

University of Mississippi

eGrove

Electronic Theses and Dissertations

Graduate School

2013

Butch, Femme, Dyke, Or Lipstick, Aren'T All Lesbians The Same?: An Exploration Of Labels And "Looks" Among Lesbians In The U.S. South

Danielle Kerr
University of Mississippi

Follow this and additional works at: <https://egrove.olemiss.edu/etd>



Part of the [Sociology Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Kerr, Danielle, "Butch, Femme, Dyke, Or Lipstick, Aren'T All Lesbians The Same?: An Exploration Of Labels And "Looks" Among Lesbians In The U.S. South" (2013). *Electronic Theses and Dissertations*. 1153.
<https://egrove.olemiss.edu/etd/1153>

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by the Graduate School at eGrove. It has been accepted for inclusion in Electronic Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of eGrove. For more information, please contact egrove@olemiss.edu.

BUTCH, FEMME, DYKE, OR LIPSTICK, AREN'T ALL LESBIANS THE SAME? AN
EXPLORATION OF LABELS AND "LOOKS" AMONG LESBIANS IN THE U.S. SOUTH

A Thesis
presented in partial fulfillment of requirements
for the degree of Master of Arts
in the Department of Sociology and Anthropology
The University of Mississippi

by

DANIELLE E. KERR

August 2013

Copyright Danielle E. Kerr 2013
ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

ABSTRACT

This thesis is an exploratory qualitative sociological analysis of gender, sexuality, and race among “out” lesbians in the U.S. South. In this thesis, I explore the following questions: (1) what labels are self-identified lesbians in the South using and/or applying to themselves, and how do they use them? (2) How do they talk about and experience their dress as a part of their identity? (3) How are lesbians doing gender and sexuality in both private and professional environments? (4) How does Southern location influence lesbians’ conceptualization of their gender and sexuality? This research expands current understandings in the literature regarding the complex intersections of gender, sexual identity, and race in a Southern lesbian group. I conducted 12 qualitative, in-depth interviews with self-identifying lesbians ranging in age from 19 and 35, currently residing in one of the following states located in the Southeastern region of the US: Virginia, North Carolina, Tennessee, Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi, and Louisiana. Of the 12 respondents interviewed, 8 identified as Black/African American, 3 identified as White/Caucasian, and 1 identified as multi-racial. This study allowed Southern lesbians to indicate and describe the use and function of labels they apply to themselves and others in their own words. Additionally, this study examines how Southern lesbians do gender through their appearance and how Southern location influences the way they conceptualize their gender and sexuality.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank all of the people who made this thesis possible. First, I would like to thank my committee members. Thank you to Dr. Kirsten Dellinger for all of her kind words of encouragement and endless support throughout this entire process. I am so grateful to have a committee chair and mentor that I could always count on and who seemed to know me better than I knew myself at times. To Dr. Barbara Combs, my mentor and my spiritual guardian, thank you so much for being a part of my committee, and academic and personal maturation throughout this process. You have a laugh that could brighten up any building and could bring sunshine to any rainy day. To Dr. Ross Haenfler, thank you so much for your down-to-earth approach to education and advising. Without your calming techniques, I would have been eaten alive by this thesis.

Now, I would like to thank all of the people who helped me behind the scenes. To Dr. Katherine Irwin, my first mentor, thank you for introducing me to the field of sociology and for being the first person to make me believe I could make it in graduate school. You are a woman I truly admire academically, professionally, and personally. I never would have started this journey without you. To Dean Worsham, you have been my full-time guardian angel throughout these last two years, as well as the only person able to restore my sanity at times; thank you. To Dr. Amy Gibson and Melissa Dennis, working with you both in the library has been the best resource I could have asked for. Thank you both for showing me that it is possible to be a professional in Mississippi and still maintain a sense of reality outside of the classroom. You two provided the perfect balance of structure, chaos, and laughter to my life during both my best and

worst times over the last two years. To Blake & AD, thank you so much for all of your support and hard work during the interview process. I could not have completed that phase or began writing without you. To Bobby Moore, you were never at a loss for words during the times I needed you most. Thank you for all of the pick-me-ups, the shoulder to cry on, the ear to listen, and teaching me to find the bright side of things, even when I fought you along the way. To Juan Thurmond, or “The Guru” as I like to call him, thank you for helping me to find my academic inspiration at a time when I was lost. I never would have come up with a thesis topic if it were not for our numerous discussions on the meaning of life. To all of my respondents, thank you so much for letting me into your world and sharing your experiences with me. It has truly been a pleasure meeting and getting to know all of you. I hope you are as proud of this manuscript as I am to have had the privilege of working with you all.

Finally, I would like to thank the people who are closest to me and who have served as my foundation throughout this process. To my grandmother, Violet, thank you for always encouraging and supporting me even when I felt as though I had nothing left to give. You have always believed in me and have always been able to make me believe in myself. To Carrington Jones, thank you for answering all my emergency phone calls and for continuing to support me over all these years. To Elizabeth Parsels, I am so thankful that fate brought us together in this program; I NEVER would have made it without you. All of our late night study sessions, last minute road trips, and endless rock-out sessions are definitely the highlight of my graduate tenure in this program. Badger Sisters Unite! To Dionne Bailey, thank you for coming into my life at exactly the right time and for being my strength during the times when I wanted to quit

and for being my biggest cheerleader during my triumphs. Your endless support and encouragement was often the only motivation I had at times throughout the writing process.

Lastly, I would like to thank my mom, Freda Kerr, for ALWAYS being there to support, encourage, and uplift me. You have been my biggest fan and have put forth just as much effort towards this thesis as I have. This is for you. I love you!

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT	ii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	iii
INTRODUCTION.....	1
LITERATURE REVIEW	3
METHODOLOGY	15
LABELING	22
DRESS & APPEARANCE	43
THE SOUTH & RELIGION	71
CONCLUSION	86
LIST OF REFERENCES	97
LIST OF APPENDICIES.....	103
APPENDIX A	104
APPENDIX B	109
APPENDIX C	113
VITA	115

I. INTRODUCTION

My research interest in lesbian labels and appearance practices among Southern lesbians emerged in response to different encounters I have had with lesbians throughout my life. Since I recognized and embraced my lesbian sexual identity, I applied labels to myself and other lesbians based on physical characteristics and personality traits. However, living in the South for the last two years, Mississippi particularly, I have noticed anomalies in the ways that women who identify as lesbians use labels to define themselves or others. It was not until my current relationship that I began to question the relevance of the labels I had been using for more than half my life.

Currently, I am involved with a Southern woman who prefers masculine styles of dress and appearance. I originally labeled her as a stud, and assumed that her masculine style of dress was a reflection of her dominant and aggressive personality. However, I found that her masculine style of dress and appearance completely contrasts with her sensitive and docile personality. In fact, she did not describe herself using a label at all because she claimed not to know any labels that would be appropriate for her. Therefore, my new curiosity concerning the significance of labels based on dress and appearance among lesbians living in the South, as well as the pride I feel in shattering lesbian stereotypes led me to this research topic. In this thesis, I explore the following questions: (1) what labels are self-identified lesbians in the South using and/or applying to themselves, and how do they use them? (2) How do they talk about and experience their dress as a part of their identity? (3) How are lesbians doing gender and sexuality in both

private and professional environments? (4) How does Southern location influence lesbians' conceptualization of their gender and sexuality?

This research expands current understandings in the literature regarding the complex intersections of gender, sexual identity, and race in a Southern lesbian population. Current literature does not account for the evolution and creation of these new labels. As lesbians are breaking away from the traditional "butch-femme dynamic," they are developing new labels while they negotiate their gender and construct their lesbian sexual identities within the Southern lesbian population. Additionally, this project differs from other research in that I interviewed "out" and open, racially/ethnically diverse lesbians currently residing in both urban and rural locations throughout the Southeastern region of the US. My 'insider' status offered me better access to the pool of respondents and increased respondents' willingness to share their life experiences. This research is important because this project allowed me to give respondents the opportunity to speak for and define themselves, based on their experiences and style of dress and/or appearance. This process also allowed respondents to personally contribute to scholarly research about their lifestyle; which many respondents claim to appreciate.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Doing Gender, Doing Heterosexuality, Bodywork, and Intersectionality

An overview of the ‘doing gender’ perspective, and an understanding of bodywork and intersectionality are important to my thesis because they are the theoretical frameworks through which I examine the way Southern lesbians experience their everyday lives. I argue that respondents use their bodies to do gender in a way that perpetuates assumed heteronormative standards of masculinity and femininity, and influences the ways these lesbians use labels to identify themselves and others in the South. Using the concept of intersectionality, I explore the ways that lesbians of different races, ages, and classes in the South construct their gender and attempt to challenge the limits of the binary gender system in both personal and professional atmospheres. I address these concepts by first reviewing the doing gender, bodywork, and intersectionality frameworks. I then explore existing literature concerning lesbian labeling and appearance practices, and conclude with an examination of the limitations of this literature.

‘Doing Gender’

Gender is a social construction. Gender is "the activity of managing situated conduct in light of normative conceptions of attitudes and activities appropriate one's sex category" (West and Zimmerman 1987:127). Sex is determined by biologically male or female classified characteristics, such as genitalia, hormones, and chromosomes (Lucal 2008). In other words, gender is a learned concept that is accomplished through "ongoing activity embedded in everyday interaction" (Ibid. 2008:131). According to West and Zimmerman (1987: 137), "doing gender means creating differences between girls and boys and women and men, differences that

are not natural, essential, or biological." For instance, feminine styles of dress, and the wearing of makeup are associated with the female sex category. In other words, gender emerges from social situations and the socially assumed ways people conduct themselves as members of one sex category or another. It is a product of society, "not a set of traits, nor a variable, nor a role" (Ibid. 1987:129).

Gender and sex are assumed to be congruent in that individuals belonging to one sex category must belong to the corresponding gender category (Lucal 2008). For example, a female is assumed to be feminine. The issue in our society is that people can only assume the sex, or physiological characteristics, of another individual because we do not publically display our genitalia. We therefore assume that people are making an effort to portray their sex through their gender display (Ibid. 2008). Thus, people rely on the appearance and the corresponding behavior of others as cues for determining their sex.

As we have seen, the societal assumption is that one's sex and sex category are the same. However, they are not actually dependent on one another at all. Gender is the social construction of 'masculine' and 'feminine' behavior that is deemed acceptable for the sexes (West and Zimmerman 1987). Gender also privileges masculinity over femininity. Thus, gender is an ongoing interactional process that is used to legitimate a separation and difference in treatment between the sexes (Ibid. 1987).

'Doing Gender' is 'Doing Heterosexuality'

In our current binary gender system, a relationship between an individual's gender and sexuality is also assumed to exist (Lucal 2008). The difference between heterosexuality and homosexuality is assumed to be visible by incongruence between the sex and gender category of an individual. As stated by Lucal (2008:520), "sexual deviance is assumed to be signaled by

gender deviance, just as sexual conformity is assumed to be evidenced by gender conformity." A stud, or woman who dresses in men's clothing, will be presumed homosexual, and a femme, or woman who dresses in women's clothing, will be presumed heterosexual.

To do gender is also to do heterosexuality (Schilt and Westbrook 2009). We know that gender is a learned concept, based on socially acceptable behaviors for males and females and reinforced through repeated interactions. Gender is also a system of power, used to perpetuate domination at structural, cultural, and individual levels. As part of the hierarchy in the gender system, masculinity and heterosexuality are privileged over femininity and homosexuality. This hierarchy assumes men to be masculine and women to be feminine. As such, heterosexual sexual attraction is assumed to occur 'naturally.' In contrast, our binary system labels homosexual attraction as unnatural or deviant.

'Masculine' is naturally supposed to be attracted to 'feminine,' thus relationships are 'naturally' assumed to include individuals of opposite genders. These assumptions attempt to normalize and control homosexuality to fit into heterosexual roles that are perceived to be natural. Therefore, when we do gender 'appropriately', we also unintentionally reinforce heteronormativity within the cultural power dichotomy of sex, gender, and sexuality.

Bodywork

Body and appearance are important to our understanding of doing gender and sexuality because society relies on them to identify people. Ironically, our society deems it necessary to identify people in order to know the correct way to interact with them. These differences assume that men and women must be treated differently. However, when we are interacting with people on a day-to-day basis, our genitals are not usually visible for examination. Therefore, we assume that people use their appearance to display their membership in one category or another. Thus,

all people are attempting to display their gender and sexuality through their body. This display is then interpreted, or better yet assessed, by the rest of us and used to assign a gender and sexuality to the other person.

Essentially, no matter what we individually 'intend' to express as our gender or sexual identity, others hold us accountable by interpreting and categorizing our gender performance as male or female, heterosexual or homosexual (Jurik and Siemsen 2009). For example, lipstick and femme lesbians 'do' female gender and are assigned or assessed as female and heterosexual, despite their lesbian sexual identity. These assumptions are challenged by the body work of contemporary lesbians, as well as the everyday appearance of all women. Women, including lesbians, are using their bodies in ways that are chameleon-like in that there are no longer strict displays that allow us to assume their gender identity or sexual orientation.

The aesthetic component, or aesthetic labor, of bodywork refers to the way an individual constructs their style of dress, mannerisms, voice, appearance, and attractiveness in different contexts and under different conditions to manipulate their environment (Williams and Connell 2010). In other words, individuals are held accountable by others based on their aesthetic component, "a set of normative expectations regarding appropriate appearance and demeanor" (Ibid. 2010:353; Pettinger 2004; Witz et al. 2003). For these reasons, I explored the ways Southern lesbians used their bodies to construct their gender and negotiate their lesbian sexual identity.

Intersectionality

Intersectionality is the recognition that race, class, gender, and sexuality all play a role in people's sense of identity and opportunities. "Race, class, gender, and sexuality are not just identity statuses, but also structural locations that influence the life chances and ways [people]

experience their social worlds” (Moore 2011:4). According to Collins (2009) a hierarchy exists among individuals both within and among racial, class, gender, and sexual groups that she calls the ‘matrix of domination.’ For example, Collins (2009:77) argues that controlling images or stereotypes, created by elite groups, “are designed to make racism, sexism, poverty, and other forms of social injustice appear to be natural, normal, and inevitable parts of life.” These intersecting oppressions create “others,” those who are marginalized because they do not fit the ‘right’ image created by the elite or dominate group. In this case, Black is the ‘other’ to White, and homosexual is the ‘other’ to heterosexual. Black women have been marginalized since the creation of the traditional ideal of true womanhood (Ibid. 2009). The virtues of womanhood, piety, purity, submissiveness, and domesticity, are encouraged for White women. Black women, on the other hand, have historically had their femininity devalued, then sexualized, and are now viewed as aggressive women.

Collins (2009:30) stated, “Despite the common challenges confronting African-American women as a group, individual Black women neither have identical experiences nor interpret experiences in a similar fashion.” For instance, a middle-class Black woman and a lower class Black woman can have completely different outlooks on life. Crenshaw (1991:1242) similarly states, “Ignoring differences within groups contributes to tension among groups.” Thus, within races and sexuality, a highly educated homosexual Black woman will differ from an uneducated homosexual Black woman in life experiences. To expect all Black or White lesbians to possess the same perspectives on life is to remove the independent identities of these women.

For these reasons, the intersectionality of race, age, and class are central to understanding Southern lesbians' perspective of gender and sexuality in their everyday lives. In other words, lesbians of different races, ages, and classes have different life experiences in the South. They

are each exposed to different environments, involved in different types of interactions, have access to different resources, and may therefore, have different perspectives.

Labels

Scholarship on lesbian labels and what they mean is constantly evolving. Labels such as butch and femme have been overused and incorrectly generalized to apply to women in lesbian populations. After reading the literature on lesbian labels, I have noticed a change in researchers' views of these labels from being roles for lesbian relationships, to simply words used to describe external attributes or physical features (Ponse 1978; Faderman 1991; Inness and Lloyd 1996; Weber 1996; Rifkin 2002; Jennings 2006; Moore 2006; Lev 2008; Wahlig 2011). However, even with these progressions in our understanding of lesbian labels, there is still an overemphasis on the 'butch-femme dynamic.' In other words, researchers are focusing on butch and femme as the main – and in older literature, the only – terms used to describe lesbian labels and appearance practices.

Much of the existing literature concerning lesbians has focused strictly on the butch/femme relationship. This butch/femme relationship was judged as an imitation of a heterosexual relationship (Faderman 1991). Therefore, lesbian relationships were assumed, just as heterosexual relationships, to include one butch or masculine partner and one femme or feminine partner. In fact, assuming either a masculine and feminine role became an indicator of lesbian sexual orientation for many young lesbians in the 1950s (Ibid. 1991). Butch represented the masculine role and femme represented the feminine role in this form of relationship role-play. Again, this dichotomy imitated the heterosexual roles between men and women, as masculine and feminine, possibly because no other relationship model existed. As stated by Faderman (1991:168), "when a young woman entered the subculture in the 1950s she was

immediately initiated into the meaning and importance of the roles, since understanding them was the *sine qua non* of being a lesbian within that group." In other words, if one did not adopt one of the two roles, they were not considered as participants of the lesbian lifestyle.

According to Jennings (2006:218), "Butch-femme identities strictly defined codes of behavior and dress and, in the immediate post-war decades, a butch or femme identity was the only option available to women wishing to be accepted" into the lesbian scene at that time. Inness and Lloyd (1996) found that women in the 1950s and '60s who embodied the butch role were viewed as women imitating or trying to live their lives as men, and that women who embodied the femme role were simply condoning traditional feminine stereotypes; essentially, these roles were perceived to perpetuate patriarchal relationships.

Another requirement of these roles in the 1950s and '60s was that butch and femme were the two and only two components of a functioning couple (Inness and Lloyd 1996). Butch women would dress in men's clothing and adopt masculine mannerisms while femme women dressed in women's clothing and wore make up, matching the traditional heterosexual idea of femininity. Essentially, it was a collective mindset that butch-femme roles were the default or 'standard of lesbian identity' to these young lesbians in the 1950s and '60s (Ibid. 1996).

In the 1970s, women who participated in butch/femme role-play came under scrutiny as the lesbian-feminist movement began to build momentum. Lesbian-feminists declared that lesbian women were no different from heterosexual women; thus, lesbian-feminists rejected the butch/femme roles (Faderman 1991). These women argued that butch/femme roles condoned patriarchal values and perpetuated homophobic ideas (Ibid. 1991). However, the 1980s saw a resurgence of the butch/femme roles as "a way to challenge the lesbian-feminist status quo" (Inness and Lloyd 1996:3). Basically, the styles of butch and femme became less rigidly

dependent upon the clothing and relationship roles these women donned and performed, and began to serve more as a form of gender expression (Inness and Lloyd 1996). As the butch-femme styles became more fluid, they were viewed as an “expression of lesbian gender” and an acceptable way of challenging the taboo of homosexuality (Faderman 1991). For example, Ponse (1978) conducted a study that examined lesbian preferences for dating partners. In this study, Ponse (1978) found that participants who identified themselves as butch claimed to prefer a partner who identified as femme. Study participants described butch lesbians to be more logical, factual, directive, and capable of decision-making and handling tasks outside the house (Ibid. 1978:115). Femme lesbians were described as passive, docile, nurturing, sexually passive, and similar to traditional women in the heterosexual population (Ibid. 1978:115). In other words, these butch/femme roles were now ‘flaunted’ as a way to smash the taboo of lesbianism rather than to exist simply because they were based on the only relationship model available.

Beginning in the 1990s, scholars’ understanding of gender as a social construction began to influence the literature on lesbian relationships and roles. Scholars recognized that gender is emergent through interaction rather than being a set of roles. Shifts in our understanding of gender focused less attention on butch and femme as roles and more attention to the ways lesbian women use these labels. In other words, the labels of butch or femme were expanded to become viewed as a way to describe a woman’s character traits or physical characteristics rather than simply the role she would play in a relationship.

In a study by Weber (1996), participants who identified themselves as femme lesbians emphasized an enjoyment of lingerie, dresses, makeup, and traditionally feminine occupations. Participants that identified as butch claimed they did not like to wear traditionally feminine clothes and preferred to wear men’s clothing, cologne, jewelry, short cut hairstyles, and to play

sports. These characteristics focus mostly on external attributes and qualities as descriptions of butch and femme rather than roles. Further emphasizing butch and femme as descriptions of external attributes rather than roles, Rifkin (2002) argues that some lesbians use their external display to identify themselves as part of a lesbian group. Rifkin (2002:172; Inness and Lloyd 1996) found that:

Butch lesbians used clothing as a way to indicate membership in a group; butches are easily recognized as lesbians because both lesbian and heterosexual cultures typically interpret masculine appearance and clothing...as indicators of homosexuality.

In other words, butch and femme labels describe differences in appearance between women in the lesbian population. Walters (2008:302; as cited in McAuliffe and Tiernan 2008)) argues that butch lesbians are often recognized by their “masculine style.” Walter (Ibid. 2008:302; Ibid. 2008) later claims:

Outward cues including dress, demeanor and the way the butch lesbians occupies her physical space often send a message of confidence, power and strength; all of which are crucial elements of traditional masculinity.

In describing femme lesbians, Walter (Ibid. 2008; Ibid. 2008) claims that the femme identity is overpowered by the butch identity, which results in femme lesbians being indistinguishable from heterosexual women unless they are accompanied by a butch lesbian.

While this shift in the literature moved away from applying heteronormative roles to lesbian relationships, it continues to be limited by its emphasis on the ‘butch-femme dynamic.’ Only within the past decade, have researchers begun to expand traditional academic perceptions of butch and femme labels to create a more nuanced description of self-identification through appearance.

At the forefront of this expansion, Moore’s (2006) research presents a disruption to the traditional binary butch and femme assumption. Based upon her interviews with African

American lesbians, she grouped the respondents into three categories of physical display within the lesbian population: femme, transgressive, and gender-blender.

A femme lesbian, consistent with previous researchers' findings, dresses in traditionally feminine clothing and displays a traditionally feminine appearance. Transgressive women, consistent with previous researcher's findings on butch, display a masculine appearance by wearing traditionally masculine clothing and hairstyles. Gender-blenders, a new label, use a combination of masculine and feminine styles, almost resembling a heterosexual 'tomboy' woman. For example, Moore (2006:125) describes these women's styles as:

Certain men's clothing like pants or shoes, combined with something less masculine like a form-fitting shirt or a little make up. Sometimes their clothes are not specifically men's clothes but are tailored, conservative women's items worn in a less feminine style...presentation, through hips, hair, and breasts often signal that these are women's bodies.

To clarify the difference between a transgressive and a gender-blender, transgressive lesbians would never wear form-fitting clothes. Moore's (2006) gender-blender category of identification branches beyond the 'butch-femme dynamic' to acknowledge the existence of other labels, and challenges the binary assumption that there can only be two types of gender display. However, these categories are limited in that only one additional distinction of lesbian gender display is recognized: gender-blender. Femme represents feminine, transgressive represents masculine, and gender-blender represents some combination of the two, but all the points in between femme and gender-blender and transgressive and gender-blender are left out.

Similar to Moore's (2006) critique and expansion of the butch and femme labels used to describe lesbians, Ward (2009:100) claims:

Butch and femme labels are no longer useful categories...the butch/femme dynamic represents a campy critique of the reworking of heterosexual masculinity and femininity. Though the concept of

butch/femme is still widely observed among lesbians, its meaning has become increasingly complex and contested since its emergence.

These complexities of the butch and femme labels become obvious as different levels of ‘butch’ and ‘femme’ emerge over time (Coyote and Sharman 2011). In Hillman’s (2011; as cited in Coyote and Sharman 2011) critique of the exclusiveness of butch-femme labels, she listed the labels stone butch, and andro-but. Stone butch lesbians were described similar to butch women; however, they would prohibit their partners to touch them sexually. Andro-but. lesbians were also described as similar to butch women, with the exception of wearing women’s underwear on occasion.

While greatly influential, previous studies only provide a starting point for understanding labeling and appearance practices in today’s lesbian population. With the exception of Moore (2006), Ward (2009), and Hillman (2011), they do not account for the constant development of new labels and ways lesbians identify themselves within the lesbian population. Butch and femme are not only roles used in lesbian relationships, nor are they the only labels used to describe contemporary lesbians. “Individuals [lesbians] do not fit the label, the label fits these individuals” (Wahlig 2011:710). In other words, new labels are being created over time to ‘fit’ the lesbians that do not match that of a traditional ‘butch’ or ‘femme.’ Examples such as, lipstick, stem, stud, boi, and AG/aggressive are labels currently being used by contemporary lesbians that do not fit the traditional labels of butch and femme. These new labels and the ways respondents use them separate this project from previous research on lesbian labels and appearance practices. I explore the ways that lesbian women use many different labels to define not only themselves, but others as well. I also address the ways respondents experienced their dress as a part of their identity. I then conclude by exploring the ways Southern location influences lesbians’ conceptualization of their gender and sexuality.

This thesis will be structured as follows; chapter 2 describes the research methods used to complete this research. Chapter 3 examines respondent perceptions of labels and their significance. I report conflicting definitions between why and how respondents claim they use labels. I then conclude by exploring the ways in which these labels may be associated with the race, age, and location of the individual using them. In chapter 4, I examine the circumstances that influence respondents' dress and appearance preferences. I then report the contexts and conditions under which respondents' dress and appearance proposes judgment and/or potential risks. Chapter 5 explores respondents' perceptions of living in the South and the impact that religion has had on their experiences as "out" lesbians. The contents of this chapter provide important contexts for understanding how location, or place, shapes the ways respondents do gender and sexuality. The final chapter presents a summary of the chapter findings and discusses the significance of this study for our understanding of the ways lesbians in the South define themselves, negotiate and construct their dress and appearance, and do gender in both their private and professional environments.

III. METHODS

Design of the Study

I conducted 12 qualitative, in-depth interviews with self-identifying lesbians ranging in age from 19 and 35, currently residing in one of the following states located in the Southeastern region of the US: Virginia, North Carolina, Tennessee, Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi, and Louisiana¹. Of the 12 respondents interviewed, 8 identified as Black/African American, 3 identified as White/Caucasian, and 1 identified as multi-racial. The purpose of this study was to have Southern lesbians indicate and describe the use and function of labels they apply to themselves and others in their own words. Additionally, this study examined how Southern lesbians do gender through their appearance and how Southern location influences the way they conceptualize their gender and sexuality. I used snowball-sampling methods to obtain participants, and all the interviews were completed between November 2012 and January 2013; each interview averaged an hour in length.

Rationale for Qualitative Research

According to Creswell (1998) the type of the research question determines whether to use qualitative or quantitative methods. The overarching questions of this study were how Southern lesbians do gender through their appearance and why they chose the labels they used to identify themselves and others. The nature of the questions are *how* and *why*, as opposed to *how many* and *what*, the goal of quantitative research. Galls' (2007) take on qualitative research argues that the participants construct their own social reality. The purpose of this qualitative research is exploratory. I acknowledge that I cannot generalize these research findings to the entire lesbian

¹ See Table 1 for list of respondent pseudonyms and demographic characteristics.

population. However, this research is necessary to give Southern lesbians a voice that would not be documented otherwise. The qualitative research goal for Southern lesbians to indicate and describe the labels they use to identify themselves in their own words, which allows for the exploration of Southern lesbians' social reality.

Rationale for Interviews

Gall (2007:634) defined this research as the “in-depth study of instances of phenomenon in real-life settings and from the perspective of the participants involved in the phenomenon.” Research that examines individual interpretations of social reality should be conducted at the local, immediate level (Ibid. 2007). In this case, the local group was the particular group of lesbians I interviewed, not lesbians in general.

The principle method of data collection was individual in-depth interviews. The rationale for selecting the interview model was that interviews place the emphasis on the perspectives of the participants, a theme central to qualitative research. Additionally, the interview process provided the opportunity for follow-up questions and to observe body language.

Data Collection

Sample

The rationale for using snowball sampling is that the units of analysis are people who have specific characteristics (self-identified lesbians in the south), versus a random sample where specific characteristics are not important (a study of what all lesbians think about labels). Likewise, snowball sampling allowed me the ability to interview Black lesbian women; often underrepresented in random samples. I obtained demographic information—gender, race/ethnicity, age, and occupation in order to determine the existence of commonalities in responses and themes. Demographic information was linked to participant responses when the information revealed a pattern. This sample provided a snapshot of lesbians in a cluster of

Southern communities. The goal of the sample was to provide a holistic picture of lesbian experiences with labels and appearance in a specific time and place.

Contacting Participants

Before conducting the interviews, the procedures of the department of Sociology and Anthropology, and the University Institutional Review Board (IRB) were followed. These included passing the IRB's Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI) training, gaining approval of my thesis proposal, and obtaining IRB approval to conduct my research. Due to the closeted nature of the Southern lesbian population, I first interviewed 5 lesbian women with whom I already established a friendship; 2 were originally from Mississippi, 1 from Georgia, and 2 from North Carolina. However, I conducted all interviews with participants in the State in which they currently reside. Of the 12 respondents, 7 reside in Mississippi, 2 reside in Tennessee, and 3 reside in North Carolina. Again, I conducted these interviews at various points between November 2012 and January 2013.

All initial contact took place through a series of phone calls and text messages with key informants in order for me to schedule the interview at their convenience. I then conducted interviews in various locations including respondents' homes, the local public library, and the university library; all of the interviews were conducted face to face.

Interview Model

At the beginning of each interview, I read an oral consent statement which informed the participant of the research goals, the interview process, and that they could drop out of the study at any time. To ensure confidentiality, I used pseudonyms for the participants and any specific locations they mentioned. Gaining the confidence of the participants or trustworthiness is an important part of qualitative research (Creswell 1998). I conveyed the purpose of the study to the

participants at the beginning of each interview. There was no deception in this study. I assured the participants of the confidentiality of their comments.

Interviews & Observations

The primary method of inquiry was interviews and observations. Research was conducted independently, without a research team. The key to constructing interview questions for this study was to use open-ended questions in order to gain insight into respondents' everyday experiences as lesbians living in the South. Each participant was asked the same set of questions (see Appendix A). Additional questions were added as saturation on questions and as the discussions became more profound, building on previous comments and points of view (Morgan and Krueger 1998). All questions were framed by the 4 guiding research questions in the project:

1. What labels are self-identified lesbians in the South using and/or applying to themselves? How do they use them?
2. How do they talk about and experience their dress as a part of their identity?
3. How are lesbians doing gender and sexuality in both private and professional environments?
4. How does Southern location influence lesbians' perception of gender and sexuality?

I used an audio recorder during each interview and took detailed hand-written notes. I transcribed each of the recorded interviews and hand-written observations to avoid any intentional or unintentional distortion of the data. The focus of the recorded observations was a broad, holistic view of the responses and how they contributed to previous interviews. Details about specific comments, body language, and other insights were also recorded after each session. Gall (2007) commented that the observer role in qualitative research varies along a continuum of complete observer and complete participant.

I adopted the observer role and let the outsider (**etic**) perspective dominate during the interviews. I did mention that I was also a lesbian, which brought a small amount of **emic** perspective to the interviews because the participants may have thought of me, in some respects, as an “outsider within” or fellow lesbian (Gall 2007; Collins 1986).

Piloting

Due to the time and energy consuming in-depth interview process, piloting the design of this research was important. The pilot interview was used to eliminate possible bias in the questions. Gall (2007:253) suggested that during the pilot-test, the researcher should be alert for “communication problems, evidence of inadequate motivation on the part of the respondents, and other clues that suggest the need for rephrasing questions or revising the procedure.” Gall (2007) further noted that a pilot can reveal threatening questions so that the threat value can be lowered or eliminated. For this project, I test piloted an interview with one of my key informants. The pilot revealed that I needed to simplify some of the language I used to construct the interview questions. Out of the initial 17 questions, 3 were eliminated and 1 was added. The pilot interview experience also indicated that participants were willing, comfortable, and interested in discussing the topics of this study and gave me an approximate timeline of how long each interview would take.

Data Analysis

Interview & Observation Analysis & Coding

The data analysis for this research involves description, themes, and assertions (Creswell 2003). I organized and prepared the data by transcribing the interviews and observation notes. Next, I read all of the transcriptions to begin to open code or record reoccurring themes in the data. I printed a hardcopy of each transcript and manually wrote themes in the margins. Then, I

organized all open codes based on generally similar themes. I looked through all of the open coded transcripts and created a document that I used to record and tally all of the recurring themes so that I knew which codes occurred the most often in the transcripts. After coding, the description and themes were represented in narratives in the form of themes and sub-themes. In other words, I created a new document and compiled all of the transcript quotes related to the top 10 themes; for example, 'outsider' versus 'insider' group labels usage, uses and functions of labels, job promotion, trying to 'fit in,' actions judged by orientation, dress for comfort, open-minded versus close-minded, male attention, and denial. I then categorized these themes into 5 broad topics: labels; dress and appearance; fear of judgment due to dress; religion; and the influence of Southern location. Finally, I compiled these 5 topics into 3 distinct topics with 2 sub-topics: labels, dress and appearance, with fear of judgment due to dress as a sub-topic; and the influence of Southern location, with religion as a sub-topic.

Limitations

The limitations of this study included restricting itself to the research design of qualitative research. Respondents were between the ages of 19 and 35, and were currently in the process of or had already attained a degree from a traditional institute of higher education. In other words, because I spend a majority of my time in an academic environment, all of my key informants also occupy the same academic environment. Therefore, utilizing snowball sampling resulted in respondents who also occupy an academic environment; because each respondent was connected to myself or a respondent with whom I had a previously established friendship. This research is limited due to the small amount of time I was able to spend with each participant. Also, others may interpret the data differently in terms of analytical themes and the implications. My interpretation of interview responds may be subject to my own personal experiences.

Additionally, because this research is based strictly on the experiences of these 12 women, this research is not transferrable to Southern lesbians as a whole. The major challenge that I faced was not being able to interview as many women as I originally planned. However, I had to take into consideration that I was interviewing during the holiday season and many potential participants were out of town or too busy to commit to an interview. Nevertheless, the respondents I was able to interview provided me with extremely rich and diverse insight into their everyday life experiences as lesbians living in the South.

IV. LABELING

When I originally began this project I was interested in whether lesbians actually use lesbian labels in everyday conversation, whether to describe themselves or others. If so, I wanted to know what labels they were aware of, what labels they were using, and why they chose to use those particular labels. Academically, I wanted to examine the labels that lesbians were using to describe themselves because I felt that sexuality scholars placed too much emphasis on the ‘butch-femme dynamic’; focusing on butch and femme as the main -and in some older literature, the only- labels used to describe lesbians. I thought that examining the labels used by lesbians would allow me to explore whether lesbians in the south are redoing gender and challenging the binary gender system through their use of different labels. Now that I have been out in the field conducting research, I realize that it is imperative to discuss the importance of lesbian labels and their uses for the sake of both the heterosexual and homosexual population.

Similar to heterosexuals, lesbians have established a ‘separate’ community with its own norms, values, and rituals that conceptualize how lesbian society should operate (Faderman 1991). Therefore, individuals of the heterosexual population may not understand the labeling practices of lesbians because they are not a part of this population. However, I found evidence that these labeling practices may not be as rigidly defined and easy to understand by lesbians either. This chapter examines respondent perceptions of labels and their conflicting descriptions, why and how they are used, and the ways in which their use is perceived to be influenced by the race, age, and location of the user.

Label Descriptions & Definitions

Dyke and Butch are examples of labels that have been used to describe lesbians for generations, but what do these words actually mean? Do they describe a woman's appearance, her mannerisms, or strictly her sexual orientation? How about a combination of all three? The point I am making is that when it comes to labels applied to lesbians, it is not as easy as looking them up in the dictionary to select the 'one' that fits the lesbian being described. In this section, I report the lesbian labels and descriptions that respondents mentioned in their interviews. I then discuss the ways these labels are informed by assumptions of gender, as well as how their conflicting definitions and functions challenge the significance of the existence of labels. In other words, in regard to the conflicting definitions and functions of labels, I examine the purpose these labels serve for respondents.

I found that there were only a couple of labels used for lesbians who exhibited a traditionally feminine gender display: lipstick and femme. The label lipstick or femme was used to describe a lesbian that fit the traditional heteronormative ideal of femininity by dressing in all women's clothing, wearing high heel shoes, carrying a purse, wearing feminine hairstyles, and typically wearing makeup. She is most often referenced as a lesbian that can "pass" in and out of the heterosexual population without her homosexual orientation being noticed. One respondent, Muscles, describes the lipstick label as representing a woman that would straighten her hair, and wear a skirt and lipstick. According to Rebecca:

Lipstick is the very- maybe this is not quite a fair term- but for lack of a better word, sort of high maintenance women, very feminized...your stereotypical feminine looks, you know, makeup, dresses, you know, long nails, high heels.

For Rebecca, she struggles to find a "fair" way to describe the lipstick label, but manages to get her point across that emphasized femininity is the trademark. She is faced with the same struggle

as she defines what she thinks the femme label entails, "femme is, I guess, sort of like lipstick to me, but maybe not as- not as- I don't know, glitzy maybe." Rebecca has a hard time describing the difference between the two feminine labels, but she still recognizes that the two are different and separate labels. Indicating a difference in the degree of femininity with lipstick at the top followed by femme. Other respondents did not seem to experience such difficulty when describing the lipstick and femme labels. Jessica, Bo, and Candice claim that lipstick and femme represent women that are "feminine" and "heel-wearing." Sheila claimed:

A femme is like the girlie girl female. It's like the old time, has to have your hair done, has to have your nails done, has to have on makeup, has to look cute at all times.

Rozay echoes Sheila's description by stating, "femme is just a girl, a woman. I won't say a girl, a woman...make up, all that stuff...Basically, if you looked at them, you wouldn't think they was gay."

Stem, described as a cross between or combination of stud and femme, is a label that was used to refer to a lesbian that presented both masculine and feminine traits and characteristics. Short Dawg said, "A stem, for me, is a little mixture of a lot of different things. One day you can be super feminine, and the next day you can be not so feminine." Sheila describes stem as:

The ones that are not femmes, but they're not studs at the same time. They're in between, and they just go with the flow...Clothing-wise, it depends on the day. Some days they'll be girlie, some days they'll have men clothes on...Sometimes the tighter shirt, with maybe some cargo shorts or something like that.

Onyx echoes these descriptions by stating, "they [stem] might have on pumps this day, and the next day they might be studded out." Jessica states:

They [stem] might...have hair. They might not go straight to cutting their hair, or they might have haircuts, and some stems have short little afros, natural things. They might have on heels one day, and the next day, they have on polos [collar shirts].

In other words, Short Dawg, Sheila, Onyx, and Jessica describe stem as a label that is used to refer to a lesbian that exhibits an appearance that alternates between the traditional feminine and masculine styles of dress. While the previous quotes reference appearance practices used to describe the stem label, other respondents used traits in their description of the stem label. Rozay claimed:

You've [stems] got that feminine look, but you've got a manly look at the same time. You might have on girly clothes, but the way you carry yourself might be manly or masculine.

Sharing the same sentiments, Bo stated:

It's [stem] a look. I think the labels are more look and personality. Because there are some feminine chicks who might put on some baggy jeans but they're still ultra feminine...If it was Aaliyah [*heterosexual* R&B singer known for wearing tight shirts with baggy pants], you would say that maybe she was a stem, because she is super feminine but she still has on baggy clothes.

In other words, Rozay and Bo reference demeanor and personality as important in determining what kind of lesbian would fit the stem label.

From stem, I now move to the Soft/Feminine Stud label. Taylor describes a soft/feminine stud as a lesbian that dresses in men's clothing, yet performs "feminine mannerisms." In the context of her interview, feminine mannerisms would include sitting down with legs crossed or keeping fingernails and hair professionally styled. Bo described soft/feminine stud as going "in between" from time to time. In other words, a soft/feminine stud possesses feminine personality traits and presents an appearance that is masculine at the same time. Feminine personality traits include being nurturing, caring, passive, and sensitive according to respondents. However, taking into account the descriptions of both stem and soft/feminine stud, there appears to be some overlap occurring. Overlap continues to occur as respondents reference the label, Soft Butch. Taylor refers to soft butch as feminine, yet dressing in men's clothes. Janeesha describes soft

butch as a lesbian that, "rarely to almost never [wears] a dress, you know, tops that are form-fitting, and sometimes makeup, sometimes not. Sometimes crossing your legs." Essentially these exact same descriptions are used to describe stem and soft/feminine stud.

The line between labels is blurred further with descriptions between the labels of Stud, Boi, Butch, AG/Aggressive, Bull Dyke, and Dyke. Bo and Rozay reference stud and butch as a lesbian that is more aggressive or dominant in their sexual relationship, and that dresses in men's clothing. Sheila claimed, "stud, in my eyes, studs are usually the ones that, at times, can forget that they're actually women." In other words, Sheila asserts that a stud lesbian lives her life as a man would, by dressing in men's clothing, performing masculine mannerisms, and possessing personality traits such as being aggressive, independent, assertive, and emotionally detached. Samantha echoes these descriptions by stating that a stud is an individual with a dominant mind and a "bringing home the bacon type of person." Samantha also referenced the term "Boi" as being synonymous with stud, but simply spelled with an 'i' instead of 'y'. Jessica, on the other hand, offered a more cynical description of the stud label as:

Thugs, your pants hanging out, oversized clothes, tattoos, earrings, piercings, dope, guns...They really think they're growing chin hair type of stuff.

For Jessica, the label of stud included not only dress and demeanor; it also included the types of activities in which an individual would participate. Her description also references the type of style made popular by African American youth in the hip-hop culture (Haenfler 2012). The same style is also criticized and stigmatized by both heterosexual and homosexual populations regardless of the race of the individual dressed in the hip-hop style.

Jessica later went on to describe the butch label as a woman that is, "very masculine, hard hands, mustache. This is natural, just hard, muscular." Janeesha claims that the label butch would

include "shorter hair, more androgynous clothing, or even what may be seen as male clothing."

Onyx sees butch as different from stud by saying:

I'm assuming butch is a little more [masculine] than stud...more aggressive, manly acting...I think it has something to do with their demeanor, how they act, carry themselves, and how they dress...They would dress like stud, in the baggy pants or manly acting...but their actions and demeanor would be harder, more masculine...than stud...you're definitely not [sexually] touching no butch.

In this example, Onyx claims that the butch label includes sexual relationship preferences in addition to dress and demeanor. Conversely, Sheila states that she perceives butch as almost equivalent to soft/feminine stud rather than more masculine or dominant, as stated by other respondents. AG or Aggressive was also brought up as an interchangeable label that is used among lesbians. According to Bo, "it's just like stud, pretty much. It's short for Aggressive Girl. It's for tomboy, more masculine types. I would use them interchangeably." For Taylor, bull dyke is a label she claims is interchangeable with stud and defines it as:

A big, old like football player, but a woman. Like a woman, [with] short hair, no hair...I always imagine- I hate to say it- like a truck driver....Stud is a bull dyke, essentially...T-shirts, not even baggy clothes, just like- you know, like redneck t [shirt] and jean shorts, but came down to your knee, you know, very eighties [looking] lesbian.

Dyke is a noteworthy term as it was mentioned as a generalizable term to encompass all lesbians. "If you're gay, you're a dyke," claimed Rozay. "I think, when you use the word dyke, that goes for gay period. That's just a harsh way of saying gay to me," stated Onyx. For Rozay and Onyx, dyke was a label used to describe lesbians in general, rather than as a way to describe any particular lesbian's dress, demeanor, or relationship role.

A significant difference exists between respondents' perceptions of these labels. There are far more terms used to describe more masculine appearances and styles than to describe feminine appearances and styles. Also, there appears to be more hostile language used to describe the

“masculine” lesbians. Lipstick and femme were used to describe appearance and possible relationship roles, but were nevertheless referenced as 'normal' or appropriate ways of behaving for women. Respondents used stud, boi, soft/feminine stud, soft butch, butch, AG/aggressive, and bull dyke to refer to women who adopted more masculine behaviors and mannerisms that are traditionally assumed to be ‘unnatural’ for a woman. In other words, these lesbians were described in a way that seemed as though they embodied “masculinity.” These labels were used to describe 'abnormal' or inappropriate ways of behaving for women, and there were many more labels for these deviant ways of behaving than for those that conform to the heteronormative ideals of femininity. The large difference in the number of masculine labels than feminine labels suggests that labels are informed by heteronormative assumptions of gender. If something is normal, then it need only limited description because it is assumed to be ‘natural’ in its existence. However, if something is abnormal, numerous and in-depth descriptions are necessary to explain what and why the abnormality has occurred.

These labels are all referred to by their own individual names, but their descriptions appear to be less independent than I originally hypothesized. After observing the difficulty that respondents faced in defining these labels, I am left questioning the use of labels and their implementation. Upon completing these interviews, I attempted to formulate a definition for each of the labels I was aware of, and I too struggled to produce a set of clear and distinct definitions. I am left questioning, how is it that an individual can be categorized to fit any particular label when the labels do not have a distinct or technical definition? Also, what label is given to an individual that is interpreted as not matching any subjective description of any label that a particular individual may be aware of? For these reasons, I argue that the differences in the interpretation of definitions signal a problem with the existence of these ambiguous labels or

terms. Respondents struggled to define these labels because gender and sexual identity is fluid, rather than simply a set of traits (West and Zimmerman 1987). Some respondents describe these labels as a complete mentality for the lesbians that carry them, while others simply refer to the labels as a way to describe one's outward appearance or personality. This provides support for the argument that gender is something that an individual 'does' in the context of a particular situation and is a practice or process that emerges in that context. In the next section I discuss this further.

Label Interpretation

Respondents' perceptions of how and why labels were used was based on the identification of the user. By identification I am referring to whether they identify as part of the heterosexual population or the homosexual population. Individuals who identify as heterosexual will be referred to as 'outsiders' or the 'outside group.' Individuals who identify as homosexual, lesbians unless stated otherwise, will be referred to as 'insiders' or the 'inside group.'

Outsider Group Usage

I found that there is a difference of opinion when labels are used by outsider groups as opposed to when they are used by insider groups. Respondents explained that labels were in existence only to put lesbians in a box because they were different and misunderstood by the heterosexual population. Onyx and Rebecca share their understanding of labels as a way for outsiders to make themselves more comfortable with a lifestyle they do not understand:

Onyx: I feel like society had to think of some way to label the people that's not the norm, and they couldn't figure out nothing else but to put titles on them. You don't have all different types of straight people. You either call them straight and straight. You don't say, 'Look at that feminine straight girl.'

Rebecca: I thought it was sort of something that society placed on different people to, unfortunately, sort of disenfranchise them and to feel more comfortable about their identity.

Additionally, it seems that when labels are used by and in conversations with outsiders, respondents expressed feelings of hostility and judgment. While explaining her opinion on outsiders' perceptions of herself based on her appearance, Short Dawg says:

I think, when you see me, you definitely know I'm a woman, but people [outsiders] who idealize about a person by what they dress, of course they're going to say I'm gay or lesbian... but I dress the way I dress for me, not to portray this image or to say, 'well I'm a gay stud, so I have to wear these clothes.'

Other respondents claim that outsiders use imagery and stereotypical derogatory terms, like lumberjack, butch, and dyke, strictly based on a woman's gender display, appearance, and dress. In the following quote, Jessica explains her feelings about the lumberjack image; an outsider image of a lesbian, and why she feels it is judgmental. Jessica argues:

What do they [butch labeled lesbians] do? Do they chop wood? That's the last picture I saw with a butch female. She had a flannel shirt, some boots, and she was chopping wood. I don't chop wood.

Essentially, respondents argue that an outsider will label a woman that dresses in men's clothing or that has a men's hairstyle in a derogatory way. In a sense, respondents are arguing that outsiders may perceive certain lesbians' masculine appearance as a threat to the masculinity of heterosexual men; which is the reason for the stigma placed on the lesbian lifestyle by the outsider group. Men have historically perceived masculine-appearing lesbians as a "direct threat to their manhood" because of the assumption that these lesbians had the ability to weaken or rival their entitlement to what they equated as masculinity; their sexual access to women (Heap 2009:262; as cited in Moore 2011:87).

Insider Group Usage

Several respondents mentioned feeling pressured or forced by lesbian peers to claim a certain label as part of the lesbian identity once they began to acknowledge and accept their

homosexuality and transition into the lesbian population. By transition into the lesbian population, I am referring to when these women first begin to acquire or spend increased amounts of time around peers that are also lesbians. For instance, Taylor recalls her first encounter with the importance of labeling as soon as she began to embrace her lesbian identity. She stated, "When I was younger, I just thought...I thought that [using labels] was just how it was. Because that's how I learned it." In Taylor's experience, when she accepted her lesbian identity, she was interacting with lesbian peers that spoke or referred to each other using lesbian labels. Therefore, Taylor assumed that labels were a vital and required part of a lesbian lifestyle. Short Dawg experienced a similar situation when she first began to identify herself as a lesbian. Short Dawg claimed that her lesbian peers would say things such as, "well, you have to be something [a label]." In other words, these examples solidified the significance these labels carried for their lesbian peers. Therefore, when Taylor and Short Dawg accepted their sexual identity as lesbians they were already under the impression that they had to have a label to describe the "type" or lesbian they would be.

On the other hand, a majority of respondents argued that when labels were used among insiders they are only for description purposes rather than as a way to define or stigmatize one another. For example, certain labels are used to describe the personality, demeanor, or physical features of a woman in preparation for a blind meeting. For instance, Muscles stated:

I would feel more comfortable telling you [a lesbian] they're [another lesbian] more butch looking, but I would not in everyday conversation with a non-lesbian say, 'you're going to be looking for a butch lesbian,' no. It's sort of like, ok within the culture.

In a sense, it seems that respondents feel more comfortable with lesbians using labels amongst themselves rather than non-lesbians because there is less fear of judgment or stigma being placed on the label. In Muscles' case, she is using the butch label only to describe a woman's dress and

appearance to another lesbian that does not know what the woman looks like. There is no judgment being made about the butch woman's personality or lifestyle choice. The label simply functions as a form of description; almost equivalent to describing one's style as hip-hop, country, or goth.

Labels were also mentioned as a useful way to predict the personality of a woman based on her style of dress as well as the role she would play in a relationship. For example, Rozay uses labels to describe women when determining their dating compatibility:

Like for instance, I'm trying to hook my best friend up with somebody. I'm like, 'Oh, she's a femme,' you know. 'She ain't a stud, or she might be a stem. She kind of got that boy side to her.'

In this example, Rozay is describing the way a woman dresses as feminine, but her personality is a bit more masculine or aggressive than the stereotypical gendered assumption for a woman's personality. Essentially, Rozay is using these labels to try to prepare her friend for how to interact with the woman she is going to be "hooked up" with. Rozay is also demonstrating the assumption that lesbian relationships are based, at least in part, on gender. Upon closer examination of her interview, I have come to understand that Rozay's best friend is a stud. Therefore, using labels to describe the woman she would be "hooked up" with as not another stud is important because it provides an example that demonstrates how heteronormative assumptions of gender are maintained even in lesbian relationships. Bo explains how she feels about labels being a way for people to know how to interact with someone they have never met:

I think people try to pick words so that when you're describing somebody you kind of know what you are dealing with. Because it's not as simple as saying boy or girl anymore. It's more like, 'She's a stud, she looks this way, she dresses this way.' You have to figure out if you want to deal with them or not.

Basically, these labels are used to describe the style of dress of an individual, but are also used to predict the demeanor and relationship roles of these women as well. Therefore, the assumption is

that a lesbian that dresses in men's clothing is going to be labeled by a masculine term, like stud, butch, or AG, and is expected to have a masculine demeanor. Bo identifies as stud and claims, "I just knew that I was more of stud type, butch type, the more aggressive, more dominant one in the relationship." In this example, Bo explains that as a stud she feels as though she must maintain a masculine demeanor and perform the masculine role in her relationships; i.e. being the decision maker and controller of her relationship.

Contradiction within Insider Group Usage: Analysis

Thus far I have presented evidence that insiders find labels to be important for multiple purposes. However, I now address how respondents' contradicting opinions of label uses reinforces the binary gender system and heteronormative roles for relationships.

Contrary to Bo's claim of being stud and dominant in her relationships, Onyx, a stud, explains how she thinks the labels being used by insider groups do not properly denote the role she plays in her relationships:

I think it has nothing to do with because I'm a stud, or I'm the man of the house, so you [I] need to do that [stereotypically masculine chores like taking out the trash]...I like being mutual. What you're [relationship partner] strong in, that's what you do and what I'm strong in [is what I do].

According to Onyx, her stud label, masculine gender display, has nothing to do with what role she will play in a relationship. She later went on to tell me about her experience as a member of a lesbian wedding party. Onyx's best friend is a femme labeled lesbian, and she is getting married to a stud labeled lesbian. The issue Onyx faces is the fact that her best friend would like her, Onyx, to be the maid of honor and wear a dress in the wedding. The bride claimed that the stud she is marrying will have members of her wedding party in suits, so it is only 'proper' for Onyx to wear a dress since she will be standing on the femme side of the bridal party with her best friend. Onyx explains her thoughts about the situation below:

How am I going to do that [be the maid of honor]? Because of course she's marrying a stud, and all her [the stud] people probably going to have suits on. I'm going to have on a suit. If she [Onyx's best friend] has a matron of honor, she's [the matron of honor] going to have on a dress. I said, 'Well...I'm going to have on a suit. What's so odd about it? Have them [the rest of the bridesmaids] put on pant suits, then, to blend in with me. To blend in with the whole row'... I can even wear a women's suit. It don't matter to me. I just don't want to wear a dress. [It's uncomfortable].

In this example, Onyx provides evidence that not only do some insiders reinforce the assumption that masculinity is naturally supposed to be attracted to femininity, but also that heteronormative assumptions of roles are still being reinforced even in lesbian relationships. Onyx's friend is a femme and, as Onyx explains it, is "of course" marrying a stud. This comment supports the assumption that "only sexual attractions between 'opposite' genders is natural or acceptable" (Schilt and Westbrook 2009:441; Kitzinger 2005). Onyx's best friend is also attempting to enforce heteronormative assumptions of roles onto her bridal party. The stud bridal party is expected to be dressed in suits, while the femme bridal party is expected to don dresses. Onyx, on the other hand, is resisting this reinforcement by questioning what is so "odd" about her wanting to wear a suit even as the maid of honor. This situation provides multiple examples of how Onyx feels that labels impractically reinforce the binary gender system as well as heteronormative roles in lesbian relationships.

There are other instances where labeling an individual poses a problem. The label, stem, in particular, was mentioned as problematic for both description and dating compatibility purposes. Sheila, a woman who has been labeled as stem by other people shared her experience about the challenges she faces as a result of simply dressing in clothing she finds comfortable for each particular day. Sheila does not like labels and does not attach one to herself, however, she knows that other people are looking at her and trying to attach a label to her. Sheila claimed that the task of labeling her becomes difficult for others because of her style of dress. This difficulty

results in others labeling her based on how often they see her and what she is wearing during their encounters. Essentially, if they see her dressed in all women's clothes they will label her as femme. If they see her in all men's clothes they will label her as stud, but if they see her on multiple, separate occasions alternating between the two styles they will label her as stem and often attribute that label to her inability to make up her mind. Sheila recalls a recent incident:

The girl I'm talking to, she calls me a stem all the time...I showed her a picture of my hair [in a feminine style rather than pulled back in a ponytail] and she was like, 'you look like a cute little stem, because you don't know whether you want to be a guy or a girl right now.'

In this example, Sheila expresses her frustration with the label chosen by her peers in the insider group, but also the rules that she feels are being forced upon her to dress or behave in particular ways.

More often than not, respondents referred to a stem's style of dress as being unacceptable and confusing. Jessica and Samantha share some criticism about the stem label. Jessica said, "Stem? That's just for the people who's just there. Appearance and sometimes personality. I think they're schizophrenic." Samantha follows by saying, "They [stems] like stud one day, then femme the next day. See how it's confusing?" In this exchange, Jessica describes a stem as someone who is "just there." This is a derogatory phrase that refers to their inability to make up their mind about how they want to dress. In other words, they will dress in feminine or masculine clothes based on the way they feel that day. This exchange also provides another example of how heteronormative assumptions of gender display are reinforced in the lesbian population. In other words, there are only two options for style of dress and they are either masculine or feminine, not a combination of the two. Jessica and Samantha go on later to discuss how the stem label can interfere with a woman's dating compatibility:

Jessica: It interferes with who's interested in you and who you would be interested in because how could a person like me [a stud style of dress]--

I like my heel women [femme women]. I might see heels and I'm like, 'Oh, she's attractive.' The next day, I see you [the same woman] in polo boots and some baggy Levis and it just threw me off.

Samantha: It [stem style of dress] messes me up.

Jessica: I'm not as attracted to you as I was when I saw you [a woman in heels from before]. I'm not even attracted to you, let's just state the facts. I'm not attracted to you at all in your polo boots and your shirts or whatever, your Levis, because I saw you the other day and you had on heels, and I was like, 'Oh she's pretty. She's a pretty woman,' but now you look like a pretty woman like me [stud style of dress]. I'm not saying I'm not pretty, but a pretty woman like me [is not what she finds attractive].

In this scenario, not only does Jessica exhibit discontent for stem labeled lesbians due to their lack of a distinct style of dress, she also implies the heteronormative assumption that masculine and feminine styles belong together in a relationship rather than masculine and masculine styles.

Essentially, while a majority of respondents claim that label use in the insider group is free from judgment and strictly used for descriptive purposes, I found the opposite to be the case. Based on respondents' interviews, I found that many have been faced with the reality of the existence of a binary gender system even in homosexual or lesbian populations; there is one and only one way to present one's self and that is masculine or feminine. When that binary is disregarded, confusion, stigma, and "not knowing whether you want to be a guy or a girl" can result. When a woman is challenged for not conforming to this binary system, her dating compatibility is also threatened.

In addition to the binary gender system being reinforced, respondents referenced the enforcement of heteronormative relationship roles. From the above exchange between Jessica and Samantha about how individuals labeled stem face dating challenges, it is clear that conformity to heteronormative relationship roles is still being maintained through the sanctioning of the butch/stud--femme relationship as the one and only appropriate type of lesbian relationship. Resistance to this sanctioned relationship can result in stigma and a form of

discrimination within the lesbian population. For example, Samantha remarks on stud-on-stud relationships; a relationship between two lesbians that dress in men's clothing as being frowned on in a way that is similar to relationships between Black and White people before the civil rights movement. Bo echoes the same contempt for stud-on-stud relationships by recalling an experience when a friend tried to introduce her to another lesbian as a potential dating interest:

Because there's some straight people in the straight community that will try to hook you up with people and they'll be like, 'Yo, I know this chick and you all will be great,' just because they know another gay person...because two gay people just have to meet each other, right? And they bring them [the other lesbian] over and you're like... 'That's not my type! That's a fuckin' stud! Why would you think two dudes [stud lesbians] want to be together?'...I want a feminine chick!

Based on Bo's colorful display of discomfort toward the idea of a stud-on-stud relationship, it is easy to see that heteronormative roles, based on the assumption that masculine and feminine attract, are expected to be maintained even in the insider group.

Race, Age, and Location Influences Perception

In addition to the different ways labels are defined and used, respondents presented conflicting opinions in regard to the influence that race, age, and location have on their usage.

First I begin with respondent's comments about the influence race has on the individual using the label and the individual being referenced by the label. For example, Samantha claimed, "Femme is the African American version of that [lipstick]." In other words, Samantha thinks femme is a label used to refer to Black feminine lesbians, while lipstick is used to refer to White feminine lesbians. It is noteworthy to mention that again, there were very few comments made about differences in labels that refer to feminine women, possibly due to their conformity to traditional feminine gender displays. However, there were multiple comments that referred to masculine lesbian labels and how these are influenced by race, particularly when referring to Black lesbians. Stud, AG, and stem were also distinguished as labels used by women of the black

lesbian population, while butch was perceived to be used by women of the white lesbian population. When I asked Rebecca if she thought there were any labels that were specifically used by or used to refer to a specific race of lesbians she replied, “I’m sure there are man. One I’ve heard before—I don’t know if it’s specific to the Black LGBT community, but I’ve heard the term stud.” Bo references stud as a predominantly Black label and stated:

Studs [are] in the Black community. They wear either braids or dreads, or something like that, or brush cuts, and the White community [referring to butch lesbians], you see a lot of girls with the shorter cuts, the spikey hair, you know, the flannel shirts.

Muscles, claimed that the label AG or aggressive is an African American label and that she learned about it from watching an LGBT documentary called “Aggressives.” She referred to the AG or aggressive label by saying, “I was just really kind of blown away. I had no idea that that kind of subculture existed.” Short Dawg said , “Black lesbians, I don’t hear them saying “butch.” Essentially, I found that just as more labels were mentioned to refer to masculine lesbians, more labels were mentioned to refer to Black lesbians. This difference in racial influence of label use suggests that Black lesbians, much like Blacks as a racial minority, are under scrutiny and therefore further differentiated from the norm in a way that White lesbians are not.

Furthermore, other respondents argued that White lesbians did not use labels at all. Jessica argued, “White people don’t care what you are. They just love all.” In other words, Jessica perceives White lesbians as simply women that love women. She also provides evidence that suggests labels based on gender display do not frame White lesbian identities as they do Black lesbian identities. Bo also perceives racial differences between lesbians and makes a distinction between Black and White lesbians as similar to the Black and White racial population:

Just like in the straight community and you have the clubs and it’s a totally different vibe than when you go to the White bars or clubs. It’s

the same way in the lesbian community. There's the Black clubs they cater to the hip-hop crowd...and there's the White clubs... You know, the same difference between the cultures. One's the more hip-hop style, one's the other. The same difference between White and Black [people].

With these quotes in mind, I argue that respondents perceived labels, especially masculine labels, to be more prevalent among Black lesbians due to the racial stigma applied to Black masculinity.

As stated by Moore (2011:87):

White masculinity in butch women...gives them an outsider status relative to traditional notions of White femininity and White respectability. The masculinity portrayed by Black women, however, is particularly feared in society and tends to be associated with violence, so transgressive [masculine appearing] women become problematized and feared by others because of the masculinity they portray.

In other words, respondents' comments imply that Black lesbians must negotiate their gender and sexuality in a way that White lesbians are not required to do.

I now discuss the perception that age and location influence the use of lesbian labels. Samantha and Jessica exchange differing opinions in regard to influences not only in race, but also in age of the user in the following excerpt:

Samantha: I feel like butch is more classified to the White people, male-looking females.

Jessica: No, that's Black. Black older people use that term, too, or bull dagger.

Samantha: Yes, bull dagger and all that, but I still feel like stud is more African American related.

Jessica: Yes, stud is more of an African American term.

In this exchange, Jessica and Samantha refer to both race and age as having an influence on a users' application of lesbian labels. Short Dawg echoes these sentiments claiming:

I'm not really into the young culture, so I know that the young kids [lesbians younger than her, 32] out there, they use even different terms. Probably stud, to them is a term that's extinct.

Jessica, Samantha, and Short Dawg provide insight that the labels an individual is aware of is the result of their generation. Basically, these respondents provide examples that suggest that the age or generation at which a lesbian begins to accept and embrace her lesbian identity will determine many of the labels she will know and use.

Correspondingly, I found that where respondents were from, geographically, influenced their comfort with and knowledge of certain lesbians labels. Samantha, for example, asserted that the spelling of certain labels was influenced by the geographic location in which it is used. She explains:

Boi, b-o-i...it makes the word look cooler. It's a southern thing. People [lesbians] want to change vowels and letters and stuff. You can spell it with a 'y', but I think the word looks better with an 'i'.

For other respondents, certain labels carried a derogatory association while others were unknown or unused depending on the location. For instance, Jessica said:

Since I've been gay, I don't like being called a stud. I don't like that because [of] where I'm from...they see stud as derogatory almost...you say stud and you [people in her hometown] automatically think thugs, your pants hanging out, oversized clothes, tattoos, earrings, piercings, dope [and] guns.

In this instance, provides insight into how she perceives the stud label as a result of where she grew up. Jessica is from a small, rural town in the southern region of the United States and she also mentioned that she did not know many lesbians in her town around the time that she acknowledged and accepted her lesbian identity. Therefore, due to her upbringing in that particular southern town, she feels that the label stud carries a stigma that it probably would not had she been from a town that did not carry such a derogatory association toward it.

Similar to Jessica, Rozay believes the word dyke carries a derogatory association in her hometown. Raised in a northern rural town, Rozay claims the word dyke is a label used to

describe all lesbians regardless of their gender display and explains her negative feelings about the label. She stated:

Where I'm from, that's [dyke] what they [lesbians] are. If you're gay, you're a dyke...I always hate that word. I hate it...When I was younger [before I realized I am a lesbian], it didn't bother me... but now that I am gay, it's like, that's offensive to me...They're [lesbians] all labeled as dykes. I'm telling you, the north is totally different.

In Rozay's case, there is no attempt to distinguish between appearances in her hometown when it comes to labeling lesbians. Rozay also mentions that before she realized her lesbian identity, she was not bothered when she heard the word dyke, most likely the result of lack of understanding the homosexual identity, which was due to her outsider group status. However, now that she does identify as a lesbian, her status as part of the insider group finds the dyke label offensive and judgmental.

Ultimately, the influence that respondents' race, age, and location had on the use and perception of these labels provides evidence that sexual identity is a gendered set of practices and discourse, not a set of traits. If sexuality or gender were simply a set of traits there would be one set of clear and distinct definitions for each label, and the race, age, location, or sexual orientation of the user would not influence the way the labels were used.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have reported the lesbian labels, their definitions, and the functions the labels serve as they were presented in respondents' interviews. I also reported how respondents perceived certain labels to be influenced by race, age, and location of the person using the label. I found that respondents struggled to define the labels they mentioned, resulting in no clear and distinct definition for each label. Respondents also mentioned more labels for women that exhibited masculine displays than feminine displays.

Furthermore, I found that respondents presented contradicting opinions of how and why labels are used, whether they are used by outsider groups or insider groups. While outsider groups were mentioned as using labels in hostile and judgmental ways, respondents presented examples that portray insider groups as using labels in similar antagonistic ways. Respondents also provided examples of how insider groups force the use of labels to maintain order and to promote 'appropriate' dating compatibility in the lesbian population. Order was thought to be maintained by being pressured to choose either a masculine or feminine gender display so that one can easily be paired with a lesbian of the opposite gender display. Moreover, respondents mentioned that outsider groups are very limited in their knowledge of the numerous various labels used by the insider group. Therefore, it is noteworthy to consider that the correct use of labels can and does function as a signal of insider status for individuals of the insider group.

Additionally, some respondents believed that race, age, and location influenced the attitudes held about the use of certain labels, which provides evidence that sexual identity is a socially constructed, gendered set of practices and discourse. I also found that more terms existed for Black women's masculine displays which suggests that the same racial stigma applied to Black masculinity is applied to Black lesbians. These contradictions indicate the limitations of applying labels based on traits and/or characteristics to define one's gender and sexual identity.

V. DRESS & APPEARANCE

What does it mean to ‘look like a lesbian?’ Do lesbians have a particular look? These are the types of questions I considered when I began this project. Academically stated, I wanted to know if the way lesbian respondents constructed their dress and appearance accommodated or resisted the binary systems of gender and sexuality and what consequences this might have. In other words, do respondents construct their dress and appearance to fit traditionally masculine or feminine norms, and how do they experience this on a day to day basis?

It is important to report the contexts and conditions under which dress and appearance are perceived as a source of pleasure or judgment, and possibly pose a risk for respondents. This chapter examines the circumstances that influence respondents’ dress and appearance preferences, and explores the contexts and conditions under which respondents’ dress and appearance proposes judgment and potential risks.

Dress versus Appearance

Essentially, I am examining whether respondents are performing aesthetic labor and if so, how. Aesthetic labor refers to the way an individual constructs their style of dress, mannerisms, voice, appearance, and attractiveness in different contexts and under different conditions to manipulate their environment (Williams and Connell 2010). In other words, respondents are held accountable by others based on their aesthetic component, "a set of normative expectations regarding appropriate appearance and demeanor" (Williams and Connell 2010:353; Pettinger 2004; Witz et al. 2003). For the sake of clarification in this project, I refer to dress and appearance as two separate concepts. Dress refers to the garments, clothing, and apparel

(jewelry, hats, purses, etc) adorn by respondents. Appearance refers to the manner in which respondents present themselves; this includes hair length and hairstyle, bodily hygiene, makeup, and mannerisms and gestures. These concepts of display are important because respondents' dress and appearance send messages to the people around them. These messages may inform others of their social identity, mood, or intent (Goffman 1979).

Circumstances that Influence Dress and Appearance

The circumstances that influenced respondents' dress style depended on several different factors. By style I am referring to what is perceived as masculine or feminine clothing or dress. A few respondents have only slightly adjusted their style of dress, if at all, since they accepted and embraced their lesbian sexual identity. They perceived their style of dress as a source of pleasure, or as something that feels natural and comfortable to them. Slight adjustments in their style of dress included changes in the color of garments, combination of clothing pieces worn, and variations in the size of the particular garments. For the other respondents, their dress style completely changed as a result of the circumstances they encountered when they "came out" or began to proclaim their lesbian sexual identity. Complete changes meant that respondents transitioned from one style to a totally different or opposite style. For example, a respondent stating that they used to dress in women's clothing when they first "came out", but now they dress in men's clothing. In this section, I present the circumstances that influenced respondents' dress practices when they first "came out" as well as the circumstances that influence respondents' preference for their current style of dress. I first briefly examine the experiences of respondents who have only slightly altered, but maintained, the same masculine or feminine style of dress over time. Then, I examine the experiences of respondents who have changed their dress from the time they "came out" until the time of their interview. I explore the different

circumstances that influenced their dress and the reasons they construct their dress the way they do.

Dressing for Pleasure: Styles Maintained

The following experiences are those of respondents who perceived themselves as having consistently maintained their style of dress over time. In other words, they claim to have dressed in the same masculine or feminine style since they “came out.” Candice, a femme, claimed:

No, I didn't [change my style of dress when I came out]. I'm about whatever makes me comfortable. If that [dressing differently than I do now] made me comfortable, then I'm pretty sure I would have swayed that way.

For Candice, her main concern when it comes to dress has always been comfort, whether that meant dressing in her normal feminine fashion styles or dressing in a more masculine fashion style. Bo and Rebecca echo this preference for comfortable dress by claiming that they had always dressed the way they wanted:

Bo: From when I came out, and a little before that, I mean, even when I was a kid, I dressed like a boy... I was always a tomboy so I guess you could say I was always a stud from birth. I came out rocking Timberlands [men's boots] or something.

Rebecca: My fashion didn't change when I came out. I'd always, you know, really enjoyed [being able to say to myself], 'Well, today, I feel like wearing a dress, and maybe some little short heels or something.' But then the next day, I'll wear some baggy shorts, or some guys' shorts, you know, and a tank top and a baseball cap... As far as my fashion's concerned... I've never really caught a lot of flack for it.

Bo's statement implies that she has always dressed in the same masculine style. Moreover, she even goes so far as to claim that she has preferred and enjoyed masculine styles of dress since the day she was born. In Rebecca's statement, it is noteworthy to recognize that she stated she has had the luxury of never being criticized for her chosen style of dress. Rebecca went on to say:

It's very interesting because my parents never—I cannot remember my parents ever making me wear pink... They let me wear whatever I wanted

to. I gravitated more, I guess [towards]—what people consider boyish colors and boyish attire, like blue and green and stuff like that.

By her parents allowing her to dress the way she wanted, Rebecca was able to freely experiment with both masculine and feminine styles of dress without facing negative repercussions.

However, Rebecca mentioned that once she realized her lesbian identity, she made certain adjustments and alterations to her style depending on who she was around:

Back when I was sort of attempting to hide my sexuality—I was aware of, well if I'm going out with my family, I might dress a little bit more feminine, just because I was so hyper-sensitive to trying to hide that [homosexual] part of my identity. But it's not like I would wear a dress when I didn't want to, you know, or something like that. I would just sort of, for lack of a better term, sort of femme it up a little bit when I was with my family...Anywhere outside the realm of my family, I would really just dress any way I wanted to.

When I asked Rebecca to describe what she meant by “femme it up a little bit,” she said that she would continue to wear the feminine styles she liked, but that perhaps she would wear a “cute ruffly top” instead of a “button-up shirt and vest” that she would usually wear when going out with her friends. Therefore, while Rebecca claims that she has maintained the same feminine style of dress, her statement suggests that she simply altered that feminine style; consciously selecting and wearing different combinations of feminine garments when she was around her family, in an effort to hide or mask her sexuality. This statement also implies that Rebecca perceives that to “femme it up” would cause less ‘concern’ or be less likely to arouse suspicion about her sexuality.

When these respondents were asked to describe their current style of dress, they mentioned that they continue to dress in the same masculine or feminine styles as when they “came out.” For example, Candice said:

I'm very feminine in the way I dress...I wear the tight jeans, tight shirts. I love dresses...If I'm just lounging around the house, then I have on sweats [sweat pants] or something, but other than that, I just can't go out in some boyish clothes or something.

In the above statement, Candice explains that she loves her feminine style of dress, but also makes a distinction that when she is relaxing she will wear women's sweat pants instead of baggy men's sweat pants. Rebecca described her current style as, "Comfortable, casual, I guess...I like being able to mix it up because I enjoy being able to." Bo, a stud, mentioned:

My jeans are more fitted than they used to be but I can't do the skinny, paint on your leg type [of jeans], no man. I have to be able to put stuff in my pockets...I just like enough room to be able to move around in [my jeans]. But not too baggy where I'm tripping over them or too tight where I can't have circulation in my toes...So [I now dress] more grown up, more polished...Yeah, it's more neat.

While Bo perceived she had maintained the same masculine style, certain aspects of that masculine style have evolved to include more "tailored" or "neat" fitting clothes. Her masculine style remained the same, but she has altered it to be more "neat" or "polished" by wearing the men's jeans that are less baggy than they were when she first "came out." Dressing in a masculine style or men's clothing that is more 'loosely fitted' than baggy and falling off is what Bo alluded to as more "neat" or "polished."

The recurring theme for Candice, Rebecca, and Bo is that they all dress in a way that brings them pleasure and reference comfort as the reason for their preferred style of dress; a rationale that I will revisit later in the "current style influences" section. Essentially, each of these respondents describe their preferred style of dress as something they have "always" chosen, which implies that they perceive their gendered styles to be 'innate' or 'natural.' Nevertheless, Rebecca's "femme it up" statement arouses an interesting notion which implies feminine styles of dress may allow a lesbian to hide her sexuality and be assumed as heterosexual. As a result of the traditional heteronormative ideas of femininity, dressing in an 'appropriately' feminine way may therefore cause a woman to be assumed heterosexual by default.

Style Change Influences: "Coming Out"

Respondents who described themselves as changing their style since they “came out” revealed that family members’ opposition toward their dress styles, and self-perception of their body had influenced their style of dress. Rozay recalls her style of dress when she first “came out”:

When I came out I was more of a femme. It was the fact of I couldn’t come out like I wanted to, as a stud, because I was still in my mom’s [house]—[living] under her roof. I couldn’t just come out [as] who I really wanted to be [a stud]...I think I always had that masculine [side], but I just didn’t want people to look at me. I think everybody goes through that. They don’t want people to just look at them and judge them.

Rozay implies that she feared her mother would be opposed to a “differential”, or masculine, style of dress and that she would face judgment had she dressed in the masculine style that she preferred. Taylor’s style of dress was also influenced while she resided in her parents’ home. She mentions how she preferred to wear looser, more masculine clothing, but was at the mercy of whatever clothing her mother purchased for her to wear:

That’s [when I first came out] when my mom was still buying—like, you know, mom was still buying [my] clothes, so I would ask for bigger, like one size up. So I was still wearing women’s clothes to appease mom, but I’d be like, ‘no, you need to go up two more sizes.’

For Taylor, since her mother would not buy the men’s clothing that she wanted, Taylor tried to compromise by wearing oversized women’s clothing. I later questioned Taylor about whether she was concerned that people would assume she was a lesbian even though she would wear women’s clothing because it was excessively baggy. She responded:

Not even close...That didn’t even cross my mind... I guess before, I was more self-conscious of my weight and how people perceived me.

In other words, Taylor was so concerned with using her baggy women's clothing to conceal her weight that she did not even consider that other people would associate her style with

homosexuality. Furthermore, Taylor's response also suggests that she assumed wearing women's clothing, despite their baggy fit, would exempt her homosexual orientation from being scrutinized. Short Dawg describes her style when she first began to accept her lesbian sexual identity, but was still trying to hide her homosexual identity from others:

Yes, my style definitely has changed...I used to shop...and buy women's clothing. But the reason I did that was because I was performing. I thought that's what I wanted, especially if I was having to dress up [formal attire]...I was buying women's clothing because I was trying to perform in this idea where...I wanted to make sure that people saw me as one way. I did dress a certain way [in more masculine clothing on a regular basis]. The best way for me to get around that [people questioning my sexual orientation because of my masculine attire] was to wear sweat suits, because everybody wears sweat suits, dresses down and can wear sweat suits.

For Short Dawg, she suggests that dressing in feminine clothing was a performance of heterosexuality that would allow her to avoid being questioned about her homosexual orientation. Even though she preferred to wear masculine or men's clothing, she was not willing to adorn those men's garments on a regular basis for fear of exposing her homosexuality. However, Short Dawg implied that wearing sweat suits allowed her to dress comfortably and avoid any inquiries about her sexual orientation. It is important to again acknowledge that these experiences reflect these respondents' dress styles at the time when they first "came out" as a lesbian. By the time I conducted these interviews, all of the respondents were proud and "out" lesbians, women that openly embraced their homosexual identity.

Current Style Influences

I now discuss the circumstances that influenced the way respondents' constructed their dress and appearance at the time of their interview. As previously mentioned, a majority of respondents referenced comfort as the main factor that influenced their style of dress and appearance at the time of their interview. Furthermore, for respondents who dress in masculine

or men's clothing, they describe their current style as "more tailored" than when they first began to wear masculine or men's clothing. Likewise, respondents express contentment with their current comfortable dress style and imply that style of dress should be a personal choice rather than something sacrificed to appease others around them.

Sheila referenced comfort as the rationale for her style:

Now that I'm out, I'm more comfortable with dressing how I feel...I have both men and women clothes, so it depends on how I'm feeling that day. If I'm going to be super comfortable, I'll grab a pair of baggy jeans and a t-shirt.

For Sheila, even though she dresses in both masculine and feminine styles, she will only wear the style in which she is comfortable each day. Rozay, a stud, stated:

It's [dressing in men's clothing] more comfortable for me. I just ain't with them tight clothes. I kind of found myself in the army, to be honest. I really did...We could go out on the weekends and stuff like that, so my whole image started to change. I started shopping in the men's section...

In the above instances, Sheila and Rozay express that they choose their style of dress based on what is comfortable to them, rather than what has been deemed appropriate by the traditional heteronormative assumptions for femininity. For Sheila, she dresses in a style that is comfortable to her for each particular day, whether the style is assumed to be traditionally masculine or feminine. For Rozay, she felt so free from judgment while serving in the military that she chose to directly challenge the assumed standards of feminine attire by dressing in men's clothing.

However, while Rozay mentioned being able to be herself when she went into the army, it is important to recognize that this was also the same time she moved out of her mother's house.

Rozay described her mother's reaction when she returned home:

I came back home and it was just like she was happy to see me, but she questioned me. She was like, 'what happened? I expected to see you with pearls on and stuff like that.'

Rozay did not mean that her mother expected to see her come home from the military wearing pearls in a literal sense, she was implying that because she dressed in feminine clothing before she joined the army, her mother expected her to return home dressing in that same feminine style. Essentially, Rozay's mother was not pleased about the masculine transformation she saw upon Rozay's return from the military, which suggests that despite Rozay's newfound comfort, masculine styles are perceived as more risky than feminine styles. Likewise, Onyx explained her preference for wearing men's clothes:

Yes, I dress in mostly men's clothes, and they're comfortable to me. I don't wear dresses, because I'm not comfortable in a dress. I just wasn't comfortable in tight pants and stuff...I don't really wear pumps, because my feet are bad...So I gradually got a little baggier, a little looser, and I stayed like that.

Again, comfort is mentioned as the reason for Onyx's chosen masculine style of dress. She mentioned her "feet are bad" to indicate that because her feet do not fit comfortably into pumps, they make her feet hurt, which is why she chooses not to wear them. Onyx also claims that her discomfort with tight pants led her to experiment with looser, more comfortable, clothing. Therefore, Onyx chooses to dress differently from the assumed 'appropriate' feminine dress norms to avoid the physical distress she would endure if she followed these norms.

Other respondents who dressed in masculine styles claimed that their current style has become more "tailored" than it was in the past. Short Dawg describes her current style as transforming to a "more tailored" look:

I'm just even more comfortable...Now, I'll buy jeans always a size too big, partly to cover up my assets, and then just because I guess that was what made me comfortable. [When I first came out] I wasn't really comfortable with myself, but now...I've been more comfortable with the type of things I choose to wear, but I also wear tighter-fitting [men's] clothes, so a more tailored look than just slouchy, [or] baggy.

The above quote demonstrates that over time Short Dawg has embraced her lesbian identity and is now as mentally comfortable with her masculine style of dress as she is physically comfortable. This comfort has allowed her to dress in men's clothing that she describes as "more tailored" rather than baggy. For Taylor, while dressed in women's clothing, she perceived the baggy manner in which she wore them to be masculine. However, Taylor claimed that her current style had changed to include "more fitted" clothing:

I've gotten more—like, I'm wearing more fitted clothes now...more fitted, and actually...I've just started wearing [fitted] women's clothes, and I'm really excited [about that]. Like, I'm surprised, I'm like, 'I look cute.'

For Taylor, she went from wearing baggy women's clothes to hide her body weight, to being comfortable experimenting with more fitted clothes. Essentially, as all of these respondents have become more comfortable with their lesbian identity, they have been able to find a style of dress that is both physically comfortable and that feels 'right' to them, or that satisfies their sense of self. In doing so, they recognize that they do not need to dress a certain way to please the people around them.

For example, Short Dawg mentioned that she now enjoys being comfortable when she gets dressed. She also mentioned that she no longer wears feminine or women's clothes because she has accepted and embraces her lesbian identity. She went on to later describe her style transformation from feminine to masculine as not only more comfortable, but also as a "freeing" and "much more enjoyable" experience than being in the closet and dressing in a style that is uncomfortable in order to satisfy those around her. She stated, "even if I put on a dress, I'd still be gay," as part of how she now feels about her masculine style of dress. Muscles explained why she also does not feel the need to dress a certain way to please people around her:

I don't feel comfortable in a dress. Lipstick makes me feel like I can't breathe...I'm serious! You know, when I put it on, I feel like there's not

enough room for the air hole... You really have to force some Chapstick on me too... I like to be comfortable. I think I've grown out of the whole, 'I need to dress for other people' thing.

For Muscles, she implies that the way she dresses should only affect her, not the people around her. She does not see a reason to walk around uncomfortable just to appease other people. Onyx shared a situation where a member of her church confronted her about her masculine style of dress:

Even in church sometimes, they'll [church members] be like, 'I can't wait to see you in a skirt or in a dress.' I'm thinking, 'What is that going to do?... What is that going to do for you?... You want my feet to hurt for these three hours I'm in here, to prove to you that I can look good in a dress?'... Don't assume [that] because I'm gay, this [men's clothing] is what I have to wear... It's [my style of dress] whatever I want to wear, not because of my sexual orientation.

In this example, Onyx directly challenged the church member's opposition to her masculine style of dress by acknowledging that changing her style to appease others would be both pointless and uncomfortable for her. She also implies that her masculine style of dress is for her personal comfort rather than her sexual orientation. In essence, her style of dress is a personal choice and there is no 'natural' connection between being lesbian and dressing in a masculine style.

Each of the respondents' experiences above support the notion that their style of dress is for personal comfort rather than to appease others. For respondents who had not changed their style of dress from masculine to feminine, or feminine to masculine, they claimed that they always dressed in a way that was comfortable to them, and they had not been scrutinized about that chosen style of dress. Those respondents who had changed their style of dress since they "came out" to the time of their interview mentioned family member opposition toward differential dress styles, overcoming personal concerns with their body image, and fear of judgment from others as factors that influenced their original dress style. However, every respondent claimed that their current style of dress was for their own comfort or pleasure. I

found no difference in the way feminine and masculine respondents used the term 'comfort' as the rationale for their dress style. All respondents utilized 'comfort' to describe both the fit of their garments, as well as the way their style matched their sense of self or felt pleasurable and/or 'natural' in relation to their masculine or feminine identity. The fact that all of the women I interviewed are openly lesbian could contribute to the reason they are all comfortable with the way they currently dress. If I would have interviewed women that were not “out” and open about their lesbian identity, perhaps personal comfort would not have been the rationale for their current style of dress. I do think it is noteworthy to mention that I did not find evidence that respondents perceived their race to have influenced their style of dress. This could be due to the fact that respondents utilized gender specific terms, such as masculine and feminine, to describe their appearance and how these terms applied specifically to their personal appearance and dress style. In other words, when respondents described lesbian labels, they referenced stereotypes to formulate and apply the description to others; however, they avoided the use of stereotypes to describe their personal dress and appearance styles.

Potential Judgment and Risks due to Dress and Appearance

In this section, I examine the contexts where respondents' dress and appearance serves as a potential source of judgment and I explore the conditions where respondents' dress and appearance propose a potential risk. Potential judgments include others presuming respondents' actions or style of dress are a result of their lesbian sexual identity, and masculine respondents being mistaken as men based on their style of dress. Potential risks include respondents being questioned or reprimanded about their lesbian sexual identity, or having their professional ability and job performance devalued solely on their style of dress.

Dress as a Source of Judgment

Many respondents shared experiences when their actions or style of dress had been judged as a sign of their lesbian sexual identity. For example, Muscles shared an experience where she had her hair pulled up in a ponytail and was dressed in baggy sweatpants, a t-shirt, and a visor. She explained that a random woman asked if she was a fighter, because she claimed that Muscles looked like a boxer of some sort. Muscles responded to the woman by saying, "Fight what? What are you talking about?" Based on experiences like this, Muscles later said, "sometimes I'll look really [explicative] gay!" In other words, Muscles interpreted the woman's question as a response to the way she was dressed; and that style of dress implied that she looked like a lesbian. Sheila recalled an experience when she wore a shirt in support of the fight against breast cancer, but her friends saw the shirt and made jokes as if it was a reference toward her admiration for breasts because she is a lesbian:

The "keep a breast" [shirts and wristbands], so everyone knows it's for breast cancer. That's something I've very serious about...my gay friends, they're all [joking], 'You got it cause it says you like boobies.' Well, yes, I like boobies, but that's not the reason why I got the shirt!

Sheila's experiences suggest that her sexual orientation is sometimes used as a way for others to make assumptions about her actions based on her style of dress. Sheila said that she was used to people making these sorts of jokes because she perceives her style of dress to be under constant scrutiny from others. Sheila, a stem, alternates between both masculine and feminine styles of dress depending on the day; which she said often causes people to be uncertain about her sexual orientation. Sheila told me that when people she worked with discovered her lesbian identity, they made comments such as, "It makes perfect sense now" and "but you don't fit the stereotypical lesbian." Sheila interpreted their claim, "it makes perfect sense now," as their way of internally rationalizing why she sometimes dresses in men's clothing. This rationalization also

implies that Sheila's coworkers assume women who dress in men's clothing are homosexual. Therefore, she perceived their comment to mean that her coworkers assume her homosexual orientation is the reason she sometimes wears men's clothing. The claim that Sheila does not "fit the stereotypical lesbian" implies that her coworkers assume all lesbians all dress in men's clothing. Therefore, because she does not dress in men's clothing constantly, they do not perceive her as fitting the "stereotypical lesbian" looks. Sheila mentioned that she finds these kind of comments to be frustrating because people think that she dresses in both men's and women's clothing as a result of her sexual orientation rather than her personal comfort. Sheila also revealed that she is annoyed when people make references to the "stereotypical" lesbian because she argues that not all lesbians dress or appear to look like men. Similar to Sheila not fitting the stereotypical lesbian look, Muscles explained that when her girlfriend "came out" to her family, her parents immediately said, "but you're so pretty." These statements imply that these people perceived lesbians to be women that dress in men's clothing, and are unattractive or unwanted by men.

Respondents also experienced situations where people assumed that they had to dress in a certain style because they are lesbians. Rozay claimed that her mother continues to express opposition toward her masculine style of dress:

Right now, to this day, she'd say, 'I've accepted you're gay, but I don't accept the way you dress.' She don't like it. She won't go out and buy me clothes. She will not buy me men's clothes at all, but she'll sit there and wash them and iron them...I think it's the fact that it's just because I'm gay now, [she thinks] I gotta dress like that [in men's clothes]. I'll be trying to explain to her [that being a lesbian has nothing to do with the way I dress], but we really don't get nowhere when we talk about it.

Similar to Rozay, Candice recalled a similar situation with her mother:

Like I said, when I lounge, my clothes are loose. They're sweatpants [and] shirts. Now I did—my mom, I guess she thought I was going to go in this deep transition [with my clothes]. She's like, 'why you got your

pants hanging down like you're a boy,' you know? I'm like, 'mom, I'm lounging.' So I guess she was kind of nervous or scared that I was going to transition to that whole boy phase...Right [because], that's what she thinks a lesbian should look like.

For Rozay, her mother has a stereotypical view of lesbians as women that dress like men. She assumes that Rozay dresses in men's clothing because, as a lesbian, she is 'required to.' However, even when Rozay tries to explain that her masculine style of dress is comfortable to her and simply a personal preference rather than a 'requirement', her mother's stereotypical preconceived notions continue unchanged. As for Candice, her mother seems to carry the same stereotypical assumption that lesbians dress like men, which is why she reinterprets Candice's sweats as a 'sign' of that lesbian identity. Based on her interview, Candice implied that before she "came out," her mother did not think of her sweats as a signal of her sexuality. While Candice said that her mom was nervous that she would start to dress "like a boy" because she is a lesbian, this fear also implies that her mother may be using Candice's feminine display as a way to remain in denial about her daughter's lesbian sexual identity. Both of these situations provide evidence that suggests that masculine styles of dress are viewed as appropriate attire for lesbians and are perceived as a direct reflection of lesbian sexual orientation.

Respondents made references to masculine clothing being perceived differently by others once they revealed their lesbian sexual identity. Onyx reflected on the way she is now perceived by others by saying, "I was a tomboy until I realized I was gay." Similar to Onyx, Sheila said her mother now treats her differently because she is an "out" lesbian:

Until I came out, that's what everyone thought I was. They just said, 'Oh, you're a tomboy'...Now that I've come out...she's so weird about it [the way I dress]. I'm looking at her like, 'mom, it's just me. I'm still the same Sheila I was beforehand.'

These respondents were originally perceived as tomboys due to their masculine style of dress before they "came out", but now that they are open lesbians, people assume that their style is a reflection of their homosexual orientation. Onyx and Sheila claimed to have been called tomboys when they were younger based on their preference for masculine styles of dress. However, once they "came out," they said that these same people no longer viewed their style of dress with the same innocence; their preference for masculine styles of dress became, instead, a result of their sexual orientation.

In addition to people assuming that one's sexual orientation is directly linked to a masculine style of dress, being mistaken for or directly addressed as "sir" was also brought up during the interviews. The following exchange between Jessica and Samantha includes their feelings about being called "sir" based on their dress and appearance:

Jessica: I don't like being called a sir.

Samantha: I get called sir a lot...No, I don't think they really know.

Jessica: I don't think they know.

Samantha: I don't really get upset about it.

Jessica: I think it's more older [people that call me sir]. I think it's just they see short hair, male clothes, [and then they just say] boy.

Samantha: Yes, they automatically go boy. [But when they hear me speak] They're like, 'Oh, I'm sorry.' I'm like, 'No, it's cool. I get it a lot, it's whatever.'

Jessica and Samantha both agree that they do not think people call them "sir" on purpose, because they recognize that their masculine dress and appearance, short haircuts, are the reason for the mistake. However, during the interview Jessica was angrier than Samantha about how being called "sir" made her feel. Jessica's tone was very stern as she said that she does not like being "sir," and she claims people need to pay attention to more than just the clothes an individual is wearing. She mentioned that when she corrects the "sir" mistake, people typically

look at her face and then apologize for the mistake by saying that her clothes misled them and that she does not physically look like a man at all. Bo also referenced multiple occasions where she was mistakenly called “sir,” including walking down the street, going through the drive thru line at a fast food restaurant, and being pulled over by the police:

I mean, I've been mistaken for a guy on the street for eleven years. Like they [people] see me with a girl and they'll be like, 'Sir!' ...I'm like, are you serious? I go through the drive thru, [and they say] 'Sir, would you like fries with that?' ...Or I get pulled over by the cops and he's [the police officer] like, 'Sir, can I get your license and registration?' I hand him my I.D. [and] he's like, 'Oh, I'm sorry ma'am. I'm going to have to give you a ticket.' [I am left thinking] What, are you pissed off because I'm female now? I still get the ticket, what kind of shit is that? Pulls me over thinking I'm a black male, and I'm a female, and I still get the ticket.

Despite being called "sir" on multiple occasions, the instance where Bo was pulled over by the police is particularly interesting. She thinks the cop pulled her over because he thought she was a black male. However, when he sees her I.D., she implies that he became frustrated for mistaking her as a male, but continued to issue the ticket. Bo's response provides evidence that suggests her masculine style of dress does not grant her the same gender privilege as women that dress in feminine styles. She implies that if she were a feminine dressing female, the officer might not have issued her a ticket.

Onyx and Sheila mentioned being referred to as “sir” while they were at work:

Onyx: Yes, somebody called me sir I think at work, because I'm serving [food at a restaurant]...They [the customers] just probably was just talking at the table, saying how gay I was, and then I came over and they probably was like, 'No sir—I mean ma'am.'

Sheila: The other day at work, it was hilarious. I didn't feel like going to work that day, so I wore my big khakis and my big shirt and I had my pullover [sweatshirt] on, all of which are too big to show my shape. I was helping a customer and she was like, 'Sir, can you tell me where toys [the toy section] is?' Her daughter was like, 'Mom, that's not a man. That's a woman.' She [the mother] was like, 'Oh, I'm sorry...It's because how you dress.' I was like, 'I understand, I'm used to it. There's days when I don't feel like coming to work, and this is how I dress. I'm

used to being called a man.’ She was like, ‘But you don’t [physically] look like a man at all. You’re just so pretty.’

Onyx and Sheila shared their impressions of these experiences as humorous because they claimed that the people that made the mistake were not paying attention to anything other than their masculine dress styles. However, once the people examined Onyx’s and Sheila’s faces, they quickly realized their mistake. These mistakes provide evidence that supports the assumption there are only two genders, masculine and feminine. In the cases of Jessica, Samantha, Bo, Onyx, and Sheila, any individual that is not feminine is automatically assumed to be male by default, or "people who do not deliberately mark themselves as feminine are taken to be men" (Lucal 1999:783; Kessler and McKenna 1978). Therefore, these respondents recognize that their masculine styles of dress are going to cause them to be perceived as men.

Potential Risks of Dress

Respondents referenced different conditions where they perceived that their dress style proposed a potential risk. Again, potential risks include respondents being questioned or reprimanded about their lesbian sexual identity, or having their professional ability and job performance compromised solely on their style of dress. In this section, I discuss the conditions where respondents’ dress and appearance proposed potential risks both outside of work and at work.

Non-Work Contexts

Men questioning and/or commenting positively or negatively about respondents' sexual orientation and style of dress were referenced as the potential risk in relation to non-work contexts. Several respondents said that men were confused by their lesbian orientation because the men found them to be attractive. Janeesha recalls a recent experience at a local bar:

I remember one night I wore this dress that was really beautiful, and I hadn’t worn a dress in years, but I just—you know...I just felt differently

about dresses all of a sudden. So, I wore one, and I got all this attention that was crazy, and I was like, ‘Oh this is why I don’t wear dresses.’ But one guy in particular was just so disappointed that I was gay...and he just couldn’t get over it...He didn’t question me too hard about it because he was actually a really smart guy, he just kind of wanted—he wanted an education all of a sudden about it [why I am a lesbian]...gender theory questions even. I was like, ‘Whoa, can I just have a beer and not do this?’”

Wearing a dress brought unwanted attention from men at the bar. For Janeesha, her decision to wear a dress resulted in unwanted attention from men, which is often the case for heterosexual women that wear dresses to a bar. However, lesbian women have to endure the additional burden of having men question their sexuality instead of accepting the rejection as simply a lack of interest. Janeesha's explanation that the man who was "so disappointed" that she was a lesbian implies that he assumed that lesbians were unattractive and unable to attract a man. In other words, he "just couldn't get over" her being a lesbian because not only did she did not fit his preconceived notions of what a lesbian looked like, but he also found her attractive. Janeesha later told me that as the man questioned her at the bar, he invaded her personal space by leaning over her and even resting his weight on her shoulder as he questioned her. In a similar type of situation, Rozay stated that men often tried to persuade her to dress in feminine clothes by saying, “You’re pretty as a girl...If you dressed like a girl, all the dudes would want you.” Basically, these men found Janeesha and Rozay attractive and could not understand why they were lesbians when they were perceived as easily being able to attract a man. Rebecca exclaimed that she and her girlfriend often receive positive comments from men such as, “That’s hot. Y’all make a cute couple,” or, “Oh, I really like to see that,” when they were seen out in public as a couple. Taylor revealed that men most often approached her when she was dressed in baggy clothing like sweat shirts and basketball shorts:

What I find funny is days I run out of the house...and I have more loose stuff, that’s when I get hit on by guys the most...they’re like, ‘Well,

because you're so feminine still, and it looks like you just ran out of the house' ... I wouldn't expect to get hit on by men dressed like that.

In this instance, Taylor provides evidence that she recognizes that women who wear men's clothing or who dress in masculine styles risk being judged as homosexuals. Therefore, she finds it "funny" that men "hit on her" when she is dressed in a masculine style. In her interview she explained that the men that "hit on her," claim that even though she wears men's clothing, she does not appear to be masculine in her mannerisms; which is why they simply assume that she was in a hurry when she ran out of the house, and that the men's clothing or "loose stuff" she wore were just the first garments she picked up to put on. Basically, even though her style of dress was masculine, her appearance was not, which resulted in these men assuming her to be heterosexual. Bo also expressed her impression of men that approach her despite her masculine style of dress:

I've had guys hit on me before and I look so tomboyish that I have to be real, 'you're sounding gay, bro...That's kind of gay, bro.' Like if my jeans are baggier than yours...No man. That's not cool. You might be a little fruity. You might want a dude in your life.

For Bo, she perceives her masculinity to be closely associated with that of a man. Therefore, her perception is that the men that "hit on her" are attracted to the masculinity of a man; which would make them homosexuals. Samantha shared a similar experience to Bo by saying, "this one guy was trying to get with me and I was like, 'dude, no. I'm bigger than you!'" In Bo and Samantha's case, besides discouraging unwanted attention from men, they perceive their style of dress to resemble that of a man so closely that when a man finds them attractive they question his heterosexuality.

Respondents also shared experiences where men questioned and/or commented negatively on their sexual orientation and style of dress or appearance. Rebecca claimed that she knew a lesbian couple that alleged a man had spit on them while out in public. Rebecca did not

know the context of whether they had been interacting or simply approached by the man before he spit on them, but she did say that the women typically dressed in women's clothing but that they had an androgynous or loose-fitting style. This experience was not the only instance where a respondent's dress or appearance posed a negative risk. Muscles mentioned that a friend and her girlfriend had been discriminated against at a local restaurant because of their homosexual orientation. Muscles claimed:

She and her girlfriend were holding hands at the table and they waited two hours for their steaks and didn't get them, and then the chef came out and asked them to leave.

Muscles also explained how a man at a bar responded harshly to her entering a bar with her girlfriend based solely on their appearance:

I was aware, however, about the difference, whenever my hair was shaved, the difference in people's reaction to me... I once went into a bar, and my head was shaved, and I had shaved my girlfriend's head also, and immediately [a man in the bar yelled] 'Fucking dykes!'... When he said 'fucking dykes' I flipped him off. And then he started to get up off his barstool like he was coming at me.

Muscles later revealed that she was at the bar to meet a male friend of hers, and that when the angry gentleman got off of his barstool to charge, her friend quickly put the man's head through a pinball machine. The evening concluded with Muscles, her girlfriend, and the male friend they came to meet being asked to leave the bar because the police had been called. She did not mention anything about charges being filed, nor did she recall ever receiving an apology from the angry gentleman or the bar employees.

Work Contexts

Respondents' dress and appearance also posed a potential risk in their professional or work environment. The biggest proposed risks mentioned by respondents were having their job performance or ability questioned, and the potential to be denied promotion or a new position

due to their style of dress or appearance. Janeesha, a teacher, disclosed that she consciously negotiated her style of dress when at work:

I found myself—especially teaching—I found myself thinking, ‘You know, if I wear this, maybe they will—my students—will be more comfortable with me in some way’...Because it’s teaching...I feel like I have to earn their [the students’] trust. And a lot of way to do that is through your gender performance...I feel like my job begins in the morning when I’m picking out my outfit. What says professional and gender-neutral? Or not even gender-neutral, but feminine...I mean I get creative when I can go out with my friends, but I’m very constrained in front of the classroom.

For Janeesha, she assumed her style of dress, particularly feminine style of dress, determined whether or not her students took her seriously as an instructor. Janeesha's experience supports the notion that "there is an assumption of heterosexuality built into professionalism" (Dellinger and Willams 1997:160). In other words, in order for an individual to be perceived as professional and taken seriously, they must also be assumed heterosexual. These assumptions provide evidence that women, particularly lesbians, are deprived of the privilege of being able to dress in non-feminine styles and still be taken seriously at work. They must perform bodywork by constructing their bodies, dressing their bodies, in ways that have been deemed 'appropriate' for females in order for them to do their jobs. Short Dawg, also a teacher, acknowledged that she recognized the risk she takes while dressing in her usual masculine style:

Even our [department] secretary, she’s super conservative in my department, and she always says, ‘Dr. Dawg, you look so nice today. That tie is so nice,’ and I know I’m probably, for real, the first lesbian that she has really known personally, the first gay woman. It’s one of those things that probably, if she didn’t know me, and she saw me, there might be some judgment there, but because she knows me, it’s ok [that I am a lesbian that dresses in men’s clothing].

Short Dawg’s experience with the department secretary suggests that while this particular occasion was positive, there is still a potential risk for her colleagues to question her ability to teach based on her style of dress. In a sense, Short Dawg represents what Kanter (1977:207)

refers to as a "token" in her department, a symbol that serves as a "stand-in" for all lesbians. While Kanter's (Ibid. 1997) work focuses on women as the token in the corporate atmosphere, the same concept can be applied here. Essentially, Short Dawg, is the "token" or only lesbian in her department. Therefore, her style of dress is noticed because she is "different" and thus "highly visible" (Kanter 1977:207).

Taylor works in retail and provided examples where customers have responded negatively toward her based on her style of dress:

When I go to greet people, they are scared. Some of these women are afraid of me. I can see the terror—you can just see it in their face. [I ask them] ‘You finding everything ok?’ [They quickly respond] ‘Yep. Thank you’ ...And I’m like, ‘Oh honey I ain’t going to rub off on you, but when you need help, I’ll be right over here’ ...Some days it wears [on me], where it’s like oh my god, I’m trying to do my job. Would y’all just freaking get over it!

In this instance, Taylor implies that women are intimidated by her masculine style of dress. As a result, she perceives that whenever she is trying to assist these female customers, they assume that she is trying to make a pass at them, which interferes with her trying to do her job. Taylor later described a particular incident with a customer experience survey directed at her:

I’ve had comments—we have a customer experience survey that customers take—so I’ve had, I guess it was kind of a complaint. A customer had put on there, "The manager that wears the men’s clothes" ...[my coworker told me] ‘Evidently this woman said that you were looking at her weird, but you could have clearly been looking just out the window.’

Taylor interpreted that the female customer not only assumed that masculine style of dress reflected her homosexuality, but also that Taylor was staring at her because she admired her rather than just looking out the window. Taylor went on to say that she gets irritated at work because she recognizes she is at risk of people assuming she is a lesbian and treating her different as a result of her masculine style of dress.

Besides the potential risk of having their job performance or ability questioned, respondents also referenced their style of dress and appearance as a risk when it came to job promotion or hire. Taylor explained her frustrations with the way her style of dress is perceived by management:

I have personal issues because I work in retail. So working in retail, I'm like, 'Do these bastards want me to wear a dress? Is that the way I need to move up? Do I need to show more cleavage? Do I need to do my hair?...Like, why am I not going anywhere?'

In the above quote, Taylor questioned whether her style of dress was the obstacle that stood between her and a job promotion. In the following quote, Taylor revealed that her suspicions were correct in that her style of dress and appearance stood in the way of her getting a promotion at work:

The first time I tried to move up within my company, I was talked to and I could tell that he was trying—and this is coming from a gay man... 'Ken [the boss] only sees you wearing that ball cap all the time'...The only reason I bought the hat was to keep the [my] hair from getting knotted up [in the headsets that we are required to wear]...I think it was he thought maybe he was trying to like, 'Hey you're family [homosexual as well], just a heads up, he only sees you always wearing that baseball cap. I know that you can do more, but just think, every time he comes in here, you're wearing that baseball cap.'

In this case, Ken is the promotion manager and Taylor assumed that her gay coworker was trying to warn her that the baseball cap she wore to work was something that Ken would take into consideration when determining staff promotions. Likewise, Samantha told me that a friend of hers used to dress in men's clothing, but now "turned back" or dresses in women's clothing again so that she can better gain access to job opportunities:

She [my friend] was telling me how she felt like one of her reasons for turning back [dressing in women's clothing again] was she felt like she was missing out on a lot of job opportunities, for being stud...She did feel like, as a stud, she was getting [negatively] noticed more and just losing out on job opportunities.

Similar to Samantha's friend, Onyx said that she would change her style of dress from masculine to feminine if her job required every female to dress up in feminine clothing once every three months for a meeting. She claimed she would do it to keep her job as long as it was only required once every three months or so.

Sheila stated that she dressed in women's clothing during the hiring process of a job search:

Well, for an interview, I do, I usually do girlie [clothes and appearance]. Even though I have guy dress clothes in my closet, I try to stay away from them, if it's an interview because I don't want them to automatically disqualify me based on how I look. I want them to see that I can be professional, even though I might come in with a uniform and look altered, but before I can get the job, I have to be professional.

Essentially, Sheila recognized the risk she would assume by dressing in men's clothing when applying for a job. I found out that the interview was for a job as a police officer; a male dominated occupation. Therefore, I asked Sheila to clarify why she felt dressing in women's clothing during the interview would give her an advantage:

It's one of those jobs where, at least from my perspective, if you don't fit a certain part, you're not going to get the job. No matter how qualified you are, no matter anything. Unless I came in there with a fade [short, masculine haircut] or something like that, I don't think they would have been too accepting of me coming in there in guy clothes...Yes, it's a masculine field, but at the same time...I feel like, in order for me to actually get my foot in the door, I need to persuade the more girlie side of me...Once I'm in there, I'm going to do whatever the hell I want to. I just need to get in the door first.

In the above explanation, Sheila implies that because she is a woman, she must present herself as such, which means dressing in traditionally feminine styles, so that the men hiring her will take her seriously as a potential female officer. Sheila's explanation also suggests a fear that if she were to attend the interview dressed in men's clothing, she would be interpreted as imitating a man. However, it is noteworthy to mention that Sheila makes the distinction that she feels it

could have been more acceptable for her to be dressed in men's clothing if she had a "fade" haircut. In other words, Sheila implies that if she were a stud (lesbians that stereotypically wear fade haircuts and constantly dress in men's clothing), it would be acceptable for her to dress in men's clothing for an interview. This distinction suggests that because she chooses to alternate between masculine and feminine dress styles and appearance, it would not be acceptable for her to first appear in men's clothing.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have discussed how and why respondents' styles of dress and appearance have been constructed from the time they "came out" until the time of their interview. I also discussed the potential judgment and risks associated with respondents' dress and appearance styles. I found evidence that family attitudes as well as the tolerance level of respondents' surrounding environment, initially influenced respondents' styles of dress and appearance. For example, respondents who did not change their style of dress or appearance did not face scrutiny or opposition directed toward their particular style of dress from their families or surrounding environments. On the other hand, respondents who did change their style of dress or appearance found that masculine styles of dress were viewed more harshly than feminine styles. All respondents, however, mentioned that the rationale for their current style of dress is for their own comfort or pleasure, rather than to satisfy those around them or as a direct connection to their sexual identity.

I examined different contexts in which respondents' dress and appearance served as a source of potential judgment. Additionally, I presented conditions where respondents' dress and appearance posed a potential risk in both their personal and professional environments. I even

found evidence that respondents who dressed in masculine styles or wore men's clothing would alter that style to reap potential occupational benefits.

Essentially, I found evidence that suggests that dress and appearance are strongly policed for lesbians. Respondents were forced to constantly negotiate their dress and appearance styles because they knew that they would face potential judgment or risk. Feminine styles were not policed as much due to their conformity to traditional heteronormative ideals of femininity. Masculine styles were very strongly policed among respondents, and resulted in many respondents altering their dress or appearance in order to 'succeed' or 'progress' occupationally. In a sense, I found that Black working and lower class masculinity is devalued and demonized and the respondents who dress in masculine styles face the challenge of negotiating this stigma by negotiating whether or not to alter their style depending on their occupational goal. Respondents' experiences suggest that their dress and appearance styles are not undoing or redoing traditional gender assumptions. The general assumptions of gender, what is masculine and feminine, are not concrete, but they are still used to hold people accountable for their gender display (Lucal 2008). So while some respondents dress in masculine styles and challenge the traditional gendered assumptions of femininity, others reprimand them for their deviation from the norm. According to Butler (1990:140), society "regularly punishes those who fail to do their gender right." This punishment is evident from respondents who claim they altered or changed their style of dress or appearance based on the response of the people around them in order for them to progress; most often for occupational purposes. Therefore, I found both feminine-identified and masculine-identified respondents are not redoing gender because they continue to conform to the two and only two binary system of gender. Feminine-identified respondents are rewarded for their conformity to the binary gender system and masculine-identified respondents

are reprimanded for their resistance. In a sense, respondents who dress in masculine styles must negotiate their style in ways that respondents who dress in feminine styles do not. Masculine dressing respondents perceive that they are often virtually forced to adopt feminine styles of dress in order to acquire jobs so that they may support themselves. Consequently, even if respondents did want to challenge the binary gender system, masculine respondents cannot and do not redo gender because their resistance or challenge to traditional heteronormative ideals of femininity results in discrimination, judgment, and occupational stagnation that leave them no other option than to change their style of dress in the end.

VI. THE SOUTH & RELIGION

This chapter explores respondents' perceptions of living in the South and the impact that religion has had on their experiences as "out" lesbians. The experiences in this chapter provide important contexts for understanding how location, or place, can shape the ways respondents do gender and sexuality. It is important to understand that *place* is a social construction, much like the conceptualization of race and gender. Therefore, along with encompassing a geographic location, place is also "a social, cultural, geopolitical construction" (Whitlock 2009: 100). Consequently, 'the South', much like 'Southern place', and 'Southerner,' carry different meanings dependent on the individual (Ibid. 2009). In other words, the meanings or values attributed to a particular place like the South are interpreted in multiple ways by different individuals of different cultures (Gieryn 2000). In this project, the South refers to states geographically located in the Southeastern region of the US as well as the beliefs, morals, and values associated with these locations. The respondents I interviewed were currently residing in, and in some cases were originally from, different size cities in one of the following states: Virginia, Tennessee, North Carolina, Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi, and Louisiana. Much like Whitlock (2009:99), I argue that respondents' memory of their experiences are "place specific." Essentially, respondents' recollections of their experiences are specific to the places in which they occurred.

My specific interest in researching lesbians currently residing in the South is due to the overwhelming presence of religion in this region of the US. In 2013, scholars at UC Berkeley and Duke University published a report that examined religious preferences based on the results

of the General Social Survey (Klein 2013). According to the 2012 General Social Survey, “Southerners expressed the most religious attachment,” 85%, in comparison to all other regions of the US (Ibid. 2013). In other words, only 15% of Southern respondents claimed that they had no religious preference; which strongly suggests that religion continues to be an important part of Southern culture. Frequently referred to as, ‘the Bible Belt,’ people from or residing in the South have a reputation for maintaining what respondents call a “Southern mentality” that places religion as central to a Southerner’s way of life. As stated by Wilson (2000:3), “the proliferation of conservative Christian morality distinguishes the South as the Bible Belt.” Essentially, religion, specifically Christianity, is extremely “potent” in the South, and this religious framework does not condone homosexuality; thus, Christianity and homosexuality are arguably among the most influential aspects of respondents’ social and personal psyches (Whitlock 2009). In the following sections I report respondents’ perceptions of how being lesbian has influenced their experiences living in the South. I then examine the ways respondents explain that religion has shaped their experiences living as "out" lesbians in the South, and I conclude this chapter with my interpretation of what these experiences ‘tell us’ about the ways these lesbians do gender and sexuality in the South.

"Being lesbian" in the South

During the interview process, respondents shared many different contexts regarding how their everyday experiences have been influenced by their "out" lesbian lifestyle. I found that life as an "out" lesbian in the South has proven to be a positive experience for some but a negative experience for others. In this section, I first report respondents' positive experiences, followed by their negative experiences.

Positive Experiences

Several respondents claimed that living in the South has been a positive experience and that the South is an open and accepting environment toward them as lesbians. Onyx, residing in a large city in North Carolina, stated:

I've only been in the South. I've never really been too far up north, and I've been to Miami and Atlanta, but we [lesbians] fit right in. I've never been stereotyped for being gay, really...because I really never felt put in a negative place...it's like I fit in. Everywhere I go, I fit in. At work, I fit in...It's like, I fit in wherever I go. They know I'm gay. They don't sit here and, 'Onyx is the gay.'

For Onyx, she has had nothing but positive experiences while living in North Carolina as an "out" lesbian. Even when she is at work, she does not feel that her coworkers judge her because of her lesbian sexual identity. Rozay, residing in a small university town in Mississippi, is originally from an urban city in a Northern state, but adamantly claims that she feels the South is much more "open" and accepting of homosexuals than the North:

The South is more open...The South, it seems like whenever we moved down here, I seen more gay people. They were more out in the open with it. The north, I ain't going to lie --the north, they're stuck-up. They're just real stuck-up. My whole family is from the north, so coming down here, they're more out in the open with their lives and stuff like that. They really don't care. The north judges. They judge a lot. They're judgmental...I think the South is more open. I mean you do get those few people that look at you kind of crazy out in public, and you're going to get that, regardless of where you go, but I feel more accepted now, down here. I feel accepted, down here in the South, more than anything.

Rozay fervently expressed her comments about there being more gay people living "out in the open" in the South than in the North during her interview. Interestingly, she also expressed gratitude for living in the South rather than the "stuck up," or "judgmental" North on multiple occasions throughout her interview. Rozay's comments are noteworthy due to their direct contradiction of the South being more tolerant of homosexuality than the North; Ovadia and

Moore (2005:2) found that “people living in the South or in small communities are significantly less accepting of homosexuality.” Furthermore, Candice, residing in a large city in North Carolina, went so far as to say that the South is so tolerant of lesbians that young people see being gay as the "popular thing" to do:

Nowadays, it seems like it's--it's like the popular thing...You see it a lot of times, like now in my generation--well, after my generation--it's like people seem--I don't know, it's the thing to do. Like, the younger people are doing it because they see it, and it's like, 'Oh, I want to be gay.' And then two weeks later, they're back to guys, or something like that. It's just a fad for some people--a lot of people.

In the above quote, Candice perceives that people in the South feel so sexually unrestricted that they are comfortable openly experimenting with their sexuality and sexual orientation. Muscles, residing in a small university town in Mississippi, described an experience with her girlfriend's 9-year-old niece over the past Thanksgiving holiday that supports the idea that people in the South are accepting of lesbians. Muscles and her girlfriend, Caitlin, have been together for about five years and live in a house that they purchased together. Caitlin's niece, Dawn, was originally told that Caitlin and Muscles were "good friends" and "roommates" for these last five years. Since Caitlin has not publically "come out" as a lesbian, they decorated one of the spare bedrooms to appear to belong to Muscles. However, Dawn recently questioned the validity of their living arrangement during her visit over the past Thanksgiving holiday:

So she would ask really great questions like, well if you were out of school, why are you still living together, why do you have a roommate?...And I have monogrammed bedding so that it looks like this [the spare room] is my bedroom. So whenever she goes through it recently, she says, 'where are your clothes?' Which is a good fucking question because my clothes were not in there! There was nothing personal about the room other than the bedding, so I finally tell Caitlin's sister, look I'm tired of lying to Dawn because she's smart. And she was like, you're right, they're getting old, they know what gay is, they go to school, this is 2013. And so for

Thanksgiving they just say, 'you know Muscles and Caitlin, they're lesbians.' and so the kids are like, 'uh huh'...They were so nonchalant about it, and they were like, 'that's ok, and so if you have any questions about it, let me know.' And they were like, 'nope, we're good.'

In this case, Muscles, Caitlin, and Caitlin's sister had assumed that the children would be bothered by the idea of a lesbian couple. They were proven wrong when Dawn did not express even the slightest adverse reaction toward their revealed homosexual relationship. Dawn's nonchalant and accepting attitude toward homosexuality supports evidence that younger generations in the South do not carry the same intolerant attitudes towards homosexuality as older generations (Smith 2011; General Social Survey 2010).

Similarly, a few respondents made the distinction that residing in a college or university area in the South can be attributed to their positive experiences. Rebecca, residing in a small university town in Mississippi, stated:

For the most part, it seems--because this is a university town--there's a lot of progressive-mindedness, and it seems like it's probably fairly too acceptable here, and I don't think that most people would have a difficult time here.

In the above quote, Rebecca perceives that because she lives in a "university town" people are more accepting of lesbians and would not be given a hard time about their homosexual orientation. Likewise, Sheila, residing in a large city in Tennessee, said:

Well, it all depends on who you associate yourself with, because no matter where you are, there are going to be people who accept you and people who don't, but here, I think it's more--at least on college campus, it's more accepting, because there's so many of us. A lot of people I hang out with, that I'm really cool with, they don't even think twice about it.

Parallel to Rebecca's perception, Sheila also implies that because of the homosexual tolerance around campus, there are more "out" and open lesbians; which further perpetuates the idea of

acceptance. Furthermore, Janeesha, residing in a small university town in Mississippi, commented about working in an academic setting:

The cultural tide has shifted so that now it's not really PC to question somebody's sexual history and their orientation...Although again, I'm privileged to work in an academic community...My other friends in town--lesbian friends--definitely have been questioned at work, and so maybe I should say PC within the cultured, educated class.

In Janeesha's case, she acknowledges that while she works in an academic environment, people who are not affiliated with academia or are uneducated may be less tolerant of an individual's homosexual orientation. These respondents' experiences support scholarly findings that, "as the proportion of college graduates in an area increases, so do individuals' acceptance of homosexual behavior" (Ovadia and Moore 2005:1).

Respondents also revealed positive examples where their parents accepted their lesbian identity in spite of their conservative, Southern, religious upbringing. Muscles said that her family was completely accepting of her lesbian sexual identity and claimed that they "knew" she was a lesbian before she did:

I was 20, and I had no clue I was gay. And I was working with this girl...and she was gay. And she, one day, just looked at me and said, 'Are you gay?' I was like, 'I don't know.' I had never thought of it, I really hadn't...Before her, I hadn't questioned it, I didn't, you know, a lot of people have this sort of push and pull where they don't want to be gay, and they're like, 'Oh god, this is not happening to me. I can't be gay, I'm going to fight it,' I didn't have that...I brought it to my dad and he was like, 'I've known you were gay forever.' It's like they were waiting for me to realize it, and so I know a lot of people don't have that experience...I really didn't get that opportunity [to "come out"], everybody already knew.

I asked Muscles how her family "knew" she was a lesbian and she mentioned that they claimed she had always been masculine and "tomboyish" as a young girl, so they simply attributed that to her being a lesbian. Muscles explained to me that she was a bit shocked that her father was so

accepting because of the intolerant attitudes toward homosexuality that are prevalent in the South. In contrast to Muscles, Rebecca recalled her conservative parents' response when she revealed her lesbian identity:

I wrote them a four-page letter...they didn't call me to tell me I was getting kicked out of the family...They responded, you know, they didn't pop open a bottle of champagne, but they were like, 'We still love you, and we don't necessarily understand. We're not going to pretend to understand, but we're going to support you and love you no matter what.'

During her interview, Rebecca explained that she had been very fearful about her decision to "come out" to her parents due to her conservative, Southern, religious upbringing, but was pleasantly surprised by their hesitant but positive response.

Negative Experiences

Conversely, respondents also claimed that living in the South has proven to be a negative experience and that the South is an intolerant environment that reprimands deviance and promotes isolation and fear toward homosexual individuals. When I asked Samantha and Jessica, of Mississippi, about their experiences living in the South as "out" lesbians they responded that there was "nothing" positive about living here, and Samantha actually said, "shoot me." Short Dawg, residing in a small university town in Mississippi, expressed her feelings by saying:

It's just not that open. People aren't comfortable enough to walk around holding hands with their partner. If you go to places that are more liberal, you get that, but in the South, as a whole, is not that liberal. You get that close-mindedness. It's hard to be who you are and not feel like you're fighting the world to be that person...Hard as hell. Depressing...You can only be one way, and that's heterosexual, in the South. That's this idea. Anything outside of that, it's like you're deviating from the norm.

Short Dawg's statement implies that there is an emphasis on heterosexuality as the norm or default, and that anything outside of that norm is objectionable and even unsafe. Similar to Short

Dawg, when I asked Taylor, residing in a large city in Tennessee, how she perceives living in the South as a lesbian, she replied:

Oh my god, petrifying. I think it's petrifying. I'm scared...I haven't embraced the positive. I will say that. I won't say that it's just totally horrible, but I mean, we are in the South.

Muscles communicated her disgust with the negative attitudes she perceives as being held by the overwhelming majority of people in the South by saying:

It makes me sad living here...Just the fact that we are so behind, I feel, as a state, you know during the election, I was just so sad about...the fact that I started to be afraid for myself because of my Obama shirts that I had...I felt uneasy wearing them because of the reputation that this university has, I mean it's fucking called "Ole Miss!" I mean, come on...I mean that's the lady of the plantation. Let's call a spade a spade here, and it's embarrassing what this university represents largely. And the recent documentary that came out on ESPN about the riots and whenever JFK had to step in and James Meredith and the whole thing, it's embarrassing.

Muscles, is embarrassed by the intolerant attitudes she perceives to be held by people in Mississippi both currently and in the past. Her comments also imply that the mindset in Mississippi has not progressed very far from that of the segregation era.

Additionally, respondents shared experiences where they have had to explain that their lesbian sexual identity is not a choice or the result of abuse. Bo, residing in a large city in North Carolina, said:

A lot of people say that people are a lesbian because they've been molested or something happened in their past. A lot of people try to say that maybe I'm gay because my mom died at a young age. But to be real with you, my mom died when I was ten years old and I was in the fourth grade. And I had a girlfriend and I was messing with girls way before that. I believe that people are born gay. They don't choose to be gay. Why would you choose to be discriminated against? I don't believe that everyone has to be touched, or raped, or done something to, to end up being a lesbian. I just don't like dudes, I've never liked dudes. I've always been a lesbian and I like women. Pussy is the shit!

Short Dawg echoes Bo's animated comments:

Another thing about, in particular, being a lesbian is that this idea something has gone wrong, have you been touched, or something has caused you to be that way. This cannot just be you, but it has to be something else, or it's this idea that you can be a lesbian for right now, but you'll see the light again.

Both Bo and Short Dawg adamantly expressed that being a lesbian is not always the result of any type of abuse and is not something that people can turn on and turn off; it is not a choice. In other words, respondents perceive that people in the South attribute homosexuality as a choice or the result of some adverse event due to their strong religious background. Essentially, conservative Christianity constructs homosexuality as a behavior or choice, not an identity; thus, “homosexuality is sin and homosexuals are the devil incarnated” (Wilson 2000:4). Further illustrating this Southern notion that homosexuality is a chosen behavior, Sheila, who has a son, commented that her family members still think she is choosing to be a lesbian since she has already given birth to a child:

That [my son] was a choice. What I really am, I've known for years that I was gay, but they see it as, 'Well, you choose to be gay, because you've already had a child'...My folks, I think some of them still won't outright say it, but I think they question in their minds, it's a possibility that I just choose to do this.

Sheila, claims that being in and having a heterosexual relationship, which resulted in the birth of her son, was a choice. She remarked that she was always a lesbian, but chose to try to be heterosexual in the beginning, but did not want to continue to live that lie. However, for Sheila's family, their strong Christian background attributes to their perception of her 'decision' to choose to live a life of sin as a homosexual. Christian morality supports the idea that homosexuality is again chosen, and is a sin that “threatens the individual's soul as well as the collective values of Southern Christian society” (Ibid. 2000:125). Therefore, her family's

religious beliefs continue to influence their interpretation of her homosexuality as a conscious decision rather than her sexual identity.

Aside from these respondents' overall negative perception of the South as intolerant, I also received feedback that this intolerance promotes isolation and fear of retaliation in response to homosexuality. Bo, said:

In high school, and even now, there are not too many open lesbians. Especially when I was younger, there were not too many open lesbians. There were a lot of people who were afraid to come out of the closet because of the backlash.

I asked Bo to elaborate on the types of "backlash" these women feared and she said fear of being kicked out of their homes and disowned by their families, or being fired from their jobs. These fears support evidence that LGBT youth are more likely to be homeless than heterosexual youth (McBride 2012), and that job security does not exist for lesbians (Wilson 2000). In fact, some scholars report that upwards of 30% to 40% of homeless youths in the US identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender (McBride 2012; Corliss et. al 2011). Similarly, "there are no federal laws protecting them [homosexuals] from being fired simply because they are gay men or lesbians" (Wilson 2000:133). Rebecca and Candice mentioned how they struggled to accept their lesbian sexual identity because they were raised in the South and taught that homosexuality was not appropriate:

Rebecca: I'm not gay, it's just something I need to--maybe go to therapy and figure out, or just ignore it. I tried to date a bunch of guys, you know, try to get rid of it, you know.

Candice: At that time, like I knew I liked women, but growing up in my household, you know, my mom was really church-y. So it was like I tried to ignore it and avoid it.

Both Rebecca and Candice claimed that they originally tried to ignore their homosexual feelings and deny their sexual identity because they feared their family's reactions would be negative.

Janeesha explained how Southern intolerance promoted feelings of isolation among the homosexual population:

I think it's very isolating...So, isolating because it's so traditional and conservative that you can almost--I don't know--it makes you feel less secure in where you can be safe and where you can't; and who is going to be safe...also emotional safety.

Janeesha went on to say that this isolation might lead some to adopt self-destructive habits:

I see this pattern in the South of isolation causing substance abuse, and you know--I mean I know substance abuse is an issue in queer communities all over, but I think in the South there are much higher rates, and there's much less incentive to get help. And this isolation doesn't seem to end any time soon.

Janeesha's perception, though grim, does support evidence that finds higher proportions of alcohol and drug use among homosexuals (McKirnan and Peterson 1989). In other words, Janeesha perceives that Southern intolerance not only leads to increases in substance abuse in the homosexual population, but also that because of the overwhelming intolerance in the South, people may be dissuaded to seek help or rehabilitation.

Religious influence on negative experiences

As previously stated, religion has a strong presence in the South, and respondents' experiences echoed that notion. Short Dawg stated, "We're in the Bible belt, and everyone here is uber-Christian. Christians--not all Christians, but some have these ideas about homosexuality." By ideas, she was referring to negative ideas that claim homosexuality is wrong or a sin. Jessica recalled an instance where her basketball coach, also a preacher, expressed her distaste of homosexuality during their halftime break:

She said she didn't recruit any gay players, but during the middle of the season, everyone was gay...The whole team turned out gay...During the halftime of the game, we was not even talking

about basketball...It was about being gay and how happy our mothers were and didn't know, and then our assistant coach was a preacher, and he gave a little slick sermon. We came out of half time, not even crunk [excited]. We just walked out...Just defeated. We just walked out like, 'Ok, we're going to hell.'

Jessica's basketball coach claimed that team members' mothers were "happy" or proud of them for winning games, however, she also implied that the happiness was falsely deserved because of their 'closeted' homosexuality. In other words, if their mothers knew about their homosexual identity, they would be mortified rather than happy. Jessica claimed that religion was so important to her basketball coach that the team received a sermon rather than a pep talk during the halftime break that resulted in the team believing their homosexuality was a sin and they would be going to hell. Bo experienced a similar situation where she was confronted about her sexuality and told that religion would save her from her 'sins' as a lesbian:

They tell you that the Bible says you're supposed to be with a man. And that being gay is wrong, it's a sin. It's an abomination and shit like that. And maybe if you go to church, you will meet a nice boy. As a matter of fact, somebody sent me something on Facebook the other day...I put up a status about wanting a wifey and all this other stuff. And the comment was, 'Wait until God sends you somebody and he will treat you right'...And I sent the comment back, 'If *he* is coming, I'll stay single.'

Bo does not believe that she is sinning because she is a lesbian. She also implies that trying to date a man would be a lie and thus equally sinful, so she would rather be single. Rebecca recalled that her conservative Christian family was concerned that she was going to hell or was possessed by the devil when she first "came out" because they were taught that homosexuality was a sin.

Candice said that she even tried to reason with her religious mother when she first "came out":

When I told her, I was just like, 'Look, I don't want you and my aunt to go interceding. I don't want you to go pray for me. Like, this is what I like. I've got to make my own decisions. You can't go to heaven or hell for my sins.'

Candice also said that there was one point where her mother said that she thought she was a failure as a parent because her daughter is a lesbian. However, Candice's mother later accepted her lesbian sexual identity, but Candice said that she still thinks her mother prays for her to "grow" out it. Sheila expressed, rather confrontationally, her feelings and attitude toward religious comments about her sexuality:

I've had plenty of people who would be like, 'Ok, you do realize that you're sinning, right?' I respond, 'You do realize that lying is a sin? That having sex before marriage is a sin? I know the Bible just as much as you do.' A sin is a sin, regardless of what sin it is...Some of my family has said that before...Not to me, but I've heard it through the grapevine...It can be hard, because once people find out, they can look at you differently. That can be anywhere, but particularly here, it's one of those where the South is so church-oriented that they definitely look at you differently, like, 'Well, you're going to burn in hell.' One of those, 'Well, you're going to burn in hell because people sin everyday,' those things.

In the above example, Sheila does not endure religious criticism without acknowledging that the person criticizing her is not free from sin either. Her statements also imply that she does not feel that she is going to burn in hell for being a lesbian, but if she does, then everyone will be burning with her because everyone sins.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have reported respondents' experiences that provide an important context for understanding how their Southern location, or place, has influenced the way they do gender and the way their gender and sexuality are perceived by others. I argue that place is socially constructed, and therefore, carries different meanings for different people (Whitlock 2009). According to Gieryn (2000:465; Feld and Basso 1996):

Without naming, identification, or representation by ordinary people, a place is not a place...the meaning or value of the same place is labile—flexible in the hands of different people or cultures, malleable over time, and inevitably contested.

In other words, place includes not only an individual's cognitive sense of location, but also the meanings they attribute to that location. Therefore, respondents' sense of place, the South in this case, is the result of their experiences that took place there. Additionally, I argue that it is particularly important to examine these respondents' experiences due to the large role religion plays in the South. The Christian religious framework forbids supporting or tolerating homosexuality, and many respondents claimed to have been confronted by that negative frame of thought (Wilson 2000). Respondents' experiences support evidence that finds gender, sexuality, and principles of normative Christianity to be compelling influences on the respondents' formation of their lesbian sexual identity (Whitlock 2009). As such, the conservative and religious attitudes prevalent in the South did play a role in the way respondents interpreted their lesbian sexual identity as well as the way other people responded to respondents' "out" homosexuality.

Several respondents mentioned feelings of anxiety and unease when they began to acknowledge their homosexual identity due to their religious Southern upbringing, while other respondents referenced experiences where homosexuality was publicly reprimanded or scrutinized as inappropriate. As a result, some respondents' experiences shifted between positive and negative depending on the contexts of the particular situation. For example, the importance of religion in the South led some respondents to reference negative experiences in contexts where they interacted with strangers; such having their homosexual lifestyle criticized as a choice or a sin. However, a few of these same respondents also referenced positive experiences in contexts where they interacted with family members and friends; such as having a conservative and religious upbringing, yet being accepted by family and friends after they "came

out.” Other respondents made the distinction that residing in a college or university area in the South attributed to their positive experiences; due to trends suggesting that places with high proportions of college graduates also have an increase in the “acceptance of homosexual behavior” (Ovadia and Moore 2005:1). Likewise, it is important to mention that only one of the women interviewed, Onyx, attended church regularly. Although she did not directly discuss why she chose to attend church, she did imply that church was simply something that Southern people do, or rather just a part of the Southern lifestyle. Contradictorily to evidence that supports religious intolerance toward homosexuality (Wilson 2000), Onyx even mentioned that she did not feel threatened due to her lesbian identity, and that she “fit in” at church even though she was the only “out” homosexual member of her congregation.

Overall, after conducting these interviews I recognize how influential respondents’ Southern location plays into their perceptions of gender and sexuality. Southern location shaped all respondents’ life experiences because Southern attitudes are generally more intolerant toward homosexuality (Whitlock 2009; Wilson 2000); regardless of whether they present a masculine or a feminine gender display. In other words, respondents perceived their experiences to have been the result of reactions to their homosexuality rather than their gender presentations. Essentially, the way respondents ‘do gender’ takes a backseat to the way they ‘do sexuality,’ homosexuality in this case, in the South.

VII. CONCLUSION

The purpose of this thesis was to examine labeling and appearance practices among lesbians living in the US South. My general research interests were to explore the existence and relevance of lesbian labels and the ways they are used or resisted. I also wanted to determine whether lesbians disrupt the binary systems of gender and sexuality, and to explore the ways lesbians in the South do gender. Using in-depth interviews, I found answers to the following questions: (1) what labels are self-identified lesbians in the South using and/or applying to themselves, and how do they use them; (2) how do they talk about and experience their dress as a part of their identity; (3) how are lesbians doing gender and sexuality in both private and professional environments; and (4) how does Southern location influence lesbians' conceptualization of gender and sexuality. In the following sections, I briefly summarize the important points of each chapter, and reveal the answers to the above research questions. I then provide implications of this research, and suggest further research questions that may be addressed.

Analysis of Findings

In chapter 3, I found that the “out” lesbian women in this study use many different labels to define not only themselves, but others as well. These labels include lipstick, femme, stem, soft/feminine stud, stud, boi, butch, AG/aggressive, bull dyke, and dyke. Respondents claimed that labels served several purposes depending on whether ‘outsider’ or ‘insider’ groups use them. These uses included derogatory remarks; dress, appearance, and personality descriptors; and potential relationship role predictors. The outsider group represented individuals identifying as

part of the heterosexual population, and the insider group represented women who identifies as part of the lesbian population. Dyke was mentioned as the label used by the ‘outsider’ group to serve as a derogatory remark for all lesbians regardless of their gendered appearance. All other labels were perceived to be used by the insider group, and I argued that the correct use of labels function as a signal of insider status for individuals of the insider group. Lipstick and femme were used to describe feminine dress styles and appearances, while soft/feminine stud, stud, boi, butch, AG/aggressive, and bull dyke were used to describe masculine dress styles and appearances. Stem was used to describe women that dress in a combination of masculine and feminine styles. Labels were also mentioned as a useful way to predict the personality of a woman based on her style of dress as well as the role she would play in a relationship. Lipstick and femme women were assumed to have a stereotypically feminine demeanor and to play the stereotypically feminine role in her relationships. Stem, Soft/feminine stud, stud, boi, butch, AG/aggressive, and bull dyke women were assumed to have a stereotypically masculine demeanor and to play the patriarchal role in her relationships.

Furthermore, I found that respondents offered a wide and ranging set of interpretations for what each of these labels meant. They did not produce a clear and distinct definition for any of the labels they provided. These contradictions support the notion that there are limitations to applying labels to individuals based simply on traits or characteristics when one attempts to define another’s gender and sexual identity. In other words, gender is a social construction and sexual identity is a gendered set of practices and discourse, rather than a set of traits (West and Zimmerman 1987).

Also, I argue that the labels respondents used were informed by heteronormative assumptions of gender because there were far more labels to describe masculine appearances and

styles than to describe feminine appearances and styles. Respondents used lipstick and femme to describe appearance and possible relationship roles, but nevertheless referenced them as 'normal' or appropriate ways of behaving for women. Conversely, respondents used stud, boi, soft/feminine stud, soft butch, butch, AG/aggressive, and bull dyke to refer to women that took on a masculine mentality that they described would be traditionally assumed as 'unnatural' for a woman. In other words, these lesbians were described in a way that seemed as though they embodied "masculinity." These labels were used to describe 'abnormal' or inappropriate ways of behaving for women, and there were many more labels for these deviant ways of behaving than for those that conform to the heteronormative ideals of femininity. The large difference in the number of masculine labels than feminine labels suggests that labels are informed by heteronormative assumptions of gender. In other words, if something is normal, then it need only limited description because it is assumed to be 'natural' in its existence. However, if something is abnormal, numerous and in-depth descriptions are necessary to explain what and why the abnormality has occurred.

Moreover, I found that some respondents believe race, age, and location influenced the use of certain labels. I found that more labels were mentioned to refer to Black lesbians than White lesbians. These racial differences in label use suggested that respondents perceive Black lesbians, much like Blacks as a racial minority, as under scrutiny and therefore further differentiated from the norm in a way that White lesbians are not. In other words, respondents' comments implied that Black lesbians must negotiate their gender and sexuality in a way that White lesbians are not required to do. Likewise, respondents mentioned that the age at which a lesbian accepted and embraced her lesbian identity and the geographic location in which she grew up determined many of the labels she knew and used. I argued that respondents' beliefs

that race, age, and location influence the attitudes held about the use of certain labels, further provides evidence that sexual identity is a socially constructed, gendered set of practices and discourse.

In chapter 4, I found that all respondents' current dress and appearance styles served as a source of pleasure, or comfort. All respondents utilized 'comfort' to describe both the fit of their garments, as well as the way their style matched their sense of self or felt pleasurable and/or 'natural' in relation to their masculine or feminine identity. I also found that respondents perceived their dress and appearance styles as strongly policed by others, and this often resulted in judgment or potential risk depending on the context.

Essentially, I found that respondents experienced masculine styles as more risky than feminine styles. These risks were due in part to the fact that feminine styles conform to traditional heteronormative ideals of femininity, which result in assumed heterosexuality. Masculine styles were more intensely scrutinized and some respondents perceived the need to negotiate or alter their style in order to obtain or maintain a job. These findings address the ways respondents experienced their dress as a part of their homosexual identity, suggests that respondents construct their appearance in a way that accommodates rather than resists the binary system of gender, and describes ways respondents do gender and sexuality in response to different contexts and environments.

I originally expected respondents to interpret their style of dress as a way to resist the current masculine-only and feminine-only binary assumptions of gender, and instead, promote a more androgynous or fluid understanding of gender among lesbians (Lucal 1999). However, respondents, whether they preferred to dress in feminine or masculine styles, were not redoing gender because they strictly conformed to the two and only two binary gender system and

reprimanded stem styles; styles that incorporate both masculine and feminine garments, clothing, and apparel. Respondents who preferred feminine styles of dress were rewarded by others for their conformity to the heteronormative assumption of ‘appropriate’ feminine gender by being assumed heterosexual, and therefore, exempt from inquiry and criticism about their sexuality. Conversely, others reprimanded respondents who preferred masculine styles of dress for their resistance to heteronormative assumptions of ‘appropriate’ feminine gender by having their sexuality scrutinized and facing occupational barriers. Likewise, I found that even respondents who preferred a stem style of dress perceived they were negatively judged by other women in the lesbian population for their usage of both masculine and feminine dress styles. These respondents also perceived they were forced to negotiate their style to conform to heteronormative assumptions of ‘appropriate’ feminine gender in order to obtain a job.

In chapter 5, I argued that respondents’ Southern location provided a perfect example of the way location, or place, shapes how respondents conceptualize the way they and others perceive masculine and feminine gender and lesbian sexuality in everyday life. The social construction of location, or place, contributed to the meanings, values, and experiences of each respondent. I argued that respondents’ memories and recollection of experiences are specific to the places in which they occurred (Whitlock 2009). In other words, place includes not only an individual’s cognitive sense of location, but also the meanings they attribute to that location (Gieryn 2000). Respondents’ Southern location is particularly important to examine because of the overwhelming presence of religion in this region of the US. Religion, specifically Christianity, is extremely “potent” in the South, and this religious framework does not condone homosexuality; thus, Christianity and homosexuality are arguably among the most influential

aspects of respondents' conceptualization of the way gender and sexuality are perceived (Whitlock 2009).

I found that some respondents perceived the South to be surprisingly positive and tolerant of their homosexuality, despite the presence of a religious framework that forbids supporting or tolerating homosexuality; regardless of whether they presented a masculine or feminine gender display. Several respondents even mentioned that the university town in which they resided allowed them to have more positive experiences because attitudes in university towns and college areas are more tolerant and accepting of homosexuality than attitudes in rural areas in the South (Ovadia and Moore 2005). On the other hand, some respondents claimed to have experienced anxiety and uneasiness about their homosexual identity due to their religious Southern upbringing.

Similarly, other respondents referenced experiences where their homosexuality was publicly reprimanded or scrutinized as inappropriate and a sin, according to religious morality. Therefore, I argued that the conservative and religious attitudes prevalent in the South played a larger role in the way respondents interpreted their lesbian sexual identity, as well as the way other people responded to their "out" homosexuality, than the way respondents constructed their gender. In other words, the religious framework is so ingrained into the Southern mentality that respondents' lesbian (homo) sexual identity takes precedence over her gender display; whether it be feminine or masculine. These findings address the ways Southern location influenced lesbians' perceptions of gender and sexuality. All respondents perceived their experiences to have been the result of reactions to their homosexuality rather than their gender presentations. Essentially, the way respondents 'do gender' takes a backseat to the way they 'do sexuality,' homosexuality in this case, in the South.

I originally expected to find that living in the South would influence and affect the ways respondents constructed their gender display rather than their sexuality. In other words, I expected respondents to share experiences where they felt they needed to adjust their gender display to conform to heteronormative assumptions of ‘appropriate’ femininity in order to avoid being assumed as homosexual. However, my findings suggested the opposite; respondents perceived that their homosexuality posed more of a threat than their gender display; regardless of whether they dressed in a masculine or feminine style.

Research implications & future research

The implications of this research are that regardless of respondents’ homosexual identity, they continue to do gender in ways that uphold the binary gender system (Lorber 1994). All but one of the labels mentioned by respondents was either a masculine or a feminine descriptor; the stem label was the only label that acknowledged both masculine and feminine traits or characteristics in the same individual. However, respondents claimed that stigma was attached to the stem label because it did not conform to the two and only two assumptions of gender. This stigma supports Butler’s (1990) claim that individuals who do not do ‘appropriate’ gender will be punished regularly by society. In other words, I found that the expectation among respondents was to be either feminine or masculine in one’s gender display; anything in between was perceived as confusing or inappropriate. I recognize that a majority of respondents struggled to attach a label to themselves, because they claimed they did not like the judgment associated with labeling. Several of these respondents even claimed that other people did not have the right to label them unless they got the chance to know them personally.

In response to the existing scholarship discussed in the literature review, I found that while respondents used different labels to describe themselves and others, these labels continued

to support the gender binary in the same fashion as that of butch and femme. Even in relation to more recent literature, Moore (2006) argued for the existence of the gender-blender label; a label similar to stem, which combines both masculine and feminine dress and appearance styles. Butch has simply been expanded and renamed to include stem, soft/feminine stud, stud, boi, AG/aggressive, and bull dyke, and femme has been expanded and become synonymous with lipstick. After conducting the interviews, respondents' explanations of the functions these labels serve supports literature that examines these labels as potential relationship roles congruent with those of traditional masculine and feminine heterosexual roles. There was some controversy over the extent to which these labels served the function of description versus relationship role prediction, however, upon mention of the stem label, a majority of respondents expressed dissatisfaction with the stem's fluid migration between masculine and feminine traits and characteristics. Therefore, I do not agree that these labels challenge the binary gender system. My findings suggest that gender bending, whether it is labeled as lipstick, stem, stud, or boi, preserves and perpetuates the masculine and feminine gender categories rather than challenging them (Lorber 1994). Essentially, even with the creation of new labels like lipstick, stem, stud, and boi, the distinction between masculine and feminine gender displays used among lesbians suggest that the culture of what is butch and femme has and will continue to persist (Coyote and Sharman 2011).

I found the same conformity to the binary gender system concerning respondents' dress and appearance practices. Again, respondents were not fond of individuals that did not dress in a way that was either obviously masculine or obviously feminine. Alteration between the two gender displays was referenced to cause problems with respondents' acceptance among other

lesbians as well as dating compatibility; which suggests that respondents support assumptions that masculine must be attracted to feminine and vice versa (Schilt and Westbrook 2009).

The implications of this research also suggest that respondents support the binary system of sexuality. None of the respondents claimed to be bisexual and whenever bisexuality was mentioned during the interviews, their disapproval was made apparent through verbal and physical condemnation. Likewise, numerous respondents mentioned that individuals who did not claim one or the other sexuality are confused or lying to try to hide their homosexuality for fear of backlash. Respondents' dissatisfaction with bisexuality supports literature that suggests there are two and only two sexualities, homosexuality and heterosexuality (Butler 1990; Lorber 1994).

Having conducted this research, respondents' experiences suggest that lesbians occupy two minority and marginalized groups, female gender and lesbian (homo) sexuality. Originally, I thought I would find that respondents' labeling, and dress and appearance practices would challenge the two and only two gender categories of masculine and feminine. I assumed that labels such as stem, soft/feminine stud, and stud would serve as examples for how lesbians in the South did not conform to the dichotomous ideals of gender in lesbian sexual identity. However, I found that respondents' experiences reified the binary gender system. In fact, respondents simply use numerous labels to represent that which is almost identical to the original butch or masculine description or role. These findings suggest that respondents essentially do the same masculine and feminine gender as heterosexuals, but they utilize different aliases to label that masculine and feminine gender.

The influence of religion in the Southern location signifies that while attitudes toward homosexuality are changing, the religious morality that shuns homosexual behaviors is still very much intact. Lesbian women who dress in feminine styles are treated with the same disdain as

lesbian women who dress in masculine styles; which suggests that homosexuality is policed no matter what type of gender respondents display.

The intersectionality of race, gender, class, and sexual identity played a very large part in this research. Black respondents reported that they felt as though their masculine gender is policed more often than that of White lesbians. I believe this racial difference enriched my data because Black gender and sexuality are differentiated from the norm scrutinized in a way that Whites are not. However, I was surprised to find that none of my respondents referenced racism in combination with being an “out” lesbian in the South.

Essentially, my findings support that gender is a social construction that respondents do in their everyday activities (West and Zimmerman 1987). Also, the way respondents construct their masculine or feminine gender is not only the result of their own comfort, but also the result of social pressure to conform to heteronormative assumptions of ‘appropriate’ gender in different contexts such as private and professional environments (Butler 1990; Lorber 1994). All of the data in this research was the result of the everyday life experiences of these lesbians in response to the way others perceived their race, gender, class and lesbian sexual identity in the South.

Therefore, future research involving in-depth interviews will allow the voices of these silenced, and often ignored, women the chance to speak for themselves in spite of their existence within a culture that represses both women and homosexuals. I am interested in how and if lesbians living in the South, who regularly attend church, discover a sense of community within their congregation in the face of their homosexual identity. I only had one respondent who regularly attended church, however, all respondents referenced that religion was important to their family members. Likewise, I would like to know whether Black and White lesbians’ sexuality personally influences their perception of the importance of religion. As I conducted the

interviews, several respondents mentioned that they had grown up in religious households; yet, they did not mention how significant they personally perceive religion to be. Lastly, because all of the women I interviewed were “out” lesbians, I would like to do more research concerning the ways ‘closeted’ lesbians negotiate the ways they do gender as they consciously conceal their homosexuality, specifically in a Southern context. Based on respondents’ experiences with struggling to accept and embrace their own lesbian sexual identity and then construct their gender display in a way that suits their comfort level, I am interested in the ways a ‘closeted’ lesbian would cope with that internal struggle to deny themselves the freedom to explore their gender and sexuality.

LIST OF REFERENCES

REFERENCES

- Butler, Judith. 1990. *Gender Trouble*. New York: Routledge.
- Collins, Patricia. 1986. "Learning from the Outsider Within: The Sociological Significance of Black Feminist Thought." *Social Problems* 33(6): S14-S32.
- 2009. *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*. 2nd ed. New York: Routledge.
- Connell, Catherine. 2010. "Doing, Undoing, Or Redoing Gender?: Learning from the Workplace Experiences of Transpeople." *Gender & Society* 24(1):31-55. doi: 10.1177/0891243209356429.
- Corliss, Heather, Carol Goodenow, Lauren Nichols, and Bryn Austin. 2011. "High Burden of Homelessness Among Sexual-Minority Adolescents: Findings From a Representative Massachusetts High School Sample." *American Journal of Public Health* 101(9):1683-1689.
- 1991. "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color." *Stanford Law Review* 43: 1241-1299.
- Crenshaw, Kimberle. 1991. "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color." *Stanford Law Review* 43(6): 1241-1299.
- Creswell, John. 1998. *Quantitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five traditions*. Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications.
- 2003. *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Dellinger, Kirtsten and Christine Williams. 1997. "Makeup at Work: Negotiating Appearance Rules in the Workplace." *Gender & Society* 11(2): 151-177.
- Deutsch, Francine M. 2007. "Undoing Gender." *Gender & Society* 21(1):106-127. doi: 10.1177/0891243206293577.
- Faderman, Lillian. 1991. *Odd Girls and Twilight Lovers: A History of Lesbian Life in Twentieth-Century America*. New York, NY: Columbia University Press.
- Feld, Steven and Keith Basso. 1996. *Senses of Place*. Santa Fe, NM: School of American Research Advanced Seminar Series.
- Gall, Meredith and Joyce Gall. 2007. *Educational Research: An introduction*. Boston: Pearson, Allyn & Bacon.

- General Social Survey. 2010. "General Social Survey." Retrieved April 28, 2013 (<http://www3.norc.org/gss+website/>).
- Gieryn, Thomas. 2000. "A Space for Place in Sociology." *Annual Sociological Review* 26: 463-496.
- Goffman, Erving. 1979. *Gender Advertisements*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Heap, Chad. 2009. *Slumming: Sexual and Racial Encounters in American Nightlife, 1885-1940*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Hillman, Thea. 2011. "Butch-Femme as Spiritual Practice." Pp. 245-247 in *Persistence: All Ways Butch and Femme*, edited by J. E. Coyote and Z. Sharman. Vancouver, BC: Arsenal Pulp Press.
- Inness, Sam and Michael Lloyd. 1996. *G.I. Joes in Barbie land: Recontextualizing butch in twentieth-century lesbian culture*. In *Queer Studies: A lesbian, gay, bisexual & transgender anthology*. New York: NYU Press.
- Jennings, Rebecca. 2006. "The Gateways Club and the Emergence of a Post-Second World War Lesbian Subculture." *Social History* 31(2): 206-225.
- Jurik, Nancy and Cynthia Siemsen. 2009. "'Doing Gender' as canon or agenda: A symposium on West and Zimmerman." *Gender & Society* 23(1): 72-75.
- Kanter, Rosabeth. 1977. *Men and Women of the Corporation*. New York: Basic Books.
- Kitzinger, Celia. 2005. "Heteronormativity in Action: Reproducing the Heterosexual Nuclear Family in After-Hours Medical Calls." *Social Problems* 52(4): 477-498.
- Klein, Leighton. 2013. "2012 General Social Survey: More Americans Have No Religious Preference." *Journalists Resource*, March 26. Retrieved April 29, 2013 (<http://journalistsresource.org/studies/society/culture/2012-general-social-survey-more-americans-have-no-religious-preference>).
- Lev, Arlene I. 2008. "More than Surface Tensions: Femmes in Families." *Journal of Lesbian Studies* 12(2-3): 126-143.
- Lorber, Judith. 1996. *The Paradoxes of Gender*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- Lucal, Betsy. 1999. "WHAT IT MEANS TO BE GENDERED ME: Life on the Boundaries of a Dichotomous Gender System." *Gender & Society* 13(6):781-797.
- 2008. "Teaching and Learning Guide for Building Boxes and Policing Boundaries: (De)Constructing Intersexuality, Transgender and Bisexuality." *Sociology Compass* 2(2): 792-798.

- McBride, Deborah. 2012. "Homelessness and Health Care Disparities Among Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Youth." *Journal of Pediatric Nursing* 27(2): 177-179.
- McKirnan, David and Penelope Peterson. 1989. "Alcohol and Drug use Among Homosexual Men and Women: Epidemiology and Population Characteristics." *Addict Behavior* 14(5): 545-553.
- Moore, Mignon. 2011. *Invisible families: Gay identities, relationships, and motherhood among black women*. Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press.
- , 2006. "Lipstick or Timberlands? Meanings of Gender Presentation in Black Lesbian Communities." *Signs* 32(1): 113-139.
- Morgan, David and Richard Krueger. 1998. *The Focus Group Kit*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Ovadia, Seth and Laura Moore. 2005. "A Multilevel Analysis of American Attitudes Towards Homosexuality." *American Sociological Association*, August 13. Retrieved April 29, 2013 (<http://0-web.ebscohost.com.umiss.lib.olemiss.edu/ehost/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?vid=3&sid=f2fef952-f5f1-431b-8b5b-40fa248e19cc%40sessionmgr110&hid=114>).
- Pettinger, Lynne. 2004. "Brand Culture and Branded Workers: Service Work and Aesthetic Labour in Fashion Retail." *Consumption, Markets, and Culture* 7: 165-184.
- Ponse, Barbara. 1978. *Identities in the lesbian world*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, Inc.
- Rifkin, Lori. 2002. "The Suit Suits Whom? Lesbian Gender, Female Masculinity, and Women-in-Suits." *Journal of Lesbian Studies* 6(2): 157-174.
- Schilt, Kristen and Laural Westbrook. 2009. "Doing Gender, Doing Heteronormativity: Gender Normals," Transgender People, and the Social Maintenance of Heterosexuality." *Gender & Society* 23(4):440-464.
- Smith, Tom. 2011. "Public Attitudes Toward Homosexuality." NORC.org. Retrieved April 28, 2013 (http://www.norc.org/PDFs/2011%20GSS%20Reports/GSS_Public%20Attitudes%20Toward%20Homosexuality_Sept2011.pdf).
- Wahlig, Jeni. 2011. "What Does it Mean to be a Butch/Femme Couple? An Exploration of Identity Formation, Experience, and Couple Dynamics." M.S. Thesis, Department of Clinical Investigation, University of Wisconsin, Madison, WI.

- Walter, Mikel. 2008. "The Queering of Masculinity, Privilege and Power: A Theoretical Examination of Butch Privilege." Pp. 302-317 in *Tribades, Tommies and Transgressives; Histories of Sexualities: Volume 1.*, edited by M. McAuliffe and S. Tiernan. 2008. Newcastle, UK: Cambridge Scholars Publishing.
- Ward, Jane. 2009. *Butch/Femme: Encyclopedia of Gender and Society*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Weber, Janis. 1996. "Social Class as a Correlate of Gender Identity Among Lesbian Women." *Sex Roles* 35(5/6): 271-280.
- West, Candace and Don Zimmerman. 1987. "Doing Gender" *Gender & Society* 1(2): 125-151.
- Whitlock, Reta U. 2006. "South to a Queer Place." *Journal of Poverty* 10(2):113-116.
- , 2009. "Them Ol' Nasty Lesbians: Queer Memory, Place, and Rural Formations of Lesbian." *Journal of Lesbian Studies* 13: 98-106.
- Williams, Christine and Catherine Connell. 2010. "Looking Good and Sounding Right: Aesthetic Labor and Social Inequality in the Retail Industry." *Work and Occupations* 37(3): 349-377.
- Wilson, Angelia. 2000. *Below the Belt: Sexuality, Religion, and the American South*. New York, NY: Cassell Publications.
- Witz, Anne, Chris Warhurst, and Dennis Nickson. 2003. "The Labour of Aesthetics and the Aesthetics of Organization." *Organization* 10(1): 33-54.

LIST OF APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW GUIDE

APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW GUIDE

Oral Consent

Hello, my name is Danielle Kerr. I am a graduate student at the University of Mississippi in the Department of Sociology and Anthropology working on my Masters Thesis. I am studying the use of labels and appearance among lesbians living in the South. I am interested in getting feedback about your persona experiences with labeling, appearance, and identity as a lesbian here in the South.

This interview will be audio recorded, and will take about an hour of your time. The information you share with me will remain confidential. Pseudonyms will be created for your name and any locations you may mention during the interview. Your participation is completely voluntary. If at any time you want to stop the audio recording or end the interview, there will be no penalty. You may also choose to decline to discuss or answer any questions during the interview.

Do you have any questions concerning this research or your participation? Do you agree to participate? I'm going to turn on the recorder. Let's get started.

Demographic Questions

Just to keep my information in order, I'm going to ask you a few general questions about yourself.

1. What term(s) do you use to describe your race/ethnicity?
2. What is your age?
3. What is your highest level of education?
4. What is your occupation?
5. What is your relationship status? (Single, Partnered, Married, Divorced)
6. Do you have any children? If so, how many and how old are they?

7. How long have you lived in the South?

7a. How long have you lived in your specific town?

7b. What are some places you've lived throughout your life?

8. If you have a preference, what name would you like as your pseudonym?

Interview

Thank you! Now for the interview questions. Part 1 of 2 is about labeling.

1. Tell me about when you realized you were a lesbian. What was going on in your life at that time?

-Follow ups: How old were you?

Did you first come out to yourself, friends, or family?

Was there anything in particular (an event) that made you aware you were a lesbian?

2. How do you feel about labels like butch, stud, femme, or lipstick?

2a. How would you describe each of these terms?

3. Did you use any particular words or labels to describe yourself to others? If so, what were they? If not, why don't you use labels?

-Follow ups: When you came out as a lesbian, what "type" of lesbian did you consider yourself to be?

What were the labels that you were aware of? Can you describe those for me?

4. What label, if any, do you use now to describe yourself?

4a. What does that label mean to you? What is the reason you feel you fit that label?

5. When other people describe you, what word or label do they use?

5a. Has that label changed over time since you've been out?

6. Do you think there are terms or labels that Black lesbians use that White lesbians don't? If so, what are they and would you describe them for me?

7. What's it like being a lesbian in the South?

7a. As a lesbian, have you experienced anything particularly positive or negative being here? If so, what happened?

7b. Has there ever been a time when you were questioned about how you "know you're a lesbian" or whether you were "sure you're a lesbian?" What happened?

7c. Has that happened while you were at work or with family and friends?

Now we will move on to part 2. These questions are about your experiences with appearance.

8. How do you describe your style of dress?

-Follow ups: Does your style match any particular lesbian label?

Do you describe your style as masculine, feminine, tomboy, or anything else?

9. Has your style changed over time since you've been out as a lesbian?

-Follow ups: From when you came out, to now, have you changed the way you dress? How?

10. Can you tell me about a time when you received a compliment about your style? What happened?

11. Since you realized you were a lesbian, has there been a time when you were given a hard time because of the way you dress? What happened? What were you wearing?

12. Do you dress the same when you're out with friends and family as you do when you go to work? If not, what are the differences?

13. Would you like to add anything about your experiences as a lesbian living in the South that I did not ask?

14. Would you like to add anything in particular about labels and terms that are out there now about lesbians?

15. Do you have any questions for me?

Thank you so much for taking time out of your day to do this interview. Feel free to contact me if you would like to add anything or if you have any concerns at (919) 332-1080 or

Dkerr@go.olemiss.edu. Also, feel free to contact my Thesis Advisor, Kirsten Dellinger at (662)

916-7323 or Kdelling@olemiss.edu.

APPENDIX B: GLOSSARY OF LABELS

APPENDIX B: GLOSSARY OF LABELS

Disclaimer: All of the terms and definitions in this glossary were derived directly from in-depth interviews with respondents. In no way can or should these terms or their definitions be generalized to describe all women who self-identify as lesbians.

Lipstick/Femme: The traditional heteronormative ideal of femininity; to dress in all women's clothing and to present a feminine gender display. Involves wearing dresses, tight fitting clothes, heeled shoes, carrying a purse, having feminine hairstyles, fingernails painted, and wearing makeup of consistently. Trademark: Seen as high-maintenance and hyper feminine. Does not match the stereotypical lesbian image = "cannot tell they are lesbians just by looking at them." Thought to maintain the traditional feminine role in romantic relationships; passive, nurturing.

Blue Jean Lesbian: A lesbian who presents a feminine gender display, but prefers to wear fashionable jeans over wearing dresses, t-shirts over "glitzy" blouses, and fashionable women's flat shoes over high heels. Trademark: Does not match the stereotypical lesbian image = "cannot tell they are lesbians by looking at them."

Stem: A lesbian who presents both a masculine and feminine gender display. She may dress in all women's clothing one day and all men's clothing the next day. She may also mix both women's and men's clothing in the same outfit; such as wearing a tightfitting women's shirt with loose fitting men's jeans. She can sometimes be labeled as "sporty" due to her athletic or relaxed style of dress. She can possess either a dominant or passive demeanor. Trademark: A mixture of femme and stud styles put together. Stems are often stigmatized as confused or undecided about the role they will perform in romantic relationships due to their fluid transition between masculine and feminine styles of dress.

Soft Stud/Feminine Stud: A lesbian who presents a masculine gender display, yet, performs traditionally feminine mannerisms and maintains a traditionally feminine passive demeanor. Trademark: She may be dressed in masculine clothing that is more form fitting while still having a feminine hairstyle. She may not possess a dominant or aggressive demeanor to strive to maintain control of her romantic relationships.

Soft Butch: See Soft Stud/Feminine Stud definition. Trademark: dresses androgynously; will rarely ever wear a dress, but will mix men's and women's loose, yet form –fitting, clothing into one outfit.

Stud/Boi/AG or Aggressive: A lesbian who embodies the stereotypical lesbian gender display; she is expected to maintain a dominant and aggressive demeanor. She will dress in all men's clothing and present a masculine gender display. She is likely to be wearing excessively baggy clothing, have a masculine hairstyle, and thought to maintain a dominant or controlling role in her romantic relationships. Trademark: Often referred to and mistaken as “sir” in public due to her masculine appearance = “when you look at her you can tell she's a lesbian.” Sometimes viewed as hyper masculine; her clothing will hide all female physical features such as breasts and hips.

Butch: See Stud definition. Trademark: Matches the stereotypical lesbian image; wearing men's flannel shirts and having short cut hairstyles. She is often referred to as a lumberjack or bull dagger.

Bull Dyke: See stud & Butch definition. Trademark: Used by heterosexuals to refer to a lesbian who presents a masculine gender display. The term is also used among lesbians in a derogatory way.

Dyke: A term used to refer to all lesbians in general; both those who possess feminine and masculine gender displays. Trademark: Usually used by heterosexuals to refer to any lesbian; often used in a derogatory way.

APPENDIX C: RESPONDENT DEMOGRAPHICS

TABLE 1: RESPONDENT DEMOGRAPHICS

Pseudonym	Race/ Ethnicity	Age	Self- proclaimed Label	Education Level	Occupation	Relationship Status	Children	Current State/Residence
Bo	Black/African American	26	Stud	Bachelor Degree	Entrepreneur	Single	Yes; 5 years old	North Carolina
Candice	Black/African American	25	Femme	Graduate Degree	Pharmacy Technician	Single	No	North Carolina
Janeesha	White/ Caucasian	35	Femme	Graduate Degree	Faculty	Partnered	No	Mississippi
Jessica	Black/African American	23	No Label	Some College	US Military	Single	No	Mississippi
Muscles	White/ Caucasian	32	No Label	Some College	Student	Partnered	No	Mississippi
Onyx	Black/African American	30	Stud	Some College	Entrepreneur	Single	No	North Carolina
Rebecca	White/ Caucasian	23	Femme	Bachelor Degree	Entrepreneur	Partnered	No	Mississippi
Rozay	Black/African American	19	Stud	Some College	US Military	Partnered	No	Mississippi
Samantha	Black/African American	23	Prep Boi/ Stud	Some College	US Military	Single	No	Mississippi
Sheila	Black/African American	22	No Label	Bachelor Degree	Student	Single	Yes; 3 years old	Tennessee
Short Dawg	Black/African American	32	Stem	Graduate Degree	Faculty	Partnered	No	Mississippi
Taylor	Mixed/Multi-Racial	33	No Label	Bachelor Degree	Retail Manager	Single	No	Tennessee

VITA

EDUCATION

Master of Arts, Sociology, August 2013

College of Liberal Arts

University of Mississippi, University, MS

Bachelor of Arts, Psychology, May 2009

College of Arts & Sciences

University of Hawaii at Manoa, Honolulu, HI

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

Graduate Assistant, Information Literacy and Instruction Librarian

September 2011 to August 2013, University of Mississippi, University, MS

- Contribute to the library's operations and goals by participating in the work of the library and the development of programs.
- Assist librarians on projects as needed including, but not limited to providing in-person and virtual reference services by managing the reference desk.
- Instruction: Develop and teach library instruction sessions for composition, honors, and freshman seminar courses; Conduct Library tours.
- Assist with organization, development, coordination, and promotion of library-related outreach and events (on/off campus)
- Complete ad hoc projects as needed for example: assisting with the development of the 20/20 Strategic Plan and Institutional Repository, aid in the development of the Diversity Librarian proposal, Design online instruction tutorials, participate in the yearly Common Reading Experience, Summer Orientation planning and promotion, and attend Information Literacy Committee meetings.
- Classroom Maintenance: Manage the instruction classrooms' calendar; Regularly clean the classrooms as well as the computer and equipment in the rooms, including whiteboards; Setup and breakdown the laptops in 106D at the beginning and end of each day the room is booked for instruction; Maintain and manage the hall whiteboard, including updating the question and monitoring for inappropriate responses.

Graduate Teaching Assistant

August 2012 to May 2013, Dr. Kirsten Dellinger, University of Mississippi, University, MS

- Assign grades based on a rubric

- Attend all classes; Conduct occasional classes
- Provide research assistance for Dr. Dellinger's publications

Graduate Student Assistant

August 2011 to May 2013, University of Mississippi, University, MS

- Scheduled and organized faculty-student meetings
- Coordinated, conducted, and transcribed in-depth interviews with Mississippi, Georgia, and North Carolina community members for thesis research
- Conducted qualitative focus groups and in-depth interviews with Mississippi community members for community-based research projects

Graduate Teaching Assistant

August 2011 to May 2012, Dr. Barbara Combs, University of Mississippi, University, MS

- Assign grades based on a rubric
- Attend all classes
- Collected original data to assist Dr. Combs book on Southern slave routes

Research Assistant

May 2007 to February 2009, University of Hawaii at Manoa- Research Corporation of the University of Hawaii, Honolulu, HI

- PSY 100: Introduction to Psychology 2008; 2009
- Utilized both qualitative and quantitative research methods and analysis, including participant observation
- Coordinated, conducted, and transcribed qualitative interviews with local community members and high school students

PUBLICATIONS & PRESENTATIONS

Publications

Kerr, Danielle, Barbara Combs. (2013). Black Southern Lesbians and the Politics of Being and Belonging in the Bible Belt: The (Boundary) Work of Creating Social and Collective Identity. In Progress.

Kerr, Danielle. (2013). Butch, Femme, Dyke, or Lipstick, Aren't All Lesbians the Same?: An Exploration of the use of Labels among Lesbians in the U.S. South. Masters' Thesis.

Irwin, Katherine, Corey Adler, and Danielle Kerr. (2007). "Considering Gender and Ethnicity in Violence Prevention: Adults' and Students' Perspectives." Report, Asian/Pacific Islander Youth Violence Prevention Center. Honolulu, HI.

Presentations

Kerr, Danielle. (2013). *Housing: Affordable and Accessible or Not? A closer look at a Mississippi town's shift in housing tenure*. Paper presented at the Alabama-Mississippi Sociological Association Conference, Montgomery, AL.

Kerr, Danielle. (2013). *Education, Capacity Building, and Poverty: Research to Inform Community-Campus Partnerships and the AmeriCorps*Volunteers in Service to America Program*. Panel Session at the Alabama-Mississippi Sociological Association Conference, Montgomery, AL.

Kerr, Danielle. (2012). *A Closer Look at Population Change in the Gulf Coast and Delta Regions of Mississippi*. Paper presented at the Alabama-Mississippi Sociological Association Conference, Starkville, MS.

Kerr, Danielle. (2008). *Who Do You Think You're Talking To? Dating, Violence, and Control among High School Students*. Paper presented at the American Society of Criminology National Conference Meeting, St. Louis, MO.

PROFESSIONAL MEMBERSHIPS & ACADEMIC HONORS

Memberships

Alabama-Mississippi Sociological Association (A-MSA), member 2011-present
Mortar Bard National Senior Honors Society 2008-present
Psi Chi National Honors Society of Psychology 2007-present

Extra-Curricular Activities

Library Ambassadors, Leadership Team Member
Graduate Women's Group, Member
Student Pride Network (Formerly Gay/Straight Alliance), Member
SAGE (Faculty-Staff LGBT Support Group), Founding Member
Making Peace with Food Support Group, Member

Honors

Larry W. Debord Award for Outstanding Sociology Graduate Student. University of Mississippi, 2013.

Second Place, Best Graduate Paper Award. *Housing: Affordable and Accessible or Not? A closer look at a Mississippi town's shift in housing tenure*. Alabama-Mississippi Sociological Association (A-MSA) Conference, 2013.

Best Graduate Student Paper Award. *A Closer Look at Population Change in the Gulf Coast and Delta Regions of Mississippi*. Alabama-Mississippi Sociological Association (A-MSA) Conference, 2012.