Cultivating a Rainbow Median Through the Study of Sexuality in Second Language Acquisition: Identity Construction of Lesbian Women Native to the Southern Region of the United States

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Identity Construction of Lesbian Women Native to the Southern Region of the United States

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ABSTRACT

Despite diverging theories concerning the dissimilarities between
male and female speakers, there is a general consensus that there is
relevance in the relationship between gender and language,
especially when considering the sociolinguistic effects of gender in
second language acquisition and for the L2 learner. While there is
a wealth of publications dedicated to examining the relationship
between gendered roles and language, the idea of superseding the
study of gender roles with a more comprehensive and considered
study of gender identities has not been as forthcoming until very
recently. Furthermore, there is little significant research into the
relationship between gender identity and language when the
context of discourse takes place among speakers that have
throughout history been considered deviant rather than normative.
As such, this study investigates how lesbian identities are
constructed for women native to the Southern region of the United
Sates, and how, or to what degree, language is a facet of this
construction. The research for this study will be qualitative in

nature and be framed per Irving Seidman's Interviewing as Qualitative Research: A Guide for Researchers in Education and the Social Sciences.

DEDICATION

I am grateful to my family- Anna, Cheryl, Mom and Dad.

Without their support, I could have never completed this work.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND SYMBOLS

SLA   Second Language Acquisition

L2   Second Language

C2   Second Culture

LGBT   Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender

-            Indicates Pause in Speech

(( ))   Non-verbal Action

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

Introduction

This study investigates how lesbian identities are constructed for women in and native to the Southern region of the United Sates, and how, or to what degree, language is a facet of this construction. As research examining the relationship between language and sexuality is a recent field of study for applied and sociolinguistics spanning the last 20 years, the importance of this study is based on the lack of any current research focusing on Southern lesbians, thus it will make an important contribution to the literature as it pertains to the relationship between language and identity as well as sexuality and identity (two things that are central to an individual perspective), and from a lens that has throughout history been considered deviant rather than normative.

The significance of this study to second language acquisition lies within the framework of second culture acquisition. As culturally-determined constructs influence interaction, teaching, and learning, the way in which second cultures are learned and carried out may directly or indirectly affect values and beliefs of the first culture. Since LGBT rights can be described as inconsistent at best within the United States and globally, LGBT laws range from lawful to criminal; countries outlawing homosexuality carry penalties from fines and imprisonment to death while countries that have legalized homosexuality may still limit service in the military, marriage, or adoption to openly gay men or lesbians. Further, many countries

may legalize homosexuality for women but not men and vice versa. Examples of such

inconsistencies include:

Table 1: LGBT Related Laws Per Country

Country	LGBT Related Laws	Penalty if applicable
Algeria	Illegal	Fine and up to 2 years imprisonment
Kenya	Male illegal Female homosexuality was traditionally legal until recent legislation enacted by the prime minister called for the arrest of both male and female homosexuals.	14 years imprisonment
Benin	Legal	Restricts marriage, military service, adoption, etc…
Mauritania	Illegal	Death penalty
Canada	Legal	Total equality
United States	Legalities are subject to state laws	No marriage recognition; no federal protection; discrimination laws vary between states.
Barbados	Illegal	Life imprisonment
Palestinian Territories (Gaza)	Male illegal Female legal	Penalties unknown
Yemen	Illegal	Flogging Death Penalty
India	Legal	Adoptions and military service restricted
China	Legal	Adoption, military service, and marriage restricted.
South Korea	Legal	Adoption, military service, and marriage restricted

Considering this multiplicity, it is conceivable that immigrants entering new countries must acquire a level of cultural erudition to the degree that they develop an awareness and tolerance of the second culture in order to fully assimilate, something that can arguably be cultivated pedagogically. As such, an in-depth understanding of identity as it is constructed by members of the target culture must be sociolinguistically examined by researchers and theorist.

Further complications lie in the diversified facets of a culture. All too often, the word "culture" is used to stereotype a nationally and regionally identifiable dominant group rather than an in-depth explication of the demographics of a community. Because of the historical context from which the United States emerged and has evolved, general concepts of American culture range from a dominant white subordinating class to a melting pot with no one unified cultural perspective to a segregated set of sub-societies of individual cultural frameworks (i.e. Native American culture, African American culture, Asian American culture, Latin American culture, Southern American culture, Northern American culture, West Coast American culture).   While, depending on the perspective, the latter representation of American culture as a system of individual cultural and contextual frameworks may be the most realistic depiction, it is still a simple and unrealistic deduction of an American community. In reality, the United States is as diverse below the surface as it is at the surface for within each cultural and contextual framework lies another contextual framework with diversity encapsulating diversity, encapsulating diversity and so on… A model of this is the Southern region of the United States as a unique regional component of American culture.

The American South has a deep-seated deposit in American history, beginning with its pre-Civil War dedication to slavery and following with its secession from the Union, its active rebellion during the American Civil War, its post-Civil War reconstruction period, and its

resistance to African American civil rights. With this foundation come staunch beliefs about heavily politicized issues such as LGBT rights, immigration, abortion, affirmative action laws, and racial and religious discrimination facing the United States as a whole. It is no wonder that the region has become pilloried as white androcentric dominated, generally conservative, and heavily evangelical. Then again, these pillories overshadow and scarcely reflect the complexity and multiplicity of Southern culture and its interminable progression as demonstrated by the increasing presence of LGBT populations throughout the regional south.

In January 2011, *The New York* Times reported census results detailing gay parenting demographics in the regional South. Per journalist Sabrina Tavernise , "gay couples in the Southern states like Arkansas, Louisiana, Mississippi and Texas are more likely to be raising children than their counterparts on the West Coast, in New York and in New England" (Tavernise, 2011). Demographer Gary Gates at the University of California, Los Angles, found that child rearing by same-sex couples is more common in the American South than any other region in the United States. Specifically, Tavernise notes, demographics defy stereotypes of "mainstream gay America that is white, affluent, urban and living in the Northeast or on the West Coast" (Tavernise, 2011). Additionally, Jacksonville, Florida, demographics reveal that the city is residence to one of the biggest populations of gay parents in the United States. Per this study and Gary Gates, gay African Americans and Latino Americans are two times more likely to be raising children than whites and are also more likely to struggle financially in the process. Theories behind these statistics include traditionally having children with heterosexual partners before reconciling homosexuality based on religious disapproval. Because of the lonely existence and dangers of being gay in the American South, notable instances of danger include the 1984 bombing of St. Luke's Community Church (a "gay church"), the existence of LGBT

community members has in the past been generally invisible; however, with increasing numbers of churches and organizations open to the LGBT community, the environment and demographics are changing. Nevertheless, per Gates, "We don't know a lot about this group. Their story has not been told" (Tavernise, 2011).

And it is precisely the lack of narratives of southern LGBT residents (or the current genesis of these narratives) that results in existing identifiable gaps in theoretical research exploring both the identity construction of gays and lesbians as well as the linguistic and second language acquisition implications. Therefore, the goal of this study is to investigate how lesbian identities are constructed for women native to the Southern region of the United Sates, and how, or to what degree, language is a facet of this construction.

Review of Relevant Literature

Because there is scarce to no publications dealing directly with the regional specificity of

the topic at hand, reviewing relevant publication must be approached holistically.

Research on Southern Identity

Three specific ways southern identity has been experienced by regional residents include

stigmatized identities, racial identities, and ethnic/quasi-ethnic identities (Thompson, 2007).

Intrinsically, Thompson (2007) integrates these discernments from historians, cultural analysts,

and social identity theorist to assess why and how ethnically and socioeconomically distinct

individuals residing in the South identify with, make sense of, and act on their provincial

identities as southerners. Specifically, Thompson (2007) examines if residents of the geographic

South consider themselves southerners and how they define a southerner. Additionally, he

surveys why residents that do identify as a southerner choose to do so, if the residents feel their

identity is stigmatized, why the residents actively choose to identify with a stigmatized group,

how southern identity is practiced, and how southern identity is passed to future generations

(Thompson, 2007).   The qualitative methodology is primarily in-depth interviews with black

and white southerners from differing social classes. Per Thompson,

We tend to assume that groups which can stigmatize others have more power than the

objects of stigmatization. In a sense this may be true, as they have the power to shape larger

cultural images. But this does not mean that the objects of stigmatization have to accept these

definitions of their group. In the case of southerners, not only do they reject negative images of

their group, but in some ways these negative images seem to make southerners assert their identity more strongly. Seeing one's group as misunderstood, as an underdog, can therefore be a source of unity, a source of pride. (Thompson, 200)

Therefore, Thompson's data point out that white and black residents that identify as a southerner have an affirmative stance of their regional identity while also believing that non-southerners do not, thus southerners are disposed to affirm a stigmatized identity (Thompson, 2007).

While resolutions and policies against linguistic discrimination have been adopted by the Linguistic Society of America, some dialects are presupposed to the Principle of Linguistic Subordination, and Southern American English is no exception to the rule, especially when considering specific markers of SAE as a vernacular dialect that include multiple negation (i.e. *I didn't do nothing)*, assimilations (i.e. *wadn't* rather than *wasn't*), addition or absence of glides to certain vowels (i.e. the absence of [I] on the /ai/, *ride* or adding a conspicuous glide, *beyud* [bɛyəd] for *bed*), or respect labels used to address adults (i.e. *Sir*, *Ma'am*) (Schilling-Estes & Wolfram. 2006). Particularly, the use of *Mr, Mrs, Ms* by speakers of SAE to indicate closeness contrasts the non-Southern usage in which it designates unequal power relations (Schilling-Estes & Wolfram. 2006). Nevertheless, the use of Southern American speech is not a consequential and inexorable product of being from the South (Johnstone, 2003). Rather each speaker of SAE has available to them a complex repertoire of styles for being, acting, and sounding which are adaptable deliberately or freely to the context (Johnstone, 2003). Therefore, SAE serves the speaker more as sociolinguistic resources which can be exercised and constructed by the speaker's communicative need (Johnstone, 2003). Further, research on Southerners in the nineteenth century has described Southerners as having "'softer' manners and that they were franker and more cheerful than Northerners, more courteous and courtly" (Johnstone, 2003). As

such, Johnstone (2003) depicts studies of specific features of Southern discourse as well as how southern style is utilized. For example, the use of *sir* or *ma'am* by speakers to peers or individuals younger than the speaker themselves are used to denote friendly solidarity rather than a social hierarchy leading Johnstone to conclude that there is not one style of southern history, belief, attitude, or purpose, discourse or identity- "Southerners do not use language as they do because they are Southerners, but with particular facts about history, belief, social structure, and communicative purpose which may vary form group to group, person to person, and situation to situation" (Johnstone, 2003).

Consequently, the question that emerges from the aforementioned studies then becomes more how do southerners define and reflect solidarity rather than why it is present. If affirmation of the stigmatized identity produces unity in Southerners, then what are the social and cultural ramifications for native residents that do not identify as southern based on the presence of the stigmatization? Considering the varied use of SAE linguistic markers that produce unequal power relations for non-SAE speakers but signify closeness for SAE speakers, one might conclude that inequality in and of itself is constructed much differently in Southern culture than in non-Southern culture, and parallels (or lack thereof) in second culture acquisition for L2 learners immigrating to the region would significantly vary in experience from those outside the Southern region. Further, because most concentrated identity and sociolinguistic studies of SAE speakers have predominately focused on areas or race and gender, findings from such studies are not so applicable when attempting to dissect the below surface realities for subjected groups embedded within a stigmatized group (i.e. LGBT members in the Southern community) or for subjected members segregated from other relative subjected groups embedded within the stigmatized group (i.e. immigrant LGBT L2 members in the Southern community), and until

further examination research in Southern identity, while valuable in foundation, only scratches the surface.

Theories of Sexual Identity

Horowitz and Newcomb (2001) assemble a comprehensive model of sexual identity development that incorporates people that identify as heterosexual, homosexual and bisexual as well as those for whom the categorizations are unsatisfactory manifestations of their experiences. Utilizing the social constructionist perspective, human sexual experiences suggests that sexual identity is preserved through social interaction since individuals must interrelate with the environment to construct identity using categorizations and comparisons in the social context, thus sexual identity cannot be a fixed construct even if it is experienced as stable by the individual and the concept of a shifting sexual identity is found endangering to the individuals social and personal veracity (Horowitz & Newcomb, 2001). To support this claim, Horowitz and Newcomb (2001) note specific data from their study explicating findings that 50% of self-identified lesbians have either had heterosexual relationships, anticipate heterosexual relationships in the future, and have sexual feelings that are heterosexual. Additionally they find that most women that have or have had homosexual relationships do not identify as lesbian (Horowitz & Newcomb, 2001). As such, the development of this integrated sexual identity is multidimensional and encompasses desires, behaviors, and identity as they interact with the social and historical context experienced by an individual. (Horowitz & Newcomb, 2001)

Additionally (and per Horowitz and Newcomb theory), because identity construction is a utility of interface between the individual and society, a homosexual identity can only develop in societies wherein the homosexual classification is recognized (Horowitz & Newcomb, 2001). Intrinsically, the representation allocates for variability in sexual identity to transpire over time in

rejoinder to contact with ever-changing social edifices, life experiences, and self-constructs, thus "there is no endpoint to identity development" (Horowitz & Newcomb, 2001).

Similarly, Cameron (2005) addresses the relationship of sexuality to gender from the theoretical perspective and its application to empirical research since the idea of binary gender differences (i.e. men's and women's use of language) has been overtaken by ideologies of diverse gender identities and practices (Cameron 2005). Summarizing the modern and postmodern feminist approaches to language and gender she cites Simone de Beauvoir's claim that there is a difference between the biological existence of female and the sociocultural status of a woman (Cameron 2005). The other area of research examined by Cameron (2005) is the role of sexual identities on performances of gender which coincides with feminist research typifying the same transference from difference to diversity. This is noteworthy as it demonstrates that the affiliation of gender to sexual identity in context effects the linguistic implementation of each, even when missing or pilloried, thus associating same-sex sex as gender deviant (Cameron 2005). Cameron further examines language and gender in the "public" framework in regard to women's increasing gravitation to professions that were previously exclusively male; yet, Cameron (2005) sees gender as "not something you acquire once and for all at an early stage of life, but an ongoing accomplishment produced by your repeated actions".

Congruent to Cameron's perspective is that of Kulick (2000) which maps previous research of "gay and lesbian language" as it relates to studies of the 1980's and 1990's and addresses the question of how to identify one who's sexual and gendered ways are not bound by heterosexual norms (Kulick, 2000). Since previous research identified links language and sexuality but has had little impact on sociolinguistics, linguistics, and anthropology due to scarce research, the methodology used by Kulick was to compile a list of published works on this topic,

10

excluding unpublished conference papers and literary treatments (Kulick, 2000). Examples include *The Lavender Lexicon* and *Camp*, as well as specific research since the 1980's and 1990's such as *Gayspeak: Gay Male and Lesbian Communication* (Chesebro, 1981) and Leap's work on *Gay English* which do not examine sociolinguistic foundations such as "variation", "context", or "register" (Kulick, 2000). Per Kulick (2000), it is these types of work that hinder sociolinguistic research in this subject matter as it considers gay and lesbian language to be exclusive to identity; rather, Kulick proposes that sociolinguistic research should focus on how language communicates sexuality (i.e. desire) rather than identity so research would reform to semiotic cultural research, focus on desire rather than sexuality, and allow research into repression, unconscious motivation, and fantasy, all of which potential future research could be expanded (Kulick, 2000).

Contrasting Cameron and Kulick, Bucholtz and Hall (2004) respond to studies over an approximately 30-year period on language and sexuality that lacked in-depth examination of what Bucholtz and Hall referred to as "broader theoretical concerns". Specifically, Bucholtz and Hall (2004) address the general interpretation of "sexuality" and how language acts as a construct to sexuality as well as cultural context that surround this construction. Further, Bucholtz and Hall (2004) address the notion of "desire" over "identity", feminism and queer theory, gender as it relates to sexuality, and queer linguistics inter-disciplinarily and propose a framework called "tactics of intersubjectivity" to use as an analytical device to address the significant facets of discourse in researching language and sexuality, which can be used diversely in research studies. Because their study is not intended to be conclusive in nature, it attempts to offer a more comprehensive depiction of language, sexuality, and identity for which future research and study may build. As such, queer linguistics as a research agenda is the suitable

course as "a research agenda for linguistic study of sexuality that excludes identity will be theoretically inadequate, and a research agenda that excludes power relations will be politically inadequate" (Bucholtz & Hall, 2004).

Relatedly, Livia and Hall's (1997) linguistic inquiry of gender had concentrated predominantly on heterosexual language usage between men and women with only a very limited range of "gay-focused linguistic scholarship", thus providing a problematic framework since gay male speakers were encompassed amid the class of male respondents and lesbians with female respondents with the idea that, as Livia an Hall put it, "shared gender provides commonality that overrides consideration of sexual orientation." As such, Livia and Hall (1997) produce a collection of scholarly articles that examine gender and sexuality as separate and, yet loosely overlapping, classifications that align separating philosophies toward sexuality and gender that have become the foundation of Queer Theory as a back lash against the usage of identity dogma as fundamental to the feminist approach, and granting an individual's identity to incorporate group membership, especially when that group is subjected (i.e. women, minorities, the disabled, etc…) in that only members of the subjected group can speak to their group subjugation and excluding personal identity on the basis that it is unproblematic. Because the study of sex, gender, homosexuality, and lesbianism is presented as performative within the individual culture represented rather than descriptive, as it was previously examined through the social constructionist lens, then an individual entities of research as they relate to historical epochs and specific populations are crafted, alleviating the diminution of lucid gendered performances by the prevailing set of governing heterosexual precepts (Livia & Hall, 1997).

Barrett (1997) reexamines the notion of a speech community as it relates to linguistic theory. Doing so, he distinguishes between a "homogeneous" speech community and a "homo-

genius" speech community, the latter reflecting the queer perspective in that there is no one way to satisfactorily define the queer community with its diverse social veracities (Barrett, 1997). Thus, "linguistics founded on the notion of a community cannot adequately handle queer uses of language" (Barrett, 1997) and instead proposes what Pratt calls a "linguistics of contact" that the concepts of community and identity are internal and definable (Pratt, 1987). Further, the linguistic condensing of English to a customary prescribed usage is allocated by all adherents of a society and its grammar as a theoretical model of language that is a measure by which the dominant class preserves power (Barrett, 1997). While Barrett (1997) notes that speech communities do not have to necessarily reflect the ethnic, religious, national, gender, or sexual orientation demographic makeup in theory, the truth is those demographic peripheries have already been presupposed and demarcate a specific social group in the society that underpins stereotypes due to dynamics outside language while lacking in an precise representation of a social corporeality in which people have various over-lapping identities that do not clearly reduce into "category -based 'communities'" (Barrett, 1997). Such identity categories (i.e. "lesbian", "gay", bisexual", "transgendered") are assumed to define a particular communal relationship is rooted in identity politics theory and a communal need for recognition in American society as an authentic minority; however, this does not adequately account for the full diverse LGB population as it does not account for those still closeted or those that have not fully reconciled their homosexuality (Barrett, 1997). As such, frameworks that insulate homogeneous queer communities neglects to copiously recognize the ambiguity encompassed in instituting models of community belonging any more than linguistic unites being examined (i.e. dialect borrowing or accommodation) can be regarded as exclusive chattels of a specific group; therefore, before linguists can understand the construction of a "homo-genius" community, they

13

first have to understand the assorted means by which LGBT individuals actually construct individual identity (Barrett, 1997).

A collective examination of the abovementioned studies suggests a problematic and inconclusive agenda in regard to homosexual identity theory. While Horowitz and Newcomb (2001) are correct in the preservation of sexual identity through social interaction, it is equally flawed in cross-disciplinary sociolinguistic examination since they offer no real proof that lack or loss of social contact alters sexual identity. Additionally, if the premise to claiming sexual identity as non-static lie in statistics explicating that 50% of lesbians have heterosexual feeling, then the fallacy of the argument equally lies in the same statistics explicating that 50% of lesbians report a lack of any heterosexual tendencies, thus there is a gap in conclusive research to support a universal claim that there is no such thing as a static sexual orientation. While it is agreeable to state that social and historical context do influence desire, behavior, and identity, such context are not proven to be the foundation of sexuality nor do they unequivocally support a theory rooted in the premise that a homosexual identity can only develop if homosexuality is recognizable in the environment. If it can be logically assumed that there is no endpoint to gender or sexual orientation identity development, then doing so first requires there to be a distinction between desire and sex from sexuality, as desire and sex are more individual constructs of sexuality than they are underpinnings. Further, while gender and sexuality are linguistically implicated (Cameron, 2005) and sex and desire are not universal representations of sexuality, questions emerge as to performative nature of gay and lesbian language use in that there is ambiguity in concluding if language serves to communicate desire (Kulick, 2000) or rather a specific construction of sexual identity. To further complicate matters, it is not entirely feasible to state that gay and lesbian language is restricted to a homosexual identity since if sex

and desire are not universal representations of sexuality, than language used to communicate sex and desire are also not universal representations of sexuality, particularly when the speaker's context is that of an isolated or absent homosexual community. If it too agreeable to first consider gender and sexuality are to be taken as linguistically implicated (Cameron, 2005) and second, to consider gender as one of multiple constructs of sexuality, then it is not a far stretch to consider sexuality, at a minimum, one overlapping facet to identity that must be studied in regard to heteronormative power relations (Bucholtz & Hall, 2004; Livia & Hall, 1997). Once such a holistic framework is applied, the inadequacies of speech communities administered by heteronormative prescriptions of language use influencing SLA become apparent (Barrett, 1997). That is not to say that such a holistic framework is unproblematic since a linear framework in and of itself endangers full investigations into areas of diversity; nevertheless, specific knowledge of identity and all its constructs must be gathered before a cultural and speech community can be fully understood and diversity accounted for, while the expulsion or domination of any one construct would inhibits complete study. What is reasonably certain is that the political need for LGBT members to identify as a unified minority through identity and language in order to advance from a subjected group, as well as the lack of a necessary distinction between desire and sex and sexuality, diminishes the true depth of diversity below the surface of the LGBT community.

Constructing a Gendered and Sexual Identity

Per Zwicky (1997), there are an immense number of lexical diversities in the domain of sexual orientation- all of which are publically and knowingly disputed based on context and debatable among the LGBT community. While the lexicon is generally the easiest part of a language to study, social meaning and linguistic variables are often obscure (Zwicky, 1997). Furthermore, Zwicky notes the difference between homosexuals and heterosexuals, stating that

It is widespread folk belief that you can pick out nonstraight people, or at least

nonstraight men, by their behavior, in particular but their speech. This belief is probably

a corollary of another folk belief, that homosexuality is an (inappropriate) identification

with the other sex, that lesbians think and act like men and that gay men think and act

like women (Zwicky, 1997).

There are five problems with this ideology and the research of it (Zwicky, 1997). First,

there are great difficulties in identifying comparative groups; second, behavior is variable within

both homosexual and heterosexual populations, and even more so in terms of speech; third,

choosing the most extreme identifiable subjects skews real data; fourth, there is no one

homosexual community of practice or one heterosexual community of practice to investigate and

gather data as shifts occur across the communities in speech styles and modes of self-

presentation; and fifth, selecting actual characteristics of speech is problematic in and of itself

(Zwicky, 1997). Specifically for lesbians, research shows that lesbians really cannot be clearly

distinguished from heterosexual women, possibly, as Moonwoman-Baird (1997) suggest, is due

to lesbian "inaudibility and invisibility" (Zwicky, 1997). Further, acquisitions of gender identity

and norms of behavior (modeling, identification, avoidance, and enforcement) are important

psychosocial mechanisms- modeling and enforcement being peripheral and based on social

context while identification and avoidance are core and significant to homosexual identity

development (Zwicky, 1997).

Per Moonwoman-Baird,

I observe that lesbian practice is regarded as marked behavior but goes unmarked much

more than is true for gay male practice, even in this era of both friendly and hostile

societal discourses on queers. Lesbian language behavior in particular goes unmarked.

(Moonwoman-Baird, 1997)

An examination of a "different way to view women and language" as performance is predisposed to elucidation of conventionality or insolence of recognized gender roles (Moonwoman-Baird, 1997).   As such, minority persons must acquire ability in and be effective at employing multiple codes, since the androcentrism perspective men's speech is basic while women's speech is "conditioned variant" (Moonwoman-Baird, 1997). This results in lesbian speech being both principally marked and principally unmarked, essentially disregarded and debased when discerned since lesbians are regarded as enigmatic when noticed and nonexistent when unobserved and thus subject to what Moonwoman-Baird calls "enforced invisibility" resulting from both gay oppression which lesbians feel the strongest effect due to women already being classifies as "peripheral humans" (Moonwoman-Baird, 1997). Note, enforced invisibility also encompasses inaudibility (Moonwoman-Baird, 1997). Additionally, isolation impedes cohesion among the lesbian community and hinders true common linguistic markers of identity (Moonwoman-Baird, 1997). In testing for stereotypes among women's speech, Moonwoman-Biard (1997) conducted research into judgment of social characteristics in women's speech using 30-second stretches of natural recorded speech of six heterosexual women and six lesbians, all white native English speakers of differing classes (and three Jewish). Listeners were lower division students of social science courses at U.C. Berkley, all native English speakers, and averaged in age of 23 (Moonwoman-Baird, 1997). Results from the study show that listeners highly correlated "lesbians" with "grew up in the West" and never correlated "lesbians" with the Southern dialect (Moonwoman-Baird, 1997). Further, "lesbian" and "Jewish" had the strongest correlation, thus making them the most marked, since listeners were most reluctant to judge

speakers as either, demonstrating that heterosexual was considered the default and unmarked category overall (Moonwoman-Baird, 1997).

Congruently, Moonwoman-Baird's (2000) study explores the methodical bond between nonpublic and social discourse, social construction to individual identity, and personal and historical history. Per Moonwomon-Baird, a lesbian's identity is complex and multi-faceted (Moonwomon-Baird, 2000). Discourse and interdiscourse, agency, intertextuality, interdiscursivity, mutability, and metaleval as well as generational units are examined through the personal narrative of Marge, an African-American lesbian that came into adulthood at the height of the 2nd wave of feminism and has a codependency on alcohol (Moonwomon-Baird, 2000). Specifically addressed is the idea of the "Layered Self" demonstrated as lesbians coming out during the 2nd wave of feminism and their identity as a "recovery person" (Moonwomon-Baird, 2000). This is contradictory to the socially constructed lesbian identity that evokes powerfulness and the personally constructed recovery identity that evokes the ideology of relinquishing power (Moonwomon-Baird, 2000). Because the identity of the lesbian is an identity that is (arguably) political and the identity of the recovery person is not, the significance of this study is that it models how researchers can consider personal history in light of history and "ideological identity", concluding that "identity" is a constructed individually based on social discourse and history (Moonwomon-Baird, 2000). Nevertheless, the findings lead to a question of further research including whether or not the structures of a personal history throughout a lesbian's lifetime is really different form a heterosexual woman's.

Per Remlinger (1997), "expectations and roles for 'woman' and 'man' are dependent on a community's beliefs, attitudes, and values about sexuality" which are substantiated in heterosexual systems and flouts general phenomena that mold compounded conditions of being

men and women. Thus, Remlinger examines how members of a university community through speech and writing determine how undergraduates at Michigan Technological Institute practice gender and sexuality using language, how their language use constructs and challenges ideologies of masculinity and femininity as well as sexuality, how representational systems of campus life interrelate as undergraduates institute a cultural system of gender and sexuality utilizing language, and how the university population is a site of "cultural (re)production" so to grasp how gender and sexuality influence students' attainment of education and involvement in the campus culture (Remlinger, 1997). Using performance theory, Remlinger conducts research over a five-year period , observing students active in a campus gay and lesbian support group during the 1993-94 academic period, examining transcripts of recorded meetings, and analyzing posters, field notes, interviews, etc… ;however, semantic analysis was not used since the study focused on how gender and sexuality were practiced through language use and the "double perspective of sexuality- one that both empowers as much as it belittles" (Remlinger, 1997). Particularly, Remlinger examines the use of the word "dyke", a word that possesses both pejorative, descriptive, or empowering connotations depending on the context of its use (Remlinger, 1997). Interestingly, words used pejoratively to heterosexual women, i.e. "slut" and "biscuit", lack a descriptive or empowering androcentric political base as the lesbian "dyke", and the lack of the "double-perspective" for homosexual male pejorative terms such as "fag" and "faggot" signifies the males' election of the overriding androcentric paradigm leading gay males to adopt female-marked nouns and pronouns such as "sister" to distinguish their sexuality (Remlinger, 1997). Further, the pejorative or descriptive use of the female-marked sexuality identifier "dyke" is context-dependent and can function either pejoratively or descriptively when used by other lesbians, gay men, or heterosexuals (Remlinger, 1997). As such, adverse

implications allied with words indicated for gender and sexuality are a "social manifestation" resulting from the "androcentric and heterosexual system that devalues anyone categorized as other-than-male-heterosexuals" that preserves an androcentric and heterosexist framework resulting in the simultaneous creation of and resistance to gender roles and sexuality independent of the normative (Remlinger, 1997). Nevertheless, close examination of this and similar studies allows educators and researchers to reexamine the demarcation of gender as non- invariable and rather as an active and negotiated so to build cognizance and cultivate vicissitudes in gender and sexual dogmas (Remlinger, 1997).

Because of the variability of gender, identity is both layered and conflicting. Accordingly, social meanings and linguistic variables of gay and lesbian lexicons result in obscurity and revalidate the notion of a homogenous gay and lesbian speech community. Equally challenging are gender relations since lesbians are the most vulnerable to inaudibility within the community because lesbians suffer double subjectivity as women and homosexual. Factor a stigmatized regional classification such as the American South, one can logically conclude that Southern lesbian language is significantly more marked than their non-Southern lesbian counterparts, thus a homosexual identity that develops through identification and avoidance is as fundamental as the social context of the development. This leads to questioning the extent to which isolation and subjectivity influences identity construction of gay and lesbian L2 learners in the South since the gay or lesbian non-native L2 learner would be marked first as non-native, second as gay or lesbian, and, if lesbian, third as a woman.

Language, Identity and SLA Research
Block in *The Rise of Identity in SLA Research, Post Firth and Wagner* (1997) maps L2 research in relation to identity since previous mapping by theorist Firth and Wagner in 1997. Per Block's representation of the Poststructuralist Approach to SLA, individuals immersed into new

cultures tend to suffer from destabilized identity. Individuals in an immersed context are forced to negotiate differences in "which the past and the present 'encounter and transform each other' in the 'presence of fissures, gaps and contradictions'" (Papastergiadis, 2000; Block, 2007). Following with Wenger's (1998) analysis, individuals in this context must have "legitimate peripheral participation" where they connect with members of the community (Block, 2007); therefore, identity is not molded from within the individual or the context; instead, it is recreated by the environment or context in which the individual finds herself (Block, 2007)

In Daryl Gordon's analysis *"I'm Tired. You Clean and Cook." Shifting Gender Identities and Second Language Socialization* (2004), ethnographic studies were taken from refugee Lao-American women and men in the context of domesticity, workplace, and education. Gordon's findings showed that "domestic language events required more complex patterns of English use than the workplace did" as the low-paying factory environment for Lao-American women was accommodating if not promotional to the use of the native Laos language whereas women with children were forced to acquire more English language skills to fulfill their domestic roles (Gordon, 2004). Accordingly, this language socialization allowed Lao-American women to reconstruct their identities, thus causing a power shift from the traditional subjected status to one of power over their male counterparts and individuality as women (Gordon, 2004). The analytical framework presented by Gordon is rooted in the poststructuralist theory that intellectualized identity as "multiply constructed, contradictory, and fluid and posits a mutually constructive relationship between language and identity (Hall, 1996; Gordon, 2004). This framework recognizes that gender is an identity grouping just as class, ethnicity, and linguistic and cultural milieu (Gordon, 2000). As such, one can classify English language acquisition as a social phenomenon that, per Gordon, ESL practitioners and textbooks are yet to meet (Gordon,

2000). Hence, practitioners and textbooks should be assessed at the local level since goals for

language acquisition differ at the individual community level so that they may serve as a guide

for English language learners when attempting to negotiate the complexities of such a

phenomena (Gordon, 2000).

Congruently, Aneta Pavlenko's *"How am I to Become a Woman in an American Vein?:

Transformations of Gender Performance in Second Language*(2001) learning assesses the view

of SLL as a social development in which the correlation between the "learner and the learning

context is dynamic and consistently changing" in regard "transformation of gender performance"

through the language socialization lens (Pavlenko, 2001). For this study, five oral narratives

reflecting SLL and 25 cross-cultural autobiographies focusing on SLL were used as corpus

(Pavlenko, 2001). Per Pavlenko, gender identity is more categorical for the subjugated group

(women being the subjugated group in this respect), thus "'to be a woman in an American vein'

may entail, among other things, questioning the meaning of being a woman" (Pavlenko, 2001).

Generally, Pavlenko concludes that integration into a second culture (i.e. the American culture)

requires women to reconstruct themselves as "gender-free", adopt a particular identity, or resist

the integration, all of which are influenced by gender negotiations in respect to relationships and

friendships, parent-child relationships, and workplace interactions (Pavlenko, 133). Pavlenko, as

does Cameron (Cameron, 1996), renders a feminist poststructuralist perception that underscores

the "constitutive role of language, suggesting that it is the speech communities that produce

gendered styles, while individuals make accommodations to those styles in the process of

producing themselves as gendered subjects" (Pavlenko, 2001). Additionally, the need to

integrate to the novel community could be motivated by deleterious views of gender and

discursive systems of one's indigenous speech community in which the language doesn't identify

the personage or marks her erroneously as the culture reduces and restricts her prospects of individualism and expressiveness (Pavlenko, 133).

Warriner's *Language Learning and the Politics of Belonging: Sudanese Women Refugees* Becoming *and* Being *"American"* (2007), scrutinizes the relationship between discourse of immigration and belonging, the ideologies behind language and language learning, and real-life experience of individual language learners by conducting a two-year study of Sudanese Women Refugees participating in an ESL program designed to quickly prepare adult students for employment in English speaking communities or to attend higher educational institutions in the United States. Yet, the programs these refugee women attended and graduated form did not adequately prepare them for assimilation into American communities or for higher than minimum wage employment opportunities, thus leaving them socially disadvantages, economically vulnerable, and unequal participants in society " (Warriner, 2007). It is important to note, that this study demonstrates that language learning by itself does not provide an adequate venue for this since the implication of policies and practices that govern American English learning programs instructing these immigrants reinforces an ideology that views immigrants and refugees as "outsiders expected to not only learn English, but "learn a particular kind of English (unaccented, "standard" English)" (Warriner, 2007) encouraging that "English-only movement" (Warriner, 2007) and the "'Us'-Versus-'Them'" (Warriner, 2007) dichotomy rooted in the idea that bi or multilingualism threatens national unity. Citing Pennycook (2000), English language learning classrooms are sites of "cultural politics" where "ideologies of language and language learning are played out interactionaly between teachers and students, students and their peers, and schools and communities (Warriner, 2007).

Per Barna (2007), interpersonal interaction is complex, even within cultural groups, and the act of speaking does not indemnify effective transmission of meaning and sentiment. While all humans share basic commonalities (i.e. birth, death, hunger, etc…), those commonalities are experienced differently from person to person, group to group, and culture to culture (Barna, 2007). As such, Barna (2007) uses narratives taken from small group discussion between U.S and international students that indicate that the intense communicative contact experienced between the groups facilitates problems, prodigious, and discrimination between the two and reinforces negative stereotypes (Barna, 2007). Therefore, Barna (2007) identifies five aspect of cultural competence that act as stumbling blocks to intercultural communication- language, nonverbal signs and symbols, preconceptions and stereotypes, tendencies to evaluate, and high levels of anxiety (Barna, 2007). To overcome these stumbling blocks, Barna (2007) notes progressive study in research, resources, and training for educators.

Considering Block (1997), Gordon (2004), Pavlenko (2001), Warriner (2007), and Barna (2007) identity is continuously reconstructed based on the immersive context that immigrants find themselves. Immigrants are not only expected to learn English, they are expected to learn the prescribed English that is rooted in the heteronormative perspective. Because of the destabilized identity of newly immersed L2 learners and the lack of local level assessment of L2 learner's needs, the L2 learner is subject to more in-depth identity categorization and bias.

Pennycook (2000) describes classrooms as "sociopolitical spaces that exist in a complex relationship to the world outside"; therefore, rather than viewing classrooms as "closed boxes" (Pennycook, 2000) they should be regarded in their place as situates of melee over ideal social and cultural domains, as spheres permeated with relationship to power (Pennycook, 2000). Considering that students do not enter classrooms with a clean slate but rather bring with them

all the social and cultural relations and upbringings, then educational institutions "serve to maintain the social, economic, cultural, and political status quo rather than upset it" (Pennycook, 2000); as such, it is no longer feasible to treat the teaching of English as simply a mode to facilitating learners in procuring admission to social and economic power (Pennycook, 2000). Recognizing this lack of feasibility, it becomes the obligation of the educator to also recognize that they had the power to promote change when focusing on matters of struggle over diversities (Pennycook, 2000). Additionally, while Pennycook recognizes that classrooms are not in fact part of the outside world, context within them is "part of the world, both affected by what happens outside its walls and affecting what happens there" (Pennycook, 2000). When this recognition is made, then educators also have to recognize that classrooms are context for highly complex and social processes producing and changing identities (Pennycook, 2000). Additionally, due to the dominant cultural influence in the classroom, ESL classrooms can be characterized as sites of heteronormative power; nevertheless, education in social context has served throughout history as forums ideological change.

Correspondingly, O'Móchain (2006) relates his endeavors as a language instructor in an EFL classroom to produce classroom analysis of matters of gender and sexuality in an applicable and valuable way where unrestricted dialogues of sexuality are atypical. Because O'Móchain was teaching in a women's Christian based junior college in western Japan, the institutional context was heteronormative, women that may have been questioning their own sexuality had little to no access to resources in which to create their own articulate and assenting narrative of self (O'Móchain, 2006). Additional challenges lie in the Japanese perception of homosexuality as Western and, per Castro-Vazques and Kishi (2002) a "culture of silence (O'Móchain, 2006) was the general perception when considering issues of sexuality, so care had to be taken in order

25

to not incite incongruous of West versus East feeling within the classroom (O'Móchain, 2006).

Using local queer narratives and media as supplementary resources, students were able to

participate in dialogues that challenged representations of homosexuality as well as gender

systems as well as question ways of thinking about gender and sexuality (O'Móchain, 2006).

Furthermore, using local queer narratives provided out-of-class opportunities for narrative

research of participants similar to students in geographical and sociohistorical milieus as well as

providing students placed in institutional and regional contexts where issues of sexuality are

culturally silenced a mode of assertion for queer-identifying students (O'Móchain, 2006).

If "gender and sexuality are theoretically interconnected" (Remlinger, 2005) then gender

is influenced by both cultural ideas of "man" and "woman" and interaction between the two, then

sexuality is equally influenced by the same cultural ideas and interactions among homosexuals

within and homosexual context (Remlinger, 2005). Using cultural discourse analysis (CDC).

Remlinger considers gender ideologies in the classroom within a performative framework

(Remlinger, 2005). Using CDC, she assesses spoken and written text in the semantic and

pragmatic milieu, surveying the semantic and pragmatic use of language cross-textually to

establish what perceptions of gender and sexuality are exchanged throughout a university

community (Remlinger, 2005). In regard to gender, Remlinger found that male representations

are cultivated by their "behavior, intellect, and attitude" whereas female representations are

cultivated by their "sexuality and appearance" and the ideologies that are cultivated are linked

directly to beliefs about men and women's sexual practices , all of which are continually

renegotiated among students and individual belief (Remlinger, 2005). Further, Remlinger finds

that linguistic features such as silence, reclamation, extended development, and dysphemism are

used by students to either construct or defy notions of gender and sexuality, and dogmas of

gender and sexuality are symbiotic and fluid even within an androcentric and heterosexual norm, thus contributing to the heteronormative notions of sexuality mainly practiced by elite members of society- "how students believe, value and practice gender in their talk directly connects to how they believe, value and practice sexuality" (Remlinger, 2005).

In her Master's Thesis, Giovanini (2008)uses thematic analysis to examine questions of whether or not gay and lesbian instructors divulge their sexuality in the classroom using premises of not applicable, out of the classroom expose, students just know, and expose in the classroom. Additionally, when instructors do expose their sexuality, what is the motivation for doing so (does fear and "holding back" (Giovanini, 2008) influence this motivation), and how do instructors nurture diversity in sexual orientation in the classroom (i.e. paradox of diversity, passing, mentoring and identity over sexuality (Giovanini, 2008)). Based on the philosophy that communication is restricted to cultural norms, LGBT member are regularly marginalized in a cultural context but in positions of power within the classroom (Giovanini, 2008). As such, Giovanini interviews ten female instructors and ten gay instructors form southwestern universities. Thematic analysis from the transcribed interviews show that gay/lesbian instructors disclosed five motivations for not revealing their sexuality- irrelevance, avoidance, is not cogitated in the interest of teaching, instructor desire to withhold personal information form students, and negative history in disclosing sexuality for instructors (Giovanini, 2008). Fears of disclosure include instructor's concern students would feel they were promoting political agenda, backlash form students, community, and university (Giovanini, 2008). Further, while gay and lesbian instructors explicated the importance of fostering diversity within the classroom, they did not do so in regard to sexuality (Giovanini, 2008). A recurring theme for interviewees in the study related to identity, specifically that sexual orientation is part of who the instructor is but

not definitive of the instructor; therefore, Giovanini finds that gay and lesbian instructors may perform their identity without disclosing sexuality, thus allowing the dominant culture to preserve hegemony of the classroom communication (Giovanini, 2008).

Per Dumas, LINC (Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada, established in 1992) started to assist in the unification of adult immigrants and refugees into the "Canadian way of life" (Dumas, 2010). As such, The Department of Citizenship and Immigration Canada directs English language programs to support newcomers advance citizenship erudition to become contributing constituents of Canadian society (Dumas, 2010). Therefore, LINC instructors are expected to facilitate knowledge and proficiencies needed to interrelate in Canada's diverse atmosphere as well as offer language education (Dumas, 2010). While much is left open the interpretation of the instructor or institution in regard to the Canada's diversity, the progressively discernible LGBT presence in Canada would be reflective in such diversity, especially considering that between 2001-2006 self-reporting same-sex couples increased by five times the rate of their heterosexual counterparts (Dumas, 2010). Additionally, same-sex marriage was legalized in Canada in 2005, deeming its inclusion into the LINC mandate's criteria for teaching educated and active citizenship (Dumas, 2010). Drawing on previous studies by Derwing and Thompson, Dumas notes that instructors feel as though they lack appropriate resources and direction when considering how to teach Canadian culture and values, particularly in the area of sexual diversity (Derwing & Thompson, 2005). Moreover, because ESL classrooms are areas of power relationships, students in ESL classrooms are already relegated based on their culture and language and even more so if they self-identify as LGBT (Dumas, 2010). Thus, the questions of if instructors deem the analysis of sexual diversity within their scope, do instructors have needed resources or the ability to obtain them, what is the pedagogical implication of avoiding dialogues

on sexual diversity, and how to address the issue with language learners was examined by Dumas using methodology that incorporated a scalar survey questionnaire and semi-structured interviews of LINC instructor participants from the Alberta Teachers of English as a Second Language (ATESL) resulting in 32 valid survey responses and 7 transcribed and analyzed interviews (Dumas, 2010). Additionally, six textbook series and nine individual textbooks extending from basic level to English for Academic Purposes were examined for family relationships, marriage, and romantic relationships through pictorial and textual depictions (Dumas, 2010). The resulting data indicated an absence of LGBT related educational material and a general unwillingness to introduce LGBT rights into the curriculum out of fear of offending religious and ethnic sensitivities, while the presence of other controversial subjects such as abortion and euthanasia were not excluded in the textbooks or curriculum. Based on the results, Dumas states "if whiteness is the racial norm of North America and English the linguistic norm, heteronormativity is the sexual norm" expunging LGBT identities (Dumas, 2010). Because being LGBT is not restricted to a particular race of religion, LGBT learners should be a concern for LINC teachers as much as heterosexual learners entering Canada from countries that have institutionalized homophobia in the legal and cultural structure (Dumas, 2010). Dumas further explicates this concerns-

> Being heterosexual or queer is not comparable to a person's politics or religion, which are ideas and beliefs that are tied to an ethical or moral view of the world. Unlike the choice to undergo an abortion or euthanasia, sexuality is more analogous to "race" or ethnicity- it is not a matter of choice, but it does form part of one's identity. (Dumas, 2010)

Further, Dumas' research indicated that instructors believed that their students were more culturally conservative and, thus, less comfortable discussing issues of sexuality, a point that Dumas argues "if the narrative of anticipated intolerance in the classroom is accepted, one might consider how a gay student might feel in such an environment, especially a newcomer from a country where same-sex activities have been criminalized" (Dumas, 2010). To address this, Dumas indicates that an inclusive environment facilitation identity consideration as well as a queer framework of identity that questions heteronormativity and focuses on sexual preference as choice and sexual orientation as innate would result in increased motivation for acquiring the target language (Dumas, 2010). Examples of such an attempt would include avoiding traditional depictions of husband and wife and the incorporation of queer narratives to provoke open-ended discussion about Canadian marital norms (Dumas, 2010). Additionally, because, as Dumas states "there is no monolithic queer community", instructors are not required to be experts on the subject, and should, instead, approach the topic as per Nelson (1999) in a way that "de-emphasizes moral values while validating individual learner experience and supporting learner autonomy" through reframing, deconstruction, and reinforcement throughout the curriculum (Dumas, 2010). For example, related vocabulary can be taught in the context of appropriate and inappropriate idioms as well as neutral and pejorative terminology, especially if incorporated through textbooks and other supplementary material and adequately preparing teachers to teach queer topics through training in related TESL programs (Dumas, 2010). Concluding this study, Dumas states that the problem is in essence an invisibility factor, thus indicating a consensus of unimportance (Dumas, 2010)

Considering the ESL classroom as a powerful political forum, presupposition of L2 learners as intolerant coupled by the lack of reconciliation of instructor/homosexual facets of

ESL educators' identity allows a heteronormative system to ignore any areas of homosexuality in

second language or second culture acquisition, thus further facilitating misconceptions of

diversity and identity construction. If language correlates to beliefs and practices of sexuality,

then curriculum designed to address LGBT topics from a third person perspective provides both

a forum for greater understanding of the target culture as well as motivation in language learning.

Methodology

The research for this study is qualitative in nature, consists of phenomenologically based interviews, and is influenced by Irving Seidman's *Interviewing as Qualitative Research: A Guide for Researchers in Education and the Social Sciences*. The physical setting for interviews was a predetermined location that was private and convenient to the participant (i.e. the participant's home, a vacant conference room on campus, etc…). Four female participants that were native to and currently living in the southern region of the United States and self-identify as lesbian were selected from a pool that was built through networking with the local PFLAG groups and surrounding "gay-friendly" churches and organizations active in gay rights issues. From this pool, applicants were categorized by generation: born before 1946, born between 1947 and 1960, born between 1961 and 1979, and born between 1980 and 1993. One participant per generational category was selected for data collection and analysis for a total of four participants.

The data collection method was based on interviews of the selected participants per IRB guidelines. Interviews took place as influenced by Seidman. (2006) throughout the months of January and February of 2012. These sequences are explicated as following:

- Sequence 1: Participant's Life History- the participants will self-establish their individual context telling their personal life story as a Southern lesbian.

- Sequence 2: Contextual Detailing- the participants will construct the events of the previous interview in detail.

- Sequence 3: Self Reflection- the participants will explore the events explicated in previous interviews and impart meaning to these events/actions.

Open-ended interview questions were predetermined and based on the above three sequences; participants were asked the questions and at times, prompted for further explication of their answers. When questions were not fully understood by participants, the questions were rephrased for better understanding. Additionally, the specific interview questions are listed in the corresponding appendix. The following research queries are addressed:

1. Assuming that identity is multifaceted, how are these facets categorized and layered for lesbians in and native to the Southern Region of the United States?

    a. Does language communicate sexuality?

    b. How do social constructions affect language practices and transmissions

2. What are the connective parallels and variances between gender, sexuality, and language use cross-generationally? Is there a progression or regression of marked language use?

3. How is the public and private domain defined by lesbians, and how do lesbians consciously vary their language practices and transmissions between the two, if any?

The interviews were digitally recorded, transcribed, and reduced inductively based on correlations with the subject being studied and from which profiles of each participant could be constructed (Seidman, 2006). Using thematic analysis as the methodology, proto-themes were identified, categorized, and examined for meaning and relationship to the foundational queries listed above. Once data was assigned to the individual proto-themes, they were re-contextualized for meaning. The following chart explicates specific proto-themes that emerged.

Table 2: Methodological Proto-Themes

Queries	Proto-Themes
Query1	• Language does in fact communicate sexuality; however, non-linguistic factors are either as important of more important that linguistic factors in identification and communication of sexuality for lesbians native to the Southern region of the United States. • There is significant variation in self-explicated identity construction in regard regional identity.
Query 2	• There is a cross-generational variation among lexical items. • There is a marked regression in perceived gender bias. • There is a marked progression in perceived bias based on sexual orientation. • Code switching is a common cross-generational phenomenon.
Query 3	• Public domain versus private domain varies cross-generationally.

Because of the qualitative nature of data collection that is predominately narrative, there are potential challenges to this study. First, as Kulick (2000) discusses, I do not wish to assume that lesbian language is exclusive as language itself is not restricted to identity nor identity restricted to language; nevertheless, because this study heavily weighs construction of identity based on social constraints that do not necessarily favor or validate a homosexual perspective and does not offer a contextual comparison from the heterosexual perception, it would be easy to presuppose that such an exclusive nature exist. Therefore, explication and intertextual references will be necessary.

Second, because there is no participant observation, there is no discourse analysis, thus, no mapping of interdiscursive configuration; however, because this research is narrative in nature and focuses on self-identification and perception, such an in-depth methodology would skew the purpose of this research and fall outside the scope of this study and is consequently unnecessary.

Third, because of the phenomenological nature of the methodology, the function of the interviewer and interviewee are affirmed. As such, the concern of reliability, validity, and intersubjectivity are ever-present. Additionally, because there are multiple participants being interviewed, "common sense" intersubjectivity of response can be evaluated among participant's

rejoinder. Since the practice of putting experience into language establishes meaning, then validity is reflected.

Finally, as noted by Dyson and Genishi (2005), one obstacle facing researchers is that, "we [researchers] might also reflect on particular aspects of our selves that influence the lenses we look through". Even though I may share certain quadrants of the proverbial lens through which participants of this research may reflect, each individual's experience, narrative, and, thus, their identity is unique; therefore, as the interviewer and through personal reflection, I recognize that I share no claim in the narratives of the participants nor am I a stakeholder in any facets that construct the identity of the participants as doing so would infer a lack salience within a community that is as diverse as it is idiosyncratic.

Participant Profiles

The four self-identified lesbians native to and living in the regional South selected through networking with the local PFLAG groups and surrounding "gay-friendly" churches and organizations active in gay rights issues were categorized by generation: born before 1945, born between 1946 and 1965, born between 1966 and 1979, and born between 1980 and 1993. In this section, participants are presented to contextualize their experiences as Southern lesbians. :

Participant 21 (P21)

When P21was asked about the most influential people in her life, she described her mother as being intellectually influential because she encouraged her to read, her father as influential toward her social development, and her paternal grandfather (a minister in a Christian denomination) because he "taught me to interpret things in the Bible for ourselves and how to read it and look at it for ourselves". Some of P21's earliest memories included the death of her maternal grandfather, and she described her childhood and school day relationships as minimal because she was not popular and felt a significant social difference from classmates, stating that she would not conform to what she perceived as the social norm- "I wouldn't conform to what everybody else thought - didn't look at things the same way - I didn't listen to the same sound of music - I didn't dress the way they dressed - I didn't talk about the same people they talked about so." At age 14-15 years, P21 states that she internally acknowledged her homosexuality based on her attraction to other girls and women, and at first thought she was bisexual. She began coming out as bisexual her senior year in high school; however, she now identifies as

lesbian, and is out to her entire family. Further, P21 indicates that she began college after

graduating from high school but has not completed college for financial reasons.

Table 3; Participant Profile- P21

Year of Birth	1990	
Place of Birth	Mississippi	
Length of Regional Affiliation	Life-Long Resident of Mississippi	
Age	21	
Primary and Secondary Educational Background	Private, Christian-Based School	High School Diploma Received
Post-Secondary Educational Background	Completed Some College; Currently Not in Attendance	Regional College No Degrees Received
Race	Caucasian	
Native Language	English	Speaker of SAE Dialect
Other Language Competency	None	
Familial Structure	Middle Child; No Children	1-Sister; 1-Brother
Age of Acknowledgement of Homosexuality	14-15 Years Old	
Status of Social/Professional Acknowledgement of Homosexuality	Socially "Out" Professionally "In"	
Employment	Works Full Time	Hospitality

Participant 37 (P37)

When P37 was asked about the most influential people in her life, she describes her parents first,

stating she felt a constant need to please them, her uncle because he his company was enjoyable,

followed by her coaches because she liked playing sports. Some of P37's earliest memories

include getting a doll for her third birthday, which she did not like because she preferred the

trucks her brother had previously gotten for his birthday, the family dog, and playing on the

playground in Kindergarten. P37 states that most of her childhood friends were boys.

Table 4: Participant Profile- P37

Year of Birth	**1975**	
Place of Birth	Mississippi	
Length of Regional Affiliation	Life-Long Resident of Mississippi	
Age	37	
Primary and Secondary Educational Background	Private, Christian Based School	High School Diploma Received
Post-Secondary Educational Background	College Graduate	Bachelor's Degree Received from Regional College
Race	Caucasian	
Native Language	English	Speaker of SAE Dialect
Other Language Competency	None	
Familial Structure	Middle Child; Has Children	1-Sister 1-Brother 3-Children
Age of Acknowledgement of Homosexuality	Approximately Age 21	
Status of Social/Professional Acknowledgement of Homosexuality	Socially "Out" Professionally "In"	
Employment	Works Full Time	Medical Field

When describing childhood and school day relationships, she states "I was always different. I was a different child.", and further indicated she was not feminine and preferred activities traditionally considered male (i.e. football, bikes). Despite the gender deviance, she describes family relationships as good, stating that her mother was the caretaker and she felt loved by her family and had a strong desire to be with her father. While stating she did not have many friends in school and that she did not fit into the social norms, she felt the close relationships she had were adequate- "I defiantly knew I was the odd ball but I wasn't a sad child, ya know."

Approximately age 15 she began dating the father of her children, became pregnant and married approximately age 18. She subsequently had other children while attempting to maintain a

marriage, rear her first child, and attend college. Due to abusive circumstances within the

marriage, she divorced. In her own words, P37 states:

> "I realized that - That when I'd tuck the babies in at night, you know – there wouldn't be
>
> anybody to help me take care of em 'cept me, you know – it was goin to be all on me –
>
> I couldn't depend on their daddy to help take care of em – I couldn't depend on anybody
>
> but my own self to make sure that they were okay – so that kinda drove me."

Along the same timeline, P37 noted that the marriage began to fall apart; she began an intimate

relationship with a lesbian friend and divorced her husband.

> "And it just – it was a slow steady progression that, you know – it wasn't about sex – it
>
> was just about love, you know – and bein a partner and a friend and – supportin a person,
>
> you know – so – and even then - when I was with her for like six months to a year or
>
> whatever – I still didn't – I wasn't convinced I was gay – I just thought that I loved her,
>
> you know."

Since then, P37 began bringing her partner home to meet her family and states she is out to her

family, although a conversation has never taken place in which she has had to explicate her

sexuality- "They just know from bein my family – bein around, you know." While she also states

that she believes co-workers know her sexuality, she does not indicate it in the work environment

due to sensitivity and fear of making others uncomfortable.

Participant 48 (P48)

Table 5: Participant Profile- P48

Year of Birth	1964

Place of Birth	Tennessee	
Length of Regional Affiliation	Life Long Resident of the Regional South	
Age	48	
Primary and Secondary Educational Background	Lower Elementary School- Christian Based Private School Upper Elementary and Secondary School- Public	
Post-Secondary Educational Background	College Graduate	Bachelor Degree from Regional University; Master's Degree from non- Regional University
Race	Caucasian	
Native Language	English	Speaker of the SAE Dialect
Other Language Competency	None	
Familial Structure	Youngest Child Has minor Step-Child	1-Sister 1-Step Child
Age of Acknowledgement of Homosexuality	Approximately 12-Years Old	
Status of Social/Professional Acknowledgement of Homosexuality	Socially "Out" Professionally "Out"	
Employment	Works Full Time	Corporate Management

When P48 was asked about the most influential people in her life, she described her

father and paternal aunt based on their representative role in the family and her teachers because

of their acceptance and academic expectations of her. Her earliest memories included playing

with blocks and being carried in a picnic basket by her father around age two. In lower

elementary school, she attended a private Christian based school that required girls to wear

dresses; because she preferred sports like football rather than feminine play, she was transferred

to public school by her parents when school administrators requested she not be re-enrolled

because of her and her father's insistence that she be allowed to wear long pants. When asked

about her childhood and school day relationships, she states that they were short-lived and that

she really only had two close friends of which she maintained contact. When describing her relationships, she states

"Well, I think some of them kind of realized I was gay and got uncomfortable with it – I think I probably backed off from some of them because of the same reason – like I would realize that I have like an attraction to them and basically get my ass kicked [indicating a fear of physical and/or psychological confrontation rather than a physical event]."

When asked when she acknowledged her homosexuality, she states

"Well if people are asking me when I came out and I say 1964 ((laughter)) [indicating the year of her birth] – so when I played imaginary friend games or whatever I was always the boy and I had a girlfriend and stuff like that – and it wasn't like a transgender thing like I wanted to be a boy and I was a man trapped in a woman's body or anything like that-it was just that I wanted a girlfriend for some reason and I thought the only way I could have a girlfriend was to be a boy – so I pretended to be a boy whenever I was playing…by the time I was age 14 I knew I was attracted to girls and not boys – I didn't – really ever think it was wrong – it was just the way it was for me and I don't know why I never thought about it bein wrong."

While P48 is out within her family, socially, and professionally, she does state that there is uncertainty in addressing the topic with her stepdaughter (a biological child of her partners from a previous heterosexual relationship) who is still young.

Participant 69 (P69)

Table 6: Participant Profile- P69

Year of Birth	1943

Place of Birth	Mississippi	
Length of Regional Affiliation	Life Long Resident	
Age	69	
Primary and Secondary Educational Background	Primary and Secondary Public School Attendance (Note: Pre-Desegregation)	
Post-Secondary Educational Background	Completed Few College Courses	No Post-Secondary Degrees Held
Race	Caucasian	
Native Language	English	Speaker of the SAE Dialect
Other Language Competency	None	
Familial Structure	Middle Child of Multiple Children	1-Brother 3-Sisters
Age of Acknowledgement of Homosexuality	30 Years of Age	
Status of Social/Professional Acknowledgement of Homosexuality	Socially "Out" Professionally "Out"	
Employment	Retired	Journalism

When P69 was asked about the most influential people in her life she answers very simply, her mother "casue when I came out to her she said you're still my daughter"; P69 additionally describes her mother as a Biblical scholar and her family political views as liberal. When asked about childhood and school day relationships, she states "It was wonderful – I didn't have any problems with anything, elementary school was fine – junior high was fine and then high school". However, throughout the interview, she indicates until the age of thirty when she reconciled her homosexuality, she did have feelings of being different from others, feelings that diminished when she ultimately came out to her mother and family and found immediate acceptance. Additionally, while she considers herself to be an out lesbian (and was socially and professionally) she has strong feelings that sexuality should be kept discretely- "I mean, because it is a hard life – tryin to live a gay life in a straight world – but then again – like I said don't

flaunt it in front the heterosexual world – just be yourself but don't flaunt your sexuality in front everbody."

Results

Using predetermined, open-ended questions based on sequence of participants life history, sequence of contextual detailing, and sequence of self-reflection, participants were allowed to construct their personal narrative relevant to the subject matter. At times, participants were prompted to further explicate unclear answers, and questions were reworded for understanding based on participant need. Based on their answers and the thematic analysis of their responses, relevant proto-themes were identified and recontextualised for the final results presented as follows. It is notable that for the purpose of examining these results, a distinction is made between linguist use and non-linguistic behaviors (i.e. semiotic).

Query 1: Identity Implications for Lesbians Native to the

Southern Region of the United States

Assuming that identity is multifaceted and fluid as represented by the previous mentioned research on Southern identity, sexual identity, gender identity, and linguistic identity (Thompson, 2007; Horowitz&Newcomb, 2001; Cameron, 2005; Moonwoman-Baird, 2000) the relevant question becomes how are these facets categorized and layered for lesbians in and native to the Southern region of the United States? Specifically, does language communicate sexuality, and how do social constructions affect language practices and transmissions. In an endeavor to satisfy this query, each participant's identity will be explored in turn before discussing commonalities and differences across participants.

When asked about their self-identified characterizations of individual identity, different responses were given in regard to participant's sexuality and regional identification. First, when asked how she described her personal identity, P21 included abstract concepts such as "social", and "aware" as well as "outwardly gay". Further explicating this she states that she feels very aware of the social dynamic surrounding her and is sensitive to heterosexual women as she believes they perceive her as a threat to their sexuality since she senses they will misinterpret politeness as an attempt for intimacy. Additionally, because of her awareness, she avoids what others would perceive as promoting or overtly representing a pro-lesbian social political agenda which is a space that lies outside the heteronormative comfort zone calls into question homosexuality as a cultural taboo. She acknowledges that the stereotypical "Southern Belle" ideal has never been an option for her and experience and perspective have pushed her to defy those social limits, has made her more psychologically independent in realizing that individual internal satisfaction was more important than fitting into and satisfying a social norm and gaining social acceptance. She further states that reconciling her homosexuality has made her more tolerant of other beliefs and how she deals with beliefs that differ from her own.

> "I think it's [the reconciliation of her homosexuality] made me become a little bit more careful in social situations because I was a little more blunt in the way that I used to be – I was a little more in your face with what I thought and everything – and – now I know that certain things are not as big a deal as I would make them out to be and not everything is worth fighting – but certain things are worth making people understand and knowing you can't be in people's face to make them understand is what I've learned from that."

In regard to regional identity, P21 affirms that she does not feel that her regional affiliation contributes to her personal identity because she validates the stigmatization that has been externally placed on the regional South.

> "Given that I don't think the way most southerners think…not really because southern has become in my mind - relating to bible belters – like the lack of understanding here – close mindedness is always associated with southern…I was born in the South but I don't think like I live here – I don't think the way that I feel like everyone surrounding me thinks."

Additionally, P21 also does not consider her homosexuality to be central to her identity despite the fact that is has altered her sensitivity levels- "I don't consider that [being lesbian] to be the one thing that – if I were straight I'd be a completely different person – I don't think that…I think I would still think the way that I do right now, - but it has changed sensitivity levels in me – it changed socially – communication wise has changed the way I view people."

Contrary to P21, P37 feels that her regional identity is pertinent to her personal identity, stating that her southerness results in her lack of knowledge in academic areas of art and literature since the regional perspective valued more practical knowledge of farming and other culturally related activities that are reflected in a lack of sophisticated resources such as theaters, book stores, etc…available. In her own words, "I see knowin how to take your toilet out of the floor and put another wax ring down – that's more useful you know – than who did Water Lilies." When asked the extent, if any, being a lesbian affected her identity, she states

> "I don't think it affects it that much – I still think I am who I am and just the fact that I', homosexual is just part of it – um – I think I'd still be me even if I'm a homosexual, you

46

know – that I'd still like all the same things. I'd still behave the same way, you now? I

mean – I didn't like being in a marriage because I was gay and I think the only time being

a homosexual has given me a struggle with it – that being the parent part, ya know… as

far as my personal identity – I don't think that being a homosexual affects my personal

identity"

While P37 does not directly link being a lesbian to her personal identity, she does indicate that it

causes certain hardships such as fear of losing her job and concern over her children facing

discrimination based on her sexuality. When asked how she does reflect on her identity, P37

uses specific character traits and categories such as "mom", "works real hard", "struggles

financially", "sense of humor", "likes to fix things and builds things", as well as indicating a

struggle to maintain balance between a demanding professional life and a social life (social in the

sense of making time to enjoy life).

"I think that I see myself as growing – as a person as time goes by – I was young and

dumb a first ya know – like I was married and had three babies and then figuring out who

I was with my first relationship and then really evolving as a person and human – an not a

mom – but acts – for now – and then with the relationship I have now [lesbian

relationship] just wanting to enjoy life more."

Taking a different perspective, P48 describes herself as "sports lover", "animal lover",

and a "southern lesbian" while further indicating that being southern and being lesbian both

contribute to her identity, but being lesbian has a stronger influence on her identity construction

than being southern. Specifically, she state,

"well, I think all things equal – I mean – it would be the fact I was gay because – I mean – when I'm sitting in a group of people or a business meeting or whatever – people are all from - ya know – all over the country and so there may be people there that are southern, there may be people that are northern, there may be people that are international or west coast-ies – but the fact that I'm gay distinguishes me from them in some way because even if we're sittin there and we were all from the south – I'm still different form them because I'm gay and they're not – I mean - assuming that they are not – assuming they're all heterosexual – so I do – I mean – I guess I would say that being gay makes me who I am more than bein southern because like I said- I'd be gay regardless of where I was born."

P48 also states that the southern facet is mostly limited to her hobbies, community interest in agriculture that is closely associated with the South, and mannerism and limited personality traits while in other ways she feels that being a southerner affects her ability to fully express herself as a lesbian.

Somewhat contrary to P21, P37, and P48 is the perspective of P69. When asked how she reflects on her personal identity, she states she is someone who has "never met a stranger and it dudn't care who it is…I mean anybody – don't matter who it is – can be the queen [referring to the colloq. and not the common slang term for gay men]". She further explicates that her identity is rooted in her professed southern identity, that which perceives southerners as being genuinely friendly- "friendly, outgoin – and they really mean it when they say how you doin – they really want to know".

Stating "I consider myself a southern and a lesbian – a southern lesbian" she further acknowledges that she believes that both her regional roots and her sexuality are key to her identity and acknowledges that she feels she is a stronger person due to the interrelationship of the two and the recognized circumstance that a homosexual life in the South is harder for gays and lesbians because of the strong conservative and evangelical environment. Interestingly, P69 views southern lesbians as more forceful in nature because of the heteronormative environment even when she believes sexuality is unknown:

P69: "well I think sometimes it would have to be [lesbians would have to be more forceful in nature] because of who we are – even though most people don't know that we're lesbians

Interviewer: Because of who we are in the South specifically?

P69: yeah, exactly.

She additionally disagrees with the stigma place on southern culture stating "so it's like the pot callin the kettle black a lot of the time."

While all four participants acknowledge the stigmatization placed on the regional South by the rest of the United States, only P21 excludes it from her personal identity construction. Other participants found it to be at least a contributory facet (P37 and P48) if not an equivalent facet (P69) to the constructions. While P21's exclusion is based on her perceived validity of the stigma, other participants dismiss the stigma primarily as irrelevant to Southern culture ; in other words, external perceptions of what it means to be southern does not influence personal definitions for the native participants interviewed. Additionally, unlike P21, P48, and P69 who perceive their lesbian identity as at least a contributory facet (P21), an equivalent facet (P69), or

the overriding facet (P48), P37 does not regard her lesbianism as a truly significant construction in her identity, though she does acknowledge that reconciling her homosexuality has helped facilitate her personal growth and identity construction. While all participants acknowledge a perception of heightened difficulty in being both lesbian and southern, P21, P48, and P69 categorize this as a positive rather than negative result, responding that they feel the social context made them psychologically stronger as individuals and more tolerant and sensitive to those they perceive as different (i.e. race, religion, beliefs, etc…).

Based on this analysis, an important issue arises in regard to P21's disassociation from the cultural South. Because the disassociation is directly correlated by P21, then one can question whether disassociation in and of itself actively detaches from identity within personal identity construction; that is, dissociation from the of Southern culture is really only a reversed psychological reaction based on stigmatization and subjectivity rather than a detachment from the culture itself as both the culture and its and its negative connotations contribute to the construction of P21's self-described identity. To think of identity in these terms is to acknowledge that identity is not always constructed based on what the individual perceives herself to be but can be equally constructed by what she perceives herself not to be even if such a circumstance is unacknowledged by the individual, such as the case for P21.

To further complicate matters is the issue of whether or not language communicates sexuality and how social construction effect such communications or lack of communications in practice and transmission. To explain this, one must begin with self-categorization, i.e lesbian, gay, queer, etc… When asked how she prefers to identify herself, P21 stated that she most commonly used the term "lesbian" only because it was the "tag" she associated with female homosexuality, while P37 was indifferent to "lesbian" or "gay", P48 felt that most labels were

acceptable depending on the context of the communication ("lesbian" in a professional context, "gay" in a casual context, and "queer" in a joking context and only with other homosexuals), and P69 was indifferent to "gay", "lesbian", "or "funny" (a term that is traditionally derogatory and used by older generations). Additionally, all participants acknowledged a distinct lexicon unique to lesbians (but not necessarily detached from the lexicon of gay men). Examples of this lexicon follow.

Table 7:Southern American English Lesbian Lexicon

Term or Expression	Meaning and/or Context	Participant Usage
LUG	Lesbian Until Graduation- A woman that experiments with homosexuality in college but goes on to live a heterosexual life after college.	P21
Dyke	Lesbian Typically considered derogatory if used by a heterosexual. Generally refers to a non-feminine lesbian in outward appearance or forceful personality traits.	P21, P37, P48, P69
Fag Hag	Refers to a lesbian that maintains a heterosexual relationship in order to conform to the heterosexual norm. *Context and definitions of this term may vary.*	P21
Lipstick	A feminine lesbian	P21
Fence Straddler	A lesbian that fluctuates along the gender spectrum (one day she may be masculine and others feminine); similar to Baby Dyke.	P21
Family	Gay and lesbian community.	P37, P48, P69
Sister	Used to refer to another lesbian.	P21
Spaghetti Lesbian	A woman that views herself to be heterosexual until her first homosexual experience. It is often crudely stated in the context of "straight until wet". *Typically a spaghetti lesbian will continue with a heterosexual life style and occasionally have homosexual encounters. Spaghetti lesbians do not identify as bi-sexuals.*	P37, P48
Butches	Masculine lesbian	P21
Friends of Dorothy	Communal term for gays and lesbians.	P21
Roommate	When used in the lesbian context it refers to a life partner; the term is typically used in a mixed heterosexual/homosexual environment to refer to lesbians or gays that are not "out".	P21

Baby Dyke	Similar to the "fence straddle" in that it refers to a lesbian that has just "come out" or is in the process of "coming out". *This typically also refers to the new lesbian's transition in establishing a new identity and experimentation of masculine and feminine roles. It can be considered derogatory when used by lesbians referring to other lesbians, but is generally dependent on context.*	P21, P37, P48, P69
Switch Hitter	Term used by lesbians to refer to bisexual women in the context of "swings both ways".	P37
Mary	Reference to a gay man.	P48
Tweener	A lesbian that does not assume either extreme end of the gender spectrum.	P48
Queens/Fairies	Reference to a gay man. *Derogatory nature is context specific.*	P69

When asked if language is used to communicate their sexuality, all participants admit to using lexical items to communicate sexuality with other lesbians or to transfer knowledge of sexuality to women that they believe may be homosexual. By employing terms such as "Friends of Dorothy" (i.e. She is a friend of Dorothy.) into general conversation, participants state they can gather information about the receiver's sexuality based on their response to the term. In other words, using such terms acts as code for determining the conversational context since heterosexuals would be less likely to recognize lesbian-specific lexical items. Conversely, this same type of code switching may be used when lesbians are placed in a context of *mixed company* and they do not wish to out themselves or other lesbians or call attention to their sexuality. In such an instance, lesbians would use lesbian-specific lexical items to communicate but not privy heterosexuals to their orientation or the actual context and meaning of their statements. Because lesbians expect other lesbians to interpret lesbian-specific lexical items differently than heterosexuals, employment of and code switching in those specific items allow lesbians to index the social group and establish a contextual base for communication.

Interestingly, while language does play a role in inter-lesbian identification, it is not a marked significant role as each lesbian noted multiple non-linguistic factors in utilizing what is commonly referred to as *gaydar*, though they admit not all *gaydars* are equally calibrated. When attempting to determine if a woman is a lesbian, participants concedes that jewelry (specifically the display of rainbows or other lesbian symbols), mannerisms, eye contact (noted specifically by P37, P48, and P69), "the dyke nod" (noted by P37 and P48), nail length (as P48 notes, lesbians tend to wear short nails), dress, gaze, interest/hobbies, and levels of confidence (which P48 notes tend to be higher for lesbians than heterosexual women in general and without distinction to regional affiliation). Of the most significant of these is the issue of eye contact. While P34, P48, and P69 all noted its meaningfulness, none of the three could truly clarify its distinction from heterosexual eye contact; in short, lesbian eye contact is more a window to a feeling or an instinct than a physical acclimation. Similarly, "dyke nods", which tend to be very subtle nods of the head, serve as passing affirmations for lesbians once the initial presumption of shared orientation is established through other non-verbal ques.

Query 2: Cross-Generational Connection of Gender, Sexuality, and Language

Building on the identity implications for lesbians native to the Southern region of the United States, issues of connective parallels and variances between gender, sexuality, and language as well as the progression and regression of marked language use become apparent cross generationally. Interestingly, there are specific differences in perspective between P21/37 and P48/69 in areas of gender and sexuality. Additionally, there are marked variations in lesbian-specific lexical items listed in *Table 7*. Specifically, P37and P48 report similar frequency of use in the lexical samples (quantified as 5 and 6 lexical items used in their communication respectfully); P69 reported less use of lesbian- specific lexical items (3 totals).

Perhaps what is even more significant than less use by P69 is the marked increased usage

reported by P21 totaling 10. Additionally, P21 reported 7 lexical items not shared by the other

participants (i.e. "LUG", "Roommate", "Fence Straddler"), and she reported use of a different

communal term for lesbian than the other participants ("Sister" over "Family"). While the data

does not precisely reflect complete distinction between P21's lexical items and those of P37,

P48, and P69 in that there is no evidence that the other participants have never heard or never use

P21's identified terms, it does lead to a conclusion that there is a cross-generational

differentiation of lesbian-specific lexical items for the participants that correlates (though not

conclusively with the limited scope of this research) the marked progression of perceived bias

based on sexual orientation. This, however, does not mean that the limited use by P69 correlates

a specific regression of perceived bias based on sexual orientation since P69's social dynamic

differs; in other words, since P69 is retired and no longer experiences similar social or economic

dynamics as P21, a comparison between the two cannot be made within this framework.

While both P21 and P37 discuss fears based on sexual orientation discrimination, P48

and P69 relate similar feelings throughout their careers based on gender discrimination rather

than sexuality. First, P21, states that while she feels homosexuality is becoming increasingly

less taboo, she is not out at work because she is afraid of making others uncomfortable.

> "I am careful about it because anytime I'm out [referring to being in the public domain]
>
> I'm at work usually and so I don't think even if I was straight that's the place to start
>
> trying to pick to guys or girls…so I really don't outwardly shove it in people's faces –
>
> like I said I don't-"

P37 has a similar sentiment: "…and also work – that might be a reason I don't want to discuss it at work is because I'm maybe fearful of losing my job because of my homosexuality."

Contrary to P21 and P37, P48 and P69 retort hurdles of gender being more prevalent than issues of sexuality. According to P48:

Well, I work in a men's field and I've always had to compete there but, well – I think being gay kind of gave me a leg up on that because I wasn't your average mousey little woman that had to run home ad pick the kids up and cook dinner for her husband and stuff like that – when I needed to work late I could because I didn't have that conventional family and I was with somebody earlier on in my life that was very career driven to – so I kind of felt like I was supposed to be like that as well – I mean I think being gay honestly has helped me more than it's hurt me because it's kind of given me my outlook. – I mean I knew from a very young age that I wasn't going to grow up and get married and have some husband's income to rely on – that if I was going to make it I was going to have to make it on my own and my dad made this joke one time that he hoped I's have a good job because one day I was going to have to feed myself and that really stuck."

Similarly, when P69, a retired sports writer, was asked about bias, she states "it was a woman bias, it wasn't a gay bias – it was a woman bias in the sports world."

Additionally all participants admitted employing code switching as a means of structuring interaction through lesbian- specific lexical items.. As such, data indicates that fears of gender bias parallel between the older participants but vary from the younger participants since P21 and P37 did not indicate any fear of discrimination based on gender, while fears of

sexual orientation discrimination parallel between younger participants and vary for older members since P21 and P37 identified the concern and P48 and P69 did not. Therefore, data indicates a regressive trend in gender bias but a progressive trend in sexual orientation bias while language use tends to stay constant.

These results could lead to several hypotheses. First, as feminism gained momentum throughout history, more women entered professional positions, thus the political dynamic changed in regard to women. Since this political dynamic would have been directly experienced for P48 and P69 based on their age and place along that particular spectrum, they are more aware of the progressive sociological change than P21 and P37. Also, since homosexuality is becoming increasingly politicized (Bucholtz & Hall, 1997; Barrett, 1997; Moonwoman-Baird, 2000) P21 and P37 feel the current uncertainty of the political state of homosexuality manifested in their work environment, whereas, P48 is well established in her career and P69 is retired and does not have to worry about facing work-place discrimination.

Query 3: Differentiating the Public and Private Domain and

Linguistic Applications Between the Two

Foundational to Query 1 and 2 is the perception of public and private domains for lesbians, particularly how the public and private domains are defined and how lesbians consciously vary their language practices and transmissions between the two, if any. While there are some variations among participants, most participants describe work roles as public and domestic roles as generally private.

56

P21 defines her time with friends as part of her private domain even when they take place in public spaces. She responds by stating that "public is people that you don't know – that don't know you on a personal level." Similarly, P37 responds that she considers most of her life as private, stating that her private circles include her family and friends. She further states that certain aspects of her private life are restricted from even family and friends; for example, her relationship with her partner is private from her parents and other family members who know and do not discriminate against her based on her sexuality. Slightly varied from P21 and P37 is P48's representation of her public and private domains. While she primarily regards her home as private and anywhere outside the home as public, she acknowledges that friends and family entering her domestic domain constitute a "controlled public" though not as public a space as restaurants since those entering her private domain would do so by permission and have some level of intimacy in their relationship with her. She also regards any area outside her home and personal property as public space. Finally, in questioning P67 about her public versus her private domain, her response was unclear likely due to inability to fully grasp the concept even though it was rephrased for her; nevertheless, when given examples she was able to explicate that gay bars and gay restaurants were private spaces and further indicated that public spaces not geared to homosexuals were public. She further indicated there was a difference between the two, but could not really describe the difference. In her words

> "Yea it's different from a straight restaurant – from a gay restaurant – a gay bar or a gay facility of some type…I'm at ease in either one of em – it doesn't bother me which one I'm in - …Well yeah – your just more discreet at a straight restaurant – predominately like Chilies' or whatever the other one – Applebee's – something like that – ya just – it's

not so much acting as it is – you're just more discreet in a regular restaurant than you

would be in a gay restaurant."

What is interesting about P69's response that differentiates her response from P21, P37, and P48

is her concept of a "regular restaurant" and a "gay restaurant" indicating that she fully

distinguishes between the two based on a heteronormative perspective and a heteronormative

understanding of public space; similarly, P48 considers only areas of her home as private and

only when she is alone with her immediate family, while P21 and P37 feel that space within

public space can be classified as private depending on the relationship dynamic involved with

those in which they share the space. Per Query 1, variations in language use in the public space

would constitute discreetness, indexing, and code switching, whereas private space language use

would be freer, and all would be determined by the context and relationship dynamic between

the participant and communicative group.

Finding a Rainbow Median

Discussion, Interpretation, and Explanation of Research Findings

Throughout this study, I have stated three abstract thoughts that lead to my interest in this topic. First, at present I consider there to be little notable research that explores the relationship between gender identity and language when the context of discourse takes place among speakers that throughout history have been considered deviant rather than normative. Second, as I have previously stated, the United States is as diverse below the surface as it is at the surface for within each contextual framework lies another contextual framework with diversity encapsulating diversity, encapsulating diversity and so on. Third, I have argued that the Southern region of the United States serves as a model for the unique regional construction of American culture. Intrinsically, I have attempted to investigate how lesbian identities are constructed for women native to the Southern region of the United States, and how or to what degree, language is a quality of this construction. As such, the research presented evidences the following conclusions:

- While language does in fact communicate sexuality, non-linguistic factors are either equivalent to or more important than linguistic factors in identifying or communicating sexuality for lesbians native to the Southern region of the United States.
- There is significant variation in self-explicated identity construction in regard to regional identity.

- While there is cross-generational variation among lexical items, code-switching is a common cross-generational phenomenon.

- While there is a marked regression in perceived gender bias for the younger Southern lesbian categories, there is a marked progression of perceived bias based on sexual orientation for younger Southern lesbian categories.

- There is no general consensus for what constitutes a public versus a private domain for lesbians native to the Southern region of the United States.

Thus, these results leads me to question the relationship between identity, language, and sexuality in regard to the below surface realities for subjected groups within an affirmed stigmatized culture (Thompson, 2003).

If Southerners use language the way they do because they are Southern with common purposes, ideas of specific social structures, and in ways that vary from speaker to speaker (Johnstone, 2003), then it is reasonable that Southern American lesbians use language the way they do because they are Southern lesbians with similar common purposes, the same ideas of social structure, and in a way that varies from speaker to speaker, context to context With this in mind, the validation of a queer linguistics that considers language exclusive to identity must become suspect(Kulick, 2000).

Since code switching and the presence or absence of specific lexical items were the only constant among the Southern lesbians examined in this study, I first question if there is a true distinction between lesbian speech and any other speech produced by other subjected groups or heterosexuals. Considering that code switching is not a lesbian-specific phenomena, in fact linguist know it is commonly present among bilinguals or speakers that have experienced

language contact with multiple dialects, it is not plausible to consider this unique for Southern lesbians, at least until further comparative research between homosexual and heterosexual language variation within other stigmatized societies can be made. Also, the presence and absence of lesbian-specific lexical items cross-generationally indicates that the items function only as stylistic choices, and can thus be easily deduced to in-group slang rather than a real systematic lexical differentiation.

Further, if homosexuality can only arise in societies where it is recognizable (Horowitz & Newcomb, 2001), then how can lesbian presence be explained in a society in which lesbians, and specifically Southern lesbians, are both invisible and inaudible (Moonwoman-Baird, 1997)? While there is no clear-cut answer to this question, I believe the place to begin is with the function of homosexuality in identity construction.

It is generally accepted that lesbian identity is multifaceted (Moonwoman-Baird, 2000) and identity is an ongoing construction (Cameron, 2005; Block, 1997); it also goes without question that lesbian identity (as is all LGBT identity) is heavily politicized (Moonwoman-Baird, 2000). Therefore, Bucholtz and Hall (2004) present a valid premise to a queer framework basing sociolinguistic research of sexuality in the absence identity or power relations as inadequate. Nevertheless, Kulick (2000) presents an equally valid premise when stating that a sociolinguistic framework that ruminates gay and lesbian language as exclusive to identity problematic (i.e. a queer framework). When examining participant narratives, I find that one participant (P21) considers lesbianism as part of her identity construct but not central to it, one participant (P37) does not consider it relevant to her identity construct, one participant (P48) considers it central to her identity construct, and the final participant (P69) considers it equivalent to her constructed identity in relation to her regional identity. As such, P21 and P37's identity description parallels

Kulick's (2000) premise, and P48 and P69 parallel that of Bucholtz and Hall (2004), thus indicating that these participants demonstrate a notable regression from an identity framework based on power relations cross-generationally as well as reflecting the level of diversity found within the Southern lesbian community. Does this then mean that research on lesbian identity that accounts for power relations in light of the third wave of feminism has become so outdated that sociolinguistic research can begin to replace identity in study of gay and lesbian language with a study focused on a "language of desire" and its incorporation of motivation and fantasy (Kulick, 2000)? I think the most logical answer to this is no, not yet.

Bearing in mind the heavy politicization of homosexuality in the United States regarding issues such as the lack of federal protection for homosexuals, debate over the Defense of Marriage Act, and inconsistency in state laws pertaining to gay-marriage, gay adoption, or gay-anything, replacing gay language study with concepts of desire reeks with an air of political danger. Since the term "desire" in and of itself profoundly allude to feelings of "want" or "lust" and directly opposes ongoing and consistent arguments by the gay and lesbian community that homosexuality is not a choice, it edges heteronormative ideology within a sociolinguistic milieu regardless of whether Kulick (2000) meant such an interpretation or not. Further, because "a language of desire" incorporates the examination of unconscious motivation and fantasy (Kulick, 2000), it does not distinguish between sex/desire and sexuality, individual entities that are as polar as they are adjacent and not truly representative of the other as best explicated by P37 when describing her first lesbian relationship-

> "And it just – it was a slow steady progression that, you know – it wasn't about sex – it
> was just about love, you know – and bein a partner and a friend and – supportin a person,
> you know – so – and even then - when I was with her for like six months to a year or

whatever – I still didn't – I wasn't convinced I was gay – I just thought that I loved her,

you know."

In other words, a woman is not a lesbian because she wants to be a lesbian or doesn't want to be

a lesbian any more than a southerner is a southerner because she wants to be a southerner or

doesn't want to be a southerner; to put it in colloquial terms- *It is what it is.* Accordingly, such

an interpretation demonstrates a relevant application of an opposing view of power relationships

to gay and lesbian language study since it is the vary issue of power that gives the politicization

of homosexuality its momentum.

Taking this into consideration, finding a rainbow median as a basic modification within

this working dichotomy may be in order. Since frameworks from both Kulick (2000) and

Bucholtz and Hall (2004) can be legitimately applied to self-described identity representations by

the participants of this study, and since proto-themes that emerged based on participant response

demonstrate that non-linguistic factors play as much or more a part in the communication of

sexuality by Southern lesbians, a reformation to semiotic cultural research in lieu of exclusive

identity study in respect to gay and lesbian language is particularly germane (Kulick, 2000).

When considering lesbian language use within a stigmatized Southern context, one must

consider that Southern lesbians are not just subjected based on sexuality, but on regional

affiliation as well, hence they are subjected within a subjected society- in a sense, Southern

lesbians are at least one version of the other's-other. To then parallel these facing perspectives

the notion of replacing identity with "a language of desire" in gay and lesbian language study

must be revisited in respect to lesbian-specific lexical items since it is these items that are the

only truly unique aspect of Southern lesbian language use.

If my foregoing argument that Kulick's (2000) use of the term "desire" negatively contributes to the politicization of lesbian identity has any merit, then perhaps distancing gay and lesbian sociolinguistic study from a framework of a "language of desire" to a framework of a "language of acquired necessity" would better serve a reformation to semiotic cultural research in response to the politicization and subordination that results in the enforced invisibility and inaudibility of lesbians (Moonwoman-Baird, 1997) without inflating the significance of code-switching and lesbian-specific lexical items. Thus, by accepting the foundation that necessitates this limited uniqueness to Southern lesbian language use, the social construct, politicization, and power relation that affect the context are acknowledged without vitiating semiotic cultural research.

Finding a Second Rainbow Median

Discussion, Interpretation, and Explanation of SLA Application

So what? What does this all have to do with second language acquisition? Well, quite a lot actually. The threefold application is rooted in the belief that, generally speaking, ESL students enter a classroom with the purpose of not only acquiring English speaking skills but with the goal of acquiring a cultural competency that allows them to assimilate into the target culture.

First, because cultural views about homosexuality and LGBT rights/laws are globally inconsistent at best, issues of cultural sensitivity emerge; instructors charged with facilitating English language learning and teaching cultural competencies must walk a fine line between adequately preparing the student for a life in a new nation with a distinct culture from which they identify and not imposing negative feelings about the target culture on the learner or making the learner feel uncomfortable in the learning environment (Dumas, 2010; O'Móchain, 2006). English language learners do not enter the classroom with a "clean slate" (Pennycook, 2000); therefore, if student's attitudes, values, and traditions of gender associates their attitudes, values, and traditions of sexuality (Remlinger, 2005), emersion into a new culture that views gender and sexuality through a paradoxical lens causes a destabilization of personal identity for the student (Block, 1997). Further, if this paradoxical lens is complicated by heavy politicization of a controversial topic by members of the target culture, it stands to reason that such invariability

within the social structure of the target culture will have additional negative impacts on the learner.

Second, instructors typically know little about their students' lives before immersing into the target culture or about their lives during the emersion process; as such, instructors are not necessarily privy to the sexuality of their students or its effects (Dumas, 2010). Attempts to establish a queer speech community have been undertaken with the political purpose of categorizing LGBT's as a minority in American society (Barrett, 1997); however, this attempt does not reflect the diversity of the LGBT community (Barrett, 1997) as demonstrated by the participants in this study. Since social and linguistic meanings and variables in gay and lesbian lexicons are ambiguous, no one homosexual community can be identified from which to gather data (Zwickey, 1997). Therefore, English language learners that have been reduced by the target culture based on their paradoxical cultural and linguistic background are further deduced when they also identify as homosexual (Dumas, 2010). Further, add the additional circumstance of the learner entering a culture that is historically stigmatized as is the American South (Thompson, 2007), the learner is imposed with a triple reduction within the target culture; in short, the learner becomes the other's-other's-other.

Third, because the ESL classroom is a site of power relations (Pennycook, 2000), instructors that identify as LGBT find themselves in conflicting roles in which they are marginalized by society but in a position of power within the classroom (Giovanini, 2008). Nevertheless, gay and lesbian instructors that claim to believe in the importance of diversity and claim to attempt to foster those diversities do not do so in regard to homosexuality due to fears of backlash form students, the community, and educational institution (Giovanini, 2008). Thus,

LGBT English language instructors placed in positions of power are still marginalized by a heteronormative culture (Giovanini, 2008).

With this in mind, English language instructors have a difficult time finding a rainbow median between cultural sensitivity, fostering diversification, and managing elements of their personal identity while positively facilitating the reconstruction of the learner's identity. Because acquiring English language skills and integrating into a second culture allows learners to reconstruct their personal identity (Gordon, 2004; Pavlenko, 2001), instructors are subject to enforcing, even if subconsciously, a heteronormative linguistic and cultural learning framework. (Warriner, 2007) Students that enter American culture haven't lived American culture long enough to experience the complexities and diversities that it encapsulates (Barna, 2007); they may not fully understand the intricacies of regional affiliation or identification and how those constructs vary from region to region, group to group, and person to person as does that of the Southern American lesbian. Therefore, enforcing a heteronormative framework can not only give learners unrealistic impressions of American culture, it can negatively impact their development, especially if the learner is gay or lesbian and lacks resources and understanding of how their sexuality fits into their second culture.

As Pennycook (2000) states, "classrooms are sociopolitical spaces that exist in complex relationship to the world outside"; as such, educators have the ability to promote change (Pennycook, 2000) though it is a daunting responsibility to do so when there is danger of backlash from society, culture, government, educational institutions, and other educators due to the politicization of the change itself coupled with a lack of training and resources. As such, educators and their students would be better served with a didactic context that promotes

discussion and exploration into topics of sexuality (Dumas, 2010) such as O'Móchain (2006) and Dumas (2010) provide.

Because O'Móchain used third person narratives as a basis for non-threatening discussion and questioning of sexuality, he was able to provide the learners with a forum for questioning social and cultural stereotypes in a nonthreatening way. Similarly, Dumas (2010) indorses the use of open-ended discussion questions on homosexuality so to offer an environment in which learners can express and challenge their culturally acquired beliefs about gays and lesbians. Additionally, research by both Dumas (2010) and Warriner (2000) note the importance of reassessing textbooks used in ESL classrooms at the local level (Gordon, 2004) to meet the diverse needs of instructors and institution, Dumas (2010) specifically noting a need for the presentation of homosexuality as a neutral norm (Dumas, 2010). While not enough conclusive research exists on the success of this approach, O'Móchain's results are at least promising for the time being.

Conclusion

In this study I have attempted to investigate how lesbian identities are constructed for women native to the Southern region of the United States and apply those finding to the goal of acquiring cultural competency that allows English language learners to assimilate into the second culture. My goal was not to produce a study that is conclusive as it merely scratches the surface of the topic at hand; instead, I hope this study offers a more inclusive delineation of language, sexuality, and identity from which future research may build.

I confess that when beginning this research, I attempted to do so without presupposing any results; however, due to the intimacy I feel for the subject matter I now realize that was at best, naïve. The only thing I was really certain of in the beginning was that I would not agree with Kulick's proposal for replacing identity in gay and lesbian language studies with a focus on a "language of desire". The simple concept of relating homosexuality to "desire" in any academic aspect not only felt a bit degrading but also went against the grain of everything I believe I understand about my own identity and that of my gay and lesbian community. Perhaps this feeling is magnified by my regional affiliation- I'm not really sure. Either way, what I quickly began to realize from interviewing participants and identifying the proto-themes that emerged from the transcripts of the interviews was that Kulick's proposal began to make sense. Not only is Kulick not regressing to a backward perspective of homosexuality, he is progressing to an ideology that equates homosexuality with heterosexuality, something I believe Southern gays and lesbians just haven't managed to catch up with just yet.

With this in mind, the limitations of this study should be noted. First, due to the qualitative nature of the narratives, no participant observation or discourse analysis was performed to authenticate participant claims about their individual language use. Second, due to the research guidelines and time constraints, only a small sample of participants was interviewed. Third, all participants in the study were Caucasian; therefore, this study can only be considered reflective of one category of Southern Lesbians. Subsequently, suggestions for further research include more comprehensive studies utilizing observation of lesbian language use through discourse analysis, study of larger participant pools that include racial and ethnic minority lesbians in the Southern region of the United States, research that offers a comparative approach between lesbians native to the Southern region of the U.S and other regions of the U.S., comparative research between lesbians and heterosexual women native to the Southern region of the U.S, and research that focuses on lesbian identity construction/reconstruction for L2 language learners immigrating to the Southern region of the U.S.

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APPENDIX

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Part 1. Life History

1.   What is your name?

2.   What is your place of birth?

3.   When were you born?

4.   How old are you?

5.   Where were you raised, educated?

6.   Is English your native language? Other languages spoken? Do you speak a Southern

         dialect/variety of English?

7.   Who were/are the most influential people in life?

8.   Do you have siblings/children?

9.   What are some of your earliest memories?

10.   What do you remember about being in school?

11.   What were your childhood relationships like?

12.   What made you decide to go/not go to college and/or choose your profession?

13.   Have you ever lived anywhere outside the Southern region of the United States?

Part II. Experience as a Homosexual women

1.   What age did you acknowledge your homosexuality?

2.   Do your family/children know about your homosexuality?

3.   How do you relate to other lesbians? To heterosexual women?

i.   Does this change based on sexuality?

ii.   To what extent is language a factor?

iii.   Has this changed over the course of your life?

iv.   How has the gradual acceptance of homosexuality affected this if at all?

4.   How do you attempt to communicate with a woman you are lesbian?

5.   When do you feel like you are in a public/private situation?

v.   How do you define public/private?

6.   Do you alter the way you communicate (both verbally and non-verbally) based on the

       setting? If so, how?

7.   Do you feel like you can sense if another woman is a lesbian without being told?

vi.   Why/why not?

vii.   How?

viii. To what extent is language a part of this?

Part III. Reflections on Experience/Identity as a Homosexual Woman

1.   What do you think about when you think of your personal identity?

2.   How do the different areas of your life affect how you view yourself?

3.   To what extent do you believe homosexuality affects your personal identity?

4.   Do you consider yourself a Southerner? If yes, how do you think this impacts your

       identity as a homosexual women?

5.   Are there any additional comments or any other information you'd like to add that we

       haven't discussed?

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