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A STUDY OF SEXUAL IDENTITY:  
WOMEN WHO HAVE BEEN INTIMATELY INVOLVED IN A HETEROSEXUAL  
RELATIONSHIP AND HAVE LATER TURNED TO SAME SEX PARTNERS

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A Project  
Presented to the  
Faculty of  
California State University,  
San Bernardino

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In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Social Work

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by  
Carolyn Diane Jackson  
Betty Jayne Watts  
June 1997

A STUDY OF SEXUAL IDENTITY:  
WOMEN WHO HAVE BEEN INTIMATELY INVOLVED IN A HETEROSEXUAL  
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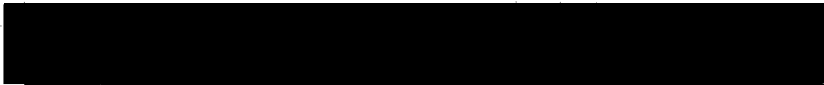
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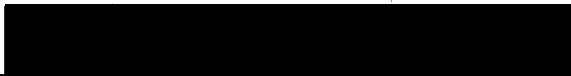
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by  
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Betty Jayne Watts  
June 1997

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## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to explore the characteristics of women who have been intimately involved in a heterosexual relationship and have later turned to same sex partners, and how these women with same sex partners identify themselves. A 36-question written survey was administered to 29 women, approximately 72% of whom were divorced or separated, and approximately 79% identifying their current status as homosexual. The specific research orientation of this study followed the Positivist research paradigm. Data was gathered and analyzed by use of Quantitative and Qualitative methods.

The goal of this study was to provide insights and theory into sexual identity of women. It is hoped that these insights will be of benefit to social workers who work directly with this population, and allow them to better serve the client's needs. Coming out as a lesbian in the twenty-first century, hopefully will be an easier and more positive process.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

We want to thank the women who unselfishly shared their inner most feelings in answering the questions for our research project. Without your cooperation, this study would not have been possible. Writing a research paper about such a private and sensitive subject has been both a challenge and a wonderful journey touching our hearts and minds.

To Dr. Hunt our Project Advisor, we extend our deep appreciation and gratitude for your support, unfailing advice, and your steadfast belief in our project.

To our family and friends who were patient and supportive throughout this endeavor, thank you for believing in us. We look forward to spending time with you, and sharing our lives with you once again. We hope we have been an example that goals can be achieved and dreams are the key to reality.

Lastly, thank you to our unseen angels standing near us, waiting to assist us, and rejoicing in our accomplishment. Our gifts and talents were given to us to help us share with others. And in sharing with others we have grown in mind, body and spirit.

It's a wrap!

Goodnight Betty...

Goodnight Carolyn.

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## INTRODUCTION

### Problem Statement

Psychologists and feminists tend to assume that most persons can be neatly categorized according to membership in one of four groups: heterosexual, homosexual, bisexual, or asexual (celibate). It is further believed that when a person's behavior fits into one of those four sexual orientation categories, that person adopts a corresponding sexual identity to match the behavior (Golden, 1987).

According to Bragg, Dalton, Dunker, Fisher, Garcia, Obler, Orwoll, Paiser, Pearlman, (1987), some research has focused on how women subjectively experience their identities, and how they react when their personally constructed identities are not concordant with social definitions. Women may fall in love with someone of an unexpected gender, and the power of that relationship may cause them to re-evaluate their identity.

These researchers posit that the relationship between sexual behavior and sexual identity may not be a clear-cut issue. For women, sexuality may be an aspect of identity that is fluid and dynamic as opposed to fixed and invariant. Troiden (1983/1984) suggests that identity is a label which people apply to themselves and which is representative of the self in a specific social situation. Troiden further states self-concept consists of many identities, each of which is activated in particular social situations.

There are married women who are involved in same-sex relationships but who do not define themselves as lesbians. There are also married lesbians who have just never obtained a divorce, and there are married lesbians who have an "open marriage of convenience." According to (Saghir & Robins 1973) who conducted a research study of 55 female homosexuals found the vast majority of homosexual women, (74%), never married while 26% had been married at some time in their lives. A significant number of lesbians have been married to men, had children, and then moved into a lesbian identity (Tully, 1989). Given this, this paper reports a study that explored the characteristics of women who have been intimately involved in a heterosexual relationship and have later turned to same sex partners, and how these women with same sex partners identify themselves.

### Problem Definition

Many women define themselves as lesbians despite the fact that their current or previous sexual experience was heterosexual. The definition of a lesbian is both problematic and far from unambiguous (Golden, 1987).

It is unknown how many homosexual people currently live in the United States, much less how many of them are women. Estimates on the size of the American homosexual community vary from 36 million, or about 10 percent of the total population, to 8 million, or about 2 percent of the

population, according to the studies by Kinsey, Pomeroy & Martin, 1948; Kinsey, Pomeroy, Martin, & Gebhard, 1953 (as cited in Tully, 1989). Given these figures, a conservative estimate is that there are between 4 million and 13 million lesbians currently living in the United States.

Lesbians are an almost invisible segment of American society. Because of their anonymity, it is difficult to ascertain not only which women are lesbians but also how many women are lesbians, (Kinsey, A.C. as cited in Potter & Darty, 1981). Kinsey and his associates reported that approximately 20 percent of all American women have had some homosexual experience during their lifetime. More recently Riley, M. (as cited in Potter & Darty, 1981) estimated that 10 to 12 percent of American women are lesbians and possibly there may be more lesbians than homosexual males.

Traditionally, a lesbian is defined as a woman who feels definite preferential erotic attraction to other women and who usually, but not always, engage in overt sexual relations with women. To limit the definition of a lesbian to a discussion of sexual desire or overt sexual behavior, is to ignore the diverse experiences, which are both psychological and sociological. Since the lesbian in our society is generally hidden, her existence has generated a great deal of conjecture and intrigue, out of which a whole body of folklore has been perpetrated on the public as fact. Once aware of the Lesbian's existence, most people tend to view

her solely as a sexual being. These stereotypes are based upon the false assumption that the lesbian is first and foremost sexual in all her thoughts, desires, and actions (Potter & Darty, 1981).

Although it is not known how one's sexuality is determined, evidence indicates that homosexuality may be more a matter of genetics than of choice Bailey, Pillard, Neale, Agyei, & LeVay, (as cited in Tully, 1989). The debate over the etiology of lesbianism has existed for more than 100 years, and there is no consensus on its causes (Paul, 1993). What is clear is that lesbians go through defined phases as they develop their lesbian identities and that patterns of lesbian relationships are definable.

Lesbians can develop their identities, or "come out," at any age, after years of successful heterosexual relationships or after having no sexual experiences. And, as with heterosexual development, there are definable stages in the coming out process, (Cass, 1979).

### Problem Focus

As a woman connects her sense of being different with same-sex feelings, she begins to have words for her struggle. During adolescence and young adulthood, sexual feelings emerge. At this time a woman may become aware that her strongest emotional and erotic feelings are in relation to women rather than men. Acknowledgment of the sexual element

of being different is often accompanied with feelings of denial, shame, anxiety, and ambivalence. This is a time of great dissonance and inner turmoil.

A woman faces conflict between the process of socialization, which teaches her that she will probably marry and have a family, and her feelings, which pull her toward wanting intimacy with other women. Women can then be in conflict with themselves, and in harmony with the world, or in harmony with themselves, and in conflict with the world. Women can feel conflict with family values and expectations which adds to the anxiety and shame. With acknowledgment of her same-sex feelings, a woman may begin a grieving process. The woman may show signs of denial and of bargaining with herself. She may refuse to admit to others or to herself any same-sex attractions (Lewis, 1984).

First relationships are difficult and may be subjected to additional stress by a lack of social support. Without a large community and access to other lesbians, two women, whose only real compatibility may be their sexual preference, could stay together for security, and out of fear of never meeting another lesbian. These isolated relationships are often dependent and enmeshed. Even if a closeted lesbian knows where lesbians meet, she may fear being seen there and losing her job. Thus, the lack of community social support can contribute to isolation of individuals and couples in

smaller communities, the bars may be the only gathering place.

As relationships are started, there may be a further withdrawal from family. A woman may need to actively hide her involvement with a lover and become even more anxious and fearful about family consequences should she be discovered. On the other hand, having new relationships may serve as an impetus for coming out to one's family. A woman who has some support within a relationship may find it easier to break the news to her family.

In their daily lives, lesbians must repeatedly make decisions about whether or not to disclose their sexual orientation to others in the face of potential rejection, discrimination, alienation, or violence. Often this act occurs in the context of few role models, inadequate support systems, lack of legal protection, isolation, and the potential loss of primary racial or ethnic communities Fasinger, 1991 (as cited in Anderson & Mavis, 1996). Further lesbians face not only negative societal attitudes, but also internalized homophobia. Although the cost of disclosing a lesbian sexual orientation may be high, the benefits may include the development of positive lesbian identity, psychological adjustment, enhancement of self-esteem, and self-acceptance (Anderson, and Mavis, 1996).

Researchers have been handicapped by the secrecy and invisibility that characterizes lesbian family life. In

general, very little empirical research is available regarding the woman in her middle years, after having experienced heterosexual relationships, turning to a lesbian life style.

### Relevance to Social Work Practice

Social workers have lacked models for understanding the process of a client's self-identification as a lesbian. No one definition of lesbianism exists. Historically, a lesbian has been defined as "a female homosexual" (American Heritage Dictionary, 1985, p. 724) or one who "has a sexual desire for" (p. 619) or "sexual activity with" (p. 619) members of her own gender. Since the 1970s the term has come to be defined in a much broader context. Rather than referring only to sexual behavior, lesbianism has come to include a more comprehensive view of women-identified women that can include spirituality, politics, emotions, and intellect, with or without overt sexual activity (Tully, 1989). NASW (1994) has determined that lesbians constitute an oppressed minority, and the Council on Social Work Education (1992) requires that content on lesbians and gay men be taught throughout the undergraduate and graduate social work curricula.

Estimates on the size of the American homosexual community vary from 26 million, or about 10 percent of the total population (Kinsey, Pomeroy, & Martin, 1948; Kinsey,

Pomeroy, Martin, & Gebhard, 1953), to 8 million, or 3 percent of the population (National Opinion Research Center, 1989-1992; as cited in Rogers, 1993). Given these figures, a conservative estimate is that there are between 4 million and 13 million lesbians currently living in the United States. This loose confederation of women, bound together only by a common political or sexual orientation, has been called a subculture by some and a community by others (Faderman, 1991; Gusfield, 1978; Harry & Devall, 1978; Murray, 1979).

The women who make up this lesbian subculture or community, are not a homogeneous group; they are as diverse as the women who make up its heterosexual counterpart. It is important for social workers to be aware of the cultural diversity among this population. Lesbians constitute an invisible minority that historically has been oppressed.

To be effective in casework with lesbian clients, social workers must become knowledgeable of and comfortable with lesbianism as a sexual orientation and life style. Social workers must recognize that heterosexist society (one governed by both heterosexual and sexist norms) has shaped their perception of this sexual orientation. They must be willing to investigate the mythology surrounding lesbianism through formal and informal means, including undergraduate and graduate social work courses on lesbianism, in service training seminars, selected readings and films, and consciousness raising sessions. Social workers who cannot

accept lesbian clients unconditionally will be destructive to their clients' personal growth (Potter & Darty, 1981).

Lesbian clients need social workers who can assist them in dealing with the discrimination they experience, as well as with other problems that may or may not be related to sexual orientation and life style. Knowledgeable social workers could facilitate social services for lesbian clients by providing information on the numerous lesbian or gay source groups located throughout the country, such as the National Gay Task Force in New York City. By helping lesbians establish such contacts, social workers aid in the formation of a crucial social network that can provide valuable support to lesbians by addressing their needs for relatedness, recognition, affirmation, and protection from social isolation. Resource groups that frequently serve as alternative family structures are particularly important for lesbians who have been rejected by their biological families. Lesbians and homosexual males, unlike members of ethnic and racial groups do not share their minority status with other members of their family (Potter & Darty, 1981).

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Identity

The development of a lesbian identity is generally conceptualized in developmental stages that may include identity confusion (questioning sexual identity and the heterosexual assumption), identity investigation (gaining an understanding of the lesbian identity), and identity synthesis (internalizing a lesbian identity through one's acceptance by self and others) (Cass, 1979).

Because society assumes heterosexuality, developing a lesbian identity is difficult. The process of self definition as a lesbian arises out of awareness of a physical or emotional attraction to women and may or may not be sexually expressed (Berzon, 1988).

From an identity development perspective, the key issues for research and theory surround the processes and stages an individual goes through in order to develop a homosexual identity. Identity development theory tends to primarily focus on individuals and their relationship to society as a whole. During the process of identity development, a lesbian often has her first lesbian sexual experience, becomes aware of the lesbian community, and begins to establish relationships with others as a self-defined lesbian. Lesbians' may live alone, in couples, with children, with friends, with heterosexual husbands, or in a variety of relationship patterns (Tully, 1989).

Social identity theory is concerned with social influences in the development of the self-concept and the derivation of positive self-esteem contingent upon it. Social identity focuses on the social or group-based aspects of identity and how these interact with the social structure, (Cox, & Gallois, 1996.)

Everyone has multiple social identities. Examples of social identities might be based on gender ("I am a man" or "I am a woman"), ethnicity, political ideology, or membership in a sporting club (cf. Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Turner, 1987), and the behaviors and values which go along with such memberships. As a result of self-categorization, dichotomies are formed, such as "We are gay (and therefore have certain characteristics, norms, and behaviors), and they are straight (and therefore have characteristics, norms, and behaviors), which we may view as being of lesser value."

For some women in their twenties, thirties, and forties who identify strongly as feminists and who were formerly heterosexual, an early phase of coming out may be different. Kinsey and his colleagues developed a six-point continuum as a way to illustrate the range of same-sex/opposite sex feeling and attractions. Results showed many women who would fall in the mid-range of Kinsey's scale do not have a sense of being different as strongly as those closer to the exclusively homosexual end. Because of strong socialization toward heterosexuality, a woman in the mid-range may fit

fairly easily into a heterosexual lifestyle. She may marry and have children, yet feel something is missing. At some point, her feeling of attraction or her political beliefs may lead her to exploring same-sex attractions (Lewis, 1984).

Many feminists in Kinsey's mid-range who chose to identify as lesbians in the 1980s might have been fairly well-adjusted heterosexuals in the 1930s or 1940s. Changes in the social environment and the increasing emphasis on liberation and personal growth provided these women with a less hostile and frightening atmosphere in which to try new kinds of relationships, (Lewis, 1984).

### Married Lesbians

According to Marcel Saghir and Eli Robins (1973) who conducted a research study of 55 female homosexuals found the vast majority of homosexual women (74%) had never married while 26% had been married at some time in their lives. At the time of the interview, 19% of the females were divorced, 4% were separated, 2% were still married, and 1% were widowed. The majority of the women (73%), got married prior to the age of 25. The tendency to get married prior to the age of 25 is possibly in line with expectations for the general population of single women. The relatively early marriage of many homosexuals coincides clearly with the period of intense conflict and questioning in their lives and

represents the unsuccessful attempt at "combating" their homosexuality.

In the Saghir and Robins study (1973), three of the homosexual women had married homosexual men, in a conscious attempt at a "marriage of convenience." Among those homosexual women who married heterosexual men, all of them lived with their husbands for at least one year. The social and personal reasons for which homosexual women claimed to have been married included the need for acceptance by family, friends or employer, a longing for children and a home life and a need to leave the parental home because of intense conflict among its members. The vast majority of the homosexual women (83%) who married heterosexual men took the initiative in seeking a divorce and all of them considered their marriages to have been unsatisfactory. The remainder (17% of those who were married) considered their marriages satisfactory and were willing to continue the relationship; however, the husband wanted a divorce. Many of the marriages of the homosexual women ended up, like marriages in general, with children.

From the results of this study, it is apparent that most homosexual women do not tend to avoid heterosexual experiences, at least during certain periods in their lives. They date, experiment with intercourse and get married with such activity occurring predominantly prior to the age of 28 (Saghir & Robins, 1973).

## METHODS SECTION

### Design of the Study

The purpose of this research study was to explore the characteristics of women who had been intimately involved in a heterosexual relationship and had later turned to same sex partners. The study also sought to ascertain how these women identified their sexual orientation. The relationship between sexual behavior and sexual identity may not be so clear-cut. These researchers predicted that, for women, sexuality may be an aspect of identity that is fluid and dynamic as opposed to fixed and invariant.

A positivist study of an exploratory nature was utilized to examine most of the data from a quantitative perspective. However, in order to understand lifestyles and social phenomena from the point of view of the participants, some questions were of qualitative nature.

The questionnaire consisted of primarily closed-ended questions (multiple choice responses). The participants were asked to select an answer from among a list provided by these researchers. According to Rubin & Babbie (1992), the chief shortcoming of closed-ended questions lies in the researcher's structuring of responses. When the relevant answers to a given question are relatively clear, there should be no problem. In the construction of the questions, these researchers were guided by two structural requirements. The response categories provided were exhaustive: They

included all the possible responses that might be expected. Secondly, the answer categories were mutually exclusive, (the participant should not feel compelled to select more than one unless so indicated). From this information, descriptive statistics were utilized presenting the quantitative descriptions in a univariate analysis (frequency table).

For a more thorough attempt to tap the deeper meaning of sexual identity, and to generate a theoretically richer observation some questions allowed comment lines for qualitative analysis. Therefore, this study included the grounded theory approach which assumes that there exists a reality which is understood through qualitative data. Including qualitative data has allowed for presentation of more intricate details of the phenomena than is perhaps possible with strictly quantitative methods.

### Sampling

These researchers used an exploratory survey methodology for identifying characteristics of sexual behavior and sexual identity among women who have experienced an intimate heterosexual relationship and then became involved in a same sex relationship. The target population was sampled by a snowball sampling technique of women who were at least 30 years old, married, divorced, separated or had an intimate heterosexual relationship. The snowball sampling technique

allowed for a method of tracing lines that link people together in a particular, often hidden network.

The specific sample was one of convenience, whereby, one respondent referred these researchers to another potential respondent. Therefore, only those individuals who chose to take part in the study, and were willing to discuss the issues surrounding the disclosure of sexual identity, participated.

The sample for this study consisted of females from 30 years old to 74 years old. Thirty-nine questionnaires were handed out, twenty-nine were returned completed, seven were not returned, and three returned blank, a response rate of 74.4%. The ethnic make-up of the population included; 4 Black/African Americans, 18 White/Caucasians, 5 Mexican Americans, and 2 Asian Americans. The study was conducted over a ten-week period. Participant's were accepted only on a voluntary basis and there was no consequence for choosing not to participate.

#### DATA COLLECTION AND INSTRUMENTS

##### Procedure

A research packet was presented to each participant in the study, including a written description of the study, a brief explanation of the purpose and goals of the study, and an Informed Consent and Debriefing statement.

Each packet had a stamped, self-addressed envelope attached which was mailed to these researchers. Each questionnaire was given an identification number to preserve confidentiality. The first page of the questionnaire included several background and demographic questions. These researchers desired to achieve heterogeneity in background variables such as ethnicity, education and income, as well as on the principle explanatory variables of heterosexual relationships, transition, coming out issues, and sexual orientation.

The study was conducted over a ten week period. The study was limited to female participants only. The data gathering was conducted as a one-time only survey, and the questionnaire took approximately 30 minutes to complete.

### Instruments

The student researchers used a modified version of the Gay Identity Questionnaire (GIQ) model proposed by Stephen Brady, Ph.D. and Wilma J. Busse, EdD in 1994, which was derived from tenets of the Homosexual Identity Formation (HIF) model proposed by Cass in 1979. The model of lesbian identity development proposed by these researchers would more accurately be entitled Proposed Model of Lesbian Identity Awareness, (see Appendix B).

A survey response questionnaire was used to explore the research questions. The questionnaire consisted of approximately 36 questions.

Variables included demographic information on age, ethnicity, education, marital status, number of children, and income. Other information such as personal perceptions of influencing factors, were also obtained. These are: At what age did you first think you might be a lesbian? Describe the process you went through to get from thinking that you might be a lesbian to actually considering yourself a lesbian. In terms of your sexual orientation, how do you identify yourself now? In terms of comfort with your current sexual orientation, how comfortable are you?: Very comfortable, mostly comfortable, comfortable, not very comfortable, very comfortable.

#### Protection of Human Subjects

This one-time only survey was given with written instructions to willing participants. The protection of each participant in the study was insured in a number of ways. Each participant was given an Informed Consent and Debriefing statement to read which described the study and the voluntary nature of their participation. The debriefing statement included the researchers names and a telephone number that the subjects could use in regards to further information about the project or to express any concerns.

To ensure each individual's confidentiality and anonymity, identification numbers were used in place of personal names. The participants were instructed to seal their questionnaire in an envelope provided with each survey packet. All data gathered was held in strict confidence with no identifying information. The results of this study is presented in terms of global responses and theories resulting from the analysis of the data.

## DATA ANALYSIS

### Results

This study was conducted to explore the characteristic of women who have been intimately involved in a heterosexual relationship and have later turned to same sex partners, and how these women with same sex partners identify themselves in terms of sexual orientation. In order to answer the research questions the following current information was ascertained from participants. The results are presented in the following order: demographics; relationships; transition; coming out; and sexual orientation.

### Demographics

Table 1 presents the frequency distribution of responses from the women on demographic variables. In summary, the sample of 29 women who filled out the survey questionnaire ranged in age from 30 years old to 74 years old. The mean

age of the 29 respondents was 46.103 years. Caucasians represented 62% (n=18) of the women, while Native Americans, Mexican Americans, Asian Americans and African Americans represented 38% (n=11) of the remaining participants. The educational level of the women ranged from high school or GED, through Ph.D. Approximately 82% (n=24) have an undergraduate, graduate or Ph.D. with the average having completed at least 4.31 years of college. Income of these women ranged from less than \$14,999 to greater than \$61,000 per year with 58.5% (n=17) earning greater than \$26,000 annually.

Nineteen of the 29 women indicated they had one or more children during their heterosexual relationship (65.5%), while a total of 11 respondents had two or more children during their heterosexual relationship. When asked have you come out to all of your children, 44.8% (n=13) answered yes, while 20.7% (n=6) answered no. When asked how did your children react when you told them about your sexual orientation, 13.8% of the children were very supportive, while 13.8% stated they were between somewhat supportive to neutral, and 27.5% were either unsupportive to hostile. A high percentage of the women 41.3% (n=12) stated the timing of their coming out process was influenced by their children, while 24.1% (n=7) reported the timing of their coming out was not influenced by their children.

TABLE 1

## Frequencies and Percentage Distribution of Demographic Category

<u>CATEGORY</u>	<u>FREQUENCY</u>	<u>PERCENT</u>
<b>Ethnicity</b>		
Black/African American	4	13.8
White/Caucasian	18	62.0
Mexican American	5	17.2
Asian American	2	6.9
<b>Education</b>		
High School or GED	3	10.3
Junior College	2	6.9
Undergraduate (Bachelors)	10	34.5
Graduate (Masters)	11	37.9
Ph.D.	3	10.3
<b>Income</b>		
0 - 14,999	4	13.8
15,000 - 25,999	8	27.6
26,000 - 36,999	5	17.2
37,000 - 60,999	9	31.0
61,000 - Higher	3	10.3
<b>Children</b>		
0	10	34.5
1 Child	8	27.6
2 Children	5	17.2
3 Children	3	10.3
4 Children	3	10.3
<b>Have you come out to all your children?</b>		
Yes	13	44.8
No	6	20.7
N/A	10	34.5
<b>Did your children have any influence on the timing of your coming out?</b>		
Yes	12	41.3
No	7	24.1
N/A	10	34.5

(n=29)

## Relationships

Using the five-point Likert scale to measure frequency/intensity, the women were asked to rate their emotional/mental satisfaction during their heterosexual relationship. The results of this satisfaction scale are found in Table 2 and in the following description. The results showed 58.6% (n=17) of these women indicated that they were not satisfied in this type of relationship, while 27.6% (n=8) stated they were somewhat satisfied, with only 13.8% (n=4) being satisfied. The women were also asked to rate their physical/sexual satisfaction during their heterosexual relationship. The higher percentage of these women, 51.7% (n=15) stated they were not satisfied, 34.5% (n=10) noted they were somewhat satisfied, and 13.8% (n=4) mentioned they were satisfied. When asked to rate their spiritual satisfaction, using the same five-point scale, 37.9% (n=11) were not satisfied, 41.3% (n=12) were somewhat satisfied, and 17.2% (n=5) stated they were satisfied. One participant did not respond. No one who answered the five-point satisfaction scale answered very satisfied while in a heterosexual relationship.

When asked what is your current relationship status, 28 women were presently in a relationship, 1 had no sexual partner. The average duration of their present relationship

TABLE 2

## Heterosexual Frequency and Satisfaction Scale

## Statistical Summary for Emotional/Mental Satisfaction:

(n=29) MIN = 2 MAX = 5 MEAN = 3.586 STD = 0.907

1	2	3	4	5
Very Satisfied	Satisfied	Somewhat Satisfied	Unsatisfied	Very Unsatisfied
0	(4) 13.8%	(8) 27.6%	(13) 44.8%	(4) 13.8%

## Statistical Summary for Physical/Sexual Satisfaction:

(n=29) MIN = 2.0 MAX = 5 MEAN = 3.621 STD = 1.015

1	2	3	4	5
Very Satisfied	Satisfied	Somewhat Satisfied	Unsatisfied	Very Unsatisfied
0	(4) 13.8%	(10) 34.5%	(8) 27.6%	(7) 24.1%

## Statistical Summary for Spiritual Satisfaction:

(n=28) MIN = 2.0 MAX = 5 MEAN = 3.357 STD = 0.951

1	2	3	4	5
Very Satisfied	Satisfied	Somewhat Satisfied	Unsatisfied	Very Unsatisfied
0	(5) 17.2%	(12) 41.3%	(7) 24.1%	(4) 13.8%

\*Missing (1) 3.4%

was 9.311 years, the minimum was 3 months and the maximum was 51 years. Twenty-three of the participants have ceased sexual contact with men, while five women have not. In 51.7% (n=15) of the women surveyed the subject of homosexuality was not discussed in the home during childhood, 48.2% (n=14) reported homosexuality was discussed unfavorably.

### Transition

A portion of the questionnaire focused on several indicators of transition within these women's lives. They were asked if they had any interest or attraction to men. Sixty-five percent (65.5% n=19) of the women reported they were not presently attracted to men, while 34.5% (n=10) stated an attraction to men even though they are now in a same sex relationship. When asked if they were not presently in a lesbian relationship, would they seek out a same sex relationship? The majority of women 78.5% (n=22) said they would seek a same sex relationship, while 17.8% (n=5) said they would not seek out a same sex relationship. Two of the women did not respond to this question. When asked if they were confused about their sexual orientation, 93.1% of the women, (n=27) reported no confusion about their sexual identity, while 6.9% (n=2) reported doubting their sexual identity. However, 20.7% (n=6) of the women reported they were not sure that they were a lesbian, and had only disclosed homosexual feelings to a few close friends.

A series of choices were given to the respondents, to answer the question about the process they went through to get from thinking they might be a lesbian to actually considering themselves a lesbian. The largest number of women, 82.8% (n=24) felt the unconditional support and love of another woman helped them in this process. Seventeen women, 58.6% said they always felt different. Contributing to the process was unsatisfactory relationships with men and abusive relationships with men, which constituted 51.7% (n=15) and 37.9% (n=11) respectively. Sexual relationship with women and spiritual experiences with another women was key to 51.7% (n=15) and 48.3% (n=14) respectively. To the question, "How old were you when you had your first homosexual experience," the minimum age was 12, the maximum age was 52, and the average age was 27.121.

#### Coming Out and Sexual Orientation

The following qualitative results from the questionnaire are in the words of these women who shared their experiences, and feelings.

The women in this survey who had already come out or were in some stage of coming out, reported that education, self-awareness, partners, counseling, value system, honesty, and the hope of increasing acceptance for others who are not out influenced their coming out process. One women stated the need to "validate her own reality and honor her mate and

their relationship by being able to accept herself, and who and what she has become." Another responded, "I have always been able to say what I feel and am more than willing to pay the price for my behavior," while others felt discomfort in living a lie and hiding a primary relationship.

When asked to describe their coming out process with themselves, it was noted that many found this to be a slow, difficult, and painful transition. Others found this experience to be transforming, an awakening, easy and extremely enjoyable. A coming to terms with themselves, being proud of who they are, and being true to themselves and their feelings, were a need some women had for coming out. One women stated, "Accepting that I am different from the norm, but not different. Denial to indecision to fear to anxiety, and finally acceptance." Another women responded, "A feeling of rejoicing, as if I had a chance at a new life, and had found myself."

The coming out experience with family members revealed that some families displayed fear, denial, hatred, shame, and embarrassment. Some family members were "heartbroken," some family members disowned them. Because of religious convictions, some family members were judgmental and not at all supportive. One women said, "My family said I was a sinner, doomed to go to hell and burn forever. They were not at all supportive. They were very judgmental." One women reported her experience as "Horrible because they were

Christians and at first they hated me and my mate, then with time and prayer, they have accepted us both." Another women responded, "This subject is not something my family wants to discuss openly. When father questioned me if I were a lesbian, they responded that I would be better off dead." Other women had stated that they told only certain family members. One father was accepting, but requested his daughter keep this secret from other family members, while another women said, "My mother left the country for five years."

When describing in their own words the coming out experience with their children, there were mixed feelings. One mother described this experience as, "A terrible, difficult, and lengthy process, I waited too long to tell them." Another mother said, "My son was uncertain about his friend's acceptance at first, but as he has gotten older he is proud of me." A third response indicated, "the children did not like the idea at first, but the family maintained an open dialogue and their questions were answered and the children accepted me for myself." One child discovered from friends, and the mother vowing she would never lie said, "yes" when asked, now they openly discuss being gay and acceptance. One women said that it was a "terrible, difficult, lengthy process, waited too long to tell. Waited for her to ask. Always felt it was 'wrong' time." One mother with two children stated that her 12 year old son was going to run away from home, her 6 year old daughter hated her and

her mate. The daughter was very angry and vocal saying she hated them both and wished they would die!

In the coming out to friends category, the responses overall were more positive. The responses were, understanding, easy, supportive, shocked, scared, to "they didn't understand why now after being married for 25 years." One women stated, "I have some friends, mostly gay that I have shared this with, they understand. I have a few heterosexual friends that I have shared this with and they seem to be o.k. It is a slow process and I'm cautious. Probably most of my friends know already. It is pretty obvious when I'm with her." Another women said, "Almost all friends who I have told have been very supportive, but I am selective as to who I share with." One response was, "Most of my friends were shocked, but were fairly accepting of my choices. I wasn't exactly conventional, having been married four times and divorced four times by the age of 30. I did get some judgmental attitudes from conservative Christian friends." One women stated that "those who were truly close friends had little problem. This is how you find out who your real friends are." Other's rejoiced that one women had discovered her true self.

In the first gay relationship for these women, 27.6% (n=8) reported they initiated the first contact, while their partner initiated the first contact with 44.8% (n=13) of the women. There was a 24.7% (n=7) that reported a mutual

initiation of their first relationship. When asked how these women felt about their first contact with this person, the response category ranged from, positive, (comfortable, natural, exciting, happy), to difficult (fearful, confused, scared, nervous) as well as feeling "scared but safe." One women stated, "I felt awkward, yet comfortable. I felt no pressure for sexual relations as I did in all heterosexual dates. No pressure about sex." Others responded feeling, "Extremely happy, I felt that I had discovered something true about myself," "Wow," "At home," "Safe and relaxed," and "Great," "I loved her and it felt right and wonderful." One women expressing difficulty stated, "I felt a little fearful because it felt so intimate." Another women expressed mixed emotions, she said, "I felt happy, scared and yet mixed-up about what was going on."

The women were asked, where did they meet their first gay partner? The most frequent response was through a friend, the second most frequent response was at school, and the third most common response was, they met their first gay partner through family members, (sister, husband, family and children). The remainder of answers were, "in a bar, church, work, a store, PTA , parent's support group for abused children, and a musical festival."

Religious background did not seem to hinder the majority of these women in the coming out process. Nine of the 29 participants indicated, however, that religion did hinder the

coming out process. Some of the responses were, "I would have to suffer and my children would suffer for my sins," "Feeling that I would burn in hell for what I was thinking and feeling," "Same sex relationships are a sin," "My ex-husband was a lay minister," "The Christian mind set and fear for my eternal damnation," and "Guilt." One woman said that religion both hindered and helped in the coming out process. "Hindered due to the judgmental attitudes and disgust. Helped because I never once felt as if God hated me! He had always loved me and always will. He is my strength! Thank you Jesus."

Before these women realized they were gay, twenty-eight of them mentioned their close female friends were heterosexual. Eleven of the twenty-eight women said they also had homosexual and bisexual close female friends.

When asked to identify their sexual orientation, 65.5% (n=19), identified themselves as exclusively homosexual, compared to 27.6% (n=8), who identified themselves as predominantly homosexual or bisexual, and 3.4% (n=1) who identified herself as predominantly heterosexual, one did not respond to the question.

The women were asked to respond to the statement, "I live a homosexual lifestyle at home, but there are places I am not comfortable having this information known." A majority of the women in this sample 62% (n=18) answered yes while 37.9% (n=11) said no. The women who answered yes that they were not comfortable having this information known in

certain places stated that they were uncomfortable with this information known in employment settings, public settings, church, local community, with parents, grocery stores and restaurants (unless it's a gay restaurant or community). The most common response was the work place.

When these women were asked how comfortable they are with their current sexual orientation, 65.5% (n=19) stated they felt very comfortable with their sexual orientation, while 10.3% (n=3) felt mostly comfortable and 20.7% (n=6) felt comfortable. One respondent answered, "Varies from week to week, but depending on situations, mostly comfortable, comfortable, not very comfortable."

The women who participated in this survey were asked to comment on the positive and negative aspects of their heterosexual relationship(s). The overall positive responses were their children's, society's and family's acceptance of the heterosexual relationship, stability, and security. Individual responses were, "I still have many heterosexual friends, societal approval. As I look back on them, you don't know you have societal approval, of course, until you later fall into a category not approved of, and you have the contrast. I enjoyed sexual relationships with men, also." Another women stated, "There are many different kinds of relationships. I had the benefits of heterosexual privileges, by which I mean, there is a general assumption that the world is heterosexual so one "fits in" to the norm. Tax laws,

retirement, health insurance, etc. is mostly geared for heterosexuals." Another women said, "The church, society, my family, and my children accepted these relationship(s) as normal and acceptable. I could exhibit affection openly in grocery stores and at parks, at church, etc. Accepted as partner-health insurance coverage, no fear of who would take care of my children or be responsible." Other comments were, "It's socially acceptable, you fit in openly. Roles are developed that are fairly clear. Choice of working or not, raising children or not, family acceptance of "husband"." "I like men and enjoy their company, but not their expectations of me." "Sexually satisfied, married 19 years, just felt the last couple years something was missing, then met my partner and it changed everything."

The responses to what were the negative aspects of their heterosexual relationships revealed the following: Most common among the answers were, verbal, mental, and physical abuse, being oppressed, and not fulfilling. One women said, "He was physically abusive and enjoyed destroying my self-esteem." Others said, "He was abusive to me and my child," "Rigid roles, society tends to give male power over wife and children, i.e., income etc.. My relationships were physically and emotionally abusive." One women's words were, "Loneliness, poor self-esteem, anger due to abuse, very unfulfilled emotionally and sexually. I felt like an object instead of a person."

In the sub-category of oppression, responses were, "Not liking myself," "Hating myself," Being part of the patriarchy and all that implies, i.e. not being a free standing person, being oppressed by indirect and direct sexism." "Had to put up with the assumption of patriarchy, one being treated as a women with a male partner, as a second class citizen in my earlier life, but still to some extent in these times." One women said, "They tend to be bossy, exhibit an ownership attitude with wives etc. and disrespect women." One women speaking out about her children said, "When I divorced, my ex was given custody of three of my children and has done everything to encourage distance between my children and myself."

Some women elaborated in detail in the area of not feeling fulfillment. Comments were, "No communication between my husband and myself," "I felt unfulfilled with men," "Sexual life was not satisfying," "Not truly fulfilling on all levels, physical, emotional, or spiritual." One women said, "I never felt accepted nor appreciated for who I am/was! I always felt as if I must adapt, adjust, change, give-up, give-in, submit, obey someone else. I was not important nor were my wants or desires. I could perform sexually and had no complaints, but was rarely satisfied back then. I never felt fulfilled. Deep dark lack existed within. I was disillusioned, depressed, and disheartened. I hated abuse and was very empty. Other responses were, "I never felt

comfortable or safe and sex always hurt. I never enjoyed it," "Not satisfied in either physical or emotional needs," "I didn't want to be there." Two other women said, "Ex-husband was emotionally superficial. Other men were emotionally too variable. Social roles and expectations - ugh!" "Emotionally empty, don't feel as understood. Rather than a role you can easily end up in a 'mold.' Sexual aspect is dependent on his performing. Less valued in general. Not personally happy with relationship. I was growing , but he wasn't. He isn't (never was) one for changes."

The last question of the survey asked the women what were the positive and negative aspects of their gay relationship(s). The overall positive responses were categorized as, fulfilling/satisfaction (emotional, physical and spiritual), loved and understood, and complete, happiness within, true to self.

Under the category of fulfilling/satisfaction, one woman's response was, "Fulfilling in all 3 areas, emotional, physical, and spiritual. I feel at peace with myself - not struggling. Feel more understood, can be myself and natural. Another woman said, "We think a lot alike, and we work well together." Under the same category, other comments from women were; "Total emotional and physical satisfaction in my present relationship. We have a partnership and are great friends as well as lovers," "I found the right community and partners for my desires/needs. I could have more egalitarian

relationships and could be assertive in my pursuit of friends and lovers," "It's natural, supportive, nurturing. I enjoy being able to share thoughts and an exchange of ideas. Sexually it's much more evenly enjoyed. Lots of give and take with good communication. More "shared" activities." Another women wrote, "To have someone to be emotionally and physically satisfying. To share feelings and life with someone you really care about" were the positive aspects of her gay relationship.

The sub-category of loved and understood as part of the positive aspects of their gay relationship, the responses were as follows: "My partner is also bisexual, so she is very understanding," Knowing someone loves me and trusts me," Comfort and understanding," "We can talk without feeling that there will be consequences for our actions, and lots of freedom," Love and encouragement," "Having an open and loving relationship," "I love her with all my heart." Another women wrote, "Finally I felt loved by another person, a woman. There was so much more to our relationship than the physical act, and that was wonderful. I had no idea my body could feel so much pleasure. My dreams and desires were supported and encouraged by my female mate. I have surely grown, matured and come to a place of feeling deeply loved, appreciated, and believed in. Much of who and what I am I owe to the deep abiding love of my caring concerned female mate. She also loves and supports and encourages my children and

grandchildren. Always there!" Other statements were, "Felt as if in a world of women we understood each other better, spoke the same language and sexually women lovers are more focused on the process than orgasm. More balance and equality in relationships, even though we might assume roles from time to time." "Acceptance and a supportive spouse in my home. She also says positive words that encourage me." "This is the first time I feel complete, supported, and truly loved. She is my best friend and a life partner."

Under the category of "feeling complete, happiness within, and true to self," the women responded: "Feeling like a complete and satisfied woman," "I feel comfortable with myself and the community," "A clear self image," "I was able to be my true self," "The happiness I felt within," "I have found satisfaction and great joy and pleasure. I love my mate and am truly committed to her," "I love women, their bodies, their smell, the softness and their minds. I love to have sex with women. Deep in their arms I find safety, security and acceptance," "My everything." Other women stated feelings of "safety, love, joy, and peace of mind," "At ease with myself finally, and feeling complete," "Support, understanding, intimacy, development of own self." Lastly, one woman said, "Finally accepting who I am. I am no longer denying my sexual orientation. Having the courage to live my life the way I am the happiest."

Finally, the last part of the question asked what was the negative aspects of your gay relationship(s)? The responses were categorized as nonacceptance and struggle (family, society, etc.), hiding and isolation, relationship issues (physical, verbal and emotional), and an element of time.

The women in the nonacceptance and struggle category responded with these comments, "not o.k. by family, friends, and society," "Society's way of looking at us," "Society not accepting my relationship," "Social acceptance," "The unacceptance of the military, society and church. Having to always be so "careful" not to disclose." One woman wrote, "Our relationship is and was always looked upon as sick, unacceptable and deviant. The lack of societal recognition of our commitment to each other (no tax breaks, no insurance benefits, dual income breaks, house purchase breaks, hospital rights, custody, death benefits, etc.!). Inability to celebrate our love openly. The abuse from family and friends that damaged emotions and spirits and made daily life difficult to live. We found out just how deep the river of prejudice ran. We also found out we had functional bigots trying to get out of Christian bodies as we were/are an interracial couple. Some lessons cost more than others, but oh, how we learn." "Having to struggle for recognition of our legitimacy in a patriarchal world." "Early inappropriate choices in lovers. The usual "adolescent" coming out kind of

situation. The existence of heterosexism in the world, and the periodic reminder that some people hate who I am." "Few friends. No "formal" acceptance from family or children. My partner is frequently left out of activities, etc. People see me as single or married still. Our work life cannot be shared. Some friends don't know as well as family (her side). Due to family and children (hers) we do not feel we can live together as yet." Another woman shared these comments. "My partner lost 3 out of 4 of her children to her ex-husband in court due to lifestyle. We've been together 10 years and the first 9 were "hell" in court. Her ex still causes problems and has taken her back to court for child support which really straps us financially. She has to work 4 jobs to pay, so I miss our time together. She also (we) have to pay a lot of taxes due to her income and he (her ex) gets free income he doesn't have to claim, also gets to write off 3 of the children she pays support for! I don't know how we've done it, with all the obstacles, but we're still hanging in there. We have at one period done couple counseling."

Within the hiding and isolation category, women responded, "Hiding who I am to my family," "Not being able to disclose to my children," "Wishing that I could tell everyone how happy I am," "We have to be so cautious due to our military involvement. We rarely get a chance to celebrate our union." Three women just wrote "isolation, isolation, isolation," as the negative aspect of their gay relationship.

Two women commented about their negative relationship issues. One woman stated, "Motivating her to do more in her life" was an issue. The other woman wrote, "Physical, verbal, and emotional abuse are also present in lesbian relationships. Lesbians share same issues as a heterosexual battered woman, and also are isolated due to sexual orientation and the myth of nurturing lesbian relationships. All of us are raised with the same social roles and there is no socialization for same sex relationships. Therefore, patriarchal "power over" relations continue hence, lesbian battering."

Other women who took the survey commented on the negative category of element of time. "Not experiencing this level of freedom earlier in my life," "Staying in the military for 30 years," and "short-term."

#### DISCUSSION

It is clear from the information gathered in this study that sexual identity is not a clear-cut issue for women who define themselves as homosexual despite the fact that their previous life style was heterosexual. Results of this research study support the literatures' assertions that these women faced difficult conflict with themselves, while in harmony with society, or in harmony with themselves, and in conflict with negative societal attitudes. Their heterosexual orientation for most of these women was detrimental to their

sense of identity and self-worth as a human being. The problems surrounding the importance placed on cultural features as sex-role expectations and reactions to male privileges in a male-dominated society are a possible contributory factor, but not causal factors for their transition from heterosexual to a homosexual lifestyle.

Lewis, (1984) stated, because of the strong socialization toward heterosexuality, women may marry and have children, yet feel something is missing. In the words of the women who participated in this survey, many said they felt uncomfortable, less valued, and they never felt fulfilled, something was missing. The majority of the women also considered their heterosexual relationships to have been unsatisfying. These results support Saghir and Robins study where all the homosexual women who married, considered their marriages to have been unsatisfactory.

Developing a homosexual identity was a difficult process as our findings indicate. During the process, the women of this study went through stages to reach their sexual identity. One woman said she went from denial, to indecision, to fear, to anxiety and finally acceptance. Many women wrote that the process was slow, difficult, painful, and confusing. A person's sexual orientation may not be easily captured in a single word and it may change over time.

Issues surrounding coming out need to be addressed for those women who had children during their heterosexual

relationship(s). The results of this study clearly indicate that their children greatly influenced the timing of their coming out. It is a travesty when in the best interest of the child, the mother is robbed of a close parental relationship for reasons of vindictiveness of the non gay parent, misinformation, or misguided tendencies of the divorce courts.

The findings of this study has helped these researchers profile characteristics of an invisible minority of women, most of which revealed they have a strong sense of identity as lesbians with lesbianism as a personal fulfillment after having been married and rejecting heterosexuality. These participants revealed an understanding, knowing, and a sensing of their identity. There is an independence reflected in the survey, which indicates a healthy separation and disengaging with a life style that was not appropriate for them.

#### Limitations of Study

One significant limitation of this study is the small sample size for understanding how middle-age women adopted a homosexual identity. Do to the time constraint of the study, the design could not incorporate a hypotheses or a control group.

Because the instrument in the questionnaire is a self-report inventory (SRI), it suffers from the weaknesses of

SRI's. These include their tendencies to miss report on relevant issues because the items are preselected by the researchers. SRI's also may not capture the internal or motivational characteristics of the respondents.

### Future Research

More research is needed on this silent minority of women, many who are mothers, and are in the process of building a positive, distinctive sense of self. Further studies might include the coming out process to children. When is a child old enough to understand, and will this information have a psychological impact on the child's developmental growth?

Another area of research might include abuse within a lesbian relationship. It is easy for society to recognize male victimization of women, and to see the need for women to leave those situations in which they are being abused by men. Oftentimes, lesbian couples isolate themselves from community support. It may be more difficult for lesbians to recognize victimization of each other, or society to offer help.

### Implications for Social Work

According to the literature it is necessary for social workers to be knowledgeable and comfortable with lesbianism as a sexual preference and life style, in order to be effective in working with lesbian clients. We live in a world

filled with negative attitudes towards homosexual person's and homosexuality. There is a need for social workers to recognize and be sensitive to the lesbian client living in a heterosexist society. The responses from participants in this study confirm this reality. The study revealed how unacceptable their life style is in the church, military, and society, making it necessary for these women to be very careful not to disclose publicly their sexual preference. To be of effective service to clients, social workers must ensure lesbian women are treated respectfully, and demonstrate to them that their sexual orientation is accepted.

There are certain heterosexual privileges that lesbians are not able to exercise. The women of this study revealed the lack of societal recognition of dual income tax and home purchase breaks, as well as hospital rights, custody of children, and death benefits. They are finding that indeed the "river of prejudice runs very deep." Social workers must be prepared to assist clients in problem solving with homophobic social institutions, as well as being cognizant of their ethical mandate to work toward social changes for the elimination of institutional barriers for their clients. The social work professional must become familiar with lesbian support systems both locally and nationally.

## Conclusion

Steven King (1983) apply clarifies the human need for silence when feelings are of great significance, "The most important things are the hardest things to say. They are the things you get ashamed of, because words diminish them; words shrink things that seemed limitless when they were in your head to no more than living size when they're brought out. But it's more than that, isn't it? The most important things lie too close to wherever your secret heart is buried, like landmarks to a treasure your enemies would love to steal away. And you may make revelations that cost you dearly only to have people look at you in a funny way, not understanding what you've said at all or why you thought it was so important that you almost cried while you were saying it. That's the worst, I think. When the secret stays locked within, not for want of a teller, but for want of an understanding ear."

Even the most positive self-identity does not protect a woman from the special pressures and social stresses homosexuals face. As our survey indicated, there are very real constraints on physical affection shown to a lover in public situations, the expectations of heterosexuality in relationships at work or in the neighborhood, financial and legal constraints on lesbian couples, family pressures to

appear at holidays without one's partner, and decisions about when, how and to whom she will "come out." Each woman must work out her own solutions to these problems depending on her values, environment, and risk factors. This must be done when the time is right for each individual. The women in this study were hopeful of an "understanding ear," and the revelations they revealed, we have attempted to document in the manner of respect and dignity that they so deserve.

**APPENDIX A:**  
**INFORMED CONSENT AND DEBRIEFING STATEMENT**

This study is being conducted by Carolyn Jackson and Betty Watts under the supervision of Dr. Marjorie Hunt, Professor of Social Work. This research project has been approved by the Human Subject Committee of the Department of Social Work at California State University, San Bernardino.

The study in which you are about to participate involves answering questions about your background, and same-sex thoughts, feelings, and behavior. As a participant you will be asked to describe your experience of your sexual orientation.

There is no foreseeable risk or discomfort as a result of answering any of these questions, however, you can leave any question blank that you want to, and you can stop any time you want without any negative consequences.

Your participation is totally voluntary, and please be assured that any information you provide will be held in strict confidence by the researchers. At no time will your name be reported along with your responses. All data will be reported in a group form only.

Thank you for your participation in this study. Should you have any questions regarding the outcome of the study or if anything has troubled you about the study, you may contact Carolyn Jackson, Betty Watts, or Dr. Marjorie Hunt in the Social Work Department, California State University, San Bernardino, at (909) 880-5501.

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Participant Signature

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Catolyn Jackson or Betty Watts

## APPENDIX B: QUESTIONNAIRE

### I. CURRENT INFORMATION

1. Identification Number \_\_\_\_\_
2. Age \_\_\_\_\_
3. Please specify your ethnic background.
  - 1 \_\_\_\_\_ Native American
  - 2 \_\_\_\_\_ Black/Afro American
  - 3 \_\_\_\_\_ White/Caucasian
  - 4 \_\_\_\_\_ Mexican American
  - 5 \_\_\_\_\_ Asian American
  - 6 \_\_\_\_\_ Other \_\_\_\_\_
4. What is your level of education?
  - 1 \_\_\_\_\_ Elementary
  - 2 \_\_\_\_\_ High School or GED
  - 3 \_\_\_\_\_ Junior College
  - 4 \_\_\_\_\_ Undergraduate (Bachelors)
  - 5 \_\_\_\_\_ Graduate
  - 6 \_\_\_\_\_ Ph.D.
5. Income
  - 1 \_\_\_\_\_ 0 - 14,999
  - 2 \_\_\_\_\_ 15,000 - 25,999
  - 3 \_\_\_\_\_ 26,000 - 36,999
  - 4 \_\_\_\_\_ 37,000 - 60,999
  - 5 \_\_\_\_\_ 61,000/Higher
6. Has your heterosexual relationship ever consisted of the following? Check all that apply.
  - 1 \_\_\_\_\_ Married
  - 2 \_\_\_\_\_ Separated
  - 3 \_\_\_\_\_ Divorced
  - 4 \_\_\_\_\_ Spouse Deceased
  - 5 \_\_\_\_\_ Never Married
  - 6 \_\_\_\_\_ Abusive Relationship

7. Did you have any children during your heterosexual relationship? If no skip to question number 12.

Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

8. If yes, how many? \_\_\_\_\_

9. Have you come out to all of your children?

Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

10. How did your children react when you told them?  
Child number 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, etc. (place the number beside their appropriate response).

1 \_\_\_\_\_ Very supportive  
2 \_\_\_\_\_ Somewhat supportive  
3 \_\_\_\_\_ Neutral  
4 \_\_\_\_\_ Nonsupportive  
5 \_\_\_\_\_ Very nonsupportive/hostile

11. Did your children have any influence on the timing of your coming out?

Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

## II. RELATIONSHIPS

12. During the period you were focused on a heterosexual relationship, how would you rate your Emotional/Mental Satisfication.

1 \_\_\_\_\_ 2 \_\_\_\_\_ 3 \_\_\_\_\_ 4 \_\_\_\_\_ 5 \_\_\_\_\_

Very Satisfied      Satisfied      Somewhat Satisfied      Unsatisfied      Very Unsatisfied

13. During the period you were focused on a heterosexual relationship, how would you rate your Physical/Sexual Satisfication.

1 \_\_\_\_\_ 2 \_\_\_\_\_ 3 \_\_\_\_\_ 4 \_\_\_\_\_ 5 \_\_\_\_\_

Very Satisfied      Satisfied      Somewhat Satisfied      Unsatisfied      Very Unsatisfied

14. During the period you were focused on a heterosexual relationship, how would you rate your Spiritual Satisfaction.

1                      2                      3                      4                      5

Very Satisfied      Satisfied      Somewhat Satisfied      Unsatisfied      Very Unsatisfied

15. What is your current relationship status?

_____ No sexual partners	Duration _____
_____ One committed partner	Duration _____
_____ Multiple partners	Duration _____
_____ Coupled, living together	Duration _____
_____ Coupled, living apart	Duration _____

16. Have you ceased sexual contact (s) with men?

Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

17. If yes, at what age did you cease sexual contact (s) with men?

\_\_\_\_\_

18. Was the subject of homosexuality discussed in your family when you were a child?

1 \_\_\_\_\_ Not discussed  
2 \_\_\_\_\_ Discussed favorably  
3 \_\_\_\_\_ Discussed somewhat favorably  
4 \_\_\_\_\_ Discussed unfavorably

19. If you are still living with your husband, do you stay in this relationship for reasons of...(check all that apply).

1 \_\_\_\_\_ Children  
2 \_\_\_\_\_ Economics  
3 \_\_\_\_\_ Loyalty  
4 \_\_\_\_\_ Comfort  
5 \_\_\_\_\_ Religion  
6 \_\_\_\_\_ Habit  
7 \_\_\_\_\_ Fear (please circle any that apply): Loss of spouse - Abuse - Loss of home - Social acceptance - Family of origin.

### III. TRANSITION

20. Are you still attracted to men?

Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

21. If you were not in a gay relationship now, would you seek out a same sex relationship?

Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

22. I doubt that I am a lesbian, but still am confused about who I am sexually.

Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

23. I have disclosed to one or two people (very few) that I have homosexual feelings, although I am not sure I am a lesbian.

Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

24. Describe the process you went through (or are going through) to get from thinking that you might be a lesbian to actually considering yourself a lesbian. (Check all that apply).

- 1 \_\_\_\_\_ I always felt different
- 2 \_\_\_\_\_ Unsatisfactory relationship(s) with men
- 3 \_\_\_\_\_ Abusive relationship(s) with men
- 4 \_\_\_\_\_ Sexual relationship(s) with women
- 5 \_\_\_\_\_ A spiritual experience with another women
- 6 \_\_\_\_\_ The unconditional support and love of another women
- 7 \_\_\_\_\_ Other \_\_\_\_\_

25. How old were you when you had your first homosexual experience?

\_\_\_\_\_

### IV. COMING OUT

26. If you have already come out, or you are in some stage of coming out, what has influenced this?

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

27. In your own words, how would you describe your coming out experience with?

Self \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Family \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Children \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Friends \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

28. In your first gay relationship, who initiated the first contact?

\_\_\_\_\_

How did you feel about your first contact with this

\_\_\_\_\_

29. Where did you meet your first gay partner?

\_\_\_\_\_

30. Did your religious background help or hinder the coming out process?

Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

If so, how \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

31. Before you realized you were gay, were most of your close female friends (check all that apply).

- 1 \_\_\_\_\_ Heterosexual
- 2 \_\_\_\_\_ Homosexual
- 3 \_\_\_\_\_ Bisexual
- 4 \_\_\_\_\_ Married
- 5 \_\_\_\_\_ Divorced/Separated
- 6 \_\_\_\_\_ Single

V. SEXUAL ORIENTATION

32. In terms of my sexual orientation, I identify myself as:

- 1 \_\_\_\_\_ Exclusively homosexual
- 2 \_\_\_\_\_ Predominantly homosexual
- 3 \_\_\_\_\_ Bisexual
- 4 \_\_\_\_\_ Predominantly heterosexual
- 5 \_\_\_\_\_ Exclusively heterosexual
- 6 \_\_\_\_\_ Unsure

33. I live a homosexual lifestyle at home, but there are places I am not comfortable having this information known.

Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

If yes, please state where or with whom you are uncomfortable.

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34. In terms of comfort with my current sexual orientation, I would say that I am:

- 1 \_\_\_\_\_ Very comfortable
- 2 \_\_\_\_\_ Mostly comfortable
- 3 \_\_\_\_\_ Comfortable
- 4 \_\_\_\_\_ Not very comfortable
- 5 \_\_\_\_\_ Very uncomfortable

The remaining questions are open ended. You are encouraged to write as much as you wish in answer to these questions. Please try to be as specific as possible in giving your answers. Thank you.

35. What were the positive and negative aspects of your heterosexual relationships(s)?

Positive \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Negative \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

36. What were the positive and negative aspects of your gay relationship(s)?

Positive \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Negative \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

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