2).

Both achieved and ascribed identities are described as socially constructed, context dependent, and space and place specific (Kaiser, 1990, p. 187). Ascribed identities refer to when an individual is assigned those characteristics by society such as gender and socioeconomic status, and achieved identity refers to when individuals create their own identities. Achieved identities are intricately related to accomplishments in an individual's life such as their career, political power, and leisurely activity participation, aspects of their identity in which they can have some control.

Identity, self, and role are intimately related. Self is "the most abstract and inclusive concept; a global sense of who one is, composed of a subset of identities" (Kaiser, 1990, p. 193). Identity is "the self-in-context; constructed and negotiated through social processes (person interacting in context); composed of a subset of roles" (p. 193). Role is a "typified response to a typified expectation; most tangible of the three concepts—refers to performance and enactment (person acting, following a script that is prescribed); may or may not be included in an identity" (p. 193). Kaiser (1990) stated that an individual "may or may not incorporate a role or performance into an identity" and that "role performances are not always included in self-definitions" (p. 193).

The outermost layer of an individual, role, is also important to consider when discussing identity. Berger (1963) defined role as "a typified response to a typified expectation" (p. 95). Theorists using Role Theory posit "within a culture each position has associated with it a set of norms or expectations" (Deutsch & Krauss, 1965, p. 175). Deutsch and Krauss (1965) discussed that the concept of role is related to the specified behaviors which correlate with the expectations of the role (p. 175). They (1965) describe role in relation to three conceptualizations, the prescribed role or the "expectations which exist in the social world surrounding the occupant of a position" (p. 175), the subjective role or "specific expectations the occupant of a position perceives as applicable to his own behavior when he interacts with the occupants of some other position" (p. 175), and the enacted role or "specific overt behaviors of the occupant of a position when he interacts with the occupants of some other position" (p. 175).

Hoelter (1985) proposed in his Structural Theory of Personal Consistency that individuals have a range of roles they perform at various times in their life. Hoelter used the theory to explain that "identities

are hierarchically ordered in terms of their importance“ (p. 119), and that “identities are considered to be differentiated with respect to a large number of dimensions, providing the means for refined definitions of self by incorporating the variety of meanings which can be attributed to a given identity” (p. 119).

Role theorists posit humans acquire masks to perform different roles in public. These roles are often ingrained in everyday events and are commonly taken for granted (Kaiser, 1990). A person often incorporates a large number of roles, yet only defines the self using a portion of those internalized roles (Hoelter, 1985). “A role is closer to ‘what a person does,’ whereas an identity refers to ‘who one is.’” (Kaiser, 1990, p. 193).

Several scholars discussed in detail the public versus private self. Eicher (1981) described the public self as the “age, sex, and occupational self universally presented by dress” (p. 40). She then defined the term ‘secret self’ to describe the individual self that is not shared with others or is behind closed doors (p. 40). Schlenker (1980) defined the public self as the identity an individual tries to “monitor and control in front of real audiences” (p. 70). Goffman’s (1959) notion of dramaturgy, where the self plays a role in either the front stage or the backstage is intricately related to Schlenker (1980) and Eicher’s (1981) presentation of self in the open world and behind closed doors. Further discussion of Goffman’s work on symbolic interaction theory and dramaturgy will be discussed later in my literature review along with other scholars and sociologists who contributed to advancements in Symbolic Interaction.

Babad, Birnbaum, and Benne (1983) studied how group membership influences self-definition. The authors reported that the group’s “self-definition can be real or imaginary (that is, with or without an actual shared membership), and they can range from ‘demographic’ (for example, Catholic, female, black) to psychological (jocks, workaholics, responsible persons, and so on)” (p. 23). They had participants respond to “Who am I?” to study their self-definition. They found that individuals’ perception of themselves often incorporated the perceptions of others, even if the perception from others was extremely different from their own perception (p. 23).

Snyder’s (1987) idea of self-monitoring is intricately related to notions of the public versus private self. He discussed in detail, relations surrounding the self and the construction of self-monitoring. Snyder believed there was not one true self, and there was a large gap and many contradictions between the “public appearances and private realities of the self” (p. 4). Similar to Kaiser (1990), Snyder believed individuals constructed the self in relation to their contexts and with consideration of impression and appearance management (p. 4). He described the process of low and high self-monitoring. Individuals who are low self-monitors, consistently express how they really feel which may be against the prevailing norms, while high self-monitors are just the opposite and try to control the image they project to others (p. 5).

### Symbolic Interaction Theory

Theorists who developed symbolic interaction theory used it to explain the self and self-formation while considering both the self and the social interactions surrounding the self (Blumer, 1981, p. 153). According to Charon (1979),

Symbolic Interactionism is a perspective in social psychology that is especially relevant to the corners of sociology. Instead of focusing on the individual and his or her personality characteristics, or on how the social structure or social situation causes individual behavior, symbolic interactionism focuses on the nature of interaction, the dynamic social activities taking place between persons. In focusing on the interaction itself as the unity of study, the symbolic interactionist creates a more active image of the human being and rejects the image of the passive, determined organism. Individuals interact; societies are made up of interacting individuals. People are constantly undergoing change in interaction and society is changing through interaction. Interaction implies human beings acting in relation to each other, taking each other into account, acting, perceiving, interpreting, acting again. Hence a more dynamic and active human being emerges, rather than an actor merely responding to others. (p. 23)

George Herbert Mead, Herbert Blumer, and Erving Goffman were the three seminal theorists who developed, contributed, and expanded ideas on symbolic interaction theory (Farganis, 2011, pp. 297-298). The theory was first built by the work of George Herbert Mead, a philosopher who sought to understand the self as a social product and self-formation within the ever-changing and interactive social world (Farganis, p. 297). Mead first influenced Blumer, who then influenced and informed Goffman's philosophical reasoning.

Mead did not always theorize the self in relation to the social world; these ideas were conceptualized and developed throughout his life and stem from interactions with various intellects at different institutions with whom he interacted (Cook, 1993, pp. 1-22). To understand how theorists use symbolic interaction theory to explain meaning, it is important to understand the various influences and paths of its creators. Therefore, I will provide a brief overview of the lives and influences of Mead, Blumer, and Goffman to fully understand the development and blossoming of the theory over time.

Mead was born in 1863 and began his intellectual development at Oberlin College where he studied psychology and philosophy and often questioned many of the doctrines being taught by his professors at the time (Cook, 1993, pp. 1-5). Mead wrote in an undated letter to Henry Castle, a peer at Oberlin who had a significant influence on Mead's thinking, that he feared he had, "too much reason and too little strength to be a Christian, and too little reason and too much sentiment to be a philosopher" (Cook, 1993, p. 7). In another letter from Mead to Castle in 1890, after Mead's two year study in Germany, Mead indicated his intellectual life had changed from being informed by the Christian piety he had struggled with earlier, to inspiration from developmental psychology and European socialism literature (Cook, 1993, p. 22).

Some of Mead's major influences on thought and formation of the known came from his academic positions at various institutions. At the University of Michigan (1891-1894), Mead taught in the Philosophy Department with John Dewey. Cook (1993) reported that

Mead follows Dewey in viewing human social life as an organic whole that expresses itself in (and thus 'spiritualizes') human individual and also physical nature insofar as the latter is utilized as an instrument for the realization of human purposes (p. 32).

After several years at Michigan, Dewey accepted the position of chairperson at the University of Chicago, and Mead came along as his apprentice and took an assistant professor position, where he began to diverge from Dewey's intellectual efforts and develop his own reasoning on meaning (Cook, 1993, p. 33). Chicago is where Mead's original focus on laboratory work in the physiological psychology field began, and it is also the place where he explored the social psychology area (Cook, 1993, p. 33).

Mead believed attention should be focused on the current society and not the "grandiose utopian scheme for the creation of an ideal society" (Cook, 1993, p. 41), and he thought the proper way to understand these ideas was through the scientific approach (Cook, 1993, p. 41). Philosophers use the pragmatism philosophical paradigm to view the world from the idea that "all ideas and theories are treated as hypotheses that can be tested for their ability to solve problems and provide useful information (Baldwin, 1986, p. 14). The "philosophical pragmatism created by Mead and the Chicago-school philosophers is an integrated philosophical system that is designed to advance all facets of human knowledge and improve the human condition by the rigorous application of scientific methods" (Baldwin, 1966, p. 14). Mead (1936) believed "science is an expression of the highest type of intelligence, a method of continually adjusting itself to that which is new" (p. 290). However, he believed that the "Truths" were ever changing and not static; Mead (1964) stated, "Every attempt to direct conduct by a fixed idea of the world of future must be, not only a failure, but also pernicious" (p. 371).

In 1907, there was a philosophical shift for Mead from Hegelianism to social psychology. In some of Mead's earliest works you can see the shift to the view that individual personality is a result of social relationships rather than a fact or existence from nature (Cook, 1993, p. 45). In Mead's (1897) review of G. Class's *Untersuchungen zur Phaenomenologie und Ontologie des Menschlichen Geistes*, he described the move of social scientists toward a new epistemology of individual personality, and he stated "personality is an achievement rather than a given fact" (p. 791). He explained that personalities are a result of social relationships and not independent of such relationships (pp. 790-791). These experiences all led to Mead's influential work in social psychology on social dimensions of human conduct, which Dewey identified as Mead's, "original haunting question" (Cook, 1993, p. 48).

Beginning with Mead's earliest works at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, he continually tried to understand the self in relation to the social world, by questioning how the self was formed in social contexts. Mead (1934) believed "every individual self has its own peculiar individuality, its own unique pattern [which reflects the whole, but] does so from its own particular and unique standpoint with that process" (p. 201). In *Mind, Self, and Society*, Mead (1934) used the phrase "unconscious conversation of gestures" to refer to the idea that individuals respond in social conversations unconsciously through gestures with different gestures or signs that hold various meanings. Mead (1913) explained these interactions in *The Social Self* by stating

The very sounds, gestures, especially vocal gestures, which man makes in addressing others, call out or tend to call out responses from himself. He cannot hear himself speak

without assuming in a measure the attitude which he would have assumed if he had been addressed in the same words by others. (pp. 366-367)

Mead's approach or method to understand the fluctuating organic whole of knowledge was to organize and observe topics in terms of processes including evolutionary, developmental, interactional, and other types of processes (Baldwin, 1986, p. 37). In the introduction to *The Individual and Social Self*, Miller<sup>2</sup> described Mead as a

process philosopher long before the term was used extensively by philosophers. This meant for him that the temporal dimension cannot be excluded from the real; the real is not timeless but consists of acts, happenings, or events. There can be no world at an "instant," as that term is defined by mathematicians. (Mead, 1982, p. 4)

Mead (1982) had a strong belief in the idea of multiple selves particularly when in different contexts (p. 143) and that the human experience is a "dynamic, ongoing social process" (p. 7). This idea reflects Miller's description of Mead as a process philosopher. Mead (2011) made additional claims about the mind and its social process including

Mind, which is a process within which this analysis and its indications takes places, lies in a field of conduct between a specific individual and the environment, in which the individual is able, through the generalized attitude he assumes, to make use of symbolic gestures, i.e., terms, which are significant to all including himself. (p. 69)

Blumer (2004) a student, long-time friend, and mentee of Mead worked with Mead until late in Mead's life when Blumer was instructed to review and publish his unpublished notes, manuscripts, and lectures upon Mead's death (p. ix). Blumer (2004) reported that Mead described the interaction among individuals was similar to the game of chess; as humans observe the other's continuous activity, the individual uses each action as a point for redirection of their own actions (p. 18). Those actions are gestures, which were a key concepts to the analysis of self within the social interaction (p. 18). Each gesture foreshadowed an upcoming gesture and ongoing action (p. 19). The gestures could be interpreted in a variety of ways without any fixed meaning, again reflecting the process orientation described earlier (p. 21). In Mead's notes published by Blumer (2004), Mead described in abstract detail his thoughts on the subject, which I believe is worthy of quotation for interpretation of his meaning:

Meaning arises and lies within the field of the relation between the gesture of a given human organism and the subsequent behavior of this organism as indicated to another human organism by that gesture. If that gesture does so indicate to another organism the subsequent (or resultant) behavior of the given organism, then it has meaning. In other words, the relationship between a given stimulus—as a gesture—and the latter phases of the social act of which it is an early (if not the initial) phase constitutes the field within which meaning originates and exists. Meaning is thus a development of something objectively there as a relation between certain phases of the social act; it is not a physical addition to that act and it is not an "idea" as traditionally conceived. A gesture by one organism, the resultant of the social act in which the gesture is an early phase, and the response of another organism to the gesture, are the result in a triple or threefold

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<sup>2</sup> David L. Miller edited and wrote the introduction to *The Individual and Social Self*, a book of Mead's unpublished work.

relationship of gesture to first organism, of gesture to second organism, and of gesture to subsequent phases of the given social act; and this threefold relationship constitutes the matrix within which meaning arises, or which develops into the field of meaning. The gesture stands for a certain resultant of the social act, a resultant to which there is a definite response on the part of the individuals involved therein; so that the meaning is given or stated in terms of response. (Blumer, 2004, pp. 75-76)

In addition to social interaction, objects were also significant to understanding human conduct for Mead (Blumer, 2004, p. 39). Mead defined objects beyond hard physical objects to include all elements of an individual's surroundings (p. 40). For Mead "objects are the things that engage the attention of human beings, the things about which they think or talk, the things toward which they may plan to act, and the things toward which they actually do act" (p. 41). For Mead

Each object has a meaning or character that distinguishes it from other objects. This meaning constitutes the nature of the object for the individual for whom the object exists. One confronts an object, sees it, refers to it, talks about it, or acts toward it in terms of the meaning it has for one" (p. 41).

Mead also thought, objects were intricately related to the ongoing social process of self-formation. As the self-defining process unfolds, objects in addition to other individuals inform the responses and actions of others. Mead believed

objects should not be thought of as detached things stored up in an outside world, but should be seen as having their existence in the process of social interaction, in which their character and fate are determined by the definition and redefinition to which they are subject. (Blumer, 2004, p. 46)

According to Blumer (2004), for Mead, all objects were products of the social worlds, and the nature of their existence and meaning changed constantly depending upon the individuals in the setting, and the interactions between those individuals (p. 47).

Herbert Blumer himself made significant contributions to symbolic interaction theory (Farganis, 2011, p. 297). Blumer was born in 1900 and studied with Mead at the University of Chicago (Farganis, 2011, p. 297). Blumer coined the term symbolic interaction theory in

an attempt to label philosophers, sociologists, and social psychologists sharing a pragmatist position regarding the nature of social phenomena. His version of pragmatism locates empirical social reality in ongoing and always situated adjustive, codeterminative relationships among people acting in worlds of objects. (Blumer, 2004, p. xi)

Like Mead, Blumer did not believe individuals were passive, reflective actors in the social world but instead they constructed their own realities by evaluating each environment and creating responses based upon personal interpretation. He proposed the social self is an active and negotiated process (Farganis, 2011, p. 297). Blumer argued against the fixed, definable, structure "with predictable outcomes and severely constrained lines of action for individuals" (pp. 297-298). Blumer built upon Mead's ideas of self-formation and provided a stronger foundation for the Symbolic Interaction school of thought.

Erving Goffman, another seminal author on symbolic interaction theory, addressed the self in his major works. Goffman was born in 1922, studied at the University of Toronto, and completed graduate

work with Herbert Blumer at the University of Chicago. It was through the work of Blumer and Mead, that Goffman was able to truly define the role of the self in symbolic interaction theory (Farganis, 2011, p. 298).

Goffman's (1959) major contribution was that he found the self plays a role in either the front stage or the backstage with a concept known as dramaturgy, which is analogous with traditional theatre (p. 22). Goffman described the "front" as the "part of the individual's performance which regularly functions in a general and fixed fashion to define the situation for those who observe the performance" (p. 22). When an individual is operating in his or her front stage they may be practicing impression management so that they appear to the audience in a particular manner. When the individual is in the backstage, the performer is prepping for their appearance to the audience where it is presented (Goffman, 1959, p. 238). Goffman "focuses on the individual as an active and reflective self capable of making a wide range of choices in determining how it should be presented in the varied social spaces in which it must perform" (Farganis, 2011, p. 298).

### Self, Identity, Dress, and the Visual Sign

Scholars have defined dress in an infinite number of ways. Dress as defined by Roach-Higgins and Eicher (1992) is "an assemblage of modifications of the body and/or supplements to the body" (p. 1). According to their definition, modifications of the body include "coiffed hair, colored skin, pierced ears, and scented breath" (p. 7) and supplements to the body include items such as "garments, jewelry, [and] accessories" (p. 7). In 1965, Roach-Higgins and Eicher suggested the use of the term dress as opposed to appearance, adornment, ornament, clothing, apparel, costume, and fashion, which were terms often interchanged with dress in scholarly writing (p. 7). They chose the word dress due to the comprehensive nature and accurateness associated with the term. They stated their definition is unambiguous, unbiased, appropriate for any national or cultural group, and includes all phenomena that accurately signifies dress (p. 7).

A number of scholars have ascertained dress is intimately related to identity and that it is used as a visual symbol or sign to communicate various identities (Barnard, 2002; Damhorst, Miller-Spillman, & Michelman, 2005; Johnson, Schofield, & Yurchisin, 2002; Kaiser, 1990; Roach-Higgins and Eicher, 1992; Stone, 1959). Davis (1992) described this relationship by stating that clothing functions as "a kind of visual metaphor for identity" (p. 25) and that it communicates the cultural and context specific ambivalences that resound within and between identities. He used black gauze to illustrate that when it is worn during a funeral it has drastically different meanings than when sewn into a nightgown (p. 8). Several scholars found that dress and its corresponding symbols influence how individuals are perceived (Damhorst, 1990; Johnson et al., 2002). Eicher (1981) stated, "dress is our most immediate environment" and continued "dress aids in the presentation of the self because the artifacts of dress enable us to provide relevant information to others that they can assess" (p. 40).

Roach-Higgins and Eicher (1995) discussed the interrelation of identity, self, and dress (a visual sign). The self was viewed as "a composite of an individual's identities communicated by dress, bodily

aspects of appearance, and discourse, as well as the material and social objects (other people) that contribute meaning to situations for interaction” (p. 12). They stated that the individual has multiple identities where they adopt different bodily practices depending upon the social context in which they are participating (pp. 12-13). Dress has a priority over other visual signs to communicate identity and that dress can serve to identify the individual’s position within the society or social structure (pp. 13-16).

Kaiser (1990) discussed identity and its heavy interconnectedness with appearance communication (p. 211). Appearance communication is the “meaningful exchange of information through visual personal cues” (p. 211). Kaiser explained that appearance communication involves both senders and receivers; the senders of the process take part in appearance management, and the receivers perceive those cues put forth by the senders (p. 211). Appearance management refers to

all attention, decisions, and acts related to one’s personal appearance (that is, the process of thinking about and actually carrying out activities pertaining to the way one looks). This concept includes all activities and thought processes leading to the purchase and wear of clothing items, as well as processes of body modifications (for example, dieting and exercising) (Kaiser, 1990, p. 5).

All individuals take part in some form of appearance management everyday (Kaiser, 1990, p. 5). Individuals use appearance management to locate and negotiate different identities they would like to have in different social contexts and choose different visual cues depending upon the social situation they anticipate (p. 186). Goffman (1995) used the term “identity kit” to describe the necessities required for appearance management of their front stage or personal front (p. 119). Goffman stated that each individual possesses this kit to include the supplies, tools, and services essential to creating and maintaining their appearance (p. 119).

Stone (1962) also considered appearance (and demanded others do too) and used it to explain an individual’s framework of multiple identities and composition of self. Along with Crawley (1931) and Zimmerman (1936), Stone was an early social psychologist who used appearance and appearance management seriously in his search to understand the meanings of identity and self. He used Mead’s theory of interaction and collected empirical evidence through in-depth interviews to explain the meaning of dress in social situations (p. 86). Stone (1962) explained identity is not a substitute for self and that

When one has identity, he is situated – that is, cast in the shape of a social object by the acknowledgment of his participation or membership in social relations. One’s identity is established when others place him as a social object by assigning him the same words of identity that he appropriates for himself or announces. (p. 93)

He continued, “It is in the coincidence of placements and announcements that identity becomes a meaning of the self, and often placements and announcements are aroused by apparent symbols such as uniforms” (p. 93). In Stone’s (1959) unpublished dissertation, he demonstrated first that social transactions must be broken into two components including appearance and discourse. Second, he found appearance was equally as important as discourse for establishment and maintenance of self. Third, studying appearance opens the door for analysis of the self, and lastly appearance is extremely important at every stage of the



development of self. Stone explained that meanings of appearance can and should be used to explain our multiple identities and the self.

The negotiation process is key to explaining the multiple identities that compose the self. The process of identity negotiation involves symbols or gestures, which include nonverbal communication such as aspects of one's dress. Kaiser (1990) described this process by stating,

Identity negotiation occurs when a wearer and a perceiver are able to come to a shared understanding of the wearer's identity through a process of give and take, interpretation and reinterpretation, using not only appearance but also verbal communication as a guide. (p. 188)

Kaiser (1990) described this negotiation process of appearance management in terms of Goffman's front stage and back stage. She described that most appearance management occurs in the backstage, while the front stage consists of actual appearances including clothing, makeup, and hairstyles and manners such as behaviors, gestures, and styles of speech (p. 199).

Several scholars addressed and discussed the complex negotiation process and nature of communication through symbols and signs. Joseph (1995) identified that individuals have multiple layers of signs and each can transmit a different identity that is part of the self (p. 80). He described the body as a battleground between the group affiliations and the self image (p. 81). Polhemus (1996) described the emergence of confusing, contradictory, and complicated presentations of selves for individuals, in other words the postmodern identity (p. 17). He described individuals as style surfers who see identity as something that is infinitely malleable. Lillethun (2011) addressed this complex notion of dress and its relationship to identity, she stated,

because meanings are negotiated in social interaction, the meanings underlying an appearance may be diffuse, undetermined, or unclear. In the postmodern condition, shifting, contingent, and overlapping meanings result in ambiguous and misunderstood identities. (p. 189)

Davis (1992) also discussed the ambivalent nature and ambiguity intertwined with dress and identity drawing on Nietzsche's (1887) ideas in *The Will to Power* about the human condition and its ambivalent state (p. 23). Davis (1992) gave several examples of ambiguity in dress relating to gender, status, and sexuality describing the symbolic risks when giving mixed or unclear messages through the visual sign, dress.

Kaiser (2001) developed the theoretical approach "minding appearances" to understand the staggering possibilities of fashioned bodies as they are related to the self or one's multiple and conflicting identities. Her developments on the theoretical approach began by asking the questions "to what extent does my appearance style represent or create truths(s) about who I am? How do my ways of being, becoming, and appearing interface with those of other?" (p. 79). Through her approach she sought to explain the linkage of style, truth, and subjectivity by examining the complex and fluid relationship between the social world and an individual's mind and body (p. 79). By style, Kaiser means, "a process or act of managing appearance in everyday life" (p. 80) and by truth, she means, "a process of knowledge

production that individuals use to negotiate a sense of meaning or purpose with others” (p. 80), and by subjectivity she means, “a way of being and becoming in the world” (p. 80). The process of minding appearances, then “enables the construction of looks, as well as tentative understandings about the self in relation to others and consumer and media cultures, at a specific time and place” (p. 80). The idea of minding appearances “notes the continual interplay between an individual and his/her various identities and communities, in such a way that combines style, truth and subjectivity” (p. 80). The approach is a way to explain how individuals think through and perform anxieties and ambivalences about identity.

### Sex, Sexuality, Sexual Orientation, and Sexual Identity: Defining Terms and Usage

Sex, sexuality, sexual orientation, and sexual identity are all intimately related. I feel it is necessary to discuss how researchers and writers have used these terms to clarify their definitions and identify the gray areas of overlap in their usage. Sex, is commonly defined as the anatomical differences between males and females (Rosen, 1984, p. 6). This term appears to be the most simple to define; however, it can become more complicated when there is not a clear distinction in anatomical parts. Hermaphrodite is one term used to describe an individual born with both male and female reproductive parts (King, Camp, & Downey, 1991, p. 203). Often the ambiguities in genitalia at birth are diagnosed as problems or conditions that need to be fixed and resolved chemically or through surgery (Harding, 1998, p. 44).<sup>3</sup> A third sex different from male and female occurs when an individual is not strictly female or male because they have taken sex hormones to become somewhere in-between the two dominant sexes (Harding, 1998, p. 45).

Several cultures around the world recognize and include a third sex in their language; the individual of the third sex in these examples does not take sex hormones. In Thailand, kathoey is a term used to describe a third sex that has no similar Western parallel (Totman, 2011, p. 21). Totman (2011) explained that the kathoey have been a part of Thai culture for centuries and are a familiar part of everyday life (p. 21). Kathoey are boys or men in an anatomical sense and perform feminine characteristics. This is an idea we would associate with transvestite or cross-dresser; however, Totman explained that using words such as cross-dresser, transvestite, or gay are inappropriate and not correct because they do not have a similar meaning in their culture (p. 21).<sup>4</sup> In ancient Greece, eunuchs were slaves kept by the wealthiest individuals to housekeep, guard, and tutor (Dynes, 1990, p. 377). The eunuchs were not considered a male or female but a third sex referred to in the language as *tertium genus hominum* (Dynes, 1990, p. 377). The eunuchs were men anatomically, had effeminate characteristics, and during sexual experiences they were expected to behave like women (Dynes, 1990, p. 377).

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<sup>3</sup> Harding (1998) stated this process of “fixing” the sex reinforces the binary system present in our language (p. 44). The binary system will be discussed in more detail in this chapter.

<sup>4</sup> The results and insights Totman (2011) arrived at in his research on the meaning of kathoey result from 43 interviews over a three year period (p. 21).

It is important to consider the notion of sex before considering sexuality due to the complexities that can exist with the meaning of sex. Sexuality is also a complex topic that is often interwoven with other terms, differs significantly between cultures, and its meaning has changed over time (Bender & Leone, 1995; Brown, 1995, p. 3; Marietta, 1997, p. 18). The definitions of sexuality have varied and influenced severely contrasting viewpoints (Bender & Leone, 1995). Marietta (1997) explained that while there are several contrasting views on what sexuality is, it is important to consider them all to understand the concept in the richest sense (p. 18). Harding (1998) stated that sexuality relates to the sexual desires individuals feel and is intricately related to their own gender identity and that of others as well (p. 44). Sexuality is often thought of as an available, cultural category and not a personal attribute with which one is born (Jagose, 1996, p. 79). Troiden (1988) described the social construction of sexuality in the following passage

Questions of sexuality are cultural constructions, specific to time and place: what sexuality is, the purposes it serves, its manner of expression, and what it means to be sexual. Lesbianism and male homosexuality are similarly constructed and culture bound. Both perspectives also conceive of sexual behavior and responsiveness as spanning a spectrum from exclusive heterosexuality to exclusive homosexuality; the positions that people occupy on this spectrum result from social learning. In addition, the two outlooks share the idea that sexual identity is independent of sexual behavior (p. 80).

Nealon and Giroux (2012) explained there is not a natural relationship between anatomical parts and how those parts should be used and that a wide range of sex acts exist and are performed; however, the two most commonly described sexualities are homosexual and heterosexual (Nealon & Giroux, 2012, pp. 186 -187). Many scholars argued against the dichotomous definition of sexuality and used a continuum explanation to describe sexuality (Brown, 1995; Harding, 1998; Jagose, 1996; Rich, 1980; Sedgwick, 1985; Sedgwick, 1990).<sup>5</sup>

Sexuality is closely related to sexual orientation, and some overlap exists in the descriptions of the two terms. Eliason (1996) defined sexual orientation as “an inborn, innate predisposition for gender of sexual or affectional partners” (p. 34). Rosen (1984) defined sexual orientation as “a person’s choice of sex partner, which may be heterosexual, homosexual, or bisexual; also called sexual preference” (p. 7). Bailey (1995) uses the term sexual orientation “to refer to one’s pattern of sexual attraction to men or to women” (p. 102).

An individual’s sexual identity is their image of themselves as a male or female and the relationship of that notion to sexuality (Yorburg, 1974, p. 1). Sexual identity is the “sex typed self image” (Yorburg, 1974, p. 1) that roots from infancy. The sexual identity includes beliefs about how the individual thinks they should think, act, and feel based on the perception of their gender (Yorburg, 1974, p. 1). Bailey (1995) described sexual identity in a similar yet slightly different way. He used sexual identity to refer to the label individuals apply to themselves to describe sexual feelings for men and women and for “reasons other than the relative intensity of the sexual feelings for men versus women” (Bailey, 1995, p. 103). He

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<sup>5</sup> The dichotomous definition refers to the idea that there are two options, homosexual and heterosexual as stated in the previous sentence.

explained that a male might participate in same-sex sexual acts, yet prefer heterosexual marriage and thus identify as a heterosexual (p. 103). A woman might prefer sexual acts with men and identify as a lesbian to express emotional solidarity with feminist lesbians (p. 103). A few researchers reported that the relationship between sexual behavior and sexual identity might not match (Faderman, 1984/1985; Lockard, 1985). Esterberg (1997) described the ambivalence in sexual identity as sexual fluidity because she found that some individuals shift their identity depending upon the context and people involved (p. 18).

#### Sexual Orientations and Lesbian Identities: Language and Defining Terms

Karl-Maria Benkert, a Hungarian physician, was the first to use the term homosexual in his published brochure in 1869, to describe sexual ‘abnormality’ (Hirschfeld, 1936, p. 226). Sexologists of the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century adopted the term and then laid the groundwork for ideas about opposing sexuality distinctions creating a binary discourse. Kraft-Ebbing’s (1922) *Psychopathia Sexualis: A Clinical-Forensic Study*, was one of the first books on sexual practices including topics on homosexuality. Kraft-Ebbing (1922) reported that procreation was the purpose for all sexual desire and acts and that all non-heterosexual sex acts for entertainment or pleasure was a perversion of the sex drive (pp. 364-367).<sup>6</sup> Hirschfeld (1936) also described sexuality using the dichotomous discourse. In his description of homosexuality, Hirschfeld (1936) explained that the two ‘real’ homosexual categories were between two same sex individuals (pp. 225 – 226). According to Hirschfeld (1936) “genuine homosexuality only exists when the physical acts are an outcome of homosexual mentality. Homosexual intercourse without a homosexual mentality is pseudo-homosexuality” (pp. 227-228). Hirschfeld (1936) declared bi-sexuals as pseudo-homosexuals. He further explained that when bi-sexuality occurs in an individual men will have urges toward effeminate men, and women will have desires towards more masculine women (pp. 228-229).

Several definitions of homosexuality used by scholars in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century use the continuum as opposed to the dichotomous perspective, and several scholars considered the language more carefully and used terms to describe intimate relationships with much more caution than the early sexologists (Cook, 1977; Dynes, 1990; Hersch, 1991; Rich, 1980; Sedgwick, 1985; Sedgwick, 1990; The Radicalesbians, 1973).<sup>7</sup> Cook (1977) defined a lesbian as “a woman who loves a woman, who chooses women to nurture and support and to create a living environment in which to work creatively and independently, whether or not her relations with these women are sexual” (p. 48). In her explanation, Cook deemphasized sexual behavior and allowed for an open interpretation of the term. The Radicalesbians (1973) defined lesbianism in the same sense as Cook, with a de-emphasis on sexual behavior and emphasis on the wide spectrum of possibilities for the term.

Rich (1980) critiqued the compulsive assumption of heterosexuality in other feminist scholar’s writing on lesbianism in her frequently referenced essay *Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian*

<sup>6</sup> He used the terms heterosexual and homosexual with no acknowledgement of inbetween.

<sup>7</sup> It is important to note that it is still a prevailing assumption by many that sexuality is still only conceived as either heterosexual or homosexual (Harding, 1998, p. 44).

*Existence*. She questioned how previous feminists spoke about and discussed sexuality and their assumption of the heterosexual norm, or as she described it, compulsory heterosexuality. After reading several texts, Rich found that it was not heterosexuality that needed explanation in feminist writing but lesbian sexuality (p. 17). In her essay, Rich (1980) constantly questioned others' research and brought to surface her interpretations of their work and what was missing in their explanations and interpretations. The missing aspect of their work was the critique and analysis of phenomena through the homosexual lens. She claimed the authors constantly ignored the lesbian existence (Rich, 1980, pp. 14-16). She stated

In none of them is the question ever raised as to whether, in a different context or other things being equal, women would choose heterosexual coupling and marriage; heterosexuality is presumed the "sexual preference" of "most women," either implicitly or explicitly. In none of these books, which concern themselves with mothering, sex roles, relationships, and societal prescriptions for women, is compulsory heterosexuality ever examined as an institution powerfully affecting these, or the idea of "preference" or "innate orientation" even directly questioned. (Rich, 1980, pp. 13-14)

Sedgwick (1990) discussed the binarism existence in our current cultural domain. She argued

that an understanding of virtually any aspect of modern western culture must be, not merely incomplete, but damaged in its central substance to the degree that it does not incorporate a critical analysis of modern homo/heterosexual definition; and it will assume that the appropriate place for that critical analysis is from the relatively decentered perspective of modern gay and antihomophobic theory. (p. 1)

Sedgwick (1990) discussed the categorical problems that are created by different speech acts and how this type of language normalizes these binary oppositions, which lead to an oppressive state for individuals who are within those categories. The speech acts Sedgwick refers to are the homosexual and heterosexual notions of sexual orientation. She proposed that our language creates an oppressive state because there is a continuum of identity categories available. Her major motivation for her influential work on sexual identity, *Epistemology of the Closet*, is her belief that "people are different" (p. 22), and there is not one-way of knowing the gay identity. Sedgwick challenged hegemonic notions of sexuality through critical readings of several literary works such as Shakespeare's Sonnets and Thackeray's *Henry Esmond*. She analyzed lines of the poems, characters, relationships of characters, and the unspoken actions, words, or movements of individuals to conclude that gay identity is complex, convoluted and that there are multiple ways of identifying within the queer identity.

Dynes (1990) defined the term homosexuality as "the entire range of same-sex relations and affections, male-male and female-female" (p. 556). Dynes (1990) acknowledged the ambiguity surrounding the term in relation to different sexual orientations and asked "does it include bisexuality and situational homosexuality?" (p. 557). He also questioned if deep friendships that do not involve genital acts should be included in the definition (Dynes, 1990, p. 557).

The discourse on what constitutes a lesbian identity is not homogenous. Brown (1995) stated that lesbian identity is complex, often ambiguous, and has been conceptualized differently across time and across cultures (p. 3). Kitzinger (1987) defined the lesbian identity as "a woman's subjective experience or

intrasubjective account of her own lesbianism” (p. 90). Brown (1995) defined lesbian identity as “a self-ascribed definition held by a woman over time and across situations as having primary sexual, affectional, and relational tie to other women” (p. 4). Ripley (1992) stated, “Obviously, more than one kind of sexuality exists among those who share the label lesbian” (p. 91). In her interviews with self-identified lesbian women, she found several different “types” of lesbians:

A self-named lesbian, when she’s fighting with her lover, has sex with men because “that isn’t cheating.” A self named bisexual has been faithful to one women for twenty years. A woman who does s/m with women says she is sexually a “pervert”; only incidentally a lesbian. Another says that having sex with women is so “perverse” that s/m is only incidental (Ripley, 1992, p. 91).

Brown (1995) described the lesbian identity in terms of the lesbian continuum. Her purpose was to understand whom the lesbians are and how does the lesbian identity develop. She described various lesbian identities including women who are sexually and romantically involved with women but who were previously involved with men; individuals who live with female companions and maintain marriages with men; and lastly women who live together, share emotional intimacy but have never been sexual with one another (Brown, 1995, p. 5). Brown (1995) pointed out that in North America there is an inclination to define exactly what a lesbian is, she stated

The need for a strict definition of lesbian reflects the tendency toward dichotomous thinking that typifies much white, Eurocentric cultural philosophies, a dichotomy which for the most part assumes separate and mutually exclusive categories of sexual orientation. (p. 6)

Brown (1995) found that many lesbians themselves have trouble with the definition of lesbian identity. She commented,

It is not uncommon for women newly coming into a lesbian identity after a history of heterosexual experience to find themselves rebuffed by other women for not being “sufficiently” lesbian, somehow tainted in their “purity” by having related to men. How then, is the lesbian to be defined by lesbians, and which lesbians possess the authority to define? Is one lesbian’s definition of herself adequate to the needs of another lesbian’s quest to create boundaries defining to whom and in what circumstances she will reveal herself most intimately? (Brown, 1995, p. 6)

Charbonneau and Lander (1991) found similar reactions from the thirty women they interviewed; they explained, “each woman was confronted by a social situation in which she was the 'new lesbian' and, to many 'old gays,' not necessarily an 'authentic' one” (p. 36).

### Gender and Performance

Several scholars argue that gender identity and gender roles are social and cultural constructions and not biological (Butler, 1990; Cahill, 1983; Järviluoma, Moisala, & Vilkkö, 2003; Rich, 1980; Sedgwick, 1985; Sedgwick, 1990). Järviluoma, Moisala, and Vilkkö (2003) stated

Many social factors, such as class, race, ethnicity and age, play essential roles in the construction of gender. The gender of an Indian woman is different from that of a British girl and the gender of an old man differs from that of a teenage boy. A study focusing on

gender should recognize the variations that are to be found in particular times and places.  
(p. 3)

Järviluoma et al. (2003) continued

Our cultural categories of gender are even more numerous and varied. The socio-cultural possibilities implied in being a man or a woman, and what is socially expected of each, vary enormously depending on place, period and personal situation (p. 3).

In Butler's (1990) influential book *Gender Trouble* she asserted that gender is a performance and not biological. She believed that individuals are able to choose their gender, yet society and our social norms prevent our choosing abilities. She stated, "There is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender,...identity is performatively constituted by the very 'expressions' that are said to be its results" (Butler, 1990, p. 25). She argued that your gender is something you do as opposed to what you are.

Cahill (1983) described gender identity development from a social interactionist perspective and viewed gender as an ascribed label. Cahill (1983) reported the earliest labeling occurred from the parents at infancy. The focus of gender identity development in Cahill's theory is on the individual's interactions, social experiences, and the reactions from others during childhood. Cahill (1983) reported that children become self-aware of their gender around age two.

Harris (1995) developed group socialization theory to explain gender development. The theory was built from four assumptions of human behavior: group affiliation, fear of or hostility to strangers, within-group status, and love. Harris (1995) found that group memberships were responsible for gender differences.

Bussey and Bandura (1999) developed social cognitive theory of gender development. They theorized that most differences in gender identity are attributed to cultural influences and external environmental impacts and not biological reasoning. Personal factors such as standards of behavior and conceptions of gender, behavior patterns including observed behaviors associated with each gender, and environmental events including all social experiences comprise the network of influences affecting and developing gender identity.

Some researchers tested the notion that gender identity is an inherent characteristic and not a social or cultural construction. Craig (1996) reported that human chromosomes have sex-linked characteristics that distinguish males from females and that those biological differences partially influence gender identity and gender behaviors. Morawski (1987) believed that gender was an inherent personality trait and not a social construction. Eaton and Enns (1986) found that at infancy boys are more aggressive and active than girls.

A few researchers found that parents have a significant influence and impact on gender identity formation. King, Camp, and Downey (1991) reported that an individual's sense of their gender identity is usually established by the age of three. Kuhn, Nash, and Bruckner (1978) found that stereotypical beliefs about gender roles were formed in children as young as 3 years old. Will, Self, and Datan (1976) reported in their sample that parents treated male and female infants differently. In their study they found mothers

gave daughters dolls and gave boys trains and when interacting with boys they did not smile as much. Tenenbaum and Leaper (2002) reported that parents who held traditional ideas about gender identity were more likely to have children who expressed those same beliefs.

The media has been reported as having an influence on children's perception of their gender role and on increases in gender-stereotypical beliefs. Morgan (1987) found that watching television influenced ideas held by boys and girls in eighth grade about traditional gender roles for household chores. Eisenstock (1984) found that children who watched more television were more influenced by gender stereotypes.

### **Queer Women's Gender Identities**

Many gender theorists study lesbian gender identities, and they describe a variety of gender categories and subcategories within which the lesbian women identify (Faderman, 1992; Feinberg, 1998; Halberstam, 1998; Hiestand & Levitt, 2005; Jeffreys, 1989; Martin, 1996; Wahlig, 2011). Most participants in Brown, Finn, Cooke, and Breedlove's (2002) study readily identified as either butch or femme. In Faderman's (1992) sample of women, her subjects used several different combinations of words to describe their lesbian gender identity such as stone butch and old-fashioned femme.

Ponse (1978) found many women simply used the term lesbian to self-identify due to its historical connection with the Ancient Greek poet Sappho who wrote "odes celebrating love between women on the Isle of Lesbos" (pp. 110-111). She also found most women over 40 years old self-identified using the term homosexual or gay. She found some women were more specific in describing their gender identity, and they identified as either butch or femme. She reported "notions of what constitutes butch and femme vary among different groups in the subculture" (p. 115). She described some of the women's experiences and interpretations with the butch and femme identity in this passage:

Many of the characteristics thought of as masculine are attributed to and expected from the butch. Such qualities as being logical (as opposed to being emotional), factual, directive, capable of decision making, as well as being able to take care of tasks outside the home and to handle emergency situations are likewise expected of the butch. In some instances, the butch is expected to be the breadwinner although, according to the women interviewed, usually both butch and femme work. In its more fully elaborated form the femme role embodies qualities of wifely virtue such as passivity, docility, and nurturance—the panoply of characteristics that comprise the expectations for stereotypical femininity in the heterosexual community. Not infrequently, the femme is described by respondents in disparaging terms as an exaggeration of a stereotypical female role (Ponse, 1978, p. 115).

Hiestand and Levitt (2005) conducted a qualitative study of 12 self-identifying butch women. The central questions of their interviews were "What does it mean to you to be butch?" (p. 66) and "What was your process of developing a butch identity?" (p. 66). Several themes emerged from their study including confusion about their gender differences as children, having emotional hardships as children, increased social pressure to conform to gender norms in junior high, and feelings of betrayal from their body at puberty. The women in the study also reported that coming out was an important part of their gender identity development along with learning about the butch-femme identity from other women in the lesbian



community. Nine of their respondents said they found a mentor or butch role model who took them under their wing and showed them the butch lifestyle and ways of being.

From their study Hiestand and Levitt (2005) developed a five-stage model to explain gender identity development for butch lesbians; they were explicit that the model does not explain femme-lesbian identity formation. The stages include “gender conflict” (Hiestand & Levitt, 2005, p. 78), “collision of gender conformity and sexual orientation pressures” (p. 78), “gender awareness and the distinguishing of differences” (p. 79), “acceptance of lesbian identity leading to gender exploration” (p. 79), “gender internalization and pride in sexual orientation” (p. 79), “gender affirmation and pride” (p. 80), and “integration of sexual orientation and gender difference” (p. 80).

In Case’s (1998) memoir, she described her experiences as a butch-identifying lesbian in the 1970s in San Francisco. She recalled her first experiences out at a lesbian bar and her connection with the butch identity. She stated, “butch was about giving sexual pleasure, taking pride in a lesbian identification, and being attracted to femmes” (p. 42). She also described her ability to pass in the heterosexual world when necessary, which was in contrast to the stone butches.<sup>8</sup>

A few other researchers studied gender identity of butch identifying women. Singh, Vidaurri, Zambarano, and Dabbs (1999) found that butch identified women reported having and exhibiting more gender atypical traits during childhood than women who identified as femme. Butches had less interest in playing house in their childhood as opposed to femmes who were interested in the typical gender behaviors such as wearing jewelry and playing house. Levitt and Horne (2002) found that woman who identify as butch realized their sexual identity earlier at an average age of 14.6 as opposed to femme-identified women who identified at an average age of 21.6. Hiestand and Levitt (2005) found that most butches came out in their early 20s or later teenage years when they came in contact with a lesbian community and learned about the lesbian culture.

Other researchers and writers described experiences related to individuals identifying as a femme-lesbian (Harris & Crocker, 1997; Levitt, Gerrish, & Heistand, 2003; Newman, 1995; Whatling, 1998). Levitt, Gerrish, and Hiestand (2003) conducted a qualitative study on 12 femme-identifying lesbians. Their focus was on “identity development, experiences in the lesbian community, heterosexual society, and romantic relationships” (p. 99). They wanted to shed light on “the motivations to claim a femme identity and the meaning that it can hold” (p. 101). The women in the study reported that the femme “label was thought to have several purposes. It helped women to describe their experiences, to identify patterns that validated their experiences, and to make sense of themselves within the lesbian community” (p. 103). The 12 women in the study had different development processes of becoming a femme including when they came out and ways of understanding the identity. All of their participants described the process as scary,

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<sup>8</sup> No further description was given about the stone butch reference.

and they approached the process with resistance. They also stated that being a femme was political, and they all confronted “femmephobia” (p. 109) in both the lesbian and heterosexual community.

Faderman (1992) researched the butch, femme, and neo-butch/femme identities among lesbian women. She sought to understand how lesbians in the 1980s and 1990s identified within the lesbian continuum. She found that women could be in two different extreme groups including groups like the 1950s women who thought that they naturally fell into the butch/femme role. Women in the other extreme group similar to the women in the 1970s argued that there is no innate butch or femme identity, and they often ridiculed the roles and called them “futches” and “bems” (Faderman, 1992, pp. 588-589). She reported that

The 1980s gave birth to new attitudes toward butch/femme relationships among many lesbian radicals. Those who claimed butch or femme identities in the 1980s (or presently, in the 1990s) often see themselves as taboo-smashers and iconoclasts. They are no longer primarily working-class women, as they were in the 1950s and 1960s – they are just as likely in the 1980s and 1990s to be intellectuals whose roots were in the middle class. (Faderman, 1992, p. 586)

Faderman stated that the women in her sample felt they had little connection with the 1950s experience of being a butch-identifying or femme-identifying lesbian. She found that the relationships, identities, and roles were complex and varied. The women in her sample identified in several different roles including “aggressive butch, passive butch, baby butch, stone butch, clone butch, old-fashioned femme, aggressive femme” (Faderman, 1992, p. 591).

Nestle (1993) wrote about her experiences as a lesbian and recalled the reactions to butch-femme relationships in her life during the 1950s. She stated, “In the late 1950s I walked the streets looking so butch that straight teenagers called me a bulldyke; however, when I went to the Sea Colony, a working-class Lesbian bar in Greenwich Village, looking for a lover, I was a femme” (p. 107). She remembered that butch-femme couples experienced more abuse on the street than more straight looking lesbians. Nestle wrote that *The Ladder*, a lesbian magazine, advocated for lesbian women to pass for survival. She claimed that the butch-femme identity represented sex, gender, and class of the women. She described the butch and femme identities as “not a woman-acting-like-a-man or a woman-acting-like-a-woman sexuality, but a developed Lesbian-specific sexuality that has a historical setting and a cultural function” (p. 109).

Weber (1996) conducted a study on 235 lesbian women and asked them to define the butch and femme identity themselves, and she sought to understand how the lesbian gender identity is dependent upon or has a connection to social class. Ninety-three percent of her participants were white, and seven percent of the lesbians in her study were women of color. Her hypothesis was that “the higher the education of a respondent, the more likely she will self-define as independent rather than as butch or femme” (p. 273). Her second hypothesis was that “the higher the income of a respondent, the more likely

she is to define herself as independent” (p. 273).<sup>9</sup> She found that lesbian women identifying as both butch and femme defined their gender identity differently than previous researchers on the topic and that social class had a significant relationship and determined if a lesbian defined herself as butch or femme. Weber (1996) reported that class seemed “to account for the difference in my findings and previous findings on whether or not lesbian define themselves as butch and femme” (p. 279).

Cooper (1990) conducted in-depth interviews with 15 lesbian women about the development of their gender identity. All of her participants rejected traditional femininity. One respondent remembered wanting her mom to buy her boy clothes, and another remembered wanting to be more masculine to attract the young girls. Many of the women stated they were forced to wear feminine clothing and play with dolls. Cooper (1990) did not describe any names or terms used by the women to self identify.

Some researchers reported that the lesbians in their samples desired to be boys as children. Wolff (1971) found lesbian women were five times more likely to express desires to be boys as children than heterosexual women. Lewis (1979) reported that many of the lesbian women in her sample went through a tomboy stage in early childhood and then most grew out of the stage after puberty yet felt confusion about their gender. Lewis stated, “The young lesbian realizes that she cannot be a boy, yet she realizes that she cannot be like her female peers and in many cases she feels a sense of intense isolation” (p. 24). Cooper (1990) found that all 15 women in her sample had tomboy experiences. In Cooper’s study, the women all reported wanting to dress like boys, play with boys, and participate in stereotypical boy activities.

Levitt and Hiestand (2005) conducted a study to examine the way that gender expression intersects with sexuality in butch and femme couple relationships of white women. They found three major intersections of identity and sexuality. First, they found that when women in butch and femme relationship were visible outside the lesbian community they experienced fewer instances of discrimination. Second, within the lesbian community, the butch and femme gender identities generated sexual attraction and stress. Lastly, the women described “a political basis to desire. Both butch and femme women conceptualized their gender performances as having an element of political resistance as they challenged traditional gender and sexual orientation boundaries” (Levitt & Hiestand, 2005, p. 49).

Richardson (1992) also reported connections between gender identity for lesbian women and sexual experiences. Her respondents stated in some relationships one woman plays the man and the other woman plays the woman. The masculine or male women in the relationship were referred to as butch, and the other women were referred to as feminine lesbians.<sup>10</sup> The participants reported that the stereotyping by others created some anxiety and discouraged them

From engaging in certain kinds of sex: for example, lying on top of a woman and gaining sexual pleasure by rubbing against her body, or putting fingers or an object into the

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<sup>9</sup> She used a snowball sample due to the small community of lesbian women and therefore stated their results were not generalizable to the population (Weber, 1996, p. 273).

<sup>10</sup> The women specifically said feminine, not femme.

vagina of another woman, or having that done to themselves. As one woman said, 'If I want that I might as well go with a man' (Richardson, 1992, p. 192).

Bailey, Kim, Hills, and Linsenmeier (1997) analyzed partner preferences of homosexual and heterosexual individuals as reported in personal advertisements. They examined "the effects of homosexual people's masculinity and femininity on their attractiveness to other homosexual people. They found that "Homosexual people were much more likely than heterosexual people to claim and to request sex-typical traits in their personal advertisements" (p. 970). They found lesbian women preferred women who described themselves as more feminine.

Some researchers focused on potential biological explanations of butch and femme lesbian identification (Brown, Finn, Cooke, & Breedlove, 2002; Hall & Schaeff, 2008; Manning, Scutt, Wilson, & Lewis-Jones, 1998; Pearcey, Docherty, & Dabbs, 1996). Brown, Finn, Cooke, and Breedlove (2002) compared index and ring finger lengths of butch and femme lesbians in the United States. They found that butches had smaller differences in finger length on the right hand than femmes. They compared their findings to similar studies on heterosexual men and women; researchers from those studies found that men had longer ring fingers than women (Manning et al., 1998). Singh et al., (1999) found that butch lesbians had a higher waist-to-hip ratio and higher salivary testosterone levels than did femmes.

#### Intersections of **Queer Women's** Gender Identities and Appearance

Cole (2000), Davis (1992), Hutson (2010), and Rudd (1996) all stated that dress is a major indicator and tool to display or perform gender in terms of Butler's (1990) theory of performativity. Davis (1992) stated dress serves as a visual metaphor for identity, and he explored the oscillating meanings individuals experience when wearing various garments in different contexts. He described that what one set of garments "mean" in one setting can be vastly different in another depending upon the "wearer, the occasion, the place, [and] the company" (p. 8). He described the lack of distinguishable Western "gendered" fashions prior to the 18<sup>th</sup> century when both men and women were displaying "lace, rich velvets, fine silks, and embroideries, to highly ornamented footwear, to coiffures, wigs, and hats of rococo embellishment, and to lavish use of scented powders, rouges, and other cosmetics" (p. 38). He explained it was not until about 1837 that clear gender distinctions were visible for men and women (p. 39). Davis used various examples in the 20<sup>th</sup> century to show that the gender pushing dress was happening from the female to male and not the other way around. Designers such as Yves Saint Lauren in 1983, Giorgio Armani, and Ungaro all produced female designs in the 1980s that aired more towards the "masculine" side.

Levitt and Hiestand (2005) examined the way that gender expression intersects with sexuality in butch and femme couple relationships. The authors conducted semi-structured interviews with lesbian women in Northern Florida. Twelve self-identified butch lesbians were recruited via advertisements in the lesbian community newsletter and through the snowball technique; interviews were analyzed using grounded theory. The women were mainly white, one Latina, two Jewish, and one Italian. Ages ranged from 23 to 67. They described two relationships between dress and gender identity. They found that dildos

were signifiers of butch gender identity. Their participants also reported that femme participants wore lingerie during sexual encounters and were hesitant to wear dildos due to their association with the butch appearance.

Ponse (1978) reported that some lesbian groups stressed “the importance of appearance and clothing styles” (p. 116). She conducted 75 semi-structured interviews with predominantly white middle-class lesbians. Her participants stated “some butches adopt male clothing, wear close-cropped hair, and approximate a male physique by such measures as binding their breasts and padding the genital area, though none of the women I interviewed had done this” (p. 116). Some femme-identifying lesbians reported wearing make up and wearing pretty and frilly clothes.

Levitt, Gerrish, and Hiestand (2003) interviewed 12 femmes to understand how they negotiated their gender. Their major question was “What does it mean to you to be femme?” (p. 101). In their study, the researchers used one paragraph to describe the appearance of the women; using phrases with three descriptive terms, they stated femme-identifying lesbians dressed sexier, wore make up, and wore body-hugging clothing. Weber (1996) also found similar results that lesbians self-identifying as femme engaged in stereotypical female gender expressions.

In Hammidi and Kaiser’s (1999) essay, they sought “to ‘complicate’ current understandings of beauty-understandings that implicitly assume heterosexuality-by focusing on how lesbians do beauty to negotiate within and across four discourses” (p. 55). They interviewed 50 women with an average age of 28 and a range from 19 to 50 years old. They first argued that “roots of cultural stereotypes about lesbian looks can be understood in the context of problematic assumptions underlying how people see and conceptualize female beauty: as an image, a system, or a narrative” (p. 56). They described that conceptualizing beauty as image defines it as a static image and ignores the “process of managing appearance” (p. 57). The image is comprised of a “white, feminine, thin, young (usually very young), fashionable, upper-middle class, long-haired, and filled with heterosexual promise” (p. 57) woman. Viewing beauty as a system in the lesbian community must be understood in the arrangement between males and females, which promotes the “binary (‘in’ or ‘out’) thinking” (p. 58). The beauty as narrative “assumption views beauty as a major component of the arrangement between the sexes” (p. 58). This approach “generates cultural script with a ‘live happily ever after’ quality” (p. 58) which does not work for lesbian beauty because “the purpose is not to lure the best male” (p. 58).

Using the three assumptions image, system, and narrative Hammidi and Kaiser (1999) illustrate four different “beauty discourses through which lesbians work, differently, to understand and achieve beauty” (p. 59). The dominant lesbian beauty asserts “strength and agency” (p. 59), which is often marked by the butch image. They theorized, “while the dominant lesbian beauty discourse promotes masculine style, it also clearly devalues cultural styles that cannot be read as chic or urban” (p. 60). Inner beauty was “not based on visibility or visual cues, but are based on principles of empowerment” (p. 60). Their participants described that they were attracted to others when they appeared comfortable in their skin. The

dominant beauty involves the “standards against which all women are measured,” (p. 61), and the political beauty involves negotiating contested choices such as “hairy or hairless, bearded or plucked, breasted or reduced/enlarged, high or flat heeled” (p. 61). They claim that “doing beauty, in this context, enables not only a multiplicity of looks, but also new ways of formulating and validating individual, couple, and community identities” (p. 62).

In Weber’s (1996) study on the intersection of class and lesbian gender identity she found that “the traditional assumptions of butch and femme as roles that lesbians play in relationships have very little to do with the way that the women in the sample define the terms” (p. 275). Many of the butch identifying women stated they did not like feminine things, and they felt more comfortable in men’s clothes, colognes, jewelry, hairstyles, yet they stressed they did not have a desire to be a man. The femmes “expressed femme as the freedom to enjoy lingerie, dresses, makeup, and other ‘feminine trappings,’ all while being able to love other women” (p. 276). The femme women also expressed that as children they liked dolls, playing house, and played with other traditional feminine toys.

Blackman and Perry (1990), Lorder (1983), and Smith (1992) found through black lesbian personal narratives that different aspects of dress were significant indicators of different gender roles.<sup>11</sup>

Blackman and Perry (1990) described several different identities lesbians portray through dress:

The sado-masochistic (SM) style, perhaps the most controversial, presents an image that many associate with an aggressive or violent sexuality. The style differs depending on whether the wearer wants to indicate that she is the top/butch or the bottom/femme. Top dress will reveal the body from the waist upwards: light vest, waistcoat (no shirt) or no clothing at all. By exposing her breasts, the top defies the pervasive western fetish of the female breast and flirts with the demand that breasts be kept hidden. She declares her sexuality, but at the same time she makes herself vulnerable. As the context is nearly always a club where this exposure is a familiar code it becomes both safe and sexually blatant; a combination that would be impossible in any other situation (pp. 69-70).

SM style lesbians also wore leather, trousers, wristbands, cowboy boots, biker boots, uniforms, and cowboy chaps. The uniforms communicated an exchange of power between the lesbians.

In Nestle’s (1993) essay *Butch-Femme Relationship: Sexual Courage in the 1950s*, she indicated dress was a part of the butch and gender identity based on her personal experiences as a lesbian in the 1950s. She stated

Dress was a part of it: the erotic signal of her hair at the nape of her neck, touching the shirt collar; how she held a cigarette; the symbolic pinky ring flashing as she waved her hand. I know all this sounds superficial, but all these gestures were a style of self-presentation that made erotic competence a political statement in the 1950s. (p. 109)

Nestle also recalled that

Butch-femme women made Lesbians visible in a terrifyingly clear way in a historical period when there was no Movement projection for them. Their appearance spoke of erotic independence, and they often provoked rage and censure from their own community and straight society. (p. 112)

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<sup>11</sup> Blackman and Perry (1990) did not describe their method or sample.

Case (1998) described her experiences as a butch lesbian in the 1970s in lesbian bars and life on campus at San Francisco State University. In her memoir, she described some aspects of her dress. She stated

Like many others, I wore long, straight, hippie hair and bell-bottom hip-huggers, but felt I was 'butch' (though I had never heard the term). They were men's pants, after all, with broad leather belts, and hippie men were sporting long hair as well. (p. 38)

When explaining the types of lesbian couples including femme/butch and femme-femme, she stated there were not any butch-butth couples until the "androgynous look came into fashion" (p. 38). Case also described a new style that emerged in the early 1980s; she stated, "Some called us 'nelly butches' as a way to accommodate the new style. We took to wearing 1930s men's clothes from the thrift stores, with flowing, Dietrich-type pants and silk bow-ties" (p. 42).

Seidman (2002) identified the post-closet era as the social changes that happened over the past 40 years to advance equal rights in marriage (Mellow, 2004; Rothblum, Balsam, & Solomon, 2008), military (Belkin & Bateman, 2003), religious communities (Glaser, 1996), and family (Seidman, Meeks, & Traschen, 1999) for gays and lesbians. Hutson (2010) studied the post-closet era and the "connections between gay and lesbian identity and appearance, specifically how gays and lesbians use appearances to construct identities they experience as authentic" (p. 214). Using the grounded theory method, the author interviewed 11 lesbian women and nine gay men between the ages 18 and 30. All participants in his study were either college students, very recently graduated college students, or college students taking the semester off. Data were collected in the spring and summer of 2005. One limitation of the study was the predominantly white middle-class sample. Hutson (2010) focused on understanding "authenticity as a motivation for altering one's appearance when 'coming out' as gay or lesbian, and also within gay and lesbian spaces as a response to changing definitions of authentic (and inauthentic) experience" (p. 217).

Hutson (2010) found most participants felt freer to express their gender identity after coming out of the closet. He stated, "appearance facilitates this transition for individuals to experience a sense of authenticity" (p. 220). Hutson reported that none of the lesbian women self-described as either butch or femme; they stated use of those terms was outdated. While the lesbians in the sample felt more comfortable in public spaces after they were out due to normalization of the lesbian identity from television shows such as *Ellen* and *The L word*, some reported experiences of difficulty "about what it meant to be lesbian within lesbian spaces" (p. 226). Some lesbian participants felt pressure to appear more butch or masculine in lesbian spaces, yet others had trouble with appearing too masculine or too butch. The author concluded, "appearance—as a process of interaction—is integral to establishing gay and lesbian identities" (p. 229).

In Wilson's (1990) essay she related

The fashions of the lesbian subculture to mainstream fashion; discuss[ed] their convergence in the 1960s and since; and suggest ways in which specifically lesbian styles may challenge what are still 'taken-for-granted' assumptions for some feminists. (p. 67)

She described lesbians and their relationship to fashion from the 1950s forward. In the 1950s she states the butch and femme looks characterized working class lesbians. In the 1960s the counter-cultural deviant styles she described as “youthfully boyish for both sexes” (p. 72) which allowed the lesbian to slip into the mainstream. Wilson then described a shift towards more feminized androgyny in the late 60s, and she described her experiences then that she could no longer “appear as an ‘obvious’ lesbian” (p. 72). She stated that the combination of Japanese designers, punk aesthetics, and masculinization of all fashion in the 1980s “created an eighties fashion image that was really quite lesbian, even SM” (p. 73). Then, in the postmodern 1980s era, fashions began to lose its shock value as punk and other boundary pushing dress made its way into mainstream. She argued, “it is not necessarily easier to ‘look fashionable,’ for now we have to decide which fashionable we want to look. Which butch, which femme, which dyke—it’s so hard to look deviant these days” (p. 73).

#### Queer Women in Market Research and the Media.

Several researchers studied queer women’s image and queer women cultural products in the media and from a market research perspective. A growing number of companies see the gay and lesbian community as a growing market with excessive buying power estimated at about \$485 billion (Brown, Washton, & Witeck, 2002). Oakenfull and Greenlee (2004) reported that many businesses such as Calvin Klein, IKEA, Banana Republic, and Benetton used queer imagery in mainstream advertising; however, many advertisers were extremely reluctant to target queer individuals through mainstream media. Oakenfull and Greenlee (2004) reported that many firms that targeted or supported the queer community received backlash from anti-gay supports. For example, IKEA received hate mail after airing a gay couple shopping for a dining table. Visa contributed \$10,000 to the Gay Games and Disney for Gay Day and their newly formed domestic partner benefit program; after their contribution, Visa received hate mail from the Religious Right group (Oakenfull & Greenlee, 2004).

In their study, Oakenfull and Greenlee (2004) addressed the question, “what are the consequences of mainstream marketers using different types of gay and lesbian imagery in mainstream media” (p. 1277). They specifically researched “how heterosexual consumers’ attitudes toward gays and lesbians affect their attitude towards advertising with gay and lesbian content” (p. 1277). They also examined the importance of gender in both heterosexual and homosexual imagery in advertisements.

Oakenfull and Freenlee (2004) surveyed 134 heterosexuals from urban areas in the Midwest. They used four advertisements with varying amounts of queer imagery, and asked participants about their attitudes towards the images. They found participants responded more positively to lesbian women’s ads than gay men’s ads. They also found, however, that heterosexual males have a more negative attitude towards gay men advertisements than lesbian women advertisements. Therefore, they suggested to avoid backlash from heterosexuals, advertisers should use subtle lesbian imagery and not overtly gay male imagery.



Bhan, Leigh, and Wardlow (1996) studied the reaction of heterosexuals to the portrayal of gay men in advertisements. They examined how heterosexuals reacted to two products, shampoo and jeans, when the image contained a heterosexual couple and then a gay couple. Their sample consisted of 325 college students; each respondent evaluated a single ad by completing a 9-item scale. The female and male subjects ranged from 18 to 61 years; 239 were heterosexual, 24 were homosexual, and 50 were bisexual. Responses on the scale included “(1) wrong, (2) disgusting, (3) a sin, (4) a perversion, (5) a lifestyle that should not be condemned (reversed scaled), (6) an indicator of a decline in American morals and the additional statements: (7) that a man should overcome any homosexual feelings, (8), that it is not a social problem (reversed scale), and (9) that homosexual marriages are a ridiculous idea” (p. 167). They concluded that attitudes toward the gay couples in the advertisements depended upon the individual’s attitudes toward homosexuals. “The findings suggest strong support the hypothesis that attitude toward an ad with homosexual imagery was much more positive for those who had a tolerant attitude toward homosexuality than for those who were intolerant of homosexuality” (p. 173).

Gay and lesbian representation in mainstream media increased significantly since the 1970s (Sender, 2003). Sender used ethnographic research methods to understand

how the gay market acquired its contours, how gay men and lesbians have been represented in marketing, in what media venues gay marketing appears, and what effects this process has had on the public image of gay, lesbian, and bisexual people, both in their communities and in the mainstream. I look at the boundaries placed on sexual content in gay and lesbian media, particularly what constitutes a ‘sex ad’ and what dimensions of taste govern publishers’ arbitration between acceptable and unacceptable content. I investigate marketers’ and publishers’ anxieties about commercial manifestations of sexuality, especially ads for phone sex lines and escort services, and the risks these are assumed to pose to a discreet gay sexuality. I consider the exceptions—the instances in which sexual content is permitted—and the characteristics of these cases that allow them to appear in gay media. (p. 336)

She interviewed 39 marketing industry professionals who worked in gay and lesbian marketing and media. Her sample was 26 queer self-identified individuals, four self-identified heterosexuals, and nine individuals who did not disclose their sexuality. Sender looked at queer advertisements, articles, and attended four queer marketing conferences on topics such as “how gay and lesbian magazines court national advertisers and how marketers advertise to gay and lesbian consumers on the Internet” (p. 338). She reviewed over 100 gay and lesbian magazine and newspaper articles from 1972 on.

Sender concluded that in national gay and lesbian glossy magazines and in some local newspapers, non-normative sexualities do not sell due to the perceived risk of mainstream advertisers. Stereotypes of the “hypersexual gay man, the fear of queer sex, and the AIDS epidemic, and the associations among explicit sexuality, low moral capital, and sleaze” (Sender, 2003, p. 359) have detracted advertisers from the queer publications. Her interviewees stated, “they would like to be less sexually conservative, whether in the creation or in the acceptance of

ads, but that their hands were tied by prudish others on whom they depended for business” (p. 344).

Murray (2007) studied the meaning of the cultural production of lesbian feminist goods and the consumption of lesbian feminists during the 1970s through analysis of several lesbian publications including *Lesbian Connection* and *Lesbian Tide*.<sup>12</sup> She stated, “cultural goods, creative writing, art, and music held a fundamental place in the articulation of lesbian feminism as a politics and identity” (p. 253). Murray explained that

Consumer culture was in fact a vital part of the development of gay and lesbian identities in the postwar period and can be seen in the proliferation of bars, restaurants, clubs, bookstores, and the like. In the 1970s lesbians too developed their own bookstores, produced their own goods, and formed community resources such as health clinics and child-care centers. Consumer culture always reveals qualities about selfhood and identity, but for gays and lesbians these cues were all the more striking, as they were fragments of an often hidden identity. In the case of lesbian feminism, these cues helped to shape an identity bound up with introspection and self-mediation. (p. 255)

She stated that lesbian produced goods became central to advertisements in lesbian periodicals in 1975. The most prominent advertisements were lesbian symbolic goods such as feminist jewelry or advertisements of women ‘looking tough’ who were making jewelry, yet had the look of a railroad workers. Murray also looked at advertisements for bars, music, and art in the lesbian publications. She found that

Lesbian feminist businesses, artisanship, and cultural orientation to goods, then, were part of a complex alternative culture, layered with varied sensibilities from mainstream consumer and market practices, from older traditions of lesbianism, from different classes and cultural traditions, and from divergent philosophies about feminism (p. 273).

Jackson (2009) explored how “young people ‘read’ contemporary representations of media lesbian and to what extent such representations inflect their own constructions of lesbian sexualities” (p. 202). Jackson interviewed 25 heterosexual, Non-Maori New Zealanders between the ages of 16 and 18. The participants viewed video clips from *Will and Grace*, *Six Feet Under*, and *Shortland Street*, which are television programs with gay or lesbian characters. Then in focus groups comprised of six or seven individuals, the researchers guided discussion with participants about the clips. Interviews were transcribed and coded for emergent themes. Participants indicated that “the ‘hot lesbians’ were designed for the male gaze and desire” (p. 219). Participants also “constructed the ‘hot lesbian’ as ‘unreal’ and as ‘performance’ rather than as identity” (p. 219). The boys described the sexual lesbian moments as asexual, which Jackson stated, makes the lesbianism “less threatening to heteronormativity” (p. 219). Jackson also found the boys viewed lesbians kissing as “asexual and as party behavior designed for the

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<sup>12</sup> The lesbian feminist movement of the 1970s was an offshoot of the gay liberation movement and the feminist movement of the 1960s and 1970s because “many lesbians would come to feel that the gay liberation movement was dominated by the interests and needs of gay men, just as the feminist movement seemed dominated by the interests and needs of heterosexual women” (Murray, 2007, p. 251).

male gaze or to annoy or punish a boyfriend; constructions firmly rooted in heterosexual discourse that function to heterosexualize girl-girl sexual practices” (p. 220). They concluded that if young homosexual individuals come out at a young age, they would probably experience discrimination or resistance.

Vänskä (2005) studied the “femme gaze and desire in relation to a range of heterosexual fashion advertisements from the British edition of the mainstream fashion magazine *Vogue*” (p. 67). She analyzed three fashion advertisements in *Vogue* between 1998 and 2000. She theorized that the three fashion advertisements created space for a lesbian gaze and lesbian desire. Vänskä explained that “fashion magazines produce and reproduce women’s views of themselves, they are about women and womanly things, and, more precisely, they are about femininity itself” (p. 70). She looked at the signifiers of femininity and masculinity in the images; each image she analyzed contained two women in erotic and sexually heightened positions. She concluded that her “reading queers the interpretation of representations of feminine women in physical proximity, thus displacing the conventional reading that posits them as representations belonging to the history of heterosexual male pornography” (p. 79).

Freitas, Kaiser, and Hammidi (1996) explored “the interconnections between queer communities and cultural space(s) in the context of style” (p. 83). They described that

Within commodity capital, the heuristic categories of ‘subculture’ and ‘target market’ describe space or spaces that gays and lesbians occupy differently, based on self positionability within gay cultures, within commodity capital, and in relation to gender-specific discourse (p. 84).

In their study, they conducted 60 in-depth interviews with both lesbian women and gay men to understand how style, clothing, and appearance provided an avenue to understand “visibility, identity, community, and cultural spaces” (p. 87), and they illuminated “the ambivalences gays and lesbians express in embracing ‘subculture’ and ‘target market’ as categories to establish differences and fashion identities with the current cultural economy” (p. 84). They interviewed 36 women and 24 men who lived in Northern California. Their sample identified mostly as lesbian or gay. They concluded that the target market and subcultural experiences create a space that the gay and lesbian community can occupy. The use of different stylistic signs and symbols in both of these categories allowed for an alternative expression and cultural occupation via Gap, Calvin Klein, and IKEA advertisements, Doc Martens, and denim shirts. The examples of cultural spaces they described were a negotiated and ongoing process that blurred the boundaries of the “community, commodity, style, and politics” (p. 103).

Kessler (2003) surveyed the image of lesbians in movies. She answered three questions in her research: “how does *Bound*’s vision of the female body and lesbian sex lend itself to both heterosexual male and lesbian desire” (p. 14), “how can the film’s depiction of lesbian stereotypes be read on both the levels of empowerment and trivialization/marginalization/exoticization” (p. 14), and “how does the film

use parody or caricature of gangsters to produce humor and alleviate the severity of the lesbian thread” (p. 14). She found that movies before 1990 rarely focused on lesbians. She stated,

The available object choices for lesbians tended to be either vampire lesbians such as *Dracula's Daughter* (1936) or the more recent and now iconic Catherin Deneuve in *The Hunger* (1983), ‘arty’ lesbians such as those in *Entre Nous* (1983), better-off-dead lesbians such as Sandy Dennis in *The Fox* (1968), or the ‘now I’m a lesbian, now I’m not’ type in films such as *Personal Best* (1982). Very few films contained a lesbian love story in which the relationship was overt and intact at the end of the film. (p. 13)

Most films with lesbian roles directed by men after 1990 contained murdering or violent lesbians; these films included *Heavenly Creatures* (1994), *Bound* (1996), *Fun* (1994), and *Butterfly Kiss* (1995). Kessler (2003) found that female directors after 1990, produced films that contained lesbian love without the murdering and violent lesbians; the films produced by women included *Late Bloomers* (1996), *The Incredibly True Adventure of Two Girls in Love* (1995), and *It's in the Water* (1998). She chose to focus her analysis on how directors and writers Andy Wachowski and Larry Wachowski made the movie, *Bound*, that was “family fun for everyone” (p. 13). Her reasoning for choosing the film for the purpose of her analysis had minimal justification except that it stood out to her as a “dyke mob thrilled” (p. 13) that was “family fun for everyone” (p. 13). She state

There were three main characteristics that allowed *Bound* to draw favor from both heterosexual and lesbian crowds: (1) images of desire that work for both lesbian and heterosexual viewers, (2) strategic use of stereotypes, and (3) camp or parody of the prototypical Hollywood gangster. (p. 14)

She analyzed *Bound* and found it was opposite of the typical lesbian films that featured murdering and violent lesbians. She stated *Bound* had “much needed empowering and erotic images for lesbians” (p. 14) and it “provides a point of visibility and recognition for the often ignored or subordinated lesbian viewer” (p. 21). Three main characteristics portrayed in the movie worked for both heterosexuals and lesbians. First, the images of desire worked for both lesbian and heterosexual viewers. Second, the writers strategically used stereotypes. Lastly, they used “camp or parody of the prototypical Hollywood gangster” (p. 14).

### The Queer Community

Research has been conducted regarding the statistics of queer women’s communities and individuals in the United States. There is significant disagreement on the estimated number of lesbian women and gay men in the US (Herek, 1991). Gates and Ost (2002) reported “voter exit polls found that between 4 and 5 percent of voters in the last five national elections identified as gay or lesbian” (p. 19). They explained it is difficult to assess the number of individuals who identify as gay or lesbian because of the lack of consensus on the definition of gay and lesbian. According to the US census data, “4 million Americans are gay or lesbian, or about 2 percent of all adults” (Gates & Ost, 2002, p. 19). Laumann, Gagnon, and Michael (1994) found in a sample of 3500 people that more than six percent of men and four percent of women reported sexual attraction to an individual of the same sex.

Gay and lesbian couple households are in 99 percent of U.S. counties, yet concentration and distribution of the couples vary by state. California, New York, Texas, Florida, Illinois, and Pennsylvania have the most same-sex couples residing in their states. Most couples live along the California coast, in southern Florida, and throughout the New England areas. The top two areas with the highest population of gay and lesbian couples include the Castro neighborhood in San Francisco and Provincetown in Massachusetts (Gates & Ost, 2002).

Lesbian couples tend to live in rural areas as opposed to gay men who predominantly occupy urban cities. Lesbians do not cluster in one area, which is the opposite trend for gay men who live in closer proximity. The top ten neighborhoods in which lesbian couples reside include Provincetown, Massachusetts; Florence/Northampton, Massachusetts; Guerneville, California; Jamaica Plain, Massachusetts; Decatur, Georgia; Castro, San Francisco; Oakland/Piedmont, California; Berkeley, California; and Mission District, San Francisco, California. More lesbian couples than gay men couples choose to have children and have lower incomes, which may be the reasons lesbian couples are inclined to reside in rural areas. Metropolitan areas traditionally have a higher cost of living (Gates & Ost, 2002).

#### A Brief History of the Gay and Lesbian Movement in the United States

Gay and lesbian activists fought a serious battle against antigay counter movements throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Staggenborg, 2011). One of the first social movements to make advances in civil rights of gay and lesbian people was in 1897 in Germany (Adam, 1995). Throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century in North America

Gay and lesbian activists have battled against discrimination in areas such as employment and housing. They have also fought for same-sex relationships, including rights to partner benefits, custody and adoption of children, and marriage or civil unions. (Staggenborg, 2011, p. 83)

Carter (2004) also described the harsh cultural environments that surrounded gay and lesbian individuals in the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century. He stated,

At the end of the 1960s, homosexual sex was illegal in every state but Illinois. Not one law—federal, state, or local—protected gay men or women from being fired or denied housing. There were no openly gay politicians. No television show had any identifiable gay characters. When Hollywood made a film with a major homosexual character, the character was either killed or killed himself. There were no openly gay policemen, public school teachers, doctors, or lawyers. And no political party had a gay caucus. (pp. 1-2)

The origins of the gay and lesbian movement in the United States began in the 1960s (Staggenborg, 2011). World War II provided increased socialization of gays and lesbians in the military, war industries, and the growing number of gay and lesbian bars. Gay and lesbian individuals formed organizations during the war such as The Mattachine Society in Los Angeles to support the community (Staggenborg, 2011).

Major movements toward gaining civil and human rights for lesbian and gay individuals began in 1969. The riots at the Stonewall Inn, a New York City gay bar, are often cited as the beginning of these political gains (Carter, 2004; Staggenborg, 2011). During a routine raid, gay men, lesbians, and transvestites fought back against the police, which turned into brutal riots that lasted for six days. The Stonewall Inn was a popular gay club in Greenwich Village neighborhood in New York City (Carter, 2004).

Greenwich Village was a neighborhood known for unconventional lifestyles and as a bohemian quarter. It attracted many gay and lesbian individuals because “they sensed that a place known for wide tolerance might even accept sexual nonconformists” (Carter, 2004, p. 7). The Village neighborhood has a long history of fighting for their beliefs, for example

when an attempt was made in 1817 to impose a grid plan on all of Manhattan’s streets, the citizens of Greenwich Village successfully resisted the plan and the Village became the only part of Manhattan north of the Wall Street area where the new street plan was not implemented. (p. 9)

Resistance to the plan had its roots in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, because “Villagers” (Carter, p. 9) planned the roads to follow the footpaths left by the original Indians and settlers of the area. Due to the winding roads, the Village remained fairly isolated from the rest of Manhattan. However, once the vote passed in 1918 to extend Seventh Avenue south past 11<sup>th</sup> Street into Greenwich Village, the neighborhood lost its physical isolation from the rest of the city.

The extension of Seventh Avenue, now called Seventh Avenue South, into the Village resulted in increased traffic, commuter trains from New Jersey, and the introduction of subway lines. The Stonewall Inn, a famous gay bar, was centrally located in the Village in this “knot of streets” (Carter, 2004, p. 13). It was

Only a block away from eight subway lines, only about two short blocks away from a PATH train station, and between three major avenues: Sixth Avenue, Greenwich Avenue, and Seventh Avenue South. More significantly, the club was only a short city block and a half from Greenwich Avenue, the premier cruising ground for gay men in New York City in the 1960s. Moreover, the new bar was located the same distance from what these men call The Corner, the intersection of Greenwich Avenue and Christopher Street, the most popular meeting place for gay men on all of Greenwich Avenue. (p. 11)

In the late 1960s, the Stonewall Inn had blacked out windows to provide privacy from police. The windows were reinforced with “two-by-fours to prevent the police from being able to simply break through the windows and rush inside” (Carter, p. 69). The bar had thick oak doors on the exterior with steel doors on the inside and multiple locks to slow the police from entering during their routine raids. The bar also had a sign-in book to prevent straight people from coming into the bar, but there was speculation this book was used to find and blackmail gay and lesbian individuals. The bar was known for dancing, which was one of its main attractions (Carter).

Like many gay and lesbian bars in New York City during the 1960s, the Stonewall Inn paid a portion of their profits to the police. The police came once a week and were give hundreds of dollars to leave the bar alone. They arrested random patrons during the monthly raids and took them down to the station where they were quickly released. Despite the payoffs, the bar and many others like them were often shut down, and queer individuals were forced to socialize in “dirty and dangerous environments” (Carter, 2004, p. 80). The Stonewall Inn did not have fire exits or running water and was run with highly unsanitary conditions which caused, at one point, an “outbreak of hepatitis among the Stonewall’s customers” (p. 80). However,

It offered its patrons three crucial things: space, security, and freedom. Added to these were longevity and the continuity that longevity made possible. Through the power of music and dance, the club fused these elements to create among most of its regular customers a sense of gay community and identity and thus a loyalty to the Stonewall Inn. (Carter, 2004, p. 88)

The famous riots outside the Stonewall Inn began on Friday, June 27<sup>th</sup> 1969. The riots were initiated and led by young homeless homosexuals. After the first night of rioting, thousands showed up Saturday evening to protest the police and continue the fight, however the crowds fizzled out by Tuesday. After news reports of the incidents circulated on Wednesday, the protestors were back in full force. “Police and protestors fought their hardest on Wednesday” (Carter, 2004, p. 204), and after many gays and lesbians were injured and wounded the riots came to a close that evening.

The riots at Stonewall were reported as “The Hairpin Drop Heard Around the World” (Carter, 2004, p. 210). The riots led to formation of The Gay Liberation Front (GLF), which focused on “homosexual issues for the immediate future” (p. 219). Members of the group described the GLF as

A revolutionary homosexual group of men and women formed with the realization that complete sexual liberation for all people cannot come about unless existing social institutions are abolished. We reject society’s attempt to impose sexual roles and definitions of our nature. We are stepping outside these roles and simplistic myths. We are going to be who we are. At the same time, we are creating new social forms and relations, that is, relations based upon brotherhood, cooperation, human love, and uninhibited sexuality. Babylon has forced us to commit ourselves to one thing...revolution. (p. 219)

The group believed that “true homosexual revolutionaries should, indeed must, ally themselves with other groups oppressed by capitalism” (p. 220).

#### Attitudes Towards the Queer Community: Heterosexism, Discrimination, and Acceptance

Discrimination against lesbian and gay individuals has significantly impacted the study of lesbian and gay history (D’Emilio, 1983). The stigma associated with queer individuals has led to destruction of many primary sources including letters, diaries, and photographs of famous and non-famous queer individual (Freedman, 1982). Heterosexism is “a reasoned system of bias regarding sexual orientation. It denotes prejudice in favor of heterosexual people and connotes prejudice against bisexual and, especially, homosexual people” (Jung & Smith, 1993, p. 13). Heterosexism and discrimination against queer

individuals continues to be a frequent reality since the Stonewall riots (Huebner, Rebhook, & Kegeles, 2004). A report in 2010 by the Federal Bureau of Investigation ranked hate crimes against queer individuals third on their list of the most prevalent types of hate crimes following race and religion. Discrimination felt by queer individuals leads to psychological distress (Smith & Ingram, 2004; Szymanski, 2005) and suicide (Johnson, Faulkner, Jones, & Welsh, 2007). Homophobia is the fear of being close to a homosexual (Weinberg, 1973). Homophobia is often associated with heterosexism, however “no logical or necessary connection exists between the two” (Jung & Smith, 1993, p. 14).

According to Blumenfeld (1992), homophobia exists on four levels: personal, interpersonal, institutional, and cultural. Personal homophobia is a “personal belief system that sexual minorities either deserve to be pitied as unfortunate beings who are powerless to control their desires or should be hated” (p. 3). Interpersonal homophobia is when “a personal bias or prejudice affects relations among individuals, transforming prejudice into its active components—discrimination” (p. 4). Institutional homophobia is when “the ways in which the governments, businesses, and educational religious, and professional organizations systematically discriminate on the basis of sexual orientation or identity” (p. 5). Lastly, cultural homophobia is when “the social norms or codes of behavior that, although not expressly written into law or policy, nonetheless work within a society to legitimize oppression” (p. 6).

Levitt and Klassen (1974) conducted a large-scale study on attitudes towards homosexuality and their “relationship to demographic and behavioral characteristics of the American public” (p. 29) based on a nationwide, probability sample of 30, 018 adults in 1970. During each two-hour interview, the researchers found an overwhelming amount of prejudice towards homosexuals. Levitt and Klassen reported 77.7 percent of the sample indicated sex acts between homosexuals was always wrong, 76 percent stated homosexual men should not be allowed to be a court judge, schoolteacher, or minister, yet over 71 percent indicated they were allowed to be a beautician, artist, musician, and florist. Forty-four percent of the sample strongly believed homosexuals were dangerous as teachers or youth leaders because they try to become sexually involved with children, 33.1 percent strongly agreed that homosexuals try to play sexually with children if they cannot get an adult partner, and 43.1 percent strongly agreed that homosexuals are a high security risk for government jobs. More than 80 percent of the sample preferred to never associate with homosexuals, and 33 percent indicated they have never liked them.

Researchers found queer individuals experienced overt acts of discrimination such as blatant acts of hostility or severe hate crimes (Herek, 1989; Herek & Berrill, 1992; Roderick, McCammon, Long & Allred, 1998). Herek (1989) found that several heterosexual individuals were willingly and openly able to discuss their hate and discrimination towards the queer community. The author reviewed policy and government surveys, and found hate crimes against homosexuals were on the rise. Herek (1989) stated, “as many as 92% of lesbians and gay men report that they have been the targets of antigay verbal abuse and threats, and as many as 24% report physical attacks because of their sexual orientation” (p. 948). He



theorized the increase in reported hate crimes might be due to the amount of previously undocumented hate crimes.

Roderick, McCammon, Long, and Allred (1998) studied behavioral aspects of homonegativity in a sample of 264 college students at a state university in the Southeastern part of the United States. The participant's ages ranged between 17 and 22. They used the Self-Report of Behavior Scale-Revised (SBS-R) (Patel, 1989) to measure self-reported negative behaviors toward homosexuals. Roderick et al. revised the original scale developed by Patel (1989) to include behavior directed towards lesbian women. Roderick et al. also used the Crowne-Marlowe Social Desirability Scale (Crowne & Marlowe, 1964) to measure "social desirability response bias inherent in the SBS-R" (p. 82). Lastly, Roderick et al. used the Index of Attitudes Toward Homosexuals scale (Hudson & Ricketts, 1980) to measure "affective responses to gay individuals" (p. 82). Roderick et al. found participants were "moderately homophobic" (p. 83). More than 10 percent of men occasionally or frequently reported behaviors such as

Spreading negative talk, warning to keep away, being rude, changing seats, staring in disapproval, yelling insults, changing bathroom behavior, verbally threatening, telling an anti-gay joke, and moving to put distance between oneself and a gay person. (p. 83)

More than 10 percent of the women in the sample reported they frequently or occasionally "spread negative talk, yelled insults, told anti-gay jokes, or moved to make more distance" (p. 83).

Using the grounded theory method, Lasser and Tharinger (2003) found that gay, lesbian, and bisexual youth experienced forms of discrimination in school environments. They conducted 20 in-depth interviews of gay, lesbian, and bisexual youth to understand how their experiences at school affected their visibility management. Lasser and Tharinger found the youth experienced constant pressure to reveal or conceal their sexual orientation. The participants often "tested the water" with their friends to determine whether they would feel comfortable revealing their sexual orientation, however most reported they concealed their identity due to fear of discrimination leaving them with a "feeling of dissonance between self and presented self" (p. 240).

Kelleher (2009) explored "the impact of minority stress on psychological distress among LGBTQ youth in Ireland" (p. 373). Her sample included 301 "self-identified LGBTQ youth aged 16-24 years" (p. 374). Using a quantitative questionnaire, she measured stressors including

actual experiences of sexual/transgender identity-related prejudice and discrimination (heterosexist experiences); expectations for rejection (stigma consciousness); and internalization of society's negative attitudes (sexual/gender identity distress); and also psychological distress. (p. 375)

Kelleher found that minority stressors "were shown to significantly predict negative psychological outcomes among the young people studied" (p. 376). Heterosexism experiences ranged from anti-gay jokes and physical abuse. The experiences created a constant unpredictable environment for the individuals. She also reported "the greater the young person's expectation for rejection based

on their sexual/gender identity, the most likely they are to report symptoms of anxiety, depression, and suicide ideation” (p. 376).

Daily experiences of heterosexism were found to impact individual’s everyday mental health. Lewis, Derlega, Bennett, Moris, and Rose (2001) conducted a quantitative study with 979 participants to understand daily stressors in homosexual’s lives. Participants each completed a 70-item measure “with stressors that had been identified in previous qualitative research” (p. 64). The participants “were asked to indicate the degree to which they had experienced stress associated with a variety of experiences” (p. 64). The participants also completed a “measure of dysphoria” to measure the “degree of openness regarding sexual orientation, and providing information about their relationship status and involvement with gay groups and activities” (p. 64). Types of stressors were

Visibility issues (difficulty being ‘out’ both with one’s family as well as in a more public arena), family conflict difficulties encountered with one’s family due to one’s sexual orientation, including family reactions to a partner), discrimination at work (concerning possible and actual job loss and other economic stressors as well as discriminatory practices), general discrimination (involving social services and housing), violence and harassment (concerning verbal and physical attacks or threats due to one’s sexual orientation), HIV/AIDS (concerning emotional behavioral changes related to the AIDS epidemic), conflict over one’s sexual orientation (shame/guilt and problems accepting one’s sexual orientation), and misunderstanding (society’s ignorance about and lack of acceptance of gays). (Lewis et al., 2001, pp. 81-82)

Women participants reported more stress related to family. Individuals in relationships had less dysphoria and had a greater sense of well-being. However, individuals in relationships indicated, “more stress associated with societal misunderstanding and lack of acceptance” (p. 83).

Swim, Pearson, and Johnston (2007) used the qualitative, daily diary research method to understand queer individual’s experiences with everyday heterosexism “using a similar conceptual framework that has been used to understand everyday experiences with sexism and anti-black racism” (p. 34). The authors stated the diary research method allowed them “to obtain a better understanding of LGB individuals lived experiences with heterosexism” (p. 34) because participants did not have to recall the incident in their memory. In their study, 69 participants, 34 queer men and 35 queer women, recorded four journal entries over a seven-day period. The average age of their participants was 31 years. Most participants were white (85.5%), however the sample also included “three Black, three Latino/a, three Asian, and one Middle Eastern participant” (p. 36). Most of the participants lived in Pennsylvania (75.4%); no indication was made where the other 25 percent of the participants resided. The researchers found the most common types of everyday heterosexism incidents included verbal comments such as “expression of stereotypes and hostile comments” (p. 44), behaviors such as bad service and fear-related hassles (Swim, Pearson, & Johnston, 2007). They concluded “encounters with heterosexism are common for LGB individuals on a day to day basis” (p. 46).

Gillow and Davis (1987) and Woodman (1989) investigated sources of stress in lesbian’s lives using qualitative data collection. Gillow and Davis surveyed 142 lesbian women to identify primary

stressors in their lives. After coding the data, six major categories emerged including problems with work, relationship problems, family conflict, financial problems, childcare and child custody, and other miscellaneous stress. The most common source of stress was fear that their sexuality would be exposed, resulting in job loss, discrimination, and harassment. Other stressors included alienation from family and restriction of affection in public. Woodman examined sources of stress in 100 self-identifying gay and lesbian college students involved in leadership positions with gay and lesbian organizations on campus. Emergent themes from the study included relationship issues, personal and group identity issues, anticipated loss, and loss.

A few researchers studied the attractiveness or likability of lesbian women. Laner and Laner (1980) measured the relationship of likeableness and appearance of lesbian women in a sample of 511 college students enrolled in a sociology course at a southwestern university. Using a seven-point scale, the students rated three different descriptions of a woman that were described as either heterosexual or homosexual. Each woman was further described as “hypofeminine (masculine), feminine (average), or hyperfeminine (effeminate)” (p. 343). They found that conventional styles, which they termed heterosexual styles, reduced dislike of lesbians. They also reported “least favorable ratings for heterosexual women were given to hypofeminine (masculine) type, but the majority of reactions to this type were still characterized by likeableness or neutrality” (p. 346). Based on the results of their study, Laner and Laner (1980) suggested that homosexuals eschew “both butch-macho and super-femme outward appearances and behaviors” (p. 353).

In another study on attractiveness of lesbian women, Dew (1985) tested the hypothesis “that inferences of homosexuality will be made more frequently about women who are perceived to be less physically attractive” (p. 143). The author was also interested in whether “the perception of a relationship between female homosexuality and level of physical attractiveness would be affected by raters’ attitudes about homosexuality and traditional sex-role behavior” (p. 143). Dew (1985) photographed 22 women from the waist up and used the photographs as stimulus for judging. Fifty undergraduate participants, 25 male and 25 female, at Johns Hopkins University randomly rated 11 of the photographs using a six-point scale indicating if they believed statements about the women such as “this women dresses well” (p. 145), and “this woman is attractive” (p. 145). Then after the first round of rating, the participants were told half the women were lesbians and to identify them in the sample of photographs. Next, the participants “completed a 15-item attitude scale to assess their opinions of homosexuality, the women’s rights movement, and civil rights” (p. 146). The researcher found most respondents rated homosexual women as unattractive. Conservative women were more likely than liberal women to identify lesbians as homely.

Dunkle and Francis (1996) conducted a similar study to Dew (1985). They investigated “whether subjects would perceived male and female faces as homosexual based upon facial attractiveness while statistically controlling for facial masculinity/femininity” (p. 13), and “the extent to which subjects’ gender and attitudes toward homosexuality would influence their perceptions” (p. 13). In their study, 80

undergraduate students, 40 males and 40 females, between the ages of 18 and 25 who studied at the State University of New York College at Cortland completed three different scales. The Index of Homophobia (Hudson & Ricketts, 1980), Bem Sex-Role Inventory (Bem, 1989), Attitudes toward Women Scale (Spence & Helmreich, 1972), and a conservation measure (Comrey & Newmeyer, 1965) were used to measure attitudes toward homosexual; subjects' sex-role characteristics; attitudes toward women's issues; and religious, political, sexual, and racial beliefs, respectively. Dunkle and Francis (1996) reported that heterosexuals assume sexual orientation of others based on appearance, and they were more likely to label unattractive women as lesbians.

In a study on queer individual's experiences in the workplace, Smith and Ingram (2004) examined "the relationship between workplace heterosexism, unsupportive social interactions (negative responses from others concerning one's experience of heterosexism), and adjustment" (p. 57). Their sample consisted of 40 men and 57 women; 53 of those individuals identified as gay, 29 as lesbian, 10 as bisexual, and five as queer. The average age was 34 years. Eighty identified as white, three as black, six Latino or Latina, and six as biracial/multiracial.

Smith and Ingram (2004) used five scales to investigate heterosexism in the workplace. First, to measure indirect and direct experiences of workplace heterosexism they used the 22-item Workplace Heterosexism Experiences Questionnaire (Waldo, 1999). Second, the Unsupportive Social Interactions Inventory scale (Ingram, Betz, Mindes, Schmitt, & Smith, 2001) was used to measure "upsetting or hurtful responses a person receives from others when discussing a stressor" (Smith & Ingram, 2004, p. 60). Third, a 54-item scale, The Penebaker Inventory of Limbic Languidness (Penebaker, 1982), was used to measure "physical symptoms such as coughing, insomnia, diarrhea, and nausea. Participants were asked to rate the frequency with which they have experienced these symptoms in the past year by using a 5-point scale" (Smith & Ingram, 2004, p. 60). Fourth, they used the Center for Epidemiological Studies Depression Scale (Radloff, 1977) to measure "current levels of depression in a non-clinical population. Participants were asked to rate how often they have felt or behaved in certain ways in the past week" (Smith & Ingram, 2004, p. 60). Lastly, Smith and Ingram used a 53-item scale, Brief Symptom Inventory (Derogatis & Spencer, 1982), to measure psychological symptoms. "Participants were asked to rate the degree to which they have experienced a variety of psychological symptoms in the past week on a 5-point scale" (Smith & Ingram, 2004, p. 60). They found experiences of heterosexism were "positively relate[d] to depression and psychological distress. Experiences of heterosexism did not, however, significantly relate to physical symptoms" (p. 64). They also found "at low levels of blaming, after controlling for outness and involvement in the gay community, the relationship between heterosexism and both depression and psychological distress was greater" (p. 64). Smith and Ingram concluded that even low incidents of heterosexism or unsupported social interactions in the work place could be extremely detrimental to mental health. Questions such as "Are you married?" (p. 65) is an example of seemingly innocuous behavior that can impact mental health. To promote positive well-being and mental health, they suggested employers

should extend benefits to partners, include nondiscrimination clauses in paperwork, and avoid biased language in all work materials.

Gagne and Tewksbury (1998) found transgendered individuals also experienced discrimination and ostracism. They conducted semi-structured, in-depth interviews with 65 male-to-female transgendered individuals to examine “gender as a social institution” (p. 81). They sought to understand how “gender is taken for granted as a presumable natural aspect of social life” (p. 81) and how “transgenderism is a discursive act that both challenges and reifies the binary gender system” (p. 81). Every participant in their sample felt pressure to conform to traditional gender presentations. Many stated, “During childhood, and later as adults, they innovatively created spaces where they could secretly enact their feminine selves” (p. 86). Most preferred to perform their feminine self-presentation in private spaces until they perfected their presentation due to pressures to stay within the current acceptable binary gender system. They feared “rejection, stigmatization, and the loss of friendships, should they violate gender norms” (p. 87).

Despite the significant amount of research on discrimination against homosexuals, Watters (1986) and Altemeyer (2001) found increasing positive attitudes towards homosexuality. Watters (1986) used Morin’s (1977) taxonomy of research questions to assess research on homosexuality from 1979 through 1983. Watters reviewed 166 studies on lesbians and homosexuality. He reported there was a 12% increase in positive attitudes towards homosexuals by individuals who identified as heterosexual between the years 1979 and 1983 (from seven percent to 19 percent).

Using a cross-sectional research method over 14 years (1984-1998), Altemeyer (2001) found there was an increasing understanding and acceptance of homosexuality. His sample consisted mainly of undergraduate students from his introductory psychology course and their parents at a Canadian university. He first studied 557 students and 521 parents in 1984, and then studied 350 students and 373 parents in 1998. The positive attitudes toward homosexuals increased for both the students and the parents.

## Chapter Summary

Identity is a complex concept yet in simplistic terms involves a self, multiple identities and different role performances (Kaiser, 1990). Formation of self for individuals, according to symbolic interaction theory, is negotiated through use of symbols and interactions in the social world (Charon, 1979). An individual’s sex, sexual identity, and gender identity are all performed (Butler, 1990) via visual language or symbols such as dress (Davis, 1992). Individuals in the queer community, specifically lesbians, use dress to communicate one’s specific subcultural identity. Lesbian women place varying importance on appearance management behaviors (Brown, 1995; Striegel-Moore et al., 1986). Despite the Gay and Lesbian Movement in the late 1960s (Carter, 2004), gays and lesbians are still represented less in the media than heterosexuals (Sender, 2003), and experience significant amounts of discrimination (Huebner, Rebchook, & Kegeles, 2004) leading to psychological distress (Smith & Ingram, 2004; Szymanski, 2005) and suicide (Johnson, Faulkner, Jones, & Welsh, 2007).

### CHAPTER THREE: METHOD

The purpose of my research was to explore the relationship of dress and queer women and how their sexual identity influences their appearance management behaviors without ignoring other subject positions such as class, race, ethnicity, location, age, and religion. To achieve this purpose, I first conducted in-depth, semi-structured interviews. Then participants completed a short survey and took a photo of the outfits they wore for 14 days. At the end of each week, the participants also completed a short, follow-up interview. The five research questions I answered in this study were:

1. How is gender identity constructed and negotiated in different spaces for queer women?
2. Does sexual identity influence dress choices of queer women?
3. Where do queer women look for fashion styles and trends?
4. What are queer women's experiences with shopping for clothing and accessories?
5. Do queer women feel anxiety, pressure, or discrimination from the fashion system and the appearance management behaviors in which they participate due to their sexual identity?

#### Research Paradigm and Assumptions

In this study, I approached the research from a combination of interpretive social science and critical social science paradigms. Interpretive social scientists “develop an understanding of social life and discover how people construct meaning in natural settings” (Neuman, 2006, p. 88). They try to understand the phenomena from the point of view of the individual. Similar to critical social scientists, I believe “social reality has multiple layers” (p. 102). Critical social scientists aim to “critique and transform social relations by revealing the underlying sources of social relations and empowering people, especially less powerful people” (p. 95). Through my research I aimed to enable these queer women to share their voice and experiences related to identity, dress, and anxiety.

In addition to the paradigms described above, my research was also informed by Butler's (1990) theory of performativity. Butler explained that gender is a performance and not something that is biological. Butler (1990) stated, “There is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender...identity is performatively constituted by the very ‘expressions’ that are said to be its results” (p. 25). I assumed gender is not binary and that it is a social construction. Therefore, when asking questions during the interviews, I sought to understand how the participants' gender identity is constructed and negotiated through the performance of appearance management behaviors in different places. During my data analysis, I assumed the participants' genders were constructed and impacted by social norms.

Symbolic interaction theory is the framework from which I formed my interview questions and analysis. I believe that meaning in the social world is constructed, deconstructed, and reconstructed through social interactions. Following the work of theorists who developed symbolic interaction theory, I assumed interaction between humans is mediated by the use of symbols and by interpretation of those symbols. Individuals recognize and then react differently to the meanings associated with different symbols in different spaces (Charon, 1979). The idea of a negotiated existence was a predominant

assumption influencing much of my work including the wording of my interview questions and how I came to understand the experiences of the individuals I interviewed.

Kaiser's (2001) theoretical approach "minding appearances" also informed my research. In her approach she asked the questions, "To what extent does my appearance style represent or create truths(s) about who I am? How do my ways of being, becoming, and appearing interface with those of others?" (p. 79). Through her approach she sought to explain the linkage of style, truth, and subjectivity by examining the complex and fluid relationship between the social world and an individual's mind and body (p. 79). The idea of minding appearances "notes the continual interplay between an individual and his/her various identities and communities, in such a way that combines style, truth and subjectivity" (p. 80). I assumed that appearance creates truth(s) about who individuals are and reveals information about their multiple and continually changing identities.

### Research Procedures

#### Sample

The sample for my research were individuals who identify as both female and queer. I used purposive sampling, which is a "nonrandom sample in which the researcher uses a wide range of methods to locate all possible cases of a highly specific group and difficult-to-reach population" (Neuman, 2006, p. 22). I required that the women share their sexual identity with friends, family, and employer due to the sensitive nature of the topic. I felt that if the women had not disclosed their sexual identity, they might be uncomfortable reflecting on their experiences with dress and sexual identity. I recruited the participants by flyers and word of mouth. At the end of each interview, I also asked each participant if they would forward my contact information and the research details to someone who they think might be interested in participating.

#### Data Collection

**Semi-structured interviews.** To answer my research questions I conducted semi-structured interviews. Questions in semi-structured interviews involve "implementation of a number of predetermined questions and/or special topics." (Berg, 2001, p. 70). The interview guide is in Appendix A. I utilized various techniques to ensure that the interviews ran smoothly. All interviews were held either in the participant's home or over an Internet video chat program such as Skype™ or Google Video Chat. Probing questions such as "Can you tell me more about this?" or "What did you mean by this?" were utilized if the participant was not expressive in their answers. If the discussion got off track I used phrases such as "I'd like to talk more about \_\_\_\_" to get back on topic. I audio-recorded each interview, and I made notes of body language and other noteworthy physical indicators using a pen and pencil during the interview. For example, a noteworthy indicator included voice level and facial expressions such as bulging eyes.

Daily diary. Swim, Pearson, and Johnson (2007) used the daily diary research method to understand the lived experiences of heterosexism for queer individuals. They felt the diary method was appropriate because participants did not have to recall events in their memory. For research question five, I determined if queer women feel anxiety, pressure, or discrimination from the fashion system and the appearance management behaviors in which they participate. To answer this research question, I asked my participants to record their thoughts and feelings about their experiences with clothing in a diary for two weeks after we completed the in-depth interview. They also took a picture of the outfits they wore each day while they were completing the diary. The template for the diary is in Appendix B. I prepared a custom diary for each participant that was labeled with all of the dates. The participants first completed a diary and took photos of their outfits for one week. Next, they completed a follow-up interview. Then they took pictures of the outfits they wore each day and completed the diary for an additional week. Lastly, they completed a second follow-up interview. Questions I asked during the follow-up interview are in Appendix C. During the follow-up interviews, the participant and I looked at their photographs from the previous week, which helped them describe how they felt about what they were wearing.

#### Data Analysis

In research in which qualitative data are collected, analysis begins while collecting data, and the researcher often moves back and forth between the data and the analysis (Creswell, 2007). I want to emphasize that while I describe my process of data analysis in a linear fashion, the process is cyclical. Analysis began during the interviews when I made notes of ideas and key concepts. Immediately after the interview I wrote down thoughts from the interview. I transcribed each interview before I conducted the next interview with the same participant so I was able to confirm some of their responses with them in the follow-up interviews. After the transcription, I began preliminary coding and searched for emergent themes. I coded the data in three phases and looked for emergent themes and patterns. I coded line-by-line using open, axial, and selective coding. Open coding is “a first coding of qualitative data in which a researcher examines the data to condense them into preliminary analytic categories or codes” (Creswell, 2007, p. 461). Axial coding is “a second stage of coding of qualitative data in which a researcher organizes the codes, links them, and discovers key analytic categories” (p. 462). Lastly, selective coding is the final stage “in coding qualitative data in which a researcher examines previous codes to identify and select data that will support the conceptual coding categories that were developed” (p. 464). I remained open during the coding process to any unanticipated results that emerged from the data. Images of the participants’ outfits were used as supporting evidence in my results, discussion, and conclusion.

On the daily diary the participants were asked to rank on a five-point scale if they felt any anxiety, pressure, or discrimination when getting dressed and when wearing their outfit that day. On the scale, one indicated no stress and five indicated very stressed. Responses on these scales were reported as frequencies in the results section and used to support the emergent themes.



### Validity and Reliability

Validity in qualitative research means a truthful and authentic account of the phenomena under study from the point of view of the participant (Neuman, 2006). To achieve validity, I first built trust with my participants by asking questions that were easy to answer before progressing into the more sensitive topics. At the beginning of each interview, I asked the participants about their week and got to know each participant. They were often interested in sharing stories about their lives with me that did not relate to the study, and they wanted to know about my life, too. These conversations seemed to make my participants more comfortable and able to share more personal stories during the interviews. I developed rapport with my participants with eye contact throughout the interviews. I followed Berg's (2001) suggestion of letting people talk and not interrupting them, and allowing for silences of up to 45 seconds to allow for thought process and response. I often summarized what the participant said during the interview and asked if I was correct. I used probing questions to help clarify the respondents' comments and to achieve a deeper understanding of the topic.

Several other techniques were used to achieve validity during data analysis. Once the data were coded, I checked my results with my participants (member checking) to ensure I had not missed any key themes, ideas, or information. During the analysis, I checked for instances where the data did not support my findings to ensure I fully understood all aspects of the data. Then, if too many negative cases were found, I reconsidered my findings and reported the revised results. Triangulation, or viewing from multiple angles, is another way to increase validity in a research study (Neuman, 2006). The combination of interviews and daily diary methods allowed me to see the phenomena under study from different perspectives using different measures and methods. Since I was the only investigator, I did not achieve triangulation from multiple observers.

I employed several techniques to achieve a reliable or consistent study. I actively utilized my interview guide and kept the same interview schedule. I used the systematic coding techniques described above. Creswell (2007) suggested developing a codebook with definitions of each code. I developed a codebook for each theme and used it to code the data.

### Limitations of the Method

The method I used to collect data has several limitations. The use of qualitative methods does not allow for generalizations to a larger population, therefore I can only report an in-depth account of the women in this study. The use of only two data collection methods is also a limitation. Utilizing more techniques such as participant observation would yield richer data; however due to time and money I restricted data collection to the two methods described above. I was limited to individuals who live within a half hour of Corvallis, Oregon or who had access to the Internet and a video chat program. This limitation reduced my sample to those who could afford the Internet if they were out of the geographic range. I did not utilize triangulation of observers. Neuman (2006) stated that "multiple observers add alternative perspectives, backgrounds, and social characteristics and will reduce the limitations" (p. 150).

Due to time and money restraints I did not hire other individuals to assist in data collection or analysis. During the interviews I asked participants about their previous experiences with clothing, and therefore memory was also a limitation.

## CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The purpose of this research was to explore the relationship of dress and queer women and how their sexual identity influences their appearance management behaviors without ignoring other subject positions such as class, race, ethnicity, location, age, or religion. I used the following types of data collection for each participant: one initial in-depth interview, daily dairies and a photo journal for 14 days, as well as follow-up interviews at the end of each of the two weeks of data collection. I used each participant's responses to each of these techniques in order to answer the following research questions:

1. How is gender identity constructed and negotiated in different spaces for queer women?
2. Does sexual identity influence clothing and style choices of queer women?
3. Where do queer women look for clothing styles and fashion trends?
4. What are queer women's experiences with shopping for clothing and accessories?
5. Do queer women feel anxiety, pressure, or discrimination from the fashion system and their appearance management behaviors due to their sexual identity?

Each research question will be addressed separately except for research question five. Issues of stress, anxiety, and discrimination felt by the participants will be reported with the results of questions two through four.

See Table 4.1 for the parts of the study each of the 20 participants completed. I assigned each participant a pseudonym for confidentiality. The names listed in Table 4.1 are the participants' assigned pseudonyms and not their real names. Three participants missed one or more parts of the data collection process. All other participants diligently took photos, filled out the dairies, and completed the follow-up interviews.

### Participant Summary

The participants were 20 women living in the United States. Three of the participants lived in Washington, 12 lived in Oregon, two lived in New York, two lived in Connecticut, and one lived in Colorado. Eleven of the participants lived in urban areas, and nine of the participants resided in rural areas.

The sample of women represented a wide range of occupations and ages, though a very narrow range of ethnicities. The ages (N=20) ranged from 18 to 35. See Table 4.2 for the breakdown of ages in the sample. The majority of participants (n=13) were currently attending college as undergraduate students, and two participants were graduate students. Three participants were artists who held part-time jobs. The other participants were employed as a tattoo shop secretary, a janitor, a museum professional, and a massage therapist, respectively. One participant was unemployed. Eighteen women identified themselves as white; the two women who did not identify as white identified as mixed race.

Table 4.1

*Summary of each participant's participation in the study.*

Participant's Pseudonym	In-depth interview	Week 1: Daily Diary	Week 1: Photo Journal	First Follow-up Interview	Week 2: Daily Diary	Week 2: Photo Journal	Second Follow-up Interview
Kayden	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Jordan	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Amari	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Melissa	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Debbie	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
London	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Avery	✓	✓	✓	-	✓	✓	✓
Mary	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Alexa	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Kelsey	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Quinn	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Harper	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Kayla	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Scarlett	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	-	✓
Micah	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Morgan	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Riley	✓	✓	✓	✓	-	-	-
Kai	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Sawyer	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Logan	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

Table 4.2  
*Age breakdown of sample*

Age	Number of Participants
18	2
19	4
20	1
21	3
23	1
24	1
25	1
28	1
29	1
30	1
31	1
33	2
35	1

All women in the study confirmed they met the eligibility requirements for the study: they identified as female and as queer. Five of the women self-identified as “queer,” five identified as “lesbian,” one identified as “bi-curious lesbian,” one identified as “lesbian or queer,” one identified as “bi-sexual,” one identified as “queer-identified bi-sexual,” and one preferred no label. Two different women described their sexual identity using three adjectives; they used the following combinations: “queer, kinky, and poly” and “gay, lesbian, and queer.”

When asked to describe their sexual identity, six of the women gave brief, effortless answers, while other participants faltered and provided long explanations of their sexual desires and attraction towards others. For example, Harper simply stated, “I say that I’m queer,” while Debbie said, “Usually I say I’m queer, but it depends on who I am talking to specifically if it’s somebody who is not necessarily part of the queer community I’ll say lesbian because not many people understand what that [the term queer] means who aren’t part of the queer community.” Amari had a lot of hesitation in her response when asked to describe her sexual identity and stated,

That’s a pretty hard question. Pretty much it’s very open. I don’t typically disqualify anyone for any reason. And it is changing a lot too so sometimes I might be interested in one type and another time in a different type. But for the most part I guess you could call it bisexual or pansexual. Usually I would describe myself as queer, but I might be more descriptive to people who don’t get that.

### Research Question 1

The first research question was *how is gender identity constructed and negotiated in different spaces for queer women?* In seeking answers for this research question I asked the participants the following questions: “What do the terms masculinity and femininity mean to you?” “Do you feel like you connect with one term more than another?” “Do you try to portray masculinity or femininity in your appearance?” “Do you think there are different types of queer women (i.e., ‘stereotypically queer women’)?” “Do you feel like you fit within one of those types?” “Have you ever transitioned between the types?” and “Did your clothing change throughout the transitions?” This section is divided into three categories: Connection or Rejection of Masculine or Feminine Identities, Reflection of Masculinity and Femininity in Dress, and Discussion of Gender and Sexual Identity.

#### Connection or Rejection of Masculine and Feminine Identities

Most women (n=15) in the sample did not feel a strong connection to masculinity or femininity. Fourteen women explained they felt in-between or androgynous. Kayden answered, “I’m kind of in-between the feminine and absolute tomboy dress.” Amari replied, “I mean...I guess, maybe, not even one more than the other. I bounce back and forth between the terms.” Alexa described her connection with these terms as feeling, “I’m comfortable like right in the middle, right on the outside where I’m not labeled.” Melissa and Debbie both claimed to feel androgynous, though each stated that others might identify them as extremely feminine. Melissa described her experience as “I feel like I present as relatively feminine because I have long hair and I’m curvy, but I don’t necessarily feel ‘femme.’” Debbie responded to the same question, “I feel as though my body could trace the femininity, not necessarily by choice, or by the fact that I was born with curves, but my emotions aren’t necessarily more feminine. I feel like I sometimes portray more of a masculine presence in a way.” Both of their answers highlight the disconnect between the way they feel about themselves and the way they feel they are seen by others.

Four of the women purposefully rejected the terms masculinity and femininity and claimed, “gender queer.” When I asked Quinn if she connected with one term more than another she said, “Not at all that’s where the gender queer comes in.” Quinn defined gender queer as, “You don’t need to necessarily be dressed like a guy or girl you can just be not androgynous, but just whatever you want.” While Jordan rejected identification with the terms, she expressed the ease of communication with others when using the terms masculinity and femininity and the difficulty she encountered when utilizing the combination gender queer.

Four women felt a strong connection to either the masculine or feminine identity. Avery connects with and feels masculine, she recalls choosing and wearing masculine clothing since she was in the third grade, stating, “My clothing began changing when my mom stopped dressing me. You can see that in school clothes like cute girly dresses, and then I began dressing myself.” Kayla felt a firm connection with femininity and rarely swayed from that identity. When asked if she connected more with one term than another, she firmly explained, without hesitation, “Yes, I definitely say I connect with feminine.”

One of the women indicated a strong connection to or identification with the so-called femme-butch dichotomy. Riley, who is originally from a southern state, was the only participant who strongly identified as a “blue jeans femme,” she continued to explain that identifying as a “blue jeans femme” was a common label in Florida where she grew up. All of the 20 participants often used the same words to categorize members of the queer community such as: “lipstick,” “femme,” “femmy,” “butch,” “soft butch,” “stone butch,” “dyke-y,” and “dyke;” yet, most participants only used the terms to describe their style or another woman’s style. They did not use the terms for self-identification. For example, Debbie felt her style looked “a little bit soft butch” although still identified as androgynous or in-between. Debbie also remarked, “my most recent girlfriend enjoyed when I sort of ‘butched it up’ a little bit more.” Melissa described, “People may identify me as femme. I don’t necessarily identify as femme, where I feel like it’s very much more of a back and forth for me.” Sawyer responded, “Other people [referring to others in the queer community] describe me as ‘femme as one can get while still being butch.’” Except for one instance, all categorical terms were used within the queer community to either describe themselves or other queer women. The exception was when London explained that her mother described her style as “dyke-y.” London felt a negative reaction to her mother’s choice of words when she said, “Despite her choice of words, she really is a wonderful and supportive, she’s just a little bit crass.”

#### Reflection of Masculinity and Femininity in Dress

The women used aspects of their appearance to navigate between their masculine and feminine gender expression. Seventeen participants shifted back and forth in their portrayal of masculinity or femininity depending upon the anticipated future context. All participants (N=20) indicated that they felt that relying on masculine identifiers in their appearance signified their queerness. Those who purposefully used masculine performance often had agendas for the additions of the garments such as creating a safe space for other queer individuals who have not yet openly shared their sexual identity with others (n=3) or rejecting expectations of femininity at work (n=5). One participant purposefully avoided appearing masculine out of fear of being perceived as a queer woman.

Three participants used masculinity in their appearance or “queered it up” to create a safe space for other queer individuals who have not yet disclosed their sexual identity to anyone. Jordan described this feeling as, “I do want people to be able to tell when looking at me—if that is at all possible—that I’m gay and I guess for a way to understand how they should interact with me. I want them to be like ‘oh she is safe to talk to about this.’” She felt that wearing masculine clothing was a way to signify a safe space for other queer people. Alexa and Micah made similar comments during their interviews. Alexa remarked she often wore “stereotypical queer garments” such as the flannel shirt in Figure 1 to create safe spaces. She explained, “I feel like I should be representing the queer community in my dress because it’s one of the easiest and most passive ways to do it, but at the same time, I don’t really feel like that’s me...At the same time I want to inspire people, to be proud of who they are.” She felt that if she wore garments that signified her queer identity it would make other “closet-ed people” feel okay. Micah stated during the interview that

she often wears queer signifying clothing because “There’s a solidarity that I think comes from being in a marginalized sort of group, I guess I work to make that safe space.” These comments highlight the struggle queer individuals often feel to not feel victimized.



*Figure 1.* Alexa wore what she described as a “stereotypical lesbian flannel shirt” to create a safe space for other queer individuals who have not begun sharing their queer identity with others.

Several participants (n=5) described pressure to conform to traditional ideas of femininity in their work environment. Debbie said, “I know that I’m supposed to act a certain way at work, I definitely know what they want of me and I dress to fit that. I definitely wear more feminine clothing.” These pressures at work lead to discomfort and the purposeful choice to wear more masculine clothing outside of the work environment. Four other participants experienced similar pressures at work. Figure 2 is an example of an outfit Melissa felt pressured to wear at work in order to conform to traditional ideas of femininity. To counteract these feelings, she often added what she felt to be masculine elements to her appearance outside of work, such as the tailored jacket pictured in Figure 3.





*Figure 2.* An example of a look, which Melissa feels pressure to wear at work to appear more feminine.



*Figure 3.* An example of a masculine look Melissa wears to counteract pressure felt at work to appear feminine.

### Discussion of Gender and Sexual Identity

Faderman (1992) traced the history of the butch and femme lesbian identities from the 1950s to the 1990s. In the 1950s and 60s, lesbian women often constructed either a butch or femme identity. These women who identified as either butch or femme “created the dominant lesbian image of the era” (p. 581). Through the 1970s, many lesbian women still claimed the butch or femme identity, though other lesbians broke the rigid expectations of lesbian appearance. Faderman found that the women she interviewed from the 1980s and 90s felt greater freedom than subjects from previous years to self-identify in many different ways. Similar to Faderman’s findings in the 1980s and 90s, I found that the experiences of queer women expressing gender and sexual identity were diverse. For some women (n=8), this experience was a constant performance of subversion. Because we live in a patriarchal heteronormative society, defying social expectations of gender roles is an act of defiance against societal norms. These acts of defiance manifested in many ways such as adopting traditional masculine clothing and appearances. Others (n=4) felt the expression of their sexuality was not even a factor in the construction of their identity. Brown (1995)

discovered many lesbians understand their sexuality differently from each other and have trouble explaining their attraction towards others. Similarly, when I asked the women to describe their sexual identity many (n=15) of the answers were long, vague, or noncommittal.

Participants in this study described various connections with or rejections of the masculine/feminine binary. Hiestand and Levitt (2005) and Levitt, Gerrish, and Hiestand (2003) specifically studied butch and femme lesbians, respectively. They recruited and interviewed butch- and femme-identifying women. Similar to Levitt and Hiestand (1005), Ponse (1978), Levitt, Gerrish, and Hiestand (2003), and Weber (1996), the participants in this study unanimously associated femininity with femme lesbians and masculinity with butch lesbians. While the 20 participants in this study used the terms butch and femme as descriptors for ease, most (n=15) rejected these terms' rigidity, and favored more fluid language such as androgynous or genderqueer. My participants' rejection of the terms butch and femme is consistent with Hutson's (2010) findings: None of the participant's in Hutson's sample strongly identified as butch or femme. Hutson's (2010) participants indicated those two terms were outdated; none of the participants in my sample described the terms as outdated, however they did not frequently use them to self identify. Quinn felt slightly different from other women in this sample "I know a lot of gay people that don't like labels. I kind of appreciate them. I like knowing what I am and who else I'm with. I hear a lot of arguments about labels though. You kind of have to have them to know where you belong." Although Quinn did not readily identify as a butch or femme, these terms helped her conceptualize her own identity as gender queer and have a sense self in a society that marginalizes queer individuals.

For many women (n=13), gender identity was often negotiated on a daily basis sometimes from work to social environments. Many of the participants (n=7) explained they preferred the term queer because it allowed for the frequent transition between the boundaries of masculinity and femininity. Scarlett explains, "I identify as queer. Really strongly, and specifically mostly because of the politics around it, but also because it allows the most fluidity." Kim observed, "There are femi lesbians and they look really girly and there are butch lesbians that are really manly. Then there are people that are queer." Utilizing the fixed butch and femme binary terms creates expectations that the term queer disrupts. Each of those terms adheres to a specific performance, where to be butch is to be extremely masculine, and to be femme is to be extremely feminine. But, to be queer does not require that, it is an amorphous though unambiguous identity expression individuals can perform at a particular time that allows room for choice and negotiation.

Several of the participants (n=15) rejected the terms masculinity and femininity and adopted the terms androgynous or gender queer to explain their gender identity expression. Some women (n=3) highlight the fluid movement or blending back and forth between masculinity and femininity by adopting the phrase gender queer to describe themselves. Self-identifying as gender queer empowered some women to juxtapose traditional masculine and feminine elements in their dress. Despite the connection some women felt with femininity or being gender queer, all participants added masculine characteristics into their

dress in some spaces to increase the amount of queerness that was visible to others in the queer community. Kayla explained that she felt that regardless of whether queer women wear men's or women's garments, it is the styling of these garments that most often signifies a person's queer identity or queer visibility. Kayla went on to describe, for example, that combining clean tennis shoes with flat-front khaki pants is a styling technique that can be readily identified as visibly queer.

Hammedi and Kaiser (1999) explained lesbian women negotiate politically charged beauty with regard to choices such as "hair or hairless, bearded or plucked, breasted or reduced/enlarged, high or flat heeled" (p. 61). The participants in this study confronted politically charged choices frequently. The participants' choices to incorporate masculine characteristics into their appearance to make others in the queer community feel safe are an evident example; these fears are rooted in the history of discrimination against the queer community. Confidence in coming out gave many women the confidence to challenge the traditional ideals of feminine beauty. Here, London's confidence to challenge these same ideals is clear: "I think a lot of people just end up doing what's comfortable for them because to kind of own up to your own sexuality, if it's something that is shunned by culture, I mean I think once you do that you can dress like a man if you want to."

#### Research Question 2

*Does sexual identity influence clothing and style choices of queer women* was the second research question. Relative to research question 5, *Do queer women feel anxiety, pressure, or discrimination from the fashion system and their appearance management behaviors due to their sexual identity*, I also report anxieties, stress, and discrimination related to appearance and clothing choices. This section is divided into seven categories: Self-Presentation After Out, Self-Presentation and Queer Appearance, Romantic Relationships and Clothing Style, Anxiety and Stress Related to Appearance, Discrimination Related to Appearance, Discussion of Sexual Identity Influences on Clothing Style and Appearance, and Discussion of Stress, Anxiety, and Discrimination Related to Clothing Style and Appearance. In order to address these questions, I conducted in-depth interviews with a focus on how and why these women style their appearance. First, to understand if a participant's style changed after she was out, I asked her "Did your choice of clothing change after you began sharing your sexual identity?" Then, to determine if she felt her appearance was informed by her queer identity, I asked, "Do you feel like you express your queer identity in how you present yourself?" and "What aspects of your appearance signify your queer identity?" Next, I sought to understand if queer women feel anxiety, pressure, or discrimination based on their appearance and clothing choices. I asked the women "Do you show your queer identity in your dress all of the time?" "Where would you wear garments that signify your queer identity?" "Where would you not wear garments that signify your queer identity?" "For what situation is it most difficult to choose what to wear?" "Do you ever feel anxiety or stress when wearing clothing that signifies your queer identity?" "Do you ever feel like you are treated differently when wearing clothes that signify your queer identity?" "Do you ever think about how others perceive how you look?" and "Do those thoughts affect how you dress or style yourself?"

In addition to these questions in the initial in-depth interview, each participant completed a survey where she was asked to rate on a scale of one to five if she felt any stress or anxiety when getting dressed or wearing the outfit or outfits for that day in a particular space. On this scale, one indicated no stress and five indicated very stressed. Lastly, I used the open-ended responses from the daily diary to supplement these findings.

### **Self-Presentation After Coming “Out”**

All participants in the study indicated that they changed their dress or wanted to change their dress after they began disclosing their queer identity to others. For some participants (n=10) the change was immediate and for others (n=4) their style changed gradually. Once out, some of the women (n=8) wore masculine clothing, cut their hair short (n=6), or tried to use blatant queer indicators such as rainbows and gay pride shirts in their appearance (n=7).

All 20 participants indicated some kind of change in their appearance or clothing choices once they began sharing their sexual identity. For 14 of the women the change was long-term. For two of the women the change was brief, and they soon reverted back to their original style. Two other participants reflected on their dress choices throughout their life and realized they had always deviated from traditional female clothing since they were children. Scarlett thought for a long time and then explained that she had sermons delivered against her in church as a child for “not dressing feminine enough,” therefore she felt as though she has had a consistent expression throughout her life, which she felt was not conforming to traditional feminine ideals. Two of the women who wanted the change to be long term experienced resistance from family members about their new style. This resistance forced both of these women to abandon their new style choice. Jordan explained that she began wearing more masculine clothing once she came out and that soon after she began wearing these types of clothes her sister would steal them from her. This period in her life was so traumatic that she “blocked that part” of her life out. Jordan stated that her style changed back quickly because her sister only left her with more feminine clothing.

Ten participants indicated that they changed their dress after they were out because they wanted to be more visibly queer to the queer community. Seven of these participants found particular importance in dressing with overt signs of queerness such as rainbows and slogans or images about homosexuality. Riley explained, “the slogans on my t-shirts changed, and I started wearing more things with rainbows on them.” One t-shirt she began wearing read “I’m not gay but my girlfriend is,” and another shirt she described had an image with two women walking along with their hands in each others’ pockets. Avery wore more garments with rainbows and shirts that she described as “blatantly queer,” such as the tie-dye rainbow shirt and taco shirt pictured in Figures 4 and 5. Avery laughed when showing the taco shirt and said, “I only think queer women would actually get what this shirt means, like it could be punny if you knew I was gay.” Micah also started displaying more rainbows in her dress such as the rainbow bracelets shown in Figures 6 and 7.



*Figures 4 and 5.* Two shirts a participant added to her wardrobe after she came out as queer.



*Figures 6 and 7.* Rainbow bracelets purposefully worn to express queer identity in dress.

Eight women in the study began dressing more masculine once they readily shared their sexual identity with others. Some participants, like Jordan, did not intentionally start wearing men's or masculine clothing to showcase her queer identity but rather because they felt masculine clothing was more comfortable. Jordan said

I did tend to wear guy's clothes a lot more often. More so than when I was a couple years younger than that, but I think I leaned towards wearing more guys clothes because it made me more comfortable like still trying to figure things out.

Figure 8 illustrates a pair of men's jeans Jordan adopted after she was out. Morgan stated, "I did feel more comfy wearing Carharts or just dressing a little bit more masculine once I was out." Kayla said, "That being okay was part of the coming out process. I can dress like a boy if I want to." London also explained her newfound comfort pushing gender boundaries once she came out.

I mean it's kind of easier to break the rules of dressing once you've broken the rules of sexuality, I think a lot of people just end up doing what's comfortable for them because to kind of own up to your own sexuality, if it's something that is shunned by culture, once you do that you can dress like a man if you want to.

This was true for Debbie, as well. She said, "It's not just your sexual identity, it's your whole being that you are hiding from yourself and others. So, when you let that go and feel more comfortable with yourself, it shows in your confidence. That made me feel more comfortable with clothes on an everyday basis." Figure 9 illustrates an example of a men's sweater Debbie added to her wardrobe once she came out. She explained the sweater provided a lot of comfort and increased her self-confidence.



*Figure 8.* A pair of men's jeans Logan added to her wardrobe after she came out as queer.





*Figure 9.* An example of a men's sweater that was added to Debbie's wardrobe once she began sharing her sexual identity.

For six of the women, cutting their hair symbolized their newly embraced sexual identity. Kai's new haircut is pictured in Figure 10. Kai laughed, "Not right when I came out, but a little bit after that I shaved it off completely. It was funny when I cut my hair, my husband knew that I was leaving him." Kai's asymmetrical haircut was a common hairstyle for many other women in the study. London, Quinn, and Sawyer all wore an asymmetrical, short hairstyle. In many cases participants had a hairstyle that was shaved on one or more parts of their head. Examples of these sorts of hairstyles are found in Figures 11, 12, and 13. Kayden, shown in Figure 14, cut her hair short and has kept it short since she came out. Kayden mentioned,

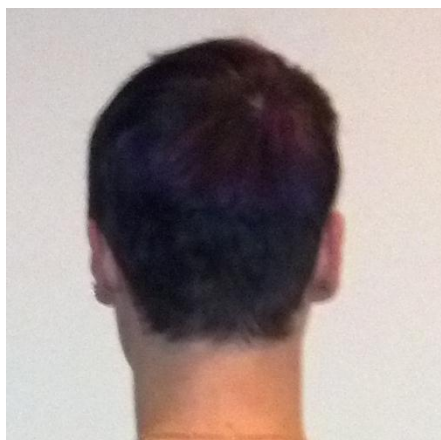
I used to have really long hair. And I would go out to gay clubs and try to dance with girls, and they'd always totally ignore me. I was like 'this isn't working, I have to show the world that I like girls,' so I cut my hair and immediately people would pay attention to me. So that was a huge thing. It's really hard to live in the lesbian world with long hair. So that was rough. That was the biggest change.



*Figure 10.* Kai cut her hair extremely short after she began sharing her sexual identity.



*Figures 11, 12, and 13.* Asymmetrical haircuts that were typical for many queer women.



*Figure 14.* Kayden cut her hair extremely short after she began sharing her sexual identity to signify to other queer women she was interested in them.



Two participants indicated the desire to cut their hair, however they feared discrimination. Kelsey stated, “I purposefully did not cut my hair because I didn’t want to look like a lesbian for fear of people judging me.” Debbie also explained similar fear of judgment from family members.

Two of the women who indicated change in their style after they began sharing their sexual identity attributed the style change to personal style evolution. They described their style as not drastically affected by their newly claimed sexual identity, yet their queer identity did have some influence on their appearance. When she was asked, “Did your style change after you came out?” Kayla replied,

I don’t think so, not because I don’t feel like it changed as much because of my sexual identity so much as I moved to a different area where there was a lot more freedom to wear something besides jeans and a t-shirt. So in some ways it changed, but I don’t know how much I would say it was because of my sexual identity more so than because of the location.

Kayla described that she did not purposefully change her wardrobe, but she did style herself sometimes in a way that would read queer. She answered,

It’s more about how you put things together, like individual pieces of clothing that don’t have those ‘stereotypical lesbian things’ on them. It’s more about how you put them together that makes them read in one way or another. I’ll wear regular t-shirts or something under a nice V-neck sweater to work and I kind of feel like that’s more of a queer thing to do. A straight woman would only wear button up collared shirts or tank tops and like having a high neck t-shirt is totally kind of a queer thing to do.

Mary explained that her style changed, but it was not solely due to her newly acknowledged queer identity. She said, “My style somewhat changed. Probably because of a lot of factors: different inspirations and comfort-abilities.” Mary indicated towards the end of her interview that she noticed that she dressed more masculinely or styled herself in a more masculine way after she was out and explained to me that she thought this may lead others to read her as queer. Initially during the interview, neither Kayla nor Mary recognized the influence of their sexual identity on their appearance, and they both seemed surprised that their clothing might suggest that they are queer after they began analyzing their appearance choices throughout the interview.

### Self-Presentation and Queer Appearance

All 20 women communicated at some point during data collection that they had at least one article of clothing or aspect of their appearance that signified their queer identity. The participants’ experiences with negotiating queerness in their dress changed depending upon the space and people they anticipated encountering. Twelve women felt that the clothing that they wear was always indicative of their queer identity. Six women only purposefully dressed in queer clothing in anticipation of being in a queer space. Five women felt that people perceived their dress as heteronormative. One participant actively tried to not “dress queer” or appear queer at any time.

Even though some of the women did not go out of their way to dress queer, they all described that they felt others would be able to identify them as queer. Alexa stated, “I kind of feel like I might be one of those people that someone might be like ‘she’s gay,’ because there are some people that you look at and an

automatic gaydar happens.” London laughed and smiled as she described the sweater vest she frequently wore in Figure 15, as “It’s just very lesbian.” Logan said, “One of the best ways to identify a gay woman is through her style. So I definitely think being gay is part of who I am and I feel like it has a role in my style.” Sawyer described the way that she dresses as “A way that makes me feel comfortable in my body, and also visible.” Sawyer put a heavy emphasis on being visible and then explained that she connected her blue hair and the boots she frequently wore with her queer identity. Riley also purposefully dyed her hair an unnatural color to showcase her queer identity to others. Moreover, Riley purposefully relied on specific shoes and jewelry to signify her queer identity. She stated, “Birkenstocks or Doc Martins instead of sneakers, I’ve been told that that tends to code or that’s what people ping me from. They’re like ‘you are wearing Birkenstocks, you must be a dyke.’ I also wear various bits of rainbow jewelry to tag myself.” The rainbow fan hairpiece in Figure 16 is a piece of jewelry Riley frequently wears when she is not feeling “queer enough.” Riley also explained she feels more “like a lesbian” in her purple Doc Martins pictured in Figure 17.



*Figure 15.* A sweater vest worn by a participant that she feels identifies her as queer.



*Figure 16.* A rainbow fan hairpiece worn by a participant to signal to others her queer identity.



*Figure 17.* The Doc Martins worn by a participant that make her feel visibly queer.

Seven women described the desire to “queer it up” in queer spaces. These seven women expressed more comfort in wearing garments that signify their queer identity. These participants commonly mentioned Pride events as queer spaces in which they wanted to dress queer. Kayden claimed, “Any of the pride events I feel like I can wear stuff that identifies me. I could wear the Salt Lake City, Utah rainbow shirt [pictured in Figure 18] or super weird crazy rainbow fishnet stockings, which you can’t wear in most parts of your life.” Jordan said, “For Pride events and then like the drag show I generally try to dress like that [queer] a little more.” Alexa stated,

I own a lot of pride shirts, and I’d probably wear a pride shirt or something, or something like a wild rainbow leopard print dress. I own a lot of really crazy crazy things. But I would go out of my way to do that for a Pride event. What’s interesting is if I was going to go out to a bar with my queer friends, I would wear something different than with my straight friends.



*Figure 18.* T-shirt worn by participant with blatant queer signifiers.

Several women (n=5) recognized their ‘queer invisibility’ and the privileges associated with invisibility. Five women felt their feminine appearance or body shape contributed to their invisibility. Melissa felt that “Most people can’t tell my sexual identity by looking at me.” Melissa added blatantly queer garments, such as the t-shirt in Figure 19, to her wardrobe in order to compensate for her invisibility. Mary understood that “I am kind of invisible and I receive a lot of the benefits and privileges that straight heterosexual people receive because I can pass easily as straight.” For Kayla this was also true,

Yea I feel like I definitely am somebody who most people tend to be surprised when I say I’m not straight, but people who get to know me can kind of be like okay well that makes sense and I can see that about you. I’d definitely say I’m ultra feminine as far as on the gay scale of femininity goes.



*Figure 19.* T-shirt with “Queer” printed on front in rainbow lettering. The participant wore this shirt to counterbalance her queer invisibility.

Mary wore the dress pictured in Figure 20, and described her experience that day as “out of body.” She recognized her invisibility as due to her feminine clothing choice and then purposefully, on the next day reverted back to a more masculine appearance, wearing a man’s button up shirt (see Figure 21).



*Figures 20 and 21.* The participant felt uncomfortable and “out of body” in the outfit on the left and therefore increased the masculinity in her appearance the next day with a men’s button up shirt.

One participant, Kelsey, actively tried to appear heterosexual and avoided all queer signifiers. Kelsey lived and went to school in what she perceived as a “safe environment” to be “out” in. Yet, she said, “I don’t ever want to have my sexual identity be the first thing that people know about me.” She purposefully did not cut her hair saying, “I will not cut my hair short. I think that would definitely point me as a lesbian, and I don’t want that.” Figure 22 illustrates an extremely feminine look she wore when going out with other queer friends. Kelsey often incorporated floral-print tops and form fitting clothing to help avoid other people perceiving her as queer.



*Figure 22.* Feminine outfit worn by participant who actively tried to remain invisible.

### Romantic Relationships and Clothing Style

Some of the women (n=12) in this study felt that their romantic relationships had an impact on their clothing and style choice. Seven women indicated that they attempted to reflect traditional ideals of masculinity or femininity in their clothing and appearance choices as a counterpart to their partner’s appearance. Five women also felt freer to explore clothing styles when in a homosexual relationship, and three participants wore specific clothes in order to please their partner.

For women (n=7) who changed their appearance in order to accommodate their partner, there was a clear, though sometimes subtle fluidity of style. For example, Melissa often had a feminine appearance, however she stated, “All of them [her girlfriends] were pretty femme presenting more so than me I would say. I feel that my sort of ‘butch’ or whatever you want to call it continued on, but I know my most recent



girlfriend enjoyed it when I sort of ‘butched it up a bit.’ So I think I did it more often than I would have otherwise.” Kelsey described similar behavior when she said, “I know they [her partners] fall on the more androgynous side and I know they are more attracted to the more feminine lesbians, I try to pull that out a bit. But once I get comfy with them, I don’t mind wearing less feminine clothing.” Quinn resonated with this sentiment: “I’ve had an ex-girlfriend who would get really mad at me if I looked girlier than her... and that definitely affected me, yes definitely.”

Some women (n=5) who were romantically involved with other women claimed that they felt more confident in their clothing choices or freer to explore unique or interesting styles that they might not have otherwise done. Debbie reflected on her clothing choices during her current relationship:

I guess when I started dating her I became more confident as an individual so I didn’t feel as ashamed as much of my identity or myself and in my life I feel more confident. It makes me more confident in wearing what I wear on a daily basis and not feeling uncomfortable in public looking a little less normative.

Kai echoed this position when she said, “In the last two relationships I have felt more free and able to explore stuff and not be as concerned.” The combination of garments in Figure 23 is an example of the expression of this new freedom in her style. She describes herself after the change as edgier, more artistic, and androgynous, which are feelings she did not have during her previous marriage to a cisgender male.<sup>13</sup>



*Figure 23.* Kai felt new freedoms after she came out. She wore edgier and more artistic clothing combinations in addition to juxtaposing feminine with masculine pieces such as the fedora.

<sup>13</sup> Cisgender refers to a person who identifies with the gender they were assigned at birth (Valentine, 2007).

Three women claimed that they wore specific clothes depending on what their partner wanted to see them wear. Riley said, “I will certainly figure out what the person I’m involved with likes to see me in, and I will wear those things around them.” Melissa described a similar behavior saying, “I think at times it depends on their reaction to what I was wearing, or if I was wearing something I knew they liked then I would wear that more often.” These three women did not lend a lot of importance to clothing as an identifier of gender roles in their relationships. Instead they were largely concerned with the effect of a certain garment or outfits.

### Anxiety and Stress Related To Appearance

All participants reported they felt anxiety or stress related to their queer identity and appearance at least once during data collection. Some participants (n=12) had only mild stress or anxiety, while others (n=6) had severe anxiety that caused significant changes in their behavior on a daily basis. Sources of stress or anxiety related to sexual identity included “appearing queer,” “dressing too queer,” and “appearing too straight.” In some instances, however, participants (n=4) felt the opposite of stressed or anxious: They felt empowered and confident in their queer signifying clothes. In addition, a few women (n=5) felt anxiety about their appearance related to body size.

During the two-week period where participants kept daily diaries, 13 of the women indicated at least one time each when they experienced stress or anxiety levels in the moderate to extreme range. When dressing and selecting clothes, the balance between appearing “too queer” and “not queer enough” was a source or nearly constant stress or anxiety for these women. Four of the 13 women experienced stress or anxiety related to their queerness and appearance five or more days throughout the survey. Four of the women experienced only mild stress about stress and their sexual identity. Two of the women reported minimal stress for the entire duration of the daily diaries and had no stress or anxiety whatsoever about what they were wearing.

All 20 participants stated they had more awareness of their appearance when they wore garments or accessories that signified their queer identity. For example, Avery stated, “It’s something I think about. I am aware of what shoes I’m wearing all day. Even when I’m walking to the bus stop and no one sees me. I’m like ‘oh I’m wearing my lesbian shoes.’” London showed me a shirt and said, “Oh my god, I’m going to look *so* gay in this.” Mary related a recent situation where she felt extra aware that her appearance might signify her queer identity:

I wondered about how visibly queer my partner and I were when we stopped and visited some shops in a small town on the way home -- this town is pretty conservative and quite close to my hometown, so this may have increased my anxiety a bit. It was more of an increased awareness of our visibility, but not necessarily anxiety.

For seven women, anxiety over wearing queer identifying clothing did not prompt them to change how they dressed or styled themselves. The other 13 women, however, often changed their dress or style according to the occasion. These women had a high level of anxiety over clothing and appearance when attending work, family functions, or special events. Out of the 14 participants who were currently



employed, eight indicated that they experienced stress or anxiety at work over their fear of appearing “too queer.” Debbie often experienced severe anxiety when getting dressed for work. During the data collection, she went to work 10 times. On average, she rated her anxiety level a three out of five, where five was very stressed and one was not stressed. Not once did she rate herself below a two.

I know that I’m supposed to act a certain way and I’m often worried that I’m not dressing to fit the part that I’m supposed to be playing. Definitely when I’m at work, I definitely know what they want of me and I dress to fit that. I definitely wear more feminine clothing...I wear clothes I’m very uncomfortable in and definitely wouldn’t wear on a regular basis.

Figure 24 is an example of such an outfit. Debbie felt that the knit green dress was too revealing, and described her experience wearing it by saying, “It felt very uncomfortable. Unsafe. I couldn’t hide in it.” During each follow up interview, Debbie described anxiety related to what she wore to work. She referred to her work outfits as her “straight” or “passing” outfits in comparison to her “queer” outfits she wore on the weekend with her girlfriend and other queer friends. Debbie did not experience any anxiety in the outfit pictured in Figure 25 that she wore on the weekend with friends. Alexa’s anxiety over dress was concentrated around her experience at work, where she felt hyper-aware of her self-presentation. “Where I work a lot of older folks come in and I have to be more aware of how I am representing myself...I need to make sure I present myself nicely or I put a little more effort to how I look. I don’t want to look too gay.” Kayla explained she felt some anxiety wearing the rainbow cuff in Figure 26 to work. In this case, her anxiety subsided once she realized that no one had noticed or was treating her any differently from other days. In the interview, she said, “It was kind of stressful. People at work clearly know that I’m gay, and then I got to work and nobody cared, and nobody said anything”



*Figure 24.* A feminine outfit worn to work by a participant that made her feel extremely anxious.



*Figure 25.* A “queer outfit” that Debbie felt comfortable wearing on the weekend with friends.



*Figure 26.* Kayla felt anxiety when wearing her rainbow cuff to work.

Melissa shared a unique experience at work when she did not feel queer enough. During the interviews she described her everyday presentation as mostly feminine, and often felt she “passed as straight” on a daily basis. One day while getting dressed for work she put on the shirt in Figure 27 that reads “Gender” with an image of a blender beneath it. She explained her feeling while getting dressed that morning: “I had a moment when I was going to wear my shirt that says gender blender but ended up not wearing it because I was working with a trans cast member and I felt a little like a poser wearing it, like I wasn’t queer presenting enough to merit it.” Melissa’s anxiety stemmed from her fear of judgment from a trans person who she thought would challenge her claim that she was bending the gender rules.



*Figure 27.* A shirt worn by a participant that she changed out of because she felt she was not queer enough to wear it.

Seven women experienced a high level of anxiety or stress from fear of appearing too queer at family functions and formal events. Amari mentioned that her high level of anxiety over her appearance at family functions largely stemmed from her fear of being judged. For example, she mentioned,

If I’m going to something that I can’t dress quite as androgynous or masculine at, I get stressed. I usually do at a family function. I guess if I was going to something formal, I might try and go [dress] a little bit more on the feminine side of what I was doing, like a socially acceptable outfit. And then there are times where I might try and dress a little bit less put together if I am with friends that I know don’t care about social acceptance and stereotypes.

Despite her attempts to appear less queer, Amari still feels burdened by the disruption her queer appearance might cause in her interactions with other people. For Riley this burden is perhaps even more tangible. Riley reported, “I certainly feel less safe wearing blatantly queer things in Florida. I’m less likely to wear them because some of my family [members] are very Catholic. They do their best for me, but we have to kind of reach an accommodation.” Kai explained that when going to certain family member’s houses she thought twice about what she was wearing and analyzed how queer she was presenting. She described her experience on these occasions as “feeling like an alien.” Furthermore, when visiting her grandmother, Kai was often asked to change into more feminine clothing. In all of these instances, the participants felt anxiety about looking too queer, and in particular, too masculine. Amari and Quinn both told me earlier in their interviews that they consistently dressed masculine everyday and very rarely wore feminine clothing. These pressures they felt to appear less queer during formal events or family functions ignited an abundance of stress and anxiety because the feminine style was a significant deviation from their everyday presentation.

Even in otherwise safe places, some participants (n=2) experienced anxiety over wearing queer identifying clothing when meeting new people or seeing old friends who might be surprised by their appearance. Two participants frequently felt anxiety when meeting new people or seeing people they had not seen since they came out. Quinn explained, “I think every time I meet people, if I go to meet my girlfriend’s new friends or her parents, it’s always in my head. Do they think it’s weird that I look like a boy?” Quinn told me when she meets new people that they sometimes comment on her clothing, and this causes her anxiety because she perceives those comments to be a judgment on her appearance. Debbie described a recent incident of feeling uncomfortable around an old friend when wearing the outfit in Figure 28 saying,

I was wearing my white cotton shirt with leggings and boots, and I ran into my old best friend and her mom. And I suddenly got super anxious in my clothing because the last time I saw her was in the junior year of high school. And I spent all of my middle school and high school hanging out with this girl and they are super Republican and super Christian. Very put together, and they are really rich. I was not like that. Her seeing me dressed really like kind of queer and butch, I got nervous and a little embarrassed.



*Figure 28.* Debbie wore this outfit and felt extremely anxious when she ran into an old friend whom she had not seen since she began dressing queerer.

Ten participants indicated that they experienced stress or anxiety related to a fear of queer invisibility or being mistaken for straight by other members of the queer community. This fear often prompted them to reconsider wardrobe choices in order to appear more queer. When I asked Kayden if she ever felt stress or anxiety when wearing any of her clothes, she promptly responded, “Definitely where I think I look straight.” Kayden described the outfits in Figures 29 and 30 as examples of styles that she felt made her look less queer. Debbie mentioned that she often felt intimidated by the butch style of dress her girlfriend wore. She went on to explain that it made her feel girly and that she should try to appear more masculine. To address this feeling, Debbie alters how she dresses by wearing sports bras and loose tops. To relieve this anxiety, Debbie used these garments to disguise the shape of her natural curvy body. Quinn also adopted these methods to increase her comfort. She described her feelings about her desire to hide her female curves when she said “Sometimes jackets and hoodies are more comforting to me because they cover up more. And when I wear sweaters and hoodies they make me look flatter in my chest too, so I felt

a little better about that but I was still weird about how my hips looked that day.” Two participants bound their breasts to hide their female body and to give them a more masculine shape. Figure 31 illustrates a typical look where Scarlett bound her breasts. She explained that she binds “especially when wearing a tie.” Scarlett adopted these binding practices to give her comfort when performing a more masculine appearance.



*Figures 29 and 30.* Outfits worn by a participant, which give her anxiety because she feels straight.



*Figure 31.* Participant bound breasts in outfit to appear more masculine.



Mary explained that she often felt frustrated because she easily passed for straight, which can be a hindrance for her romantic pursuits. When Mary feels that she does not appear queer enough she often adds men's garments such as collared button-up shirts, t-shirts, and the shorts in Figure 32. Sawyer related a similar distress, she calls this "not-queer enough anxiety." Because her work is in a place with other members of the queer community who she described as "super freakin' queer," Sawyer often went out of her way to be more "visually identifiable." In contrast to Mary and Debbie, Sawyer did not want to wear men's clothing to appear more queer, though she often wondered how to be more visible in the queer community without wearing men's garments and shaving her head. Because Sawyer recently married a cis gender male, these thoughts about how to appear more queer were a frequent question in her mind. To ensure her visibility, Sawyer chose to dye her hair an unnatural color. She felt that the blue and green highlights in her hair signified her queer identity and that the unnatural colors gave her the confidence that she appeared queer enough even when dressing in feminine clothing. In some cases, her unnaturally dyed hair color did not make her feel queer enough when around other members of the queer community. Sawyer then resorted to buying unique garments to increase her comfort around other queer individuals. She recently purchased a gold sparkly sweater to wear to work and told me "I might not have bought it if I hadn't been thinking that I wanted to sort of up my glitter quotient so I can better fit in with my queer festival fairy friends." Sawyer felt that wearing the sweater in addition to her blue and green colored hair increased her queer visibility and that these style combinations reduced her stress and anxiety related to not appearing queer enough at work around other members of the queer community.



*Figure 32.* Mary adds men's shorts to her outfit sometimes when she is not feeling queer enough.

Riley had a similar fear of queer invisibility, and she also dyed her hair an unnatural color to compensate for this feeling. Riley's fear of invisibility frequently influenced the clothing she wore. If Riley was planning to go to the "dyke bar in town" or if she was going to attend a Pride event, then she told me that she would "haul out the shiny purple metallic boots" or "the rainbow jewelry" that she felt "pinged her as a queer." She purposefully chose these shoes and pieces of jewelry because she did not want members of the queer community to ever think that she was "just a straight girl hanging out." Riley's strong fear of invisibility was evident in her tone during this conversation. At the end of her answer, she reiterated that she carefully constructed her look everyday to ensure that she felt "queer enough."

Wearing men's boxers gave two women the option of revealing or concealing their queer identity by sagging their pants or not. Both Quinn and Micah explained that boxers are a garment that signifies their queer identity. Micah went to a party with predominantly heterosexual people and wore boxer shorts. She told me she wore the boxer shorts because they "can hide under something else. So for me that is my comfort blanket but other people don't know it's there." Her ability to be able to hide her clothing that she thought signified her queer identity provided her a level of comfort when entering a place where she did not know everyone. I asked Quinn if she would ever choose to not wear boxer shorts somewhere, and she responded that she almost always wears boxers with pants, yet if she was somewhere where she did not want them to show she "would wear a belt or something."

In addition to anxiety related to appearing queer through their dress, five women described anxiety and stress related to their body size. When I asked the participants if they had any other anxiety related to their appearance choices, the three plus size women had strong responses about the anxiety of being fat and appearing fat in their clothes. Riley explained

My anxiety is mostly a function of my size, I am fat. And I am a fat activist and I'm into the body acceptance movement, body positivity. But I think a lot about my lumps and bulges, my double chin, you know how big my ass is and if the waistband on my pants is cutting my stomach in half. Things like that.

Sawyer explained her anxiety related to being fat, she stated,

Despite wanting to say I am totally comfortable and awesomely radically fat. I definitely have anxiety over how much I weigh. I'm actually much better at it than I used to be. I spent a lot of my entire life being really really worried about how much I weighed and really worried and was self-conscious about being overweight. Because my weight fluctuates, I keep a range of pants and when I'm at a place in my body where I only fit into the higher sizes I definitely get anxiety about my body.

For the plus size women, anxiety over weight seemed to resonate more than their anxiety over appearing queer.

A few participants described feelings opposite of stress and anxiety; four participants sometimes felt empowered or angry and this prompted them to wear clothing that signified their queer identity. For example, Kayden wore her Queer Pride shirt pictured in Figure 33, and when I asked her if she felt stress or anxiety that day she responded, "The opposite, I got an email that made me feel like my department was



trying to manipulate my graduation schedule just a little bit so I wore a pride shirt to remind me that I'm me and I make my own decisions. I felt like expressing my queerness.” Melissa experienced a similar feeling when she received negative feedback at work. She explained, “The queer shirt was a bit of a ‘fuck you’ to the whole situation.” These women who felt empowered in their garments in that they felt signified their queer identity also felt anxiety in these same articles of clothing on different days.



*Figure 33.* A participant wearing a queer pride shirt that made her feel empowered and not anxious or stressed.

### Discrimination Related to Appearance

Four women in the sample related anecdotes about times when they felt discriminated against because of their appearance. These participants encountered negative or sometimes openly hostile reactions to their appearance from strangers, peers, and family members and in some cases they were discriminated against by authority figures. Three women had these types of experiences during data collection. For example, Avery felt treated differently from other female students by her math professor when she went in for extra help on homework. Her professor made her feel as though she was imposing on his time, and he was very short with her. After grudgingly helping her, he went on to take his next appointment with a different female student. “She was wearing this lacy backless shirt and you could see her butterfly tattoos....she walks in there and they just start laughing.” Avery feels that she appears masculine and that her professor was favoring a more feminine student over her.

During the data collection timeframe, Quinn described an incident at a party where she felt badly treated by the host because of her masculine appearance. “I was meeting one of my girlfriend’s close

friends and he lives in a frat house...I was getting a lot of bad comments towards me and everyone was drinking, and the more people got comfortable the more they needed to say things about what I was wearing.” Quinn indicated that these comments about her dress were entirely negatively and sometimes derogatory. After the party Quinn was so uncomfortable that she immediately changed into her pajamas.

Unfortunately, Quinn is not even comfortable in her pajamas because of the constant criticism she receives from her mother for her appearance. Quinn said that her mother would check her appearance before allowing her to attend family gatherings or to enter the common areas of the house. She stated,

Usually when we go somewhere together she doesn’t let me wear a hat, and anytime we go somewhere to meet family or people she knows she has to check what I’m wearing and will make me change most of the time into something girly...Usually as heads up, she’ll say ‘so and so is coming over’ and that’s my hint to put on something more to her liking.

Quinn went on to tell me that if she hears an unexpected visitor in the house she will not leave her room out of fear of upsetting her mother. Quinn said that these interactions with her mother make her profoundly sad, even more so than they make her anxious. The outfit in Figure 34 illustrates a look Quinn’s mother would ask her to change when they anticipated interacting with others. Quinn mainly wears men’s clothing, and looking feminine or wearing feminine garments gives her a lot of stress. She voiced these feelings to her mother, yet Quinn does not want to resist her mother’s wishes. She explained it was easier to “go along with it.”



*Figure 34.* An outfit that a participant’s mother did not approve of her wearing and made her change into something girlier.

Riley said that throughout her life, “I have been called names. I have been openly discriminated against. I have gotten the funny looks, all the standard homophobic stuff.” Riley said that when she was

growing up in Florida people driving trucks would yell slurs, or death threats at her. Riley related several experiences from her high school career that included public shame, and threats of physical violence or death. Also in high school Riley was told by administrators that a shirt she was wearing that featured the phrase “I’m not gay, but my girlfriend is” was “sexually explicit,” and she was asked to change it. Because Riley’s experiences were so bad in Florida, she stated that she carefully chose where she was going to live and work as an adult to avoid discrimination and hateful people.

#### Discussion of Sexual Identity Influences on Clothing Style and Appearance

Based on the findings of my study I suggest that dress serves as a powerful tool for self-expression and increasing levels of comfort or personal freedom. This freedom was often achieved through subversion and by defying the expected dress and style of socially defined gender norms. In this same way, these women felt limited by the pervasive ideology of the fashion industry. Women in this study used dress and style as a visual signifier to communicate identity with others, and numerous scholars have supported this claim in their own work (Barnard, 2002; Damhorst, Miller-Spillman, & Michelman, 2005; Johnson, Schofield, & Yurchisin, 2002; Kaiser, 1990; Roach-Higgins and Eicher, 1992; Stone, 1959). Women in this study represent a diverse perspective on the relationship between dress and style and the expression of sexual and gender identity. Most women were comfortable locating themselves along the spectrum of traditionally defined masculine and feminine gender norms. Some of these women viewed the spectrum as a binary, while others tried to maintain a fluidity. Still others rejected these terms altogether seeking alternative gender identifiers such as queer or genderqueer.

Ponse (1978) found that her subjects “stressed the importance of appearance and clothing style” (p. 116). Similarly, the importance of clothing to communicate the participant’s queer identity was heavily emphasized in many of my participants’ responses in this study. Participants were constantly negotiating either displaying or concealing their queer identity through use of certain appearance management behaviors. For a few of these women (n=3), there were certain garments that made it particularly easy for them to reveal or conceal their queer identity. In some cases there was a day-to-day change in overall style or appearance, depending on how queer a participant felt she wanted to look. I felt that it is particularly noteworthy that all of my participants felt nearly constantly conscious of how queer their clothing or styling made them appear to others. For all of these women these garments or style choices were made in order to better express who they felt themselves to be. In some cases, especially after coming out many women (n=12) felt more comfortable dressing in men’s clothing and wearing short or shaved hairstyles. These findings are entirely consistent with Hutson’s (2010) results; he found his participants felt freer in the expression of their gender identity by cutting their hair short or wearing masculine clothing. As in Kayden’s outfit in Figure 35, some women would contrast their masculine short hair with other female clothing in order to challenge traditional ideas of femininity and masculinity.



*Figure 35.* Kayden wearing an overly feminine outfit with her short haircut.

Kayden moved in and out of her “straight and “queer” presentations, similar to Polhemus’ (1996) description of individuals as style surfers. Polhemus (1996) described the complex and often conflicting process of self-presentation. My participants’ awareness of the conflicting messages through dress is evident in Kayden’s identification of her straight and queer outfits. Kai struggles to express the complications and resulting confusion of the same process of self-presentation that Polhemus (1996) described: “Am I a femme? Am I a butch? Is there a difference? Can’t I blend?” For Kai, the categories create a confusing sense of limitation.

Similar to the process of coming out, the process of adopting new clothes to support the women’s newly claimed identity often occurred in unpredictable often repeating stages. This change of style was sometimes intentional, however other times style changes occurred due to natural evolution of style with age or change in permanent location. While many of the women recognized that their sexual identity had an influence on their style, they also often wanted to clarify that sexual identity was not their only influence. Alexa voiced an opinion that was shared with many other participants. “My sexual identity is a part of me and an important part of me, but it’s not all of me. Many other things influence and change my personal style.” Despite this attitude, these participants all felt that they could be identified as queer by

their appearance. For many (n=12), this caused anxiety or minor discomfort in social interactions. For others (n=6), they felt exposed or vulnerable to being targeted.

The meanings of certain garments or particular style elements would often change for participants depending upon their environment. Davis (1992) described that meanings attached to clothing shift depending upon the context and space. Avery felt that her taco shirt (Figure 5) was a double entendre unique to queer spaces. She thought that the garment was otherwise not noteworthy but that it served to identify her as queer to other queer women. Because of their short haircuts, some queer women can be wrongly labeled by society as subversive, militants, yet these same women see their hairstyle as providing a safe and approachable space for other queer people. Wilson (1990) described the trouble that some queer women experience with trying to be identifiable or recognizable. Because of the time frame Wilson's research was in, she discovered that because deviant fashion was so prevalent amongst a wide range of countercultures, that some of these styles were already becoming assimilated into the mainstream. Wilson attributes this trouble to being specific to the postmodern condition. This is to say that in our contemporary period, visual cultural signifiers like dress and style become entangled in working to represent a wide variety of sometimes contradictory ideals. Because many groups of people attempt to differentiate themselves from the mainstream society by changing their appearance, and there are only so many outlets available to them that have not already been appropriated by dominant society, certain aspects of dress and style appear to be almost ubiquitous across marginalized groups. The most identifiable examples of this phenomenon in my study are bright and colorful dyed hair, short sometimes asymmetrical haircuts, military style boots, and clothing that features esoteric slogans. Given that some of these fashions and styles can be indistinguishable from those of dominant society, some of my participants who rely on these strategies to identify themselves as queer often felt invisible to other queer women despite their efforts.

In the past, for queer women who identified with traditional masculine and feminine gender roles, the language of femme and butch was often the default to describe themselves and their partners. Levitt and Hiestand (2005) studied femme and butch relationships and found femmes preferred more feminine garments and butches preferred more masculine garments. Levitt and Hiestand (2005) specifically researched the butch and femme relationship. In my study, none of the women stayed firmly in an extremely masculine or feminine style when entering or exiting relationships. Melissa stated she often "butched it up a bit" if she knew her partner liked it. However, she did not readily identify as a butch and her partner did not readily identify as a femme. Most participants (n=17) felt they were androgynous or leaning towards one side of the spectrum without fully committing. The one participant who did identify as a butch or a femme still exhibited some transition between masculine and feminine styles.

Based on responses from this sample, there is no one authentic experience for being queer. As Kaiser (2001) described, the participants "mind appearances" through a process of performances marked with ambivalence. The women in this sample navigate their daily lives constructing and deconstructing looks to create meanings to cater to specific events and times. Some participants identified as femme, and

still wore masculine clothing, and some described their style as masculine, yet would add hints of femininity to counterbalance their different presentations. The women in this sample represent some of the myriad ways queer women can identify and present the complex facets of individual identity.

#### Discussion of Stress, Anxiety, and Discrimination Related to Clothing Style and Appearance

All participants in this study indicated at least one time during data collection in which they felt stress or anxiety related to their sexual identity and clothing. Some participants (n=5) experienced frequent anxiety or stress, while others (n=9) only remembered specific events in their life that caused stress, and they did not feel stress, anxiety, or that they were the victims of discrimination on a daily basis. Sources of stress or anxiety related to clothing and sexual identity largely focused around appearing queer, dressing too queer, or appearing straight.

During the two-week, daily diary data collection, 13 women at least one time ranked their stress levels between three and five on a scale of one to five, where five was very stressed and one was not stressed, and indicated that the stress was related to their sexual identity and clothing. Four of those 13 women indicated a three or higher on the scale more than five times. These findings further support Gillow and Davis (1987), Woodman (1989), and Lewis, et al.'s (2001) findings that many queer women have daily stressors related to their sexual identity. In all of the previously mentioned studies, the authors did not report stress related to clothing or appearance. Lewis et. al (2001) found homosexuals in their study felt stress due to visibility issues, although they did not elaborate any further. Therefore, I suggest from the results of my study that appearance management behaviors that are influenced by queer sexual identities can cause stress for some queer individuals.

Lasser and Tharinger (2003) and Kelleher (2009) found LGBTQ youth often experienced stress or discrimination related to their sexual identity. Lasser and Tharinger (2003) found that youth experienced a nearly constant pressure to reveal or conceal their sexual identity, and Kelleher found that the youth's experiences with stress created a chaotically complex, unpredictable social environment for their participants. Kelleher's participants were often unsure of people they could trust and were often risking their personal safety to be amongst their peers. All participants in my study were over the age of 18 and readily shared their sexual identity with their friends, family, and employer. Therefore, it was unsurprising that many participants in this study did not experience a constant pressure, though many of them could relate to this experience. At a minimum, all participants (N=20) felt aware of their self-presentation if they looked queer, and while many felt stress or anxiety this was not constant for any of them.

Despite their openness with their families, friends, and colleagues, participants in this study felt most stressed at work (n=8) or family functions (n=7). These findings support Gillow and Davis' (1987) results where participants feared the exposure of their sexual identity at their place of employment which they thought might lead to job loss. Participants (n=8) in my study commonly feared appearing too queer at work. While these participants did not fear job loss, they did feel anxious about their appearance. This stress often led to participants changing clothes or wearing garments in a style that conformed to traditional

ideas of femininity, leaving these women feeling like they had sacrificed a part of their dignity in order to please their employer.

Herek (1989), Herek and Berrill (1992), Roderick, McCammon, Long and Allred (1998) all found queer individuals experienced overt acts of discrimination. Prior researchers did not investigate if individuals felt discrimination related to appearance. Five participants in this study experienced overt acts of discrimination related to dress or style. All participants who experienced discrimination (n=4) live in a rural area. A few participants (n=5) explained they often thought twice about how they looked and the clothes they chose if they were planning to go to a more socially conservative area of the country.

### Research Questions 3

The third research question asked *Where do queer women look for clothing styles and fashion trends?* . In this section I discuss findings related to research question three as well as questions related to research question five regarding any anxiety, pressure, or discrimination felt by the respondents. I will also report negative experiences related to looking for styles and fashion trends. This section is divided into two major categories: Identifying and Adopting Styles and Fashion Trends, Perceptions of Queerness in Fashion Advertisements, followed by a discussion and synthesis of central themes.

To answer this research question, I asked my participants several questions during the in-depth interview about where they find new clothing, accessories, and hairstyles and trends and their emotional experiences during this process. I also asked more general questions about their thoughts on advertisements they have seen targeting the queer community. I asked the participants: “Where do you get ideas about how to dress?” “Are there any key people who influence how you dress?” “Do you ever look for the latest trends or styles in clothing?” and “Do you think your queer identity influences where you look for ideas about how to dress or clothing trends?” To determine if the women feel any stress, anxiety, or discrimination from looking for styles I asked, “Do you ever see fashion advertisements targeting queer women?” and “How do you feel about those ads or the lack of ads?” I analyzed and interpreted their answers to these questions in addressing this research question.

#### Identifying and Adopting Styles and Fashion Trends

Many participants (n=15) in this study looked in various places for clothing ideas and style trends. Fifteen participants stated that they looked to family members, friends, or people around them for style ideas. Seven of the 15 participants indicated they specifically looked to other queer individuals for inspiration. Eight participants named queer or male celebrities and a ninth identified her father as her style icon. Some participants (n=11) also commonly looked in fashion magazines or followed fashion blogs. Eleven participants stated they looked in magazines for current styles or to browse the images for style ideas; nine of these periodicals were aimed at a queer audience. Additionally, two participants subscribed to mainstream magazines or fashion blogs that did not specifically target queer women. See table 4.3 for a list of queer fashion magazines and blogs read by the participants.

Table 4.3

*List of queer and alternative fashion magazines and blogs read by participants.*

Magazine or Blog
<i>Autostraddle</i>
<i>Bitch</i>
<i>Bust</i>
<i>The Advocate</i>
<i>Out</i>
<i>Original Plumbing</i>
<i>Curve</i>
<i>Lezbehonest (blog)</i>
<i>Tomboystle (blog)</i>

Many participants (n=7) explained they looked to queer celebrities as style icons. Celebrities included Teegan and Sara, Ellen DeGeneres, the Liz Lemon character on *30 Rock*, and the queer women on the television show, *The L Word*. Kayla liked that Ellen DeGeneres is a popular TV host who is openly out about her sexual identity. She described that she will often look to Ellen for style ideas because she is a popular queer celebrity: “I mean that sounds kind of silly but things that Ellen wears I think about adding to my wardrobe, because she’s a queer woman and I look up to her. And I think she does awesome stuff. So why wouldn’t you want to emulate people you look up to.” Two participants felt Ellen had a good sense of style that defied traditional gender boundaries and was classic and sporty while still containing hints of femininity. Ellen’s signature look, comprised of tennis shoes, trousers, and a well-fit tailored jacket, is a coveted look for many of the women in my sample. Alexa loved how Ellen effortlessly worked tennis shoes with a suit and v-neck t-shirt or sweater, vest, and tie combination. Ellen is a popular style icon for many queer women because she violates gender identity norms in a way that is available for women to emulate and is accepted in mainstream through the popularity of her daytime television talk show.

#### Perceptions of Queerness in Fashion Advertisements

Predictably, participants had a diverse range of reactions when describing their experiences with fashion advertisements. Very few participants (n=4) reported having ever seen fashion advertisements specifically targeted at queer women. The three women who named advertisements all cited the same JCPenney print and television advertisement that ran in May of 2012 for Mother’s Day featuring two moms. Participants also indicated having seen queer people featured in fashion advertisements by The Gap, H&M, and American Apparel. One participant who lives in New York City remembered a Michael Kors window display with wedding cakes that had same-sex wedding top figurines just after New York passed same-sex marriage laws.



Many of the participants (n=10) had negative reactions to the queer imagery, or lack thereof in media. Ten participants felt frustrated, sad, or alienated by the fashion industry for the lack of queer images or advertisements. Melissa described her feelings on fashion advertisements by stating,

It's always frustrating where you see more idealized images of what you should do and don't fit into those...people always want to see themselves reflected back at them, and want to be able to take cues from that and I feel like because I don't have those sorts of images I sort of have to make it up. It's a blessing and a curse. It's nice to not have those things of what I should do represented back at me because there isn't anyone who really fits that mold. At the same time it's bothering in a way, where you know you are put on the outskirts.

Kayla related a similar feeling saying, "I kind of feel like I'm missing from them." Kai described that she felt, "kind of sad" and Sawyer responded that it "is a shame because we're awesome."

Riley had a strong reaction to the lack of fashion ads and expressed intense emotion in her response. She stated, "Frankly I feel so utterly alienated by the fashion industry on every possible front that generally what I feel is 'fuck them.'" Avery also experienced a feeling of alienation by the fashion industry. She said, "I mean we're part of society too, we're not just nonexistent and I mean I would love to see more of it, and by more, I mean any." All of these 10 participants who felt ostracized by the fashion industry explained that they were not surprised by the lack of advertisements and representation of queer imagery in the media and acknowledged that a lot of minority groups are missing or not represented. Because these women have become so accustomed to feeling left out or neglected in many areas of their lives, the thought of actually seeing an advertisement that featured queer women seemed like a far reach to them that many publishers or advertisers would not take. Five of the 10 participants who responded negatively to the lack of fashion ads said they anticipate feeling or felt positive towards fashion advertisements targeting queer women. For example, when Sawyer was walking through lower Manhattan and saw the two wedding cakes with same-sex figurine toppers in the Michael Kors window she said, "I remember walking and being like 'that's charming' and it stuck in my head." Amari stated, "Maybe I'd respond a little more positively to it."

Although there was a general agreement amongst all of my participants that queer women were missing from fashion advertisements, a few women (n=3) described that they enjoyed viewing the avant-garde high fashion advertisements that often utilized androgynous models. These three women explained they were sometimes drawn to high fashion magazine advertisements because it hinted at queerness. In particular, some participants felt the androgynous models like Andrej Pejic and Wily Cartier were pushing gender boundaries on the pages of *Vogue* and *W magazine*, however they quickly stated they knew these high fashion advertisements were not directly targeting queer women. Micah said that she enjoyed looking at avant-garde high fashion advertisements where the models are extremely androgynous. Alexa described her feelings about the high fashion magazine ads saying, "I think in high fashion it's

honestly for aesthetics more than for making a statement because you'll see someone wearing crazy rococo wear and like another woman is draped over her lap and it's supposed to have a lesbian feel to it, but I don't think it's something people should go to and think I want to identify like this." Here, Alexa is recoiling from the realization that for mainstream society, this sort of fetishization of lesbian eroticism is the reality of their experience with queerness. For Alexa, and many women like her it is absurd to imagine fashioning themselves as the focus of male desire. Scarlett addresses this same idea by saying, "I don't think they are targeting queer women. I feel like it resonates with queer women but there is nowhere in my head where I think they are targeting us. I just think it's an accident of fashion."

#### Discussion of Identifying and Adopting Styles and Fashion Trends and Perceptions of Queerness in Fashion Advertisements

Participants in this study (n=12) often looked to other queer women, men, or queer celebrities for style ideas. If the participants looked in fashion magazines or blogs they often looked in alternative media that might feature queer or androgynous women. Many women (n=10) felt frustrated or ostracized by the fashion industry due to the lack of queer advertisements, yet explained they were not surprised because many minority groups are often excluded from media.

Previous researchers have not studied queer individual's perception of queer advertisements or the lack of queer advertisements in the media. Bhan, Leigh, and Wardlow (1996) studied heterosexual's perceptions of gay men's advertisements, and they found reactions towards the advertisements depended upon the participants' attitudes towards homosexuals. All participants in my study stated they would be excited or would react positively towards queerness in advertisements similar to the participants who supported homosexuals in Bhan, Leigh, and Wardlow's (1996) study. While this finding is not surprising, it does suggest that queer women who do look for fashion styles would appreciate having representation and more style icons in the media.

Jackson (2009) researched how heterosexuals read contemporary representations of lesbians in media. Similar to participants in my study, Jackson's participants felt lesbian imagery was designed for the male gaze. Participants in my study felt queer imagery in high fashion magazines resonated with queer women, however they believed it was not directed towards them.

Sender (2003) researched queer imagery in advertisements and found most magazines and media are not interested in running queer advertisements due to the perceived risk of losing the dominant heterosexual market. Participants in my sample were aware of the lack of queer advertisements, and were not surprised. During interviews I did not discuss Sender's findings, however many of the participants seemed aware of the lack of representation of queer individuals in the media.

#### Research Question 4

*What are queer women's experiences with shopping for clothing and accessories* was the fourth research question. In this section, in addition to answering this research question I will also address research question five and report anxieties, stress, and discrimination related to shopping. To address these research questions, I asked the participants several questions about their shopping experiences during the in-depth interview and the follow-up interviews. To understand the participants' experiences when shopping I asked the following: "Where have you gone shopping?" "Do you have any places you like and do not like to shop?" "Do you ever have a hard time finding the types of clothing or accessories you want to buy?" "What department do you typically shop in?" and "Do you feel like your queer identity influences the types of clothing or accessories you buy?" These questions center around an inquiry that define the ways that each participant constructs her style and the limitations or restrictions each women felt when fashioning their style. The results are divided into three sections: Shopping Experiences, The Future of Queerness in Fashion, and Discussion of Shopping Experiences and the Future of Queerness in Fashion.

To determine if the participants experienced any stress, anxiety, or discrimination from shopping, I asked questions such as: "Were you ever treated poorly shopping in any department?" "Can you describe a good or bad experience when shopping?" and "Have you had any stress, anxiety, or different treatment when shopping for apparel and accessories?" After asking the participants about their shopping experiences and any anxiety, stress, or discrimination related to shopping, I asked them about changes they might want to see in the fashion industry in the future with the following questions: "Can you think of any stores that openly and actively support the LGBTQ community?" "Would you be more likely to shop at a clothing store that openly and actively supports the LGBTQ community?" and "Would you be more likely to shop in a store that does not separate by gender and only by body measurement and lifestyle?"

#### Shopping Experiences

Participants described a wide variety of shopping experiences trying to find garments that fit, searching for garments in different gendered sections, and interacting with sales associates on the sales floor and in the fitting room. All of the participants shopped in several different stores and chose not to shop in a few places. Participants discussed shopping issues such as problems with finding garments, sources of stress or anxiety over gendered departments and sizing, and negative experiences of being mistreated or alienated when shopping because of their appearance.

All participants shopped for clothing or accessories in corporate retailers and alternative, vintage, or thrift stores. All participants shopped in the brick and mortar stores except two participants frequently shopped online. Table 4.4 lists places where the participants frequently shopped. Participants most commonly (n=5) shopped in vintage or thrift stores. Participants (n=5) most frequently did not want to shop in malls. Additionally, many participants did not want to shop at the following: malls (n=5), stores that were thought to be too expensive (n=3), large department stores (n=2), Forever 21 (n=1), American Eagle (n=1), Ross (n=1), Abercrombie and Fitch (n=2), Macy's (n=1), Urban Outfitters (n=1), and Target

(n=1). The participants who did not want to shop at Target and Urban Outfitters specifically did not do so because those stores openly oppose support for the queer community. Fourteen of the participants shopped in both the men's and women's departments. See table 4.5 for the breakdown of the departments in which participants shopped.

Table 4.4

*Retail stores frequented by participants.*

Store	Number of Participants who Shopped at Store	Alternative, Vintage, or Thrift
Thrift or Vintage Stores (no name stated)	5	✓
Hot Topic	3	✓
Goodwill	2	✓
RedLight <sup>14</sup>	3	✓
Buffalo Exchange <sup>15</sup>	3	✓
American Apparel	4	
H&M	4	
Ross	3	
TJMaxx	3	
Target	3	
Forever 21	2	
REI	2	
The Bins <sup>16</sup>	2	✓
Spartacus Leathers <sup>17</sup>	2	✓
Nordstrom's	2	
Anthropologie	2	
Gap	2	
Housing Works <sup>18</sup>	1	✓
Savers	1	✓
John Fluevog <sup>19</sup>	1	✓
Fred Meyers	1	
Pacific Sunwear	1	
Zumies	1	
3 Monkeys <sup>20</sup>	1	
Oh Baby <sup>21</sup>	1	

Macy's	1
American Eagle	1
Marshalls	1
Urban Outfitters	1
Charlotte Russe	1
Online retailers for plus-size women	1
Banana Republic	1
Total Alternative, Vintage, or Thrift	10

<sup>14</sup> Independent retailer that buys, sells, and trades vintage clothing with a store in Portland, OR and Seattle, WA.

<sup>15</sup> Independent retailer that buys, sells, and trades vintage clothing with 31 stores located in 17 states.

<sup>16</sup> Independent thrift store located in Portland, Oregon.

<sup>17</sup> Specialty bondage, discipline, dominance, submission (BDSM) boutique with one store in Milwaukie, Oregon

<sup>18</sup> Thrift store with locations throughout the New York City boroughs.

<sup>19</sup> Online shoe retailer that sells women's, men's, and unisex styles.

<sup>20</sup> Antique and vintage store located in Portland, Oregon.

<sup>21</sup> Specialty lingerie boutique located in Portland, Oregon.

Table 4.5

*Breakdown of the departments in which the participants shop.*

Section	Number of Participants who shop in the section
Men's only	2
Women's only	2
Both Men's and Women's	13
Men's, Women's, and Kid's	1
Plus-Size	2

Twelve of the participants stated that they had trouble finding garments that fit. It is important to highlight that finding garments that fit is a common issue for many women regardless of sexual identity. Five of the 12 participants in this study who had trouble finding garments that fit experienced this trouble because they often shopped in the men's department, and it was hard to determine what size to try on and purchase. For example, Debbie felt frustrated looking for plain t-shirts. Even in a simple garment such as the plain, white t-shirt, Debbie realized that the slight differences in style and cut between men's and women's garments can cause trouble in her finding a garment that she feels gives her a silhouette that

disguises her feminine features without being too baggy. When trying on both men's and women's plain t-shirts Debbie found the women's shirt had more ease in the chest, the side seams curved in slightly, and it had a lower neckline. She found that the men's t-shirts had a significant amount of ease all over the shirt and that it had a boxier silhouette. Debbie felt uncomfortable in both types of t-shirts and desired a style in the middle. She explained the women's shirt was too revealing and hugged the curves of her body and showed off her chest, while the men's shirts were too large all over and made her appear to be swimming in the garment. These complications in style and fit caused frequent problems for Debbie when shopping in both the men's and women's sections.

When asked if they had any positive, memorable shopping experiences, a few participants recalled some instances. Four participants had positive shopping experiences because they had extremely helpful sales people who did not judge them for shopping in the men's section, or they felt that the store was openly supporting the queer community. Alexa had an extremely positive experience when shopping for lingerie with her partner. She remembered that the sales associate asked how long she and her partner were together and that the associate was "not weirded out by anything." Alexa was intimidated at first when going to this lingerie store with her girlfriend because "that's the first place where people would be judging," though when she left she did not feel judged, she felt comfortable and excited. The positive experience made her want to tell other queer individuals about the store. She commented, "These people would take anyone as they are, and treat you like a person," highlights that Alexa often feels marginalized when shopping in other stores that do not recognize her or her partner. The recognition and validation of herself as an ordinary customer made her feel as though she was accepted for her differences in sexuality and gender identity. Avery described that her best shopping experience was when she was shopping in the men's section and the sales person did not flinch when she wanted men's jeans. This made Avery comfortable and excited during this shopping experience, a feeling she often did not have when searching for new garments. Kayden attributed her positive shopping experience for clothing to the music that was playing in the store. She explained she heard Macklemore, a music artist known for advocating for queer rights, playing in the store while she was browsing. Hearing this band reaffirmed her that the store was "queer friendly" and safe to be out in.

Relative to research question five a total of 16 participants said that they experienced stress or anxiety when shopping. Sources of stress included body image and size, malls, determining which department to shop in, shopping in the men's section, asking for different men's sizes, and unavailability of styles. Shopping for clothing can be stressful for many women, and the participants in my study experienced some of the typical stressors of shopping such as anxiety over body image and unavailability of styles, yet these same women experience additional stress and anxiety when shopping that is related to gender identity and sexuality. Four participants stated they rarely, if ever, felt stress or anxiety when shopping, and if they did it was not memorable or it did not have an impact on their shopping experiences.

Five participants experienced stress when shopping in the men's section or when asking for a different size in the men's section. Quinn predominantly shops in the men's section, and her high level of anxiety when shopping on the men's side alters her shopping behaviors. When in the men's section, Quinn is nervous the men in the section are judging her. She explained she gets "really hot and sweaty and especially when other guys are around." The fitting rooms are also a major source of stress for Quinn. To avoid awkward moments with sales associates or negative comments, she usually tries on the garments she wants to purchase outside of the fitting room in a corner of the store. I asked her if this makes her uncomfortable and she said, "all the time." I then asked Quinn if she wore specific outfits in which to go shopping, and she promptly replied, "Yea, I usually wear a lightweight shirt and a jacket on top." Kelsey described a recent shopping scenario where she attempted to shop in the men's section but felt too embarrassed to try on or buy men's clothing. She said, "I attempted to find baggy jeans. I didn't know I was really too nervous to ask anybody to help me. The sizing was difficult, and I didn't know about it. I was really worried I was going to be judged when asking for it." Logan also stated she often found herself spending less time in the men's section or tucking the men's garments under women's clothing when going into the fitting room.

Several participants (n=8) experienced subtle acts of discrimination when shopping. The experiences ranged from salespeople assuming the women were shopping in the wrong section, questioning garment choices, feelings of mistreatment, and extremely bad customer service. Half the participants (n=10) had never felt mistreated either overtly or subtly while shopping. Eight participants indicated they felt subtle acts of discrimination related to their sexual identity while shopping. When shopping in the men's department, six participants experienced the sales person telling them they were in the wrong section or that they had made a mistake and had picked up men's garments. Scarlett explained how she was often corrected when holding men's garments or shopping in the men's section. Additionally, since she has a masculine look, she has been corrected in the women's sections. Scarlett told me she often feels treated differently than other customers in the store and that her service is frequently accompanied by a negative attitude. After explaining her frustrations shopping, she exclaimed, "I can't win!" Participants experienced other subtle acts of discrimination such as long stares by other shoppers and being neglected by sales staff. Alexa said, "sometimes salespeople will throw you shifty glares because you are holding hands with your partner in a store and they can act weird." A few participants (n=2) were not offered shopping assistance or received extremely poor customer service compared to other shoppers in the store. Quinn described that several times when she was in a fitting room, sales associates would knock on the other dressing room doors and skip her. She remembered two stores who have done this to her, and said she reacted by saying, "I don't want their help anyway." Riley also frequently felt mistreated while shopping. When I asked if she ever felt as though she was treated differently she seemed incredulous that I even asked the question. She could not remember any specific stories to tell, but stated if she was "looking particularly dyke-y" then she knew she would be treated differently than the other customers.

Participants in this study (n=7) experienced stress and anxiety during shopping that was not necessarily unique to being queer. Five participants reported anxiety during shopping due to concerns over body image and size. All three plus size participants described this as the dominant source of anxiety when shopping. These participants shared similar anxiety surrounding their appearance and queerness with other participants, however their anxiety about shopping was compounded when paired with their anxiety over their weight. These women frequently felt uncomfortable asking for larger sizes in the dressing room as evident in Harper's comment: "I'm a little bigger than average size, and I sometimes feel uncomfortable trying to ask for the size I need." Two participants indicated they felt anxious or stressed when shopping due to the lack of styles. Both of these participants lived in rural areas and explained there is a lack of clothing store options where they live. Morgan described, "Sometimes I get stressed out if I have to shop for a wedding but it's partially because I think the section in town here is really small." Even though these experiences might be familiar to many women in our society, some participants in this study felt these typical stressors in addition to other potent stressors related to gender and sexual identity.

#### The Future of Queerness in Apparel Shopping

After asking the participants about their past shopping experiences, I asked two questions about the likelihood of them shopping in stores that openly support the LGBTQ community and if they would be more likely to shop in a store that does not separate by gender. The majority (n=18) of the sample stated they would be more likely to shop in a store that openly and actively supports the LGBTQ community. Melissa immediately responded with "Absolutely." She previously mentioned that she shopped in stores that supported homeless youth and would be sincerely interested in shopping in a store that supported the LGBTQ community. Only one participant stated they might be interested, and one participant stated they would not necessarily shop in a store in support of the community. The participant who indicated they would not be interested was a plus-size participant who explained she thought they would not have her size.

When asked if the participant would be more likely to shop in a store that does not separate by gender but by body size and lifestyle, 17 said yes without hesitation; two participants said maybe and one said no. Kayla responded, "I think that would be awesome. Yea, I think that would be really awesome." Scarlett responded with an extremely positive attitude by stating, "Oh, that would be awesome. That would be so awesome. I just can't even imagine. It is like what heaven will be like. Not to pick your gender to buy your shirt. YEA!" At the end of the interviews, all 17 participants who said yes asked me if I was planning to start this company or line of clothing or they told me I should open this company. For example Micah stated, "You better email me if you get a clothing line started."

#### Discussion of Shopping Experiences and the Future of Queerness in Apparel Shopping

The binary oppositions present in our language that Sedgwick (1990) discussed have translated into the clothing product categories available in stores. Sedgwick explained that the categories used in language create an oppressive state for individuals who deviate from the normalized language. Many participants in this study feel as though they are limited by the selections in the women's section of the



store, and they feel anxiety when moving into another section such as the men's or boy's sections. Not surprisingly, anxiety or stress related to sexual identity was most often related to shopping for or trying on men's garments. Over the course of this research, one of the first things I came to understand was that many of these women have had negative shopping experiences because many stores employ sales associates who are trained to target people based on appearance and traditional gender roles. Because of their training, these associates are often inclined to direct customer interest towards socially normative gendered clothing. Thrift, vintage, and consignment stores served as a space where some stress over shopping in gendered sections was lessened. Many of the participants (n=6) explained that when shopping in thrift stores they did not feel as much stress or anxiety because the distinction of sections was not as concrete as in corporate or mainstream stores. The blurred lines of the gendered sections in these types of stores eased the tension for some women when entering the men's sections and it allowed for some enjoyment during shopping.

Queer individuals experience a wide range of stress that is both related and not related to their sexual identity. Lewis, et al. (2001) researched homosexual's daily stressors and found several sources of stress, although they did not discuss stress related to shopping. No previous researchers have studied queer women's experiences with shopping. In addition to common stress during shopping experiences that individuals may feel regardless of their sexual identity, some queer individuals experience stress that is unique to their sexual and gender identity. The results from this research question further Lewis et al.'s (2001) findings that some queer individuals experience unique stress from their sexual identity during activities such as shopping for clothing or accessories.

### Summary of Results

The construction and negotiation of gender identity for queer women in different spaces was the focus of the first research question. Fifteen of the twenty women in the sample did not feel a strong connection to masculinity or femininity. A total of 14 participants connected with the term androgynous or felt in-between. Four participants adopted the term genderqueer, four strongly connected with either the masculine or feminine identity, and one participant strongly connected with the femme-butuh dichotomy. All of the participants used aspects of their appearance to navigate between their masculine and feminine gender expression. Almost all of the participants (n=17) shifted back and forth in the portrayal of masculinity or femininity in their appearance depending upon the anticipation of future contexts. All participants stated that they felt that adding masculine identifiers in their appearance signified their queer identity.

The purpose of the second research question was to determine if sexual identity influences dress choices of queer women. All 20 participants indicated some kind of change in their appearance or clothing choices once they began sharing their sexual identity. For 14 of the women the change was long-term. For two of the women the change was brief and they soon reverted back to their original style. Ten participants indicated that they changed their dress after they were out because they wanted to be more visibly queer to

the queer community. Once out, some of the women (n=8) wore masculine clothing, cut their hair short (n=6), or tried to use blatant queer indicators such as rainbows in their appearance (n=7).

All 20 women said that they had at least one article of clothing or aspect of their appearance that signified their queer identity. Twelve women felt that the clothing that they wear always signified their queer identity. Six women only purposefully dressed in queer clothing in anticipation of being in a queer space. Five women felt that people perceived their dress as heteronormative. One participant actively tried to not “dress queer” or appear queer at any time. Seven women described the desire to “queer it up” in queer spaces. Several women (n=5) recognized their queer invisibility and the privileges associated with invisibility, and one participant, Kelsey, actively tried to appear heterosexual and avoided all queer signifiers.

Some of the women (n=12) in this study felt that their romantic relationships had an impact on their clothing and style choice. Seven women indicated that they attempted to reflect traditional ideals of masculinity or femininity in their clothing and appearance choices as a counterpart to their partner’s appearance. Five women felt freer to explore clothing styles when in a homosexual relationship, and three participants wore specific clothes in order to please their partner.

The focus of the third research question was to determine where queer women look for fashion styles and trends. Many participants (n=15) in this study looked in various places for clothing ideas and style trends. Fifteen participants stated that they looked to family members, friends, or people around them for style ideas. Seven of the 15 participants indicated they looked to other queer individuals for ideas. Nine participants named male celebrities or male family members as style icons. Eleven participants stated they looked in fashion magazines or blogs for current styles or to browse the images for style ideas; nine of these periodicals were targeted at a queer audience. Additionally, two participants subscribed to mainstream magazines or fashion blogs that did not target queer women.

Understanding queer women’s experiences when shopping for clothing and accessories was the purpose of the fourth research question. All participants shopped for clothing or accessories in corporate retailers and alternative, vintage, or thrift stores. Participants most frequently (n=5) shopped in vintage or thrift stores and did not want to shop in malls (n=5). Two participants specifically did not want to shop at Target and Urban Outfitters because those stores openly oppose support for the LGBTQ community. Fourteen of the participants shopped in both the men’s and women’s departments.

When asked what garments are hardest to find, the participants (n=12) most frequently responded that they felt frustrated finding any clothing that fit at all. Five of the 12 participants in this study who had trouble finding garments that fit experienced this trouble because they often shopped in the men’s department, and it was hard to determine what size to try on and purchase. Four participants had positive shopping experiences because they had extremely helpful sales people who did not judge them for shopping in the men’s section, or they felt that the store was openly supporting the queer community.

The purpose of the fifth research question was to determine if queer women feel anxiety, pressure, or discrimination from the fashion system and the appearance management behaviors in which they participate due to their sexual identity. All participants reported they felt anxiety or stress related to their queer identity and appearance at least once during data collection. Some participants (n=12) had only mild stress or anxiety, while others (n=6) had severe anxiety that caused significant changes in their behavior on a daily basis. Sources of stress or anxiety related to sexual identity included “appearing queer,” “dressing too queer,” and “appearing too straight.” In some instances, however, participants (n=4) felt empowered and confident in their queer signifying clothes. In addition, a few women (n=5) felt anxiety about their appearance related to body size.

During the two-week period where participants kept daily diaries, 13 of the women indicated at least one time each that they experienced stress or anxiety levels between three and five on a scale of one to five, where one was not stressed and five was very stressed. Four of the 13 women experienced stress or anxiety related to their queerness and appearance five or more days throughout the survey. Four of the women experienced only mild stress about their sexual identity, and two of the women reported minimal stress for the entire duration of the daily diaries and had no stress or anxiety whatsoever about what they were wearing.

All 20 participants stated they had more awareness of their appearance when they wore garments or accessories that signified their queer identity. For seven women, anxiety over wearing queer identifying clothing did not prompt them to change how they dressed or styled themselves. The other 13 women, however, often changed their dress or style according to the occasion. Out of the 14 participants who were currently employed, eight indicated that they experienced stress or anxiety at work over their fear of appearing “too queer.” Seven women experienced a high level of anxiety or stress from fear of appearing too queer at family functions and formal events. Even in otherwise safe places, some participants (n=2) experienced anxiety over wearing queer identifying clothing when meeting new people or seeing old friends who might be surprised by their appearance. Ten participants indicated that they experienced stress or anxiety related to a fear of queer invisibility or being mistaken for straight by other members of the queer community. Four women felt discriminated against because of their appearance. A few participants (n=4) described feelings opposite of stress and anxiety; they felt empowered or angry and this prompted them to wear clothing that signified their queer identity.

Many of the participants (n=10) had negative reactions to the lack of queer imagery in media and felt that they were “left out” of fashion. Very few participants (n=4) reported having ever seen fashion advertisements specifically targeting queer individuals. The three women who named advertisements all cited the same JCPenney advertisements in 2012 that featured same-sex couples. A few women (n=3) stated that they enjoyed viewing the androgynous models in avant-garde high fashion advertisements. These participants believed that the high fashion advertisements were not targeted at them although they often had hints of queer imagery.

Sixteen participants said that they experienced stress or anxiety when shopping. Sources of stress included body image and size, malls, determining which department to shop in, shopping in the men's section, asking for different men's sizes, and unavailability of styles. Five participants experienced stress when shopping in the men's section or when asking for a different size in the men's section. Several participants (n=8) experienced subtle acts of discrimination when shopping. The experiences ranged from salespeople assuming the women were shopping in the wrong section, questioning garment choices, feelings of mistreatment, and extremely bad customer service. Half the participants (n=10) had never felt mistreated either overtly or subtly while shopping. When shopping in the men's department, six participants experienced the sales person telling them they were in the wrong section or that they had made a mistake and had chosen men's garments. A few participants (n=2) were not offered shopping assistance or received extremely poor customer service compared to other shoppers in the store. Participants in this study (n=7) also experienced stress and anxiety during shopping that was not necessarily unique to being queer. Five participants reported anxiety during shopping due to concerns over body image and size.

The majority (n=18) of the sample stated they would be more likely to shop in a store that openly and actively supports the LGBTQ community. When asked if the participant would be more likely to shop in a store that does not separate by gender but by body size and lifestyle, 17 said yes without hesitation. Two participants said they might shop in a store that does not separate by gender and one said no.

Sexually identity influenced the participants' appearance management behaviors. Most participants frequently negotiated their gender identity or how masculine or feminine they were presenting. Some participant's looked at other queer individuals for fashion styles and trends and some looked at others who were not queer. Looking for fashion trends and styles caused feelings of rejection from the fashion industry for some participants because queer imagery is rarely seen in advertising. The women in this study shopped at a wide variety of stores, and some of them experienced stress during shopping for various reasons. Some sources of stress during shopping were unique to being queer and other sources of stress were not.

## CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

The purpose of this research was to explore the relationship of dress and queer women and how their sexual identity influences their appearance management behaviors without ignoring other subject positions such as class, race, ethnicity, location, age, and religion. To achieve this purpose I used a multi-method inductive approach. I first conducted in-depth, semi-structured interviews. Then I had participants complete a short survey and take a photo of the outfits they wore for 14 days. At the end of each week, the participants also completed a short, follow-up interview. The five research questions I answered in this study were:

1. How is gender identity constructed and negotiated in different spaces for queer women?
2. Does sexual identity influence dress choices of queer women?
3. Where do queer women look for fashion styles and trends?
4. What are queer women's experiences with shopping for clothing and accessories?
5. Do queer women feel anxiety, pressure, or discrimination from the fashion system and the appearance management behaviors in which they participate due to their sexual identity?

Identifying as queer influenced how the interviewees chose to dress and style themselves, where they looked for fashion ideas, and their shopping experiences. The queer women in this sample fashioned their bodies by defying gender norms and pushing the boundaries of acceptable appearances in our society. The women I interviewed worked each day to showcase their queer identity conspicuously through style and appearance choices or to hide their queer identity by adopting heteronormative styles. The participants used their style choices to construct their multiple and shifting identities when navigating what Goffman (1959) described in symbolic interaction theory as their front stage or back stage. Goffman explained the front stage is where individuals practice impression management so they can carefully construct how they feel others may perceive them. In this study, the participants' sexual identity influenced their appearance and clothing choices, yet they were all extremely active in managing their gender performances in their front stage, and they often carefully considered dress choices to negotiate how queer they appeared or thought they were appearing. I found my results support Goffman's notion of dramaturgy; the individuals carefully manage their appearance when in public or in their front stage. For these women, the management of their queerness was another layer of consideration in the appearance management process.

When participants in this study were managing their queer appearance it often translated into defying traditional gender identities and expressions. The participants all identified as female, though not all of them shared a strict definition of what it meant to be a woman. This is because some of the participants (n=3) felt being a woman meant participating in the social construction of femininity. For most of the queer women in this study (n=17) it had nothing to do with how other people perceived them but only the sex they were assigned at birth. The multiple and shifting experiences and expressions of what it meant to be a woman for each of these participants is reflective of and supports Butler's (1990) notion that

gender is a performance and that one is not born a male or female. These women challenged the social constructions of what it means to be a woman and as a result are often viewed as *others* in society because of their deviant clothing styles that are often influenced by their sexual identity. It is important to note that none of these participants expressed any desire to become a man or change genders. They simply renegotiated and challenged the traditional and acceptable performances of being a woman by playing with the expression of their gender.

All of the participants negotiated their femininity and masculinity in order to perform queerness in their dress. These expressions of masculinities and femininities were important signifiers of their queer identity both to them internally and to how they felt others might perceive them. These negotiations are seen as defiance of gender norms, and they were evident in many forms. Kayden cut her hair short, Micah wore men's boxer shorts, Jordan wore looser silhouettes, Scarlett bound her breasts, Quinn hid her breasts under boys' sweatshirt hoodies, and Avery chose not to wear make up and wore masculine sneakers most days. This defiance often led to feelings of difference and oppression. These women's understandings of gender identities and expressions challenge the binary system regulating acceptable genders and gender expressions in our heteronormative society. The challenges and everyday negotiations these women made related to dress highlight the hierarchy of sexual identities that exist.

Where these women look for clothing styles and fashion ideas was also affected by the dominant heteronormative society. Similar to many other marginalized groups, some of these women (n=10) felt ostracized by the fashion industry due to the lack of queer imagery in advertisements and the lack of queer representation in media. While many women shopped in mainstream stores, often times these types of stores caused anxiety because these women (n=8) were told by the sales associates that they were shopping in the *wrong* department. For some women (n=6) these experiences of being treated differently were normal and did not affect them emotionally because it was a part of their everyday life. For others (n=2), particularly those who pushed gender boundaries to the extreme or those who recently began sharing their sexual identity with others, these feelings of difference caused anxiety and stress and affected their behaviors. Despite the anxieties, performing queerness in dress was an important form of nonverbal communication to create safe spaces and communicate their queer identity to others.

The theoretical idea of minding appearances "notes the continual interplay between an individual and his/her various identities and communities, in such a way that combines style, truth and subjectivity" (Kaiser, 2001, p. 80). Kaiser developed this theoretical concept to help explain that individuals think through and perform anxieties and ambivalences about identity in a continual and shifting fashion. I found in this study that there are a multitude of ways queer women experience and navigate the construction of their gender identity and the ways dress is used in this construction. There is no single way of being or becoming a queer woman. As is evident in my participants' responses, they mind their appearances (Kaiser, 2001) in many ways and the development of the self and different identities is a fluid process that changes with the intersection of others. None of the women in this study exhibited a static presentation of

self. I found the responses from this study support Kaiser's concept of minding appearance. While all individuals, regardless of sexual identity, navigate who they are and their multiple identities through a series of processes, the queer women in this sample had to think through another layer of ambivalence when fashioning their bodies. Through their dress, the participants challenged traditional ideas of gender and opened up a discussion on the wider considerations of our understandings of gender.

In answering the research questions of this study, I brought attention to the inequalities in our society for queer individuals and the stress or anxiety this may cause them. I highlighted the heterosexual privileges that are present in our society that are related to appearance and fashioning the body. It is important to bring awareness to marginalized groups through research and to confront homophobia and normalize queer individuals' behaviors and appearances in order to contribute to the reduction of discrimination. In the following sections I suggest several implications from this research for the fashion industry and work environments that can help reduce stress and anxiety of and discrimination against the queer community.

#### Implications for the Fashion Industry

Through this research, I furthered our understanding of queer women's experiences with fashion, the consumption of fashion, and the anxieties faced during these activities. Based on the results, I think there are many areas in which the fashion industry can change to create a more inclusive and equitable environment for queer individuals. It is the responsibility of the individuals who work in the fashion industry to make these changes. Currently, most retailers target their marketing and sales at a traditionally gendered audience. Given that our society adheres to a paradigm of men being masculine and women being feminine, and that the most conspicuous identifier of gender is appearance, dress and the fashion industry are in many ways central to the way we construct gender. Because the fashion industry plays such an important role in the way that we construct our gender with the clothing and accessories that are available, it stands that marketers, retailers, designers, merchandisers, and other professionals involved in the fashion industry are critical to affecting this change in our society's perceptions about gender, sexuality identity, and dress by changing the way clothes are designed, marketed, sold, and worn. Instead of perpetuating the existing binary system of masculinity versus femininity through segregating clothing and accessory markets by using opaque or confusing sizing differences, prints, colors, surface embellishments, and garment shaping devices in order to create and maintain exclusively gendered clothing, we, as fashion industry professionals, can change the way our society creates and constrains the construction of gender identity.

The gendered labels that are attached to clothing are one of the most obvious examples of a social apparatus that maintains and supports the gender binary system. Almost all of the participants (n=17) indicated that they would shop at or would be interested in shopping at a store that did not separate by gender. One participant stated a non-gendered store would relieve her anxiety about shopping and would make shopping "fun." Some companies such as Saint Harridan and Polarn O. Pyret have attempted to

address the issue of the gender binary present in our society. Polarn O. Pyret is a children's clothing store with five stores located in Connecticut, New York, and Minnesota. They offer clothing that is designed by size and function and not gender. Additionally, Saint Harridan began as a crowd-source funding campaign in 2012 that creates suits and suit coordinates for women who push gender boundaries. Developing more stores and brands like Polarn O. Pyret and Saint Harridan that design non-gendered clothing would create more clothing options for those who push the boundaries of the gender binary system and help reduce anxiety and stress surrounding their dress and appearance.

The different body shapes of men and women can make gender-neutral clothing design particularly challenging. There is a need for both research and design departments of companies and apparel scholars and researchers to explore fit and style options that would be suitable for both men's and women's bodies. Apparel design professors should also assign projects in design courses that challenge students to design a gender-neutral look or even a complete line. Exposing apparel design students to the possibility and challenge of gender-neutral clothing may inspire some of them to explore career opportunities in this area.

Based on my findings, I see that there is also a need to change store environments in order to promote a more inclusive atmosphere for diverse consumer markets. A few participants (n=5) experienced anxiety when shopping due to their sexual identity. Sales associates often told the participants that they were in the wrong section or they were blatantly denied assistance on the selling floor and in the fitting rooms. To address these problems, companies should provide diversity trainings during the hiring process and offer periodic training seminars to promote equality for members of the LGBTQ community in their stores. Instituting non-gendered fitting rooms and non-gendered bathrooms is another step employers can make towards creating an inclusive environment for people of all genders.

Almost all of the women (n=17) in this study did not remember having ever seen a fashion advertisement that targeted or featured queer individuals. These individuals stated that they knew this was true for many minority groups, however it still made many (n=10) of them feel ostracized from the fashion industry. Including more same-sex couples in advertising or queer imagery in marketing is one way to reduce these discriminating feelings for queer individuals.

Eighteen participants indicated that they would be more likely to support a store that openly and actively supported the queer community. They enthusiastically endorsed this idea. Furthermore, they stated they would not shop at stores that opposed the LGBTQ community such as Urban Outfitters and Target. Therefore, companies that made a public statement or dedicated a space on their website that demonstrated support for the LGBTQ community would be more successful in marketing to these participants, and their allies.

#### Implications for Work Environments

A few participants (n=5) felt uncomfortable when going to work because they were afraid there would be disapproval of their appearance that deviated from acceptable female appearances. If companies



have not already done so, they should re-consider their dress code and grooming policies. New or updated policies should have written guidelines for acceptable appearance choices for individuals, regardless of gender, to allow for freedom of gender expression within the image that the company is trying to promote.

#### Recommendations for Future Research

After reviewing my findings, I have identified several areas that need further investigation. Participants in this study completed data collection during 14 consecutive days between January and February of 2013. Many of the participants explained that they thought it would be beneficial if they could complete the study during warmer seasons because they felt that their garments from their summer and spring wardrobes often caused more anxiety for them than garments in their winter wardrobes. I suggest conducting a longitudinal study with queer women that would start when they began sharing their sexual identity with others and would last between five to 10 years. During this time span participants would complete daily diaries and photo journals during each of the four seasons. This method of data collection would allow for a holistic analysis of changes in queer women's fashion after they began sharing their sexual identity and any anxieties they may feel related to those changes. From this study, a larger quantitative study can be developed in order to be able to generalize to a larger population.

Further investigation is needed on the intersections of queer women of color, dress, anxiety, and discrimination. Because the majority of participants in my study identify as white, I was not able to accurately address queer women of color's experiences with dress. Queer women of color's experiences with dress, identity construction, and stress or anxiety may be drastically differently because of anxiety related to race.

Transwomen experiences with dress are also in need of further research. Each participant I interviewed readily shared recruitment materials with individuals whom they thought might be interested. Several participants asked me if transwomen would fit the eligibility criteria and if I was interested in interviewing them. I told all of them my eligibility requirements would allow for transwomen to participate because I required that the woman identify as female; however, I was not contacted by any transwomen to participate. After recently taking a Transgender Studies course at Oregon State University, I learned that clothing and appearance is an extremely important part of daily life for transgendered people, and that in addition to the discrimination they face on a daily basis, clothing and appearance is a major source of stress or anxiety for these individuals. Researching trans peoples' experiences with dress is an important and understudied area of inquiry that needs to be addressed in order to bring awareness to this marginalized group.

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## APPENDICES

## APPENDIX A

## Interview Questions

## Demographics:

1. First can you tell me how old you are?
2. What is your ethnicity?
3. What is your sex?
4. Where are you currently living?
5. Have you always lived there?
6. What do you do for a living?
7. What does a typical week look like for you? Where do you go? What do you do? Who do you interact with?
8. If you were to describe your sexual identity to someone what might you say?
9. Would you describe it differently to different people?
10. Have the words you choose to describe your sexual identity changed over time?

## Style:

11. If you were going to describe your clothing style, what might you say about yourself?
12. When did you begin sharing your sexual identity with friends and family?
13. Did your style or choice of clothing change after you began sharing your sexual identity?
14. Did your style at work change after you began sharing your sexual identity there?

## Choosing what to wear:

1. For what situation is it most easy to choose what to wear (from your wardrobe)
2. For what situation is it most difficult to choose what to wear (from your wardrobe)?
3. Do you feel like you express your queer identity in how you present yourself? (your clothes and appearance).
4. If yes, what aspects of your appearance signify your queer identity?
  - a. Do you show your queer identity in your dress all the time?
  - b. Where would you not wear the outfit or garments that signify your queer identity?
  - c. Where do you feel most comfortable wearing garments that signify your queer identity?
5. Do you ever feel anxiety or stress when wearing the clothes that signify your queer identity?
6. Do you feel like you are treated differently when wearing clothes that signify your queer identity?
7. Do you ever think about how others perceive how you look?
8. Do these thoughts affect how you dress or style yourself?
9. Have you ever been in an intimate relationship before? Can you describe some of those relationships to me? Who they were with and what sex or gender the person or people identified with?
10. Did the relationship affect what you chose to wear?
11. Did the relationship affect how you styled your hair?
12. How did the other person typically dress?

## Constructing gender identity:

13. Can you tell me what the terms masculinity and femininity mean to you?
14. Do you feel you connect with one term more than another? Why?
15. Do you try to portray masculinity or femininity in your appearance?
16. Do you think there are different types of queer women (i.e., the stereotypically queer women)?
17. What are they?
18. Do you feel like you fit within one of those types? Why or Why not?
19. Have you ever transitioned between the types?
20. Did your choice of clothing change throughout the transitions?

Where they look for clothing ideas:

21. Where do you get ideas about how to dress?
22. Do you ever look anywhere for the latest trends or styles in clothing?
23. If yes, where?
24. Do you think your queer identity influence where you look for ideas about how to dress or clothing trends?
25. Do you ever look in magazines targeting queer women?
26. Do you ever see fashion advertisements targeted towards queer women?
27. How do you feel about those ads or lack of those ads?
28. What are your thoughts on media targeted towards heterosexual women?
29. Are there any key people that influence how you dress such as someone famous, a person close to you, a friend or family member?

Shopping for clothes:

30. How many times have you gone shopping for clothes or accessories in the last month, 6 months, year?
31. Where have you gone shopping in the last year for clothes?
32. Have you shopped anywhere else for clothes in previous years?
33. Do you have any favorite places you like to shop for clothes? Why?
34. Do you have any places you do not like to shop or prefer not to shop for clothes? Why?
35. Do you typically shop on the men's, women's, or children's side?
36. Were you ever treated poorly by sales people for shopping in any of those sections?
37. Can you describe an experience that was particularly good when shopping for apparel and accessories?
38. Can you describe an experience that was particularly bad when shopping for apparel and accessories?
39. Have you ever had a sales person treat you poorly or a situation where you felt treated differently because of your queer identity and appearance? What store? Can you describe the experience?
40. Can you think of any stores right now that openly and actively support the LGBT community?
41. Would you be more likely to shop at a clothing store that openly and actively supports the LGBT community?
42. What about a store that does not separate clothing by gender and only perhaps separates the clothing by body measurement and lifestyle?
43. Do you ever have a hard time finding the types of garments you want?
44. Have you ever had any stress or anxiety when shopping for specific types of clothes? Work, Special occasion, everyday clothes.
45. Do you feel like your queer identity influence the types of clothes or accessories you buy?
46. Is there anything else you feel like I should know about how or why you dress related to your queer identity?



## APPENDIX B

## Daily Diary

1	2	3	4	5
Not stressed				Very stressed

1. Please use the 5-point scale above to rate if you had any anxiety or stress when getting dressed or wearing your outfit each day.
2. Write the number next to “Getting Dressed” or “Wearing Outfit” each day below.

Friday

Getting Dressed:

Wearing Outfit 1:

Where did you wear the outfit?

What caused the stress/anxiety/discomfort?

(If applicable)

Wearing Outfit 2:

Where did you wear the outfit?

What caused the stress/anxiety/discomfort?

Any other anxiety/stress/discomfort related to your sexual identity and/or clothing today?

## APPENDIX C

## Follow-Up Interview Questions

1. What went through your mind when deciding what to wear?
2. Did you feel any stress or anxiety related to your sexual identity when deciding what to wear?
3. Did you feel any stress or anxiety when wearing the outfits in the different places you described?
4. Was the stress related to your sexual identity?
5. If yes, can you order the places from not stressful to most stressful?
6. Did you go shopping?
7. Is there anything else about your dress this week that you think I should know?
8. Is there anything else you think I should know about how and why you dress?