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Deaf Lesbian Identity

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Deaf Lesbian Identity

by

Noël E. Cherasaro

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
in Curriculum and Instruction with an emphasis in
Special Education
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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to the following people who are always there for me!

To my wife Linda Deppert, who supported me through seemingly impossible odds.

To my family

(Cherasaro/Barradale/Macones/Antinori/Bussanich)

and my “family of choice”

for being the BEST cheerleaders.

To my Deaf/Hard of Hearing and LGBT students and colleagues, past, present and future.

You teach me every day and I am grateful for the learning.

To my lifelong mentors Jerry B. Crittenden, Ph.D, Associate Professor Emeritus (R.I.P)

and

MaryAnn Ziegler, M.A.

To my colleagues and all who accompanied and encouraged me on this journey...

I am humbled and grateful.

_m/

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ABSTRACT

Deaf lesbians are a population that is underrepresented in the academic literature. Through the use of narrative inquiry, the researcher conducted in-depth interviews with a woman who self-identified as Deaf and lesbian. She shared her experiences growing up as a woman who is Deaf and later in her life, realized she is lesbian. The researcher juxtaposed her experiences as a hearing, lesbian woman and an ally to the Deaf community to better illuminate the Deaf lesbian experiences. The research delved into how these dual minority identities have affected the Deaf lesbian participant as she makes her way in the world of the dual majority cultures of hearing and heteronormative.

CHAPTER ONE:

INTRODUCTION

Two thoughts sparked this study and brought it to the forefront of my interests. The first is the 31 years I have taught Deaf/Hard of Hearing (DHH) students. Second, is my own self-identification as a lesbian and an accepted ally in the local Deaf community. Including my self-identity as part of my research came about early in my studies in a second semester doctoral seminar on *Philosophies of Inquiry*. The topic under discussion pertained to including or excluding oneself in the research. A colleague inquired about quantitative studies that recommended keeping researcher bias and references to oneself out of the study. The professor explained there are different types of studies and that in fact, qualitative studies can include the researcher/self as part of the study. After contemplating this and wondering how my DHH students who are lesbians or gays make their way in the majority hearing world and heteronormative society, the following topic came to me: *How does a Deaf or Hard of Hearing individual who identifies as lesbian make her way in the world living in two majority cultures, namely heteronormative and hearing?* To gain access to resources, many people who are DHH have to use a third party, a sign language interpreter, as a facilitator of communication. For me, as a person who is hearing, it was difficult to “come out” as a lesbian teenager in high school. I kept myself closeted for many years after that. Yet, unlike DHH individuals, I had access to resources independently of a third person, such as calling a friend or finding a counselor or a support group (e.g., sign language interpreter). Individuals who are DHH do not always have these options. I thought of how very personal and closeted I was at the beginning of my “coming

out process” and how difficult it was to disclose my sexual orientation to anyone. Then, the thought occurred to me that some of my DHH students who were beginning to identify themselves as lesbian or gay needed community resources, wanted to tell their friends and families, or considered going to a Gay Straight Alliance (GSA) meeting at their school, yet could not necessarily access these resources independently. Any of these intentions related to their sexuality had to reveal private, personal information through a sign language interpreter because of communication barriers. I learned that support from a GSA is possible at the high school level but not necessarily at the middle school level. I know what I went through emotionally during my own coming out and I thought about former students who I thought might be lesbian or gay or others who I was told were lesbian or gay. Because they were users of American Sign Language (ASL), how would they be able to communicate independently of an interpreter if they chose not to “come out” to her/him? What would this experience be like for them? Would it be terribly invasive to “come out” to the interpreter?

Problem Statement

As I began to research Deaf lesbian identity, I found that there was a reasonable amount of information on Deaf Identity. Likewise, there was significant research and writing available on lesbian Identity. However, there was limited information on the intersection of Deaf lesbian identity that would have resulted from studies that merged the two identities or at least considered them simultaneously within a study. With regard to these women and their stories, there was limited information in the research literature. I found one article that spoke to the *intersectionality* of Deaf lesbians. It was an article from the *British Medical Journal* that explored the desire of two Deaf lesbians for wanting to find a Deaf sperm donor so they could have in-vitro fertilization and produce a Deaf baby. From a Deaf cultural perspective, this would

be considered as a perfectly normal occurrence because the women would embrace their child as “same,” Deaf, and using ASL to communicate and teach — a cultural model of “difference.” The hearing community, however, would typically reject the idea that these two women would intentionally create a Deaf “designer” baby with an intentional “disability.” From a hearing perspective, Deaf is “broken” and should be “fixed.” I was pleased to read that this article favored respecting the decision of the couple toward reproductive freedom.

Newman (1997) wrote a chapter in *Queerly Phrased: Language, Gender and Sexuality* where she interviewed a Deaf lesbian regarding her education in both residential schools for the Deaf and public schools with mainstreaming, as well as her own “coming out” to her family. It is interesting to note that the interviewee preferred attending the residential school for the Deaf in favor of the public school with mainstreaming, as she felt more a part of the Deaf community. She was invited to her Deaf friend’s home on weekends. She enjoyed that experience because her friend’s parents and family were Deaf and used sign language. She found their home signing environment to be inclusive and comfortable, especially during dinnertime conversations. Her own family is hearing and she missed much of the conversations at home due to her family being oral and non-signing. Additional interesting information was that her hearing parents felt they knew what was best for her. When she “came out” to them, they blamed her lesbian and gay friends for influencing her and felt that she as a young adult woman, did not know her own mind or sexuality.

A third research paper that dealt with Deaf lesbians was a dissertation by Schaad (2015), whose dissertation was entitled, *An Interview with Three Deaf Lesbians: Intersectionality and Saliency of Identity Variables*. Her dissertation and interviews dealt with Deaf lesbians accessing mental health services. The interesting findings were that the women had very limited formal

training about sex education and sexuality. I was taken aback when I read that women who were in their forties, born in the early to mid-seventies, were unaware as teens that there were such beings who identified as lesbian or gay. They lacked common knowledge that we as hearing people take for granted through our hearing. We learn information by hearing or over-hearing conversations, watching television shows and movies with LGBT characters, and by being exposed to information that we as teenagers would discuss or debate. The women's salient identity was Deaf versus lesbian. They felt that being lesbian was not important. To them, being part of the Deaf community was more important than being lesbian and part of the LGBT community. Having read these texts, I was curious to find if my study participant would have the same experiences as the participants in Schaad's (2015) dissertation. Schaad also noted in her paper that the information on Deaf lesbians was limited in the literature. Noting that I found only three research references related to Deaf lesbians, I found this population's limited presence in the literature as well and with my interest in this particular population, I believe their stories should be told.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to expand the literature base through the use of narrative inquiry conducted with an individual who self-identifies as a member of the Deaf lesbian culture, to learn of her lived experiences in dual majority cultures, and to ensure that the stories of her experiences are captured, represented, and shared in the professional literature.

Significance of the Study

The significance of this study was that it sought to add the voices and perspectives of this group of women in the knowledge and literature base. I found limited research focused on this

particular group of women. It was my intent to conduct the research so these women's stories are represented in the literature and to include their voices and experiences as Deaf lesbian individuals living in dual majority cultures. From this study, the field stood to gain knowledge about these dual minority individuals, to understand how they make their way in both the hearing world and in the heteronormative majorities. This is important as a "queer" subgroup of both majority cultures who are not adequately represented in the literature. As persons who are Deaf or who have significant hearing losses, this subgroup historically has suffered in society by being shunned, marginalized, alone, and isolated due to a lack of concern or ability of the hearing community to learn to communicate with DHH people who are "different" due to their linguistic, cultural, and manual (i.e., using ASL) identities (Lane et al., 1996). From my years of experience in Deaf education, the hearing individuals would prefer to "fix" the "disability" by auditory or oral means of amplification devices, such as hearing aids or surgically implanted devices (e.g., cochlear implants), and by providing constant exposure to auditory training and speech and language therapy. The hearing majority favors the medical model of "disability" over the difference or acceptance model of being (Lane et al., 1996). Conversely, lesbian-feminists disrupt the patriarchal system by accepting the difference model or queer model of being, which allows for us to become empowered in our different identities. This study sought to represent Deaf lesbians as having double identities, or intersectionality, in a dual majority culture, currently not well represented in the literature.

Overview of Conceptual Framework

From the review of the survey literature regarding both the LGBT Survey (Kosciw, Greytak, Palmer, & Boesen, 2013) and the DHH Survey (Weiner, Day, & Galvan, 2013), there was a possibility I would hear things that people who are DHH struggle with, such as

communication issues, Deaf vs. Hearing World, isolation/loneliness, bullying/harassment, educational issues (e.g., reading levels at a 4th grade level for most Deaf adults), rejection from family/others, getting a job or additional education, staying employed, disability rights, tolerance/acceptance from the majority hearing culture. Likewise, I expected to hear things that lesbian individuals struggle with, such as acceptance/tolerance from the majority heteronormative culture, rejection from family, friends, religious affiliations, harassment/bullying, physical/sexual/verbal attacks, employment/housing, and human rights.

As reiterated from above, I was curious to learn about the experiences of the dual minority women living in a dual majority culture, as well as to discover what was at the center of their intersectionality. I also looked forward to developing a close relationship with an informant, through our work together on the interviews, and the additional communication during the study and afterward, if she so chose. This study was regarded as meaningful and important, as it represented an inclusionary step forward to include this group of women in the academic literature.

Theoretical Framework

The theory that most favorably deals with my study is Crip Theory, the theoretical focus of my research. After reading *Crip Theory: Cultural Signs of Queerness and Disability* by McRuer (2006), I came to realize that this theory takes into account additional theories and the intersecting cultural and identity formations in all their intense and contradictory complexity, which is why I chose it to frame my study. I view Crip Theory as representing the dome of the umbrella, which spawned several other theories as well as the identity formations, including Deaf Cultural Identity Formation, Lesbian Identity, Critical Race Theory, Feminist Theory, Critical Disability Theory (Crip Theory), and Queer Theory. The other theories and identity

formations are the underside of the dome from which Crip Theory evolved. A brief description of each theory/identity is included to set the context of the study for the readers.

With these ideas in mind, my research intended to inform, via narrative inquiry with a woman who identified as both Deaf and lesbian, and co-create the discourse of her experiences. My goal was to intensely interview a single Deaf lesbian to gain insight into her life. The Deaf lesbian participant should have an opportunity to tell her story from her own perspective. Through videotaped interviews of the woman using her native sign language, she [the dual minority woman] would do the telling. Missing from the limited literature are the stories of Deaf lesbian women from these two minority cultures. Their stories are important to learn about and understand and for younger Deaf lesbians to know as well. Stories help to understand how people make sense of their experiences, how they wrestle with the difficulties of attaching meanings to events under the press of human contingency and uncertainty, and how they struggle to do the right thing (Bochner, 2009). Telling one's story can be a liberating experience. I find this may be especially true with these women in particular because their stories are limited in the current literature. Freire (1970, p. 49) stated:

Liberation is thus a childbirth, and a painful one. The man or woman who emerges is a new person, viable only as the oppressor-oppressed contradiction is superseded by the humanization of all people. Or to put it another way, the solution of this contradiction is born in the labor which brings into the world this new being: no longer oppressor nor longer oppressed, but human in the process of achieving freedom.

LGBT History

Looking back at LGBT history, the Lesbian and Gay rights movement in the United States surged forward beginning with the Stonewall riots of June 26th and 27th, 1969 with

continuous police harassment and raiding of the known lesbian/gay bar *The Stonewall Inn* in New York City (Jagose, 1996, p. 30). The patrons tired of the intentional harassment, rioted for a weekend against the NYC Police Department. The gay liberation movement thus challenged the status quo and was constructed around the notion of a distinctly gay/lesbian identity. It was also concerned with the assertion and creation of a new sense of identity, one based on pride in being gay/lesbian (Jagose, 1996, p. 31) This incident was the catalyst for the LGBT community to fight for equal rights and we continue to do so today (Jagose, 1996). Jagose went on to state:

...the logics of coming out assume that homosexuality is not simply a private aspect of the individual, relevant only to friends and colleagues. Instead it is potentially a transformative identity that must be avowed publicly until it is no longer a shameful secret but a legitimately recognized way of being in the world. (Jagose, 1996, p. 38)

Likewise, a key strategy of feminist pedagogy is self-disclosure. When speaking of self-disclosure, Evelyn Torton Beck (1983) described it as a way of teaching that bridges the personal and the academic, humanizes the teacher, and personalizes the teaching process. Beck (1983, p. 162) further stated:

If she discloses who she is, particularly if [a woman] stands in opposition to the prevailing patriarchal orthodoxies (for instance, if she comes out as a lesbian), then she is using herself and her position as knower to help bring about social change, to break stereotypes and prejudices.

Queer Theory

Queer theory suggests that by self-disclosure, minds are opening to the “flexibility of sexuality, identity, and the presentation of the self...” (Crawley, 2009, p. 210). Queer theory is a field of post-structuralist, critical theory that emerged in the early 1990’s out of the fields of

queer studies and Women's studies. Teresa de Lauretis, an academic and critical theorist, has been credited with coining the phrase *queer theory*. In 1990, she edited a special issue of the feminist cultural studies journal *differences* entitled, "Queer Theory: Lesbian and Gay Sexualities." In explaining her use of the term, de Lauretis (1990) pointed to at least three interrelated critical projects: a refusal of heterosexuality as the benchmark for all sexual formations; an attentiveness to gender capable of interrogating the frequent assumption that lesbian and gay studies is a single, homogeneous object; and an insistence on the multiple ways in which race crucially shapes sexual subjectivities. De Lauretis went on to suggest that the threefold critique she imagines might be drawn together under the rubric of Queer Theory makes it possible "to recast or reinvent the terms of our sexualities, to construct another discursive horizon, another way of thinking the sexual" (de Lauretis, 1990, p. iv).

Queer theory includes both queer readings of texts and the theorization of "queerness" itself. Heavily influenced by the work of Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, Judith Butler, and Lauren Berlant, Queer Theory builds both upon feminist challenges to the idea that gender is part of the essential self and upon gay/lesbian studies' close examination of the socially constructed nature of sexual acts and identities. Whereas gay/lesbian studies focused its inquiries into "natural" and "unnatural" behavior with respect to homosexual behavior, Queer Theory expands its focus to encompass any kind of sexual activity or identity that falls into normative and deviant categories:

Queer is by definition is whatever is at odds with the normal, the legitimate, the dominant. There is nothing in particular to which it necessarily refers. It is an identity without an essence. 'Queer' then, demarcates not a positivity but a positionality vis-à-vis the normative. (Halperin, 1995, p. 62)

Queer theorist Michael Warner (1999) suggested that themes of homophobia and heterosexism are so deeply embedded in our social institutions and accounts world-wide, that we must work to challenge them to work for tolerance and equality.

Queer theory's main intent is to explore and contest the categorization of gender and sexuality; identities are not fixed — they cannot be categorized and labeled — because identities consist of many varied components and to categorize by only one characteristic is wrong. Queer theory posits that there is an interval between what a subject “does” (role-taking) and what a subject “is” (the self). Despite its title, the goal of the theory is to destabilize identity categories which are designed to identify the “sexed subject” and place individuals within a single restrictive sexual orientation (Jagose, 1996, p. 41; Warner, 1999, p. 16).

Feminist Theory

The history of feminist politics and theory is often considered as consisting of three “waves.” (Hill Collins, 2000). First-wave feminism is generally associated with the women’s suffrage movements of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. First-wave feminism is characterized by a focus on officially mandated inequalities between men and women, such as the legal barring of women from voting, property rights, employment, equal rights in marriage, and positions of political power and authority. Second-wave feminism is associated with the women’s liberation movements of the 1960’s and 1970’s. While seeing themselves as inheritors of the politics of the first wave, which focused primarily on legal obstacles to women’s rights, second-wave feminists began concentrating on less “official” barriers to gender equality, addressing issues such as sexuality, reproductive rights, women’s roles and labor in the home, and patriarchal culture. Finally, third-wave feminism is generally associated with feminist politics and movements that began in the 1980’s and continue on to today. Third-wave

feminism emerged out of a critique of the politics of the second wave, as many feminists felt that earlier generations had over generalized the experiences of white, middle-class, heterosexual women and ignored (and even suppressed) the viewpoints of women of color, the poor, gay, lesbian, and transgender people, and women from the non-Western world (Routledge, 2016). Third-wave feminists have critiqued essential or universal notions of womanhood, and focus on issues of racism, homophobia, and Eurocentrism as part of their feminist agenda.

Feminist social theory has influenced and been influenced by the agendas and struggles of each of these three waves. “First-wave” theorists including Mary Wollstonecraft and Susan B. Anthony were influential for their focus on how women’s lack of legal rights contributed to their social demotion, exclusion, and suffering. “Second-wave” theorists such as Betty Friedan and Andrea Dworkin were prominent for their focus on women’s sexuality, reproduction, and the social consequences of living in a patriarchal culture. Lastly, “Third-wave” theorists such as Judith Butler and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak were significant for critiquing the idea of a universal experience of womanhood and drawing attention to the sexually, economically, and racially excluded. Moreover, feminist social theorists in each wave have critiqued the male biases implicit in social theory itself, helping to construct social theory that draws on rather than excludes the experiences of women.

In all forms of feminism, a key strategy of feminist pedagogy is self-disclosure. When speaking of self-disclosure, Beck (1983) described it as a way of teaching that bridges the personal and the academic, humanizes the teacher, and personalizes the teaching process.

Ultimately, if feminism, broadly understood, is concerned with improving the conditions of women in society, feminist social theory is focused on developing ideas, concepts, philosophies, and other intellectual programs that help meet that agenda. Feminist social theory,

like any theoretical tradition, is best seen as a continuing conversation of many voices and viewpoints (Hill Collins, 2000).

How Feminist Theory Matters Today

Some commentators believe that the women's movements of the twentieth century were so successful in combating gender inequality that society has entered a "postfeminist" era (Routledge, 2016). While it is undeniable that feminist political movements have resulted in tremendous gains for women over the last 100 years, social scientific evidence demonstrates that there are still large inequalities between men and women when it comes to income and wealth, political power and opportunities, legal rights, sexual assault, rape, domestic violence, and overall status in society. This is even more the case in countries outside of the United States and Europe (Routledge, 2016). As long as gender inequality and oppression exist, feminism and feminist thought will continue to matter to millions of people throughout the world. Moreover, feminist intellectuals continue to develop cutting-edge and nuanced understandings of the social world that enrich the power and possibilities of social theory writ large.

Deaf Cultural Identity

DEAF-WORLD in the United States is concerned with a group (an estimated million people) possessing a unique language and culture. It is not associated with a single place (a "native land"); rather, it is a culture based on relationships among people for whom a number of places and associations may provide common ground (Lane et al., 1996, p. 5). Deaf means "like me" — one of us — in significant cultural ways (Lane, 2008). A Deaf person values being Deaf and possesses other attitudes, values, mores, and knowledge particular to that culture. To the Deaf, being Deaf is something positive that lies at the core of the meaning of being Deaf, and

there are no implications of loss (Lane, 2008, p. 284). Members of this culture are referred to as Deaf and the culture itself is referred to as the Deaf-World.

The physical constitution is that the Deaf rely so much more on vision (sign language) than on hearing as they communicate with each other when given the opportunity in a natural sign language (Lane, 2008). Specialized schools for the Deaf, especially residential schools, represent the settings in which the Deaf acquired fluent (manual) language and socialization. Those specialized schools — and after graduation, the Deaf clubs with their athletic, literary, political, and social programs — provided most Deaf people in America, despite their hearing parents, with the generational continuity that is essential for a rich culture (Lane, 2008). In the early 1900's, at almost the same time as the residential schools for the Deaf began, the Deaf clubs were established. For years, they flourished. Many Deaf communities across the United States raised enough money to buy their own buildings or gain long-term leases to accommodate their growing memberships in the Deaf clubs. The clubs provided a place where the Deaf could congregate and communicate easily in ASL. Deaf people designed and controlled what activities took place within their clubs (Padden, 2008, p. 169). The decline of the Deaf clubs began during the Second World War with the increased demand for factory jobs. Deaf people found they could work in factories and large plants and earn more than they did before. Deaf men and women left their homes and relocated to large cities where there was likely to be more work, such as Akron, Los Angeles, New York, and Baltimore (Padden, 2008, p. 171). Deaf people were also employed as International Typographical Union (ITU) printers and made good incomes. Post-World War II as the factory jobs declined and the printing industry changed from typesetting jobs to computer printing, the job industries for the Deaf changed again.

In the 1960's as the government expanded and offered more programs, a new workforce emerged: women, minorities, and Deaf people. Deaf people moved away from the "solitary trades" to professional and government jobs such as civil servants, teachers, rehabilitation counselors, and other types of advocacy jobs. One would think that the increase in technology would have caused the decline in the Deaf clubs; however, that was not the case. As the job market shifted, so too did the Deaf clubs and communities. Those in the trades remained in the Deaf clubs, whereas those in professions shifted from the Deaf clubs to professional associations. This shift seemed to have caused a further dwindling of the Deaf clubs, as they were designed for older types of social affiliations and did not seem to be able to accommodate the new social realities (Padden, 2008, pp. 173-174). After the decline in the Deaf clubs, Deaf people adopted the most current technologies to carry out efficient means of contacting others for purposes of social interaction (Padden, 2008, p. 175).

Currently, many of my Deaf friends use video phones, video-relay, FaceTime, texting, and Facebook as preferred methods of communication and socialization (A. Miller, personal communication, September 2, 2016; S.A. Shortz, personal communication, August 10, 2016).

In the Spring of 1988, the Deaf President Now (DPN) student protest at Gallaudet University in Washington, D.C. exposed the belief by the Deaf community and their allies that it was time to have a university president who was him/herself deaf to run the world's only university for individuals for those who are DHH. The students' goals were to remove the barriers that separated the Deaf and hearing communities and to raise the national consciousness of the rights and abilities of people who are DHH. After 8 days of protest proclaiming their demands, meetings, rallies, and marches, the students succeeded in having the hearing president

resign and having I. King Jordan, the first deaf man appointed as president of Gallaudet University.

The deaf protesters dreamed of a deaf president and drew parallels between their protest and those of the civil rights movement from the 1960's. The general public may not have been able to relate if the protest had been called a "disability movement," but because it was seen as a "civil rights movement," more people could identify and support the protesters. Today, the effects of the DPN protest still prevail in attaining rights for people who are DHH (Johnson, Liddell, & Erting, 1989).

Crip Theory

Crip Theory: Cultural Signs of Queerness and Disability emerged from cultural studies and traditions that question the order of things, considering how and why it is constructed and naturalized; how it is embedded in complex economic, social, and cultural relations; and how it might be changed (McRuer, 2006). McRuer (2006) discussed the social constructions or compositions of able-bodied and heterosexual and homosexual/queer and disabled. He argued that there must be a compulsory able-bodiedness which enables the construct of disability as well as a compulsory heterosexuality that produces queerness. During the mid-twentieth century, it was taboo to be an "out" and visible homosexual. Likewise, persons with disabilities at that time were invisible or hidden, as compared to their able-bodied counterparts.

To be accepted by society, one had to follow the compulsory able-bodied, heterosexual norms. It was thought that a homosexual had physical, emotional, or mental limitations and that those were readable or visible on the body. These limitations caused that person to fall away from his or her "heterosexual identity," thus making that person disabled as compared to his or her compulsory heterosexual counterparts (McRuer, 2006).

With similar thinking, if one is not able-bodied, then one is unfit and must be disabled. People who were homosexual or disabled were invisible in society, hiding away or “in the closet.” Terms such as queer, faggot, butch, dyke, lesbian, gimp, cripple, crip, and disabled used to carry — and in some locations, still carry — negative connotations and those persons who were labeled as such were considered not normal. It is assumed that most people seem to want to be normal and able-bodied. Able-bodied is defined as being robust and strong and physically fit (“able-bodied,” 2018). A body that is not strong or physically fit is disabled, diseased, or ill, one that cannot work. A heterosexual is defined as one who is attracted to or has sexual desires toward one of the opposite sexes and is considered as the opposite of a homosexual (“heterosexual,” 2018). In order for these ideas to be normalized, these concepts had to be deconstructed or decomposed.

The process becomes normalized over time when one resists the old paradigms of being invisible or “in the closet” and thus become visible by resisting or rejecting the compulsion to be heterosexual or able-bodied a “coming out” in the open, and to be visible to society. By rejecting the stereotypical old binary norms of society, for example, heterosexual or homosexual only or able-bodied or disabled only, with openness and flexibility there are more than just binary sexualities and more than just able-bodies or broken, unfit or disabled bodies. By our acceptance of the terms, we once considered derogatory and are/were labeled, we are accepting that we are in fact: queer, lesbians, faggots, gimps, crips, or disabled. We “come out” or “come out crip” as we are, in our own way of being, on our terms (McRuer, 2006).

Over time, and with the changes in social, political, and economic cultures as well as through activism, fighting for our rights, and the rights of others, we have caused change or reconstructed the previous cultural, economic, and social views from the beginnings of the social

and civil rights movements of the 1960's, with LGBTQ rights and disability movements with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) 1990 to the present time.

Since the writing of McRuer's text in 2006, we (LGBTQ) have gained further visibility through the U.S. Supreme Court decision for our right to marry. American society thus has become more flexible and accepting of crip-queers. We work and play alongside those who are heterosexual and able-bodied. McRuer believes as I do that we can create alternative cultures where both queer and disabled are possible (McRuer, 2006, p. 76); thus, *Crip Theory: Cultural Signs of Queerness and Disability* awakens us to a rebirth.

Rationale

My rationale for this study is that this group of women's stories inform feminist issues, disability issues, and queer issues, as well as the emergence of Deaf Culture especially with regard to women in Deaf Culture. Deaf lesbian women are underrepresented in the research literature; therefore, it is my intent to make them visible and provide them opportunities to have a voice through my work with them. I was curious to discover what might be at the center of the intersectionality between their DHH identities and lesbian identities. My study was considered as meaningful and important, representing an inclusionary step forward to represent this group of women's stories in the academic literature.

Research Questions

1. How does a Deaf or Hard of Hearing individual who identifies as lesbian understand being Deaf living in two majority cultures, namely heteronormative and hearing?
2. How does a Deaf or Hard of Hearing individual who identifies as lesbian understand being lesbian living in two majority cultures, namely heteronormative and hearing?

Definition of Terms

American Sign Language – The visual-manual language of visual and Deaf people. It is the thread that binds the members of the DEAF-WORLD to one another and to Deaf people across the ages (Lane et al., 1996, p. 42).

Audiogram – A graph that shows the softest sounds a person can hear at different pitches or frequencies. An “O” often is used to represent responses for the right ear and an “X” is used to represent responses for the left ear. There is a key on the audiogram; similar to one found on a map, that identifies what the different symbols mean. The closer the marks are to the top of the graph, the softer the sound that can be heard (Boys Town National Research Hospital, 2011).

Big “D” little “d” – In Deaf Culture, there are denotations of "big D" Deaf and "small d" deaf. What is the difference? What makes a deaf person big or small d? The differences are that "small d" deaf do not associate with other members of the Deaf community, strive to identify themselves with hearing people, and regard their hearing loss solely in medical terms. "Big D" Deaf identify as culturally deaf and have a strong deaf identity. Big D Deaf tend to have attended schools or programs for the deaf, while small d deaf tend to have been mainstreamed or never attended a school for the deaf. When writing about deafness, many writers use a capital D when referring to aspects of deaf culture, and a lowercase d when speaking solely about the hearing loss, and some just simply use d/Deaf (Berke, 2018).

Bi-Lingual – This term involves instruction which includes several components; academic subject matter is taught, transitionally at least, using the student’s primary language (ASL). English is taught as a second language (De Vera & Dharer, n.d.).

DEAF Culture – DEAF-WORLD in the United States is concerned with a group (an estimated one million people) possessing a unique language and culture. It is not associated with

a single place (e.g., a “native land”); rather, it is a culture based on relationships among people for whom a number of places and associations may provide common ground (Lane et al., 1996, p. 5).

Deafhood – Coined by Paddy Ladd, deafhood is defined as “a process by which Deaf individuals come to actualize their Deaf identity, positing that those individuals construct that identity around several differently ordered sets of priorities and principles, which are affected by various factors such as nation, era and class” (Ladd, 2003, p. xviii).

Hard of Hearing – This is a term usually used for people with a mild, moderate or severe hearing loss. People who identify themselves as Hard of Hearing usually use speech and their residual hearing as their primary mode of communication but may be involved in the Deaf community. This group of people can usually transition back and forth between the Deaf and hearing cultures (Frasu, 2009).

Hearing – The process, function, or power of perceiving sound; *specifically* : the special sense by which noises and tones are received as stimuli (“hearing,” 2018).

Heteronormative Culture – This term is used to describe a culture of belief system, which assumes that heterosexuality is the norm. Heteronormativity can take a number of forms, and it is often subtle and pervasive. One of the most important impacts of heteronormativity is the marginalization of people who do not fit within heterosexual norms, such as homosexuals and people who do not identify with commonly held ideas about sexuality and gender. Many activists in a variety of social groups have worked to combat heteronormative behavior. In a society with heteronormative values, all people are assumed to be heterosexual. Most such societies also have a binary view of gender, which divides people up as either male or female. Many such societies also have specific ideas about gender roles and what sort of activities are

appropriate for each gender. In addition, it is common for alternative sexual practices to be viewed as abnormal, even when they take place in a heterosexual context. For people who do not identify as heterosexual, such as gays, lesbians, asexuals, and bisexuals, it can be frustrating to live in a heteronormative society because assumptions are constantly being made about human sexuality in such societies. People who are not heterosexual may also be the victims of prejudice, and sometimes they are deliberately targeted with laws aimed to suppress their sexuality. Anyone who engages in alternative sexual practices, even if he or she is heterosexual, may also be marginalized by a heteronormative society (WiseGEEK, 2018).

Home Signs (or Kitchen Signs) – The gestural communication system developed by a deaf child who lacks input from a language model in the family. This is a common experience for deaf children with hearing parents who are isolated from a sign language community.

Lesbian Identity – This term is characterized by clarity and acceptance in which one moves beyond the dichotomized worldview to an incorporation of one's sexual orientation as one aspect of a more integrated identity (Cass, 1974).

CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

A Brief Summary of Deaf Education in America

In 1815, Thomas Gallaudet, a Protestant minister from Hartford, Connecticut, was sent by philanthropists to London to acquire the art of teaching Deaf people. When he arrived, he found that a particular family, the Braidwoods from Scotland, monopolized the education of the Deaf children. The Braidwoods forced their teachers to sign contracts stating they would protect and not share the secret of their teaching methods with anyone. Gallaudet tried several times to meet with the teachers and visit the schools, but they would not meet with him and refused him admission to any of their schools (Berke, 2016; Lane et al., 1996).

While in England, Gallaudet connected with Abbé Sicard, a French educator who was giving demonstrations of his teaching methods in London. Sicard's teacher was Abbé de l'Épée who established the first public school for the Deaf in Paris. Upon the death of Abbe de l' Epee in 1789, Sicard succeeded him at the Paris School for the Deaf (Massieu & Clerc, as cited in Lane et al., 1996). While visiting London, Sicard had two of his best students with him, Jean Massieu and Laurent Clerc. After viewing the demonstrations, Gallaudet was invited by Sicard to visit his school in France. Gallaudet attended classes at the school for the Deaf and received lessons in manual French from Jean Massieu and Laurent Clerc. Following this opportunity, Gallaudet contracted with Clerc to return to America with him to help establish and run the first public school for the Deaf in America. In April of 1817, the Connecticut Asylum for the

Education and Instruction of the Deaf and Dumb Persons opened in Hartford serving seven Deaf students from New England cities, several of whom were from families with other Deaf members (Lane et al., 1996). Thus, Deaf education in America had begun.

The communication system used across the school was an adaptation of Clerc's manual French, along with home signs, pantomime, and new signs that the students brought with them from their families and from their Deaf communities were creolized or morphed into what is known today as American Sign Language (ASL).

In these early beginnings of Deaf education in America, teachers came from other northeastern cities to learn Clerc's sign language and take it back to their cities to establish new schools for the Deaf there as well as in other states. These schools were residential schools for the Deaf and became (and remain) enormously important to the Deaf community and culture. The language of sign enabled Deaf students to come together, share a common language, and socialize and become a community of learners. Deaf students throughout Europe and America learned this sign language and all other subjects were taught through sign language, which became their primary language (Lane et al., 1996).

By 1869, over thirty residential schools for the Deaf were established in the United States serving over 3,246 Deaf students. Of the 187 teachers, 42% were Deaf (Lane et al., 1996). Students who had graduated from the residential schools as well as their teachers, who were Deaf, married other Deaf people and had children. This helped to continue the dissemination of ASL throughout the United States. Through the 1850's, Deaf students learned bilingually (Lane et al., 1996). Deaf children in both Europe and America successfully completed elementary school making the demand for middle and high school classes (Lane et al., 1996). Deaf students who were talented in the liberal arts continued their schooling for 4 more years and many then

became teachers of the Deaf. To meet the needs of graduating Deaf students, Thomas Gallaudet's son, Edward Miner Gallaudet, founded the first liberal arts college for the Deaf in the world. It was established in 1864 in Washington, D.C. and is known today as Gallaudet University.

However, the more sign languages thrived in Europe and America, the more hearing educators challenged them because they were certain that the native spoken languages had greater value than the signed languages. Deaf educators in both France and America tried to use the grammar of spoken language with sign language teaching manually coded French or English. However, it was cumbersome and inefficient and therefore eliminated. Hearing educators continued to challenge the sign language developments and an attempt to supplant sign language with speech. These differences in approach represent the beginnings of the tensions and struggles between manual and oral methods of communication for the Deaf (Lane et al., 1996).

Teaching the Deaf to speak dates back to the sixteenth century when Pedro Ponce de León, a Spanish monk, taught the Deaf children of noble families to speak, read and write. This shocked scholars in Spain and this news spread throughout Europe. Ponce de Leon's method may have had an indirect influence on oral education. The three men who founded oral instruction for the Deaf were Jacob Péreire in the Romance speaking countries, John Wallis in the British Isles and Jan Conrad Amman in the German speaking countries (Lane et al., 1996). Wealthy families who had sons who became Deaf at an early age hired male tutors, usually men of letters, to work on boys' speech restoration and to increase their knowledge of arts and sciences. Girls who were deaf were kept at home or in convents and did not receive the speech therapy afforded to boys (Lane et al., 1996). When a boy was successful, a philosopher noted it and the tutor published the good news announcing his achievement, but withheld his method

(Lane et al., 1996). The tutors usually moved on to other students and that boy was left without further therapy (Lane et al., 1996).

At about the same time that the American schools for the Deaf ceased using manually coded English, those who professed oral methods were unyielding in their fight for the Deaf to learn to speak. So strong were they in their beliefs that they wanted spoken English to replace sign language for the Deaf altogether (Lane et al., 1996). In 1843, two prominent American educators, Samuel Gridley Howe and Horace Mann, who had no expertise with Deaf people, returned from Germany, praising the schools for the Deaf that used only spoken German. With that information, representatives from the New York and Hartford schools went to Germany to observe. They returned to America unwavering in their support for the use of sign language and promoting training of spoken English for students who had residual hearing, especially for those who had lost their hearing after acquiring speech (Lane et al., 1996).

In the late 1860's, Howe insisted that an oral school for the Deaf be started in Massachusetts, one in which only spoken English be used and no sign language. The school was financially backed by a Mr. Clarke and today remains the Clarke School in Northampton, Massachusetts. Another oral school was opened in New York, London, and Paris (Lane et al., 1996).

In 1878, the French Exhibition was held in Paris (Lane et al., 1996). While there, a small group of almost all hearing teachers of the Deaf, the majority of whom were French, quickly met. They called themselves the Universal Congress to Improve the Lot of the Deaf and the Blind. The exhibition was sponsored by the wealthy Péreire family, who had determined that only instruction using the national spoken language could fully “restore the Deaf to society,” although signing could be as useful as an auxiliary. The group had the financial backing from the

Péire family. Those who met in Paris decided to have a second congress in Milan, Italy. Before the Milan congress, the Italian schools for the Deaf were using sign language. Ten years prior to the second convention, the Deaf in Italy were instructed in oral only methods by hearing teachers. Two days prior to the convention and after the arrival of the delegates, the afternoons of the convention were dedicated to public examinations of the deaf oral students by their hearing teachers. The exams were described as carefully, stage-managed public examinations. The American delegates thought the exercises were a sham, but the other delegates disagreed. Everyone with exception of the Americans voted to “disbar” the minority signed language in every nation in favor of speech over signs. For the DEAF worldwide, the Milan Conference became the death sentence for signed languages. Because of this, Deaf teachers were fired en masse. Deaf students who grew up signing, were quarantined in the residential schools and the students were severely punished if they were caught using sign language. Students were prevented from using their signed languages at all.

The Milan Conference

The conference in Milan, Italy in September of 1880 drastically changed the education of Deaf students through the present. Those who attended the conference voted to outlaw sign language internationally in favor of oral only methods. The U.S. delegation and those from Great Britain opposed the proposal. However, they were outvoted and those in favor of the oral only methods won. Internationally, schools for the Deaf became oral only or placed an increased emphasis on oral education. Some schools used combined methods because they disagreed philosophically with oral only methods. In those schools, the use of ASL continued and added speech and lipreading for the younger students and continued the use of sign language and fingerspelling in the advanced and vocational classes (Gannon 1981; Lane et al., 1996). Since

then, the oral versus manual methodology has become and still remains a heated debate that rages on in what has become known as “The War of Methods” (Gannon 1981, p. 359; Lane et al., 1996).

Alexander Graham Bell-Oralism and Eugenics

Alexander Graham Bell was a proponent of oral only methods. He believed in eugenics and rejected the intermarriages of Deaf persons. Eugenics is the science of improving a human population by controlled breeding (as by sterilization) to increase the occurrence of desirable heritable characteristics. Developed by Francis Galton in 1883 as a method of improving the human race, it fell into disfavor only after the perversion of its doctrines by the Nazis (“eugenics,” 2018). In 1883, Bell presented a paper, “Memoir Upon the Formation of a Deaf Variety of the Human Race” before the National Academy of Science (NAS) in New Haven, Connecticut. Bell falsified information given to the NAS stating that the number of people who were congenitally Deaf were increasing at a greater rate than the population at large and the Deaf children of Deaf parents population was increasing at a greater rate than the congenital Deaf population. The probable reason for his giving the NAS a false impression was that prior to the Milan Conference, the residential schools for the Deaf were using ASL and written English for communication, and speech for those students who could benefit from speech therapy. Bell was so vehemently opposed to sign language in favor of speech/oral only methods that he was trying to forward his agenda and his organization, the American Association to Promote the Teaching of Speech to the Deaf, which is now known as the Alexander Graham Bell Association for the Deaf. He warned of preventing Deaf intermarriage because of the “calamitous results to their offspring” bolstering his eugenics stance (Lane et al., 1996, pp. 382-383). He claimed that the Deaf signing population was a menace to society; therefore, in order for the Deaf population to

cease growing, he recommended no intermingling of the signing population nor intermarriages of Deaf individuals to prevent further congenitally Deaf from being born. Although Bell acknowledged that he nor others could dictate to a man or a woman whom they could marry, he wrote:

Those who believe as I do, that the production of a defective race of human beings would be a great calamity to the world, will examine carefully the causes that lead to the intermarriages of the deaf with the object of applying a remedy. (Gannon, 1981, p. 75)

By the 1930's, the eugenics section of the NAS prepared model sterilization laws and promoted them in state legislatures, specifically calling for sterilization of the feebleminded, insane, criminalistic, deaf, and other "socially unfit" classes. By the time the Germans were using their sterilization programs, some 30 U.S. states also had sterilization laws in force. However, none specifically included Deaf people (Lane et al., 1996, p. 382). Even today, people who are culturally DEAF and use ASL to communicate are extremely opposed to the A.G. Bell Association, what it represented historically and culturally for them, and their current and continued philosophy of oral only communication for people who are DHH; thus, the methodology debate rages on.

Deaf Identity

Cultural identity is a social construct from the literature on Critical Race Theory (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001, p. 121). Identity emerges through present and past experiences and interactions between oneself and the surrounding social environment (Baumeister, 1997). Cultural identity provides a means of understanding one's relationship to cultural communities with which one has ties (Glickman, 1993). For Deaf identity, since the 1990's, a new paradigm of deafness as a cultural minority rather than a medical pathology has been presented (Glickman,

1993; Lane et al., 1996, p. 31). To point out one implication of this new paradigm, Glickman (1993) presented a theory of how audiologically deaf people develop Deaf identities. Glickman (1993) developed and used the Deaf Identity Development Scale (DIDS) that was developed in both English and ASL to measure Deaf cultural identity. Based on each individual's answers on the survey instrument, those who responded to the DIDS were categorized based on the subscale on which they obtained the highest score.

The four main categories of identity according to the DIDS are: hearing identity, marginalized identity, deaf identity, and bicultural identity. In addition, Glickman's (1993) four stages of cultural identity development are described as follows: *Culturally hearing* refers to people who hold the dominant culture's attitudes and beliefs about deafness; *culturally marginal* refers to people who experience shifting loyalties or profound confusion regarding their relationship to the Deaf and hearing worlds; *immersion identity* refers to a radical or militant Deaf stance; and *bicultural deaf people* have integrated their Deaf pride in a balanced way into their full humanity. Different paths of development are outlined dependent on the circumstances surrounding the hearing loss.

In his research study, Glickman (1993) administered the DIDS to 161 participants: 105 students from Gallaudet University and 56 members from an organization of late deafened adults. Support for the existence of the four distinct kinds of cultural identity is provided by acceptable reliability, inter-scale, and item-to-scale correlations. Thirteen hypotheses pertaining to the survey instrument creation and theory and test validity were tested. The results were used to further clarify the paths of deaf identity development. In this research, Glickman (1993) pioneered the work in deaf identity. Prior to his development of the DIDS, there were no other instruments to measure deaf identity. From his pioneering work, other researchers used

instruments to examine the identity categories of people who were deaf, hard of hearing, or hearing with strong relationships to the Deaf community within the deaf or hearing cultures.

As society is becoming more global, there seems to be greater awareness of multiculturalism on an international level. Included in this awareness are the members of the cultural and linguistic minority of the deaf communities within the major hearing cultures, who are experiencing their own shifts in their own perceptions of identity and how those identities affect the self-esteem and wellbeing of the individual members of these deaf and hearing communities (Cass, 1979). As part of his investigation, Glickman (1993) gave recommendations for modifications and improvements to the DIDS; Leigh, Marcus, Dobosh, and Allen (1998) then provided suggestions and modified Glickman's Deaf Identity Development Scale to include hearing adults, Deaf adults, and Children of Deaf Adults (CODAs). The researchers found that there was a significant interaction between hearing status of self and parents on the hearing, marginal and immersion scales of the modified version but not on the bicultural scale. CODAs are more marginalized, less immersed, and similarly "hearing" in comparison to deaf persons with deaf parents. Hard of hearing persons with deaf parents endorsed more with hearing values and fewer deaf values in comparison to their deaf counterparts and also appear to be more marginalized. Leigh and colleagues also found that there were no significant differences between deaf and hard-of-hearing individuals with hearing parents. Compared to hearing respondents with hearing parents, deaf counterparts were more marginalized, more "hearing" and equally "deaf." Strong professional affiliations with the Deaf community resulted in scores that differed significantly from those for individuals not as strongly affiliated. The greater the professional affiliation with the Deaf community, the less endorsement of hearing values, less marginality, and a higher level of biculturalism (Leigh et al., 1998).

Fischer and McWhirter (2001) also revised the Glickman (1993) study based on his recommendations and further validated the DIDS on 323 Deaf/Hard of Hearing (DHH) participants. From these works and an acknowledgement of the limitations and problems with the DIDS, Maxwell-McCaw (2001) developed the Deaf Acculturation Scale (DAS), which focused on the bicultural/acculturation model and how ongoing dual (deaf-hearing) identity processes could be applied to DHH and hearing groups.

Another study by Hintermair (2008) was conducted in Germany and used Maxwell-McCaw's (2001) updated work to test the significance of acculturation for self-esteem, satisfaction with life, and overall well-being for Deaf participants, but with a slightly different hypothesis. Hintermair (2008) agreed that the marginal category would show significantly different levels of self-esteem and satisfaction with life but hypothesized that there would be no difference between the other three acculturation styles.

Hintermair (2008) found that the self-esteem and quality of life for DHH individuals was higher when they were bi-culturally acculturated. Being so acculturated increased the psychosocial well-being of these individuals. Hintermair made the case for good communicative conditions and optimizing academic achievement early on in learners' lives to ensure a secure, comprehensive, and differentiated opening up of the world and psychological empowerment. In this way, a good foundation can be laid for the future development of quality of life. This work on Deaf Identity is important to the field of special education because the members of the Deaf community have been marginalized for so long (Lane et al., 1996, p. 159).

The aforementioned researchers were not only interested in Deaf Identity but also the self-esteem and well-being of the Deaf individuals. Some of the studies addressed individuals who were DHH as well as individuals who were hearing and had strong relationship ties to the

Deaf community (e.g., hearing children of deaf parents, deaf siblings or relatives, or professionals who worked with these individuals).

Summary of Deaf Identity Studies

In summary, the aforementioned studies support the bicultural acculturation of DHH people. Bicultural Deaf people have integrated their Deaf pride in a balanced way into their full humanity. They have fully embraced ASL and their Deaf Culture. However, there is still a need for hearing parents of Deaf children and Deaf people to work together to create a better place for Deaf children. Ella Lentz, in her poem entitled *To a Hearing Mother*, said it perfectly when she pointed out that “the Deaf child is your child, but he is my people.” Lentz’s poem offers the best solution of all: That the best thing that can be done to develop a healthy self-esteem and a good quality of life is to work together to foster the child’s development in a bilingual-bicultural environment. I used the Deaf Identity studies to inform my study by developing an understanding that prior to the DIDS study by Glickman (1993), there were no other studies at that time that measured deaf cultural identity.

When I interviewed my participant, I endeavored to learn of how she self-identified within the Deaf community as either more Deaf, or more hearing. These self-identifications helped me learn where she was with respect to her acceptance and integration of the self within the Deaf and hearing communities, and how she communicated in both.

Lesbian Identity

In *Teaching to Transgress*, Hooks (1994) reflected on the power of bringing the teacher’s experience into the classroom. She claimed that identity is a crucial component of how the personal becomes political. Likewise, Jagose (1996, p. 38) stated:

...the logics of coming out assume that homosexuality is not simply a private aspect of the individual, relevant only to friends and colleagues. Instead, it is potentially a transformative identity that must be avowed publicly until it is no longer a shameful secret but a legitimately recognized way of being in the world.

For those who do not fit into the dominant heteronormative culture and who are willing to risk being “out,” they are self-identifying or positioning themselves as lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender (Vavrus, 2009). Positioning theory, a form of identity theorizing, recognizes repositioning one’s self, thereby challenging and deconstructing normative social structures such as heteronormativity. With the broken silences, “coming out” of the closet, presenting themselves as persons worthy of acceptance, rejecting stigmatization and stereotyping, and changing the discursive practices, the heteronormative imposed rules began to change within the LGBT community (Harré & Van Langenhove, 1999, p. 137; Jagose, 1996).

There are types of identity which are attributed to people, in that we refer to people by using the word ‘self.’ There is the ‘self’ of personal identity from which people act. Then there are selves that are presented in the interpersonal interaction in the everyday world, which are sometimes referred to as personas (Harré & Van Langenhove, 1999). The singularity of personal identity is used in the discourse when we use to refer to one’s ‘self’ such as: ‘I’, ‘me’, ‘myself’, or ‘mine.’ These words are used to express one’s personal identity. The main persona-displaying discursive acts are declarations and narrations.

Declaration statements consist of speech-acts in which the speaker gives some kind of report on how things or events appear from the speaker’s point of view in time and space.

Whereas narrations, consist of those communications in which there is a storyline (Harré & Van Langenhove, 1999). My intent is to listen and understand the experiences, both declarations and

narratives, of this woman's storied life in her world and share it so her voice is no longer absent in the research.

Cass (1979) developed a model of homosexual identity. She suggests that the individual must be "out" (i.e., disclose sexual identity) in all social settings in order to reach the highest level of identity development. Since the 1970's the question of coming out, or not, and how, is still one that clearly has no definitive answer and remains a concern of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer individuals, or at least those in English speaking western countries (Braun & Clarke, 2009).

Cass's model includes six stages. In its six-stage model, individuals move through each of the six stages, with the hypothesis that the incongruence of the stage provides motivation for further development. The first stage is *identity confusion*, which is marked by recognition that one's behavior or feelings might be defined as homosexual. The second stage is *identity comparison*, which reflects a tentative commitment to a homosexual identity.

Identity tolerance is the third stage and it is defined as a period in which the individual more strongly accepts his or her sexual minority identity. It is during this stage that individuals may make more contacts with others who are lesbian or gay which help to ease their path toward the fourth stage, *identity acceptance*. During the identity acceptance stage, the individual usually seeks additional contact to connect with others similar to her. The next stage is *identity pride*, which Cass describes as a period of total acceptance of one's sexual identity and awareness of society's rejection of gays and lesbians. It is during this stage that one's sexual identity is seen as her primary identity, which can then motivate an individual to participate in activism and confront negative feelings and perceptions of society, working toward social justice.

Positive responses from heterosexuals are considered to be the motivator that moves an individual to the sixth stage, *identity synthesis*. This stage is thought to be elusive for a good number of lesbians and gays. It is marked by the integration of sexual identity into a broader sense of self. Individuals work through each stage, remain in one stage or move forward into the homosexual identity formation process (Cass, 1984).

Two other identity models are the Degges-White, Rice, and Meyers (2000) model and the Adolescent Lesbian Identity Formation (ALIF) model, which is based on the model designed by Marcia (1966, 1987). Degges-White et al. (2000) conducted a qualitative study to assess the current validity of Cass's (1979) model. Their findings teased out specific shortcomings of Cass's (1979) model to describe the identity of lesbians today. The experiences of the individuals, who participated in that study, did not support the linear path of Cass's model. Rather, the participants in the Degges-White (2000) study supported a non-linear path through the various identities that were presented in the Cass model.

Another identity model developed by Marcia (1966, 1987) resulted from qualitative interviews of adult lesbians who responded to Cass's (1979) model of sexual identity formation. This model includes four non-hierarchical, non-sequential phases of lesbian identity formation. The *identity diffused* stage is a young woman who has not experienced a crisis and has not committed to an identity. This stage is characterized by a sense of difference in adolescence and may be marked by an attraction to other females and a sense of confusion about how to handle or to respond to these feelings. The feelings of not fitting in can be especially difficult for adolescents, who struggle with finding an acceptable identity regardless of sexual orientation.

Identity foreclosure happens when an individual has not faced a crisis but has committed to an identity. This phase is characterized by an awareness of same-sex attractions but a loyal

commitment to a heterosexual identity. These adolescents commit themselves to an identity that does not match their true feelings, but their fears foreclose the opportunity for further exploration. In the *Identity moratorium* phase, an individual has faced a crisis but has not committed to an identity. These young women recognize their lesbianism but still feel unable to commit to a lesbian identity. They may take on an asexual identity that allows them to keep from committing to a heterosexual identity or a homosexual identity. They may suppress this aspect of themselves to “pass” as heterosexual or tell themselves that it is only a phase they are going through.

Identity achievement is experienced when a young woman has faced a crisis and has committed to an identity. Some women who first experience lesbian feelings may respond positively to them. Although some individuals achieve this identity, they still may face threats to their emotional and physical health. This model of identity formation suggests that sexual identity formation may vary among young women and that it may start and stop repeatedly.

Achieving both a Deaf Identity and a Lesbian Identity seems to be a process that occurs over time and does not follow a typical straightforward linear process. In both the Deaf Identity models and the Lesbian Identity models, there are shifts into and out of the various stages of identity development and how the individuals perceive themselves as they go through the processes. Successful acculturation into both identities would be the ideal for each individual as in this way she could claim her whole authentic self.

A Brief History of LGBTQA in the United States

The Stonewall Riots June 27, 1969 propelled the LGBT movement in America as it is known today. The Stonewall Inn, a gay and drag bar in Greenwich Village, New York City, was raided by the police. The patrons had grown tired of the regular and staged police raids, as well

as the entrapments and harassment of the gay and lesbian clientele who socialized there. They resisted arrest and shouted pro-gay liberationist slogans at the police. The raid caused a weekend of rioting due to the lesbian and gay liberationists becoming tired of the regular raids, the entrapments and harassment of the gay and lesbian clientele who socialized there. They rioted to express their political discontent, their want of social change and their challenge for the status quo. The Stonewall Riots were the significant origin of the “out” gay liberation movement. At the same time, there were other homophile organizations prior to Stonewall, such as the Scientific Humanitarian Committee, the Chicago Society for Human Rights, the Mattachine Society and the Daughters of Bilitis (Jagose, 1996, p. 23-24). However, these organizations and their members preferred to stay “closeted” and to work within the norms of society rather than be “out” and militant. The twenty seventh of June continues to be celebrated internationally and most passionately in the United States as Stonewall Day, a date that marks the constitution of lesbian and gay identities as a political force. (Jagose, 1996). Currently, Stonewall Day is referred to as Lesbian and Gay Pride. In the United States, most Pride Festival events are celebrated near the end of June, nearest to the June 27th date. For example, New York Pride Fest and March will be held this year on June 25, 2017 (Heritage of Pride, 2018).

Lesbian Identity informed my study, specifically by allowing me to know from the data collected from the interviews, electronic communications with my participant to what degree she is “out” of the closet and self-identifying as lesbian or where she falls on the continuum of the Identity Scale. Her self-identity would reveal how comfortable or uncomfortable she is in relation to her identity as lesbian and how “out” she is in her everyday life both in the Deaf community and in the heterosexual community in which she lives and works.

The Gay Lesbian Straight Education Network (GLSEN)'s National School Climate Survey (NSCS) was launched in 1999 to create a roadmap in the absence of any national data on LGBT youth experiences in schools. To this day, the NSCS remains the only source of its kind, providing a national picture of the scope and impact of anti-LGBT bias and violence in our schools, and a sense of the interventions that will help us all (Byard, 2013).

About the LGBT Survey

In 1999, GLSEN identified that little was known about the school experiences of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) youth, and that LGBT youth were nearly absent from national studies of adolescents. GLSEN responded to this national need for data by launching the first National School Climate Survey, and they continue to meet this continued need for current data by conducting the study every 2 years (Kosciw et al., 2013). Since then, the biennial National School Climate Survey has documented the unique challenges LGBT students face and identified interventions that can improve school climate.

The survey documents the prevalence of anti-LGBT language and victimization, such as experiences of harassment and assault in school. In addition, the survey examines school policies and practices that may contribute to negative experiences for LGBT students and make them feel as if they are not valued by their school communities. The survey also explores the effects that a hostile school climate may have on LGBT students' educational outcomes and well-being.

Finally, the survey reports on the availability and the utility of LGBT-related school resources and supports that may offset the negative effects of a hostile school climate and promote a positive learning experience. In addition to collecting this critical data every 2 years, they add and adapt survey questions to respond to the changing world for LGBT youth. For

example, in the 2013 survey GLSEN added a question about hearing negative remarks about transgender people (e.g., “tranny”).

The National School Climate Survey (NSCS) remains one of the few studies which has examined the school experiences of LGBT students nationally, and its results have been vital to GLSEN’s understanding of the issues that LGBT students face, thereby informing their ongoing work to ensure safe and affirming schools for all (Kosciw et al., 2013). In their 2013 survey, they examine the experiences of LGBT students with regard to indicators of negative school climate:

- Hearing biased remarks, including homophobic remarks, in school;
- Feeling unsafe in school because of personal characteristics, such as sexual orientation, gender expression, or race/ethnicity;
- Missing classes or days of school because of safety reasons;
- Experiencing harassment and assault in school; and
- Experiencing discriminatory policies and practices at school. (Kosciw et al., 2013, p. xv)

In addition to the experiences listed above, GLSEN examined the following:

- The possible negative effects of a hostile school climate on LGBT students’ academic achievement, educational aspirations, and psychological well-being;
- Whether or not students report experiences of victimization to school officials or to family members and how these adults address the problems; and
- How the school experiences of LGBT students differ by personal and community characteristics. (Kosciw et al., 2013, p. xv)

In addition, GLSEN demonstrated the degree to which LGBT students have access to supportive resources in school, and explored the possible benefits of these resources:

Gay-Straight Alliances (GSAs) or similar clubs, school anti-bullying/harassment policies,

supportive school staff, and curricula inclusive of LGBT-related topics. Given that GLSEN has been conducting the survey for over a decade, they also examined changes over time on indicators of negative school climate and levels of access to LGBT related resources in schools.

The 2013 National School Climate Survey was conducted online. To obtain a representative national sample of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) youth, GLSEN conducted outreach through national, regional, and local organizations that provide services to or advocate on behalf of LGBT youth, and conducted targeted advertising on the social networking sites, such as Facebook and Reddit. To ensure representation of transgender youth, youth of color, and youth in rural communities, they made special efforts to notify groups and organizations that worked predominantly with these populations. The final sample consisted of a total of 7,898 students between the ages of 13 and 21. Students were from all 50 states and the District of Columbia and from 2,770 unique school districts. About two thirds of the sample (68.1%) was White, slightly less than half (43.6%) was cisgender female, and over half identified as gay or lesbian (58.8%). Students were in Grades 6 to 12, with the largest numbers in Grades 10 and 11.

A Summary of GLSEN Findings

To summarize my reading of “The 2013 National School Climate Survey (NSCS): The Experiences of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Youth in Our Nation’s Schools” conducted by GLSEN, the findings indicated that LGBT students are still experiencing bullying in our schools however, since the 2011 report and with more education, training, and acceptance by both the students and staff in the schools, the bullying has shown a decrease in occurrence since the 2011 report was published (Kosciw et al., 2013).

The DHH Survey: Deaf and Hard of Hearing Students' Perspectives on Bullying and School Climate

Student perspectives reflect school climate. The DHH survey examined perspectives among DHH students in residential and large day schools regarding bullying and compared these perspectives with those of a national database of hearing students. The participants were 812 DHH students in 11 U.S. schools. Data were derived from the Olweus Bullying Questionnaire, a standardized self-reported survey with multiple-choice questions focusing on different aspects of bullying problems. Significant bullying problems were found in deaf school programs. It appears that DHH students experience bullying at rates 2 to 3 times higher than those reported by hearing students. Deaf and hard of hearing students reported that school personnel intervened less than what was reported in the hearing sample. Results indicated the need for school climate improvement for all students, regardless of hearing status (Weiner et al., 2013).

From 2007 to 2009, data were collected for the present study from a nationally representative sample of American DHH youth in Grades 3 to 12 in three school settings: deaf residential schools, large deaf day schools, and self-contained, mainstream classrooms.

Schools' interest was solicited through e-mails and flyers. An attempt was made to get an equal number of students from each of the three school settings. After 2 years, 16 schools had volunteered to participate in the study. Of the 16 schools, 11 were residential schools and large day schools. The other five schools represented a mainstream setting, but because of the small size of this sample, only the residential and large schools are considered here. The 11 residential or large day schools were in California, Connecticut, the District of Columbia, Massachusetts, Michigan, Montana, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Texas, and Virginia. Students in Grades 3 to 12 filled out the forms. The largest number of students participating from one school was 314, and

the smallest number was 9. Eight schools had residential programs. These eight residential schools had 694 students fill out the surveys. The 3-day programs had 118 students participate. Fifty-two percent of the participants were male (Weiner et al., 2013).

Questions Asked

Although the survey contained 40 questions about bullying behavior in schools, the present study examined five questions related to the school climate:

1. How often have you been bullied at school in the past couple of months? Possible responses: have not been bullied, once or twice, two to three times a month, about once a week, or several times a week.
2. When you see a student your age being bullied at school, what do you feel or think? Possible responses: probably deserves it, don't feel much, feel a bit sorry, or feel sorry and want to help.
3. How often do the teachers or other adults at school try to put a stop to it when a student is being bullied at school? Possible responses: almost never, once in a while, sometimes, often, or almost always.
4. Overall, how much do you think your class or homeroom teacher has done to cut down on bullying in your classroom in the past couple of months? Possible responses: little or nothing, fairly little, somewhat, a good deal, or much.
5. How do you like school? Possible responses: dislike very much, dislike, neither like nor dislike, like school, or like very much.

The researchers acknowledged that these questions did not constitute an exhaustive analysis of the climate of bullying, but they did provide an initial look at bullying in Deaf schools.

Discussion of the Results of the DHH Survey

Weiner et al. (2013) stated that the study must be considered with caution due to its comparison of the sample with the hearing and nonresidential national sample that was part of the standardized report. While it would have been best to have had a national sample of hearing residential students for comparison, such a sample was not available at the time of the study. Nonetheless, the DHH study presents a reliable trend demonstrated based on a national sample of DHH students who completed the OBQ. Generally, it appears that the school climate for both DHH and hearing students, needs improvement. That is especially the case for schools with DHH students, since these children experience bullying at much higher rates than hearing children. The results of administration of the Occupational Balance Questionnaire (OBQ) to DHH students from across the United States show that, on average, these children experience bullying two to three times as often as hearing students. Another finding unique to the DHH students was that they appeared to feel less empathy than the national comparison group, except for high school boys, whose level of empathy was equally low.

In conclusion, the study found that the climates of schools serving DHH students are affected negatively by high rates of bullying, low student empathy toward bullied peers, and poor school-bullying intervention practices. The factors that contributed to higher rates of bullying among DHH groups were not addressed in the study. The differences in educational background, degree of deafness, age at onset of deafness, family background, race, and other variables across individual, family, peer, school, and community contexts, and these factors' relationships to bullying, need to be studied. By extension, understanding the factors that contributed to increased exposure to bullying can lead researchers to determine the most effective interventions

for DHH students experiencing bullying behaviors and thus create a positive school climate for all students (Weiner et al., 2013).

To summarize my reading of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing Students' Perspectives on Bullying and School Climate, the findings indicated that DHH students are still experiencing bullying in schools similarly to the bullying experienced by our LGBT youth. Although the LGBT Survey had almost 8,000 participants who completed the survey and the DHH Survey had 812 students complete the survey, the numbers represented by the sample sizes are noteworthy because the national DHH population is about ten percent that of the majority hearing population. The LGBT survey differs from that of the DHH Survey in that the LGBT survey was more focused on bullying specifically due to the identity of being LGBT and the DHH survey was more focused on the identity of being Deaf only. For me, the interest was in finding out what the intersectionality of both identities would bring forth from the data.

The GLSEN and DHH surveys illustrated the experiences of my participant while she was in school. I hope to discover her experiences and how these experiences affected her and if they are enduring. I hope to find whether or not her experiences were the same or different than those expressed by the students in the surveys or if she had different experiences than the survey students and how her experiences were the same or different than my experiences in school.

CHAPTER THREE:

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to use narrative inquiry to expand the literature base of Deaf lesbians and to capture their perspectives on their dual identities. Interviews were compiled from an individual who self-identified as a member of the Deaf lesbian culture to learn of her lived experiences in dual-minority cultures and to ensure that the stories of her experiences were captured, represented, and shared in the professional literature. In addition, and more importantly, the stories of this population of women in the academic literature is fairly limited. Their stories are important to inform academia, education, and the psychosocial professions. Stories are one way of knowing (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). At the very heart of what it means to be human is the ability of people to symbolize their experience through language (Seidman, 1998, p. 2).

Deaf and lesbian individuals have been marginalized for years. In order to make social changes, their stories need to be told, lived, retold, and relived through their experiences and the telling of their stories. The entire premise of narrative inquiry is based on the telling of their stories. The stories of people with disabilities, the stories of gendered, racial/ethnic, and sexual violence have changed the way we view the contemporary landscape.

McLaughlin and Tierney (1993) stated that “giving voice” to marginalized people and “naming silenced lives” have been primary goals of narrative research for several decades. Chase (2011) stated that some researchers study narrative as lived experience and the lived experience as a social action within itself. McLaughlin and Tierney (1993) and Chase (2011) explored how

people narrate their experiences as in what their stories are about. These researchers treated an understanding of storytelling practices as essential in grasping what narrators are communicating.

In this approach, narration is the practice of constructing meaningful, selves, identities, and realities (Chase, 2011, p. 422). Some researchers treat their stories about life experience (including research itself as a life experience) as a significant and necessary focus of narrative inquiry (Chase, 2011; Webster & Mertova, 2007). Sometimes their aim is to create a more equitable relationship between the researcher and those they study by subjecting the researched and the researcher to an analytic lens. And sometimes researchers' aim is to explore a topic or research question more fully by including the researchers' experience of it (Chase, 2011, p. 423). It was my intention to thread my experiences throughout the study as an ally and an accepted member in the local Deaf community as well as, an "out" lesbian in my home, work and university communities.

Because I have 32 years' experience in the education of DHH students, I am an active and an accepted ally in the local Deaf community, I identify as a lesbian, I am an active member in the LGBT community, and I am a *cultural broker* (McKenna, Fernbacher, Furness, & Hannon, 2015) in these communities. As a qualitative researcher who is situated in the dominant and minority cultures, I have a personal knowing based on my experiences with both the Deaf/Hard of Hearing (DHH) community and the LGBT community (Eide & Allen, 2005). In order that this woman's story could be told, my intent was to interview her, to listen to her story, and to know her in order to take a necessary step in helping to create social change through the sharing of her story.

Research Questions Framing this Study

1. How does a Deaf or Hard of Hearing individual who identifies as lesbian understand being Deaf living in two majority cultures, namely heteronormative and hearing?
2. How does a Deaf or Hard of Hearing individual who identifies as lesbian understand being lesbian living in two majority cultures, namely heteronormative and hearing?

In this chapter, I will explain the methods I used to collect and analyze the data pertaining to the school experiences of a Deaf lesbian. I will explain the design of the research, the participant selection, data collection, and analytical practices. In addition, I will explain my role as a researcher and participant in the study and identify some of the assumptions that have shaped my interpretations of the data and some of the ethical concerns I had in order to complete this research.

Research Design

Chase (2005) characterized contemporary narrative inquiry as "...an amalgam of interdisciplinary analytic lenses, diverse disciplinary approaches, and both traditional and innovative methods – all revolving around an interest in biographical particulars as narrated by the one who lives them" (Chase, 2005, p. 651). Narrative inquiry has been defined as a way of understanding experience. It is a collaboration between researcher and participants, over time, in a place or series of places, and in social interaction with milieus. Simply stated, narrative inquiry is stories lived and told (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 20). Narrative is a means of recollecting the meanings of past experiences, turning life into language, and disclosing to the truth in human experiences (Bochner, 2001).

In order to get to the interviewee's particular points of view, I conducted face-to-face, videotaped interviews, with the participant telling her own story in American Sign Language

(ASL). I wanted to maintain the richness of ASL and the Deaf Culture where she situates and identifies herself. Through in-depth interviewing and observation, I was able to obtain a more intimate look into her perspective on her dual minority identities. Seidman (1998) stated, “[at] the root of in-depth interviewing is an interest in understanding the experience of other people and the meaning they make of that experience” (p. 3). As a method of inquiry, interviewing is most consistent with people’s ability to make meaning through language.

Data Collection

Data was collected by conducting separate face-to-face interviews until saturation was reached. In a National Centre for Research Review Paper (NCRM) (2012), the following question was posed: “How many qualitative interviews is enough?” Several expert voices and early career qualitative researchers mostly answered with, “It depends.” Denzin (as cited in NCRM, 2012, p. 6) suggested that an interview can be treated as a number of instances that are analyzed in great depth and that a “method of instances” takes “each instance of a phenomenon, for example an interview, as an occurrence which evidences the operation of a set of cultural understandings currently available for use by cultural members.” From this perspective, the answer to the question of how many may be “one.”

From the NCRM (2012) paper, the number of interviews varied from each author from one to hundreds depending on practical constraints such as time, funding, availability of participants, the project, and the discipline in which one wishes to situate the research. I interviewed my participant six times to get her life story, her views and meanings of her identities. In the first interview, I asked her for her life story in relationship to her being Deaf and how that has affected her and her life. In the second interview, I asked about her identification as a lesbian in a heteronormative society and how that has affected her. In the third interview, I

asked more specific questions about her coming out story regarding her family, friends, and her school experiences. I then went into greater depth as to what it is like to be Deaf and lesbian in a heteronormative society and also how she had been perceived and received within the Deaf community. I conducted the interviews until saturation was achieved. I conducted my interviews with 1-week intervals in between each interview, as recommended by Seidman (1998).

Interviewing is one way to dialogue with another being to learn about that person. Stories are a way of knowing (Seidman, 1998, p. 1).

With these ideas in mind, I used the interviews to understand my participant's meaning in the context of the interviews. I listened to her experiences from the past to the present. I captured and reconstructed the details of her experiences within the contexts in which they occurred. The interviews were videotaped to capture the richness of ASL that she used in telling her story. Likewise, I too was videotaped asking and responding to questions and answers as a cultural broker between the dual minority participant. I transcribed the ASL videos into English. I repeatedly viewed the videotapes to insure I had captured everything. I then read, reread, and reflected on the meaning the experiences had for her and me. I used member checks with my participant to be sure I had not missed any information.

Language is a way to communicate with each other about their lives, experiences, and stories. Because we have language, we share our stories and our meaning is expressed. Language is a learned, symbolic communication system. For those with hearing, the symbols are sound. For those without hearing, the symbols are signs. Whether a language is signed or spoken, language is language. In order to communicate with each other, thoughts are represented by symbols and through these symbols meaning is derived. Thus, interviewing helps researchers derive meaning from the storied lives of others. At the root of in-depth interviewing is an interest

in understanding the experiences of other people and the meaning they make of those experiences (Seidman, 1998, p. 3).

Participant Selection

To select a participant for this study, I employed a purposeful sampling method to select a woman who gave me the best information about the phenomenon of interest (Mayan, 2009). The goal of purposeful sampling is to not generalize to larger populations based on statistical methods, but rather to be allowed to develop an intimate understanding of the phenomenon as presented by the participant (Mayan, 2009). The criterion I employed for selection of my participant was as individual who:

- Is a woman;
- Is 18 years old or older;
- Embraces the Deaf community and culture using ASL as her primary means of communication;
- Self-identifies as being Deaf and lesbian;
- Shares her experiences about “coming out” if she is or not;
- Agrees to at least three face-to-face interviews and reads relevant documents for trustworthiness and truthfulness; and
- Agrees to an exit interview to share her feelings about the interview/research process.

Rationale for Participant Selection

A letter was sent to colleagues in Deaf education and interpreter training program to explain the research study and seek a participants (See Appendix A for a copy of the letter). I decided to select one participant versus a larger number not only for practical considerations of

time and availability of participants but also so I could go further in depth with my participant's interviews. I was interested in learning about her life story. I wanted to know what it meant to her to be Deaf and lesbian in a hearing, heterosexual society and how this has affected her. I also wanted to learn if her "coming out" story was similar to or different from mine.

The rationale for my participant selection was for her to be 18 years or older so she could sign the consent form legally without parental consent (See Appendix B for a copy of consent form). She had to be of age to speak for herself and to tell her story about being Deaf and lesbian and to share her experiences via the interviews.

The reason I selected this woman is because as part of the study, one of my questions dealt with the age at which she began to embrace the use of sign language and the Deaf community versus oralism (i.e., if she grew up using that communication method) for herself.

The other area of interest that came up in the study was in determining the age she self-identified as lesbian. She was willing to be interviewed at least three times and to share her ideas, thoughts, feelings, and further questions she had for me that were relevant to the study via an exit interview.

With those thoughts in mind, I used the interviews to understand my participant's meaning in the context of the interviews. I listened to her experiences from the past to the present. I captured and reconstructed the details of her experiences within the contexts in which they occurred. I then read, reread, and reflected on the meaning the experiences had for her and me. The interviews were videotaped to capture the richness of ASL that she uses in telling her story. Likewise, I was videotaped asking and responding to questions and answers as a cultural broker with the dual minority participant.

Selecting a Pseudonym

Prior to the interviews and while discussing with my participant ideas for a pseudonym, I suggested using the name of a famous Deaf woman, as I learned via our conversation, that she strongly identified with her Deaf identity. I found it interesting that she preferred to use a pseudonym that she made up based on two characters she liked from a lesbian Netflix series, *Orange is the New Black*. When I inquired as to why, she said she just preferred to use a combination of Piper and Alex, the two main characters in the series; hence, with regard to this research project, P.A. was her pseudonym. She picked characters who are identified as lesbians on the show, which seems to be a lesser developed lesbian identity for her; I would have picked a Deaf person, perhaps because that is a lesser developed personal identity for me. After a few of the interviews, the choice of her pseudonym made sense to me based on comments she made during the interviews comparing her level of “out” with mine, such as suggesting that I am more “out” than she is.

Research Journal

During the process of the research, I kept a reflective journal to collate my thoughts, observations, and questions in a written format so I could revisit them often and find meaning, understanding, potential problems/tensions within the study, as well as contemplate findings, other ideas, or develop further questions brought about by the interviews and my thoughts. In Table 1 below, my research questions are addressed as well as the types of data and analysis that I used in my study.

Table 1

Questions, Data Types, and Analysis

Research Questions	Data Types	Data Analysis
How do you understand being a Deaf lesbian (dual minority cultures) living in two majority cultures (heteronormative and hearing)?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interviews in sign language • Videotapes • Field notes/Memo-ing • Researcher Journal • Email correspondence • Further probes and interviews 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Search for meanings in body language • Search for thoughts, words, themes, and meanings being made from the experiences and my understandings • Search for thoughts, words, themes, and meanings being made from the participant's experiences and her/our understandings
How does identifying as Deaf lesbian influence the construction of your Deaf identity and your Lesbian Identity?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interviews in sign language • Videotapes • Field notes/Memo-ing • Researcher Journal • Email correspondence • Further probes and interviews 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Search for meanings in body language • Search for thoughts, words, themes, and meanings being made from the experiences and my understandings • Search for thoughts, words, themes, and meanings being made from the participant's experiences and her/our understandings

The videos were transcribed verbatim and reviewed by my participant. I watched for body language and facial expressions while reviewing the videotapes because in ASL these all carry meaning. As a researcher, it was important for me to capture the meanings and feelings my participant shared through the interview process, through her e-mails, and face-to face communication with me. I gathered further information via member checks with my participant

in person and via e-mail. She communicated directly with me via video relay, e-mail, and text. In the written transcriptions from the videos, I looked for words, sentences, ASL markers, and themes that emerged from the interview data as well as from my notes, reflections, and questions. I used marginalia on the written transcripts. My notes helped me to keep an account of what I was thinking, feeling and reflecting during the process of the research project. The transcriptions, notes, and questions were shared with the participant via e-mail to ensure that the information she shared with me was accurately represented and the meanings were clear. My expectation was that member checks between us contributed to the trustworthiness and credibility of the study.

Analysis of the Data

The data was transcribed verbatim by hand, reviewed, and examined to connect threads of information, sort out patterns, and code for themes (Chase, as cited in Josselson & Lieblich, 2003). My research journal and notes helped me make connections to the data and give me ideas about the phenomenon. I built ideas about how my participant's experiences compared with the dominant cultural narratives I conducted in my pilot study in 2010: "Fractured Lives: Experiences of 'OUT' Lesbians in Education." I conducted interviews with another educator who was "out" at her university. The study focused on our experiences of our similarities and differences of coming to be "out" from the beginnings of our processes up until 2010 as working professionals in the field of education. In my pilot study, I used narrative inquiry and autoethnography to thread myself and my experiences of "coming out" into the study. Using narrative inquiry, I wanted to understand how this woman attached meaning to her life growing up as an individual who is Deaf. I wanted to know her story from her perspective how she dealt with her life, the events, the struggles, the successes, and the challenges that shaped her and her

life. I searched for meaning in her body language and facial expressions in the ASL interviews. I attended to her words/signs to find themes that she used throughout the interviews. Likewise, I wanted to know of her “coming out” narrative — I was curious to know when she came to the realization that she identified as lesbian and how that affected her. Through the use of autoethnography, I then threaded my narrative in with hers focusing on our similarities and differences in our experiences of “coming out” as well as, my experiences working within the Deaf community over the past 32 years. I focused on our words, thoughts, and themes to find meaning and understanding of our lived experiences. This project as a whole not only helped me to understand and be reflective of “others” but it also allowed me to understand my “self” in relation to my participant. This is where Chang (2008) stated, “the personal becomes political.” By theorizing and reflecting on my participant’s words and meanings as well as my own, thinking about them helped me to give more thought to what my participant was thinking and feeling (Josselson & Lieblich, 2003). Self-reflexivity encouraged me as a writer to be honest about my strengths and weaknesses. Tracy (2010) stated, “[e]thnographers should report their own voice in relation to others and explicate *how* they claim to know what they know” (p. 842). Reflecting helped me to think more abstractly about my data (Mayan, 2009). Theorizing is moving from the particular instances that make up the data to speculation and possible explanations (Mayan, 2009).

I used crystallization, multivocality, and member reflections as tools to open up a more complex, in-depth, but still thoroughly partial, understanding of the issues (Tracy, 2010) so that I knew that what I found in the data is the same thing the others see. I wanted to ensure the authenticity, trustworthiness, and credibility of the data (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005).

Crystallization

Crystallization encouraged me as the researcher to gather multiple types of data (e.g., videos, text, e-mails, and video relay) and employ various methods, multiple researchers (participant and I as co-authors), and numerous theoretical frameworks. However, an assumption of this technique is that the goal is not to prove the researchers with a more valid singular truth, but rather to open up a more complex, in-depth, but still thoroughly partial, understanding of the issue (Tracy, 2010, p. 844).

Multivocality

Multivocality suggests that the authors are aware of cultural differences between themselves and the participants. Multivocality can also be achieved through intense collaboration with participants (Tracy, 2010). Multivocality emerges part from the *verstehen* practice of analyzing social action from the participants' point of view. The Oxford Dictionary defines it as empathic understanding of human behavior ("verstehen," 2018). Verstehen requires researchers to provide a thick description of actors' performances and their local significance to interpret meaning (Lindlof & Taylor, as cited in Tracy, 2010). Participatory, autoethnographic, and feminist approaches seek out participant voices, and even friendships, to form the core part of the research process. Engaging friendship as a type of participant collaboration requires "radical reciprocity," a shift from "studying them to studying us" (Tillman-Healy, as cited in Tracy, 2010).

Participant Reflections

Participant reflections helped to increase credibility as I sought input from my participant to gain information about the study's findings, and provided her with opportunities for questions,

critique, feedback, affirmation, and collaboration about the different perspectives of the data. We agreed that what we saw in the data signified an in-depth understanding; therefore, the data was considered as crystallized and deemed confident (Mayan, 2009; Tracy, 2010). I wrote to (re) present the storied life of my participant while being highly cognizant about writing her story, the story of (an) “other(s),” deeply respecting her and her story. While writing, I was constantly mindful of my role as the researcher, critically reflecting on myself, on how I view the world, on how I frame reality, and how I seek to know (Mayan, 2009).

Ethical Issues

Due to the sensitive nature of the topic of the study, as the researcher I provided an empathetic environment created with an ethos of caring with my participant (Tracy, 2010). As one who is a cultural broker within all four cultures: Deaf, lesbian, heteronormative, and in the school environment for 32 years, I accomplished this through being sensitive, respecting my participant, and being my authentic self. I entered the interviews with a deep understanding regarding the emotional nature of the topics and the emotions they might emit from my participant as well as, from me. I was comfortable engaging in the topics that were discussed (Morse, Niehaus, Varnhagen, Austin, & McIntosh, 2008). Ellis (2007) defined an ethic of care as a mindfulness that “recognizes and values mutual respect, dignity, and connectedness between researcher and researched, and between researchers and the communities in which they live and work” (p. 4).

The ethical issues that were shared with my participant were: The sensitive nature of her/my “coming out” lesbian experience was discussed with her, due to the fact that one’s “coming out” story is very personal and requires understanding, sensitivity, and confidentiality

so that the participant is made to feel comfortable in sharing her story and knows that the information would be held confidential and within an ethos of caring.

Her participation in the videotaped interviews was discussed, as videos are a visual record of the interviews and the private conversations we had in them. Following IRB protocol, she knew that no one except me, would see the videos/transcripts and that both remain in my office in a locked filing cabinet until 5 years after the dissertation is accepted.

I explained to her that my professors would see the results from the data as part of the Results section in Chapter Four of this dissertation. I then discussed her anonymity in the study so that she knew that her identity would be protected, remain anonymous, and that she would select her own pseudonym for the study, so as not to be identified by any outside source.

Protecting her confidentiality was discussed as mentioned above by using a pseudonym to keep her identity anonymous in the study from any outside sources. The risk of the study, “Do No Harm,” was also discussed due to the work with another human being, IRB protocol, and to provide an ethos of caring during the process of the research.

I proceeded to discuss with her voluntary participation/withdrawal in the research process and shared the IRB process that must be followed and gaining her written consent to participate. She knew that she was able to withdraw herself at any time in the process without prejudice.

I also discussed with her that she could ask me questions, voice concerns, or complaints and I gave her the IRB contact information and the study number so she could contact the IRB directly should she feel the need to do so during the course of the research study. The study was presented to the Institutional Review Board (IRB) and was approved. All IRB protocol was followed.

I explained to my participant that the data is secured in a locked cabinet in my office keep it confidential and anonymous and safe for 5 years after this dissertation is approved. I also informed her that the results of the data would be discussed only with those on my committee to keep it confidential and her identity anonymous.

The study was approved by the IRB and fully explained to my participant. The IRB process was followed, and consent was obtained from my participant as required. Because I videotaped the interviews in ASL, the videos would be secured in my locked filing cabinet. After discussing the IRB protocol fully with her and the nature of the study, my participant signed the consent prior to participating in the research study.

To summarize, I explained to my participant that the information she shared about her sexuality and identity would be confidential, protected in a locked filing cabinet, and kept for 5 years after the dissertation is accepted. She knew that my professors on my dissertation committee would read the results of the data, themes, findings, and future research recommendations. She also knew that I would treat her information with the utmost care and confidentiality and I would continue to protect the videos and transcripts for the next 5 years.

Research Plan

I contacted Deaf lesbians through colleagues in the field of Deaf education, interpreter training programs, Deaf organizations, and via Deaf university professors known to me who could help put me in contact with this specific population of women. The research study was explained and volunteers were sought from this population. The interviews were videotaped so as to keep my participant's life story from her perspective in ASL. The use of ASL is paramount to the Deaf Culture and I kept that important aspect of Deaf Culture/community intact in my research.

After the interviews were conducted and translated verbatim, read, and reread, they were coded for themes, thoughts, feelings, and expressions of “coming out,” as well as the participant’s experiences as a Deaf lesbian. I immersed myself in the data. I reviewed the videotapes and the transcripts. I shared the handwritten transcripts with my participant via e-mail to be sure I had captured her story. She agreed that I had captured and understood what she meant (Josselson & Lieblich, 2003, p. 270). We reviewed the transcriptions for agreement and the crystallization of the data, as well (Tracy, 2010).

Procedure for Coding

I coded the data by themes or patterns that emerged from the data I collected. I also looked for themes that appeared in the data and used member checks with my participant to confirm the data as I did previously in a pilot study I conducted in 2010. I used memos/notes (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Mayan, 2009) as I viewed the videos and read and reread the data/transcripts to reflect on them. I used the information I gathered to create further questioning probes from the data that surfaced for the next set of interviews. Throughout the process, I included member checks (Mayan, 2009). I communicated with my participant through e-mail or real-time video with thoughts or questions I had about the data and I informed my participant that she may communicate with me at any time she wanted or felt the need to discuss anything pertaining to the project or data (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Tracy, 2010). I informed my participant about member checks to ensure the crystallization of the data. Sharing the information with her generated further discussion between us and deepened the discussion regarding the interviews and the themes discussed within them. She chose not to journal, so I conducted an exit interview to gain her reflections about how she felt about the research process, interviews, and to glean any further information from her that I also included in the study.

Limitations of the Study

The limitations of the study were that I had only one participant in my study; therefore, the study was not generalizable. If the study were to be repeated, a larger population would need to be interviewed in order for it to be generalizable. Because I used both ASL and English, there was the potential for the stories to be mistranslated from ASL to English via the transcriptions. However, with participant checks and conversations, the data was crystalized. Through the interviewing process, there was a chance my participant would tell me what she thought I wanted to hear rather than what her true experiences have been. After interviewing her six times and conducting member checks, I believe I captured her story and I received her confirmation of that via member checks.

CHAPTER FOUR:

RESULTS

Throughout the interview process, I accepted that my participant self-identified as both Deaf and lesbian. Each interview was structured to probe those aspects of her personal identity including: communication, her being Deaf and when she realized she was Deaf, being lesbian and the realization of “coming out,” how and when that came about, how she copes with being lesbian in a heteronormative majority culture, her ”coming out” with the Deaf Culture, being Deaf and lesbian in two majority cultures of heteronormative and hearing, and what she sees as ideal for her future hopes and dreams. This chapter and the results of the data are structured around the themes that emerged across the data from the interviews. Table 2 details an overview of the themes that emerged and the interviews that were conducted.

Table 2

Emerging Themes from the Data

Themes	Location of Related Data
Theme: Communication	Interview: 1, 2, 3, 4
Theme: Deaf Identity	Interview: 1, 2, 4, 5, Exit Interview
Theme: Lesbian Identity	Interview: 2, 3, 4, 5, Exit Interview
Theme: “Coming Out”	Interview: 2, 3, 4, 5, Exit Interview
Theme: Religion	Interview: 3, 4, 5, Exit Interview
Theme: Lesbian and Gay Marriage	Interview: 5, Exit Interview
Theme: Deaf Identity and Schools	Interview: 4, 5

As stated in the methodology section in Chapter Three, P.A. is the pseudonym my participant chose. I refer to her as P.A. throughout the research process. I present P.A.'s data by using direct quotations from the transcripts that give the narrative perspective from P.A.'s voice. Her shorter quotes are in quotation marks and block quotations are used for lengthier quotes. Throughout this chapter I have included my voice via my narrative reflections as I immersed myself in the data. I have structured my narratives to follow hers and I have used the following words to refer to myself: I, me, my, or myself, to cue the reader to whom I am referring, while sharing the data.

Communication and Deaf Identity

P.A. was a late in life baby to her parents. She has three older siblings, two brothers and a sister. Her oldest brother is 20 years older than her, her second brother is seventeen years older than her and her sister is 12 years older than her. She is the baby and is the only member of the family who is Deaf. Her mother was forty-three when she had P.A. Her mom had German Measles and P.A. was an Rh-factor baby. In addition to being born Deaf, she has problems with her heart and eyes. She was diagnosed with Retinitis Pigmentosa which usually causes a gradual loss of vision, difficulty seeing at night and a decrease in peripheral vision.

P.A. started school at the age of 3 and a half. Her parents learned she was Deaf when she was 2 years old and on the doctor's recommendation, they sent her to the state school for the Deaf. It was about a 30-minute drive from her home and her parents dropped her off at school and picked her up to come home on the weekends. When she thinks about how she was feeling the first time her parents dropped her off at the state school for the Deaf. She shared her thoughts with me. She said, "I was scared! I had no clue what to do. I had no idea why my parents would leave me there. I didn't understand, I was three and a half!"

When she was sharing her story of when her parents dropped her off at the state school for the Deaf and told her she had to stay there for two weeks before she could come home, I had an immediate flashback to when I did my internship at my state's school for the Deaf. I remembered vividly that while I was touring the campus with another teacher, I saw a very young child screaming and crying. The parents were visibly upset and crying as well. I asked my guide what was happening, and she explained to me that the school accepted children into their pre-K, early intervention program as young as 3 years old. The parents were there dropping off their child at the school for the first time and I was witnessing the separation process of that family. That was 34 years ago, and I remember it as if it was yesterday. It was an emotional experience for me, as I could not imagine being a Deaf 3-year-old, like P.A., with very limited language, none other than "home signs," trying to understand what was happening and then being separated from my parents.

As a young woman, I also could not imagine being in the shoes of those parents who made a very difficult decision which they felt was in the best interest of their child, to send their youngster to the school for the Deaf and to have to leave the child there in the care of people whom the child did not know. I understood why they wanted the child to be immersed in sign language and the Deaf Culture early in life and yet, it broke my heart to see. In contrast to my emotional experience, P.A. very proudly announced that she, "always and only" attended the state school for the Deaf until she graduated from high school. She recalled that she did not actually realize that she was Deaf until she was about 7 or 8 years old. She believes she learned she was Deaf from the school staff who explained it to her and the other students. She said:

At the school they explained that we couldn't hear, that we were Deaf. I just accepted it fairly quickly. It seemed normal to me. You are hearing, and I am Deaf, and I moved on.

I am sure my family did not tell me.

Her mother had learned to use some basic sign language, but her father did not. He used "home signs" to communicate with her. Home signs (or kitchen signs) is the gestural communication system developed by a deaf child who lacks input from a language model in the family. This is a common experience for deaf children with hearing parents who are isolated from a sign language community.

In our discussions of her school life she proudly stated that she learned ASL at school. She loved her school, her language (ASL), and shared that everyone from the dorm caretakers, teachers and staff all used ASL to communicate on campus. In the Deaf-World, ASL is treasured as well as the Deaf Culture, as it provides the Deaf community with a sense of belonging (Lane et al., 1996). When asked if she was still friends with her colleagues and teachers for the residential school for the Deaf, she said, "Yup, when we started at 3 and a half years old, we went through the elementary school together, then middle school and then high school." Further in the reading, some of her teachers and friends at her school have become her chosen family due to the common language (ASL) and Deaf Culture.

In my experience in both the Deaf/Hard of Hearing (DHH) culture and the LGBTQ culture, I have noticed that when people feel marginalized due to difference, rejection or those of us who are displaced from our families of origin, it seems common in both groups that people create their own family of choice. I did this in the early days of my "coming out" when I was not ready to disclose to my biological family that I was lesbian. I had close friends to whom I disclosed my sexuality. I trusted them. I spent a great deal of time with them and stayed in their

homes. Until I was ready to “out” myself to my family and other friends, my close lesbian and gay friends then became my chosen family because I felt safe and accepted without any judgement or disdain. P.A. has done this as well by choosing her lifetime, best friends from school and a few teachers who are all Deaf to become her family of choice.

In the elementary classrooms at P.A.’s school, they used Signing Exact English (SEE) to help the students learn to read and write in English. Signing Exact English (SEE) is a sign system modeled after the English language. SEE includes many signs that are taken from ASL; however, elements such as sentence structure, idioms, and verb endings are taken from English. In essence, SEE is a visual form of English (SEE, 2018). She recalled:

It was hard for me and the other students to use SEE as it is very different structurally and grammatically from ASL. In the classrooms we **had** (her emphasis) to use SEE but when we went back to the dorms, everyone used ASL. We (students) switched back and forth.

Once we were in middle and high school only ASL was used.

P.A. liked the fact that some of her teachers were Deaf themselves and the teachers who were hearing all used ASL. She shared that, “Half of my teachers were Deaf, and half of my teachers were hearing but, they all signed.”

Like P.A., I remember moving to Florida and attending a Catholic School where the majority of students were Hispanic. I did not speak Spanish at all. It was a challenge being the “new” kid and having to learn a new language and cultural differences to “fit in” with my new peer group. Although I enjoyed learning, I too struggled with the language, grammar and syntax that is so different from my native language of English. I empathized with P.A. when she shared that it was hard for her to learn English.

In her years at the state school for the Deaf, P.A. was involved in sports. She played volleyball, basketball and ran track. When she had home games, her parents would drive to the school to support her, the team and watch them compete. They attended her Individualized Education Plan (IEP) meetings as well. She shared, “My parents came to watch the games and to attend my IEPs.”

In the dorms, she was involved in Brownies, Girl Scouts, and Girls Club. Girls Club is what is more commonly known as Big and Little Sisters. The junior and senior girls would pick a little sister from the freshman class and be a friend and mentor to her.

I could relate to P.A. as I too was involved in sports. In middle school, I was the pitcher for my softball team. My grandparents attended my games as they were earlier in the afternoons and my parents were still working. I too was involved in Girl Scouts before we moved to Florida. In high school in Florida, I was involved in numerous service organizations, student government and big and little sisters. Like P.A. I was very involved in school and extra-curricular activities which resulted in my loving my high school experience.

On her weekends home, due to the limited sign language communication of her parents, the conversations were very surface level. Her parents always used spoken English with her when they talked, very little sign language. She stated that “Conversations were surface-level, not deep conversations.” When she was little they played with her and chatted. The communication did not matter much to her then. When she was in middle school and high school she had a best friend who also attended the state school for the Deaf and she and her parents who were Deaf lived nearby. P.A. spent most of her weekends with them at their house. Due to the fact that everyone in that household was Deaf and signed, the communication was very easy for P.A. and she enjoyed being in their company. She had a big smile when she said, “We’d go out

to the movies and for ice-cream, we always chatted and talked (in ASL).” When she was in middle school, her parents would drop her off or the girl’s parents would pick her up and she would be with them most of the weekend. By the time she reached middle and high school, her siblings had already left home for jobs, college or marriage. She was the only one at home. She explained, “I am the baby of my family and still no one in my family signs. I felt alone.”

In my experience with children who are DHH and sign, the students have shared, especially when there are long breaks from school like during Thanksgiving, Christmas/winter break, spring break or summer break, that they do not want to go home for such extended times because more often than not, they have no one in their families who know sign language enough to communicate with them. They complain about being bored at home and only watching television or playing video games. They say they miss their Deaf friends and teacher who can sign with them. They feel isolated and alone. I believe this is the case with P.A. as her parents really did not learn enough sign language to have deep, meaningful conversations with her, and to this day, no one in her family signs. Likewise, there are those in the LGBTQ community who have been rejected by their families for moral or religious reasons and who are thrown out of their homes. I have friends who were told to leave at ages 15 and 16 who had to fend for themselves, live with friends and other families who were accepting and allowed them to stay with them to finish school, get jobs that would allow them to support themselves and/or find financial means to go to college or trade schools. In both communities, the “family of choice” is very real.

In high school, P.A.’s friend would borrow her parent’s car and go pick her up. They had other Deaf friends who also lived near-by and they would go meet them, go shopping at the mall, go to the movies or go out to eat together. They loved having fun together and talking in ASL!

She reflected on the lack of family communication in ASL while she was growing up. She shared that now, with the available technology, she communicates with her brothers, sister, in-laws, nephews and nieces more through e-mail, texting and FaceTime. She emphasized that communication now is MUCH better with her family. Her parents both have passed in the last few years but prior to that time she used the same technology to communicate with them. It seems that she spent more time with her friend's family due to the ease of communication in ASL. The face-to-face communication in sign with her own family was strained and difficult which is why she spent so much time over at her Deaf friend's house.

In school, P.A. enjoyed math and language arts. She did not like science at all. During the interview, while she was reminiscing about her school and childhood there, she was very happy and proud to be an alumna of that school. She loved the dorm life, having friends who signed and liked being a mischief maker. As an elementary school child, she loved playing hide and seek in the basement of the dorm if it was snowing or outside. In elementary school the dorms were co-ed. The students had constant adult supervision in the dorms, in the gym, outside, in the cafeteria, and everywhere else. The caretakers were always within eyeshot and fairly strict with the students because they genuinely cared for them and because they were responsible for them. They insisted on knowing where the students were and what they were doing at all times. The kids HAD TO (her emphasis) stay with them at all times. I asked her if she had gotten into trouble at school with her sheepish grin, she shook her head, "Yes." Here is what happened:

One day in the cafeteria I was sitting at a four-top table with my friends. We were eating and joking around. One girl with a tooth missing was eating and her food shot out of the side of her mouth. Everyone at the table was laughing hysterically. Then, we all started throwing food. One of the cafeteria attendants saw us, came over and reprimanded us,

and she told us we would be speaking with the Dean! After the Dean heard our story, he decided that we would be scrubbing the walls in the dorm, cleaning the bathrooms and mopping the floors. What we did not know is that the Dean called our parents to let them know what had happened in the cafeteria and to let them know what the punishment would be.

P.A. thought that they would get a two or three-day suspension, so she willingly accepted the punishment. The funniest thing is that when she arrived home on Friday, her Mom asked her about it, she was shocked that her Mom already knew, and she was embarrassed! When she was telling the story to me, her face turned red and she giggled throughout her vivid telling, as if it just happened!

In middle and high school, as mentioned earlier, she was involved in three sports: basketball, volleyball and track. They competed against other schools for the Deaf as well as “hearing” public schools. Teams would travel to their school and they would travel to other schools as well. They also participated in tournaments where six or seven schools would compete against each other. When she recalled her days in sports, she said:

When we were competing against the hearing teams, the coaches knew we were Deaf so instead of using a whistle, they used hand signals or waved a white towel to get our attention. I found that interesting.

P.A. seemed to really enjoy her time at the school!

In middle and high school, the dorms were not co-ed. The boys were separated from the girls. After school or when homework was finished then they could meet in the lobby and chat, watch television, and play cards or board games together. I asked about other situations at school like dating. Boys with girls, girls with girls and boys with boys. “I didn’t personally see that

happening, but if it did, they didn't show it, or those students kept it a secret from everyone." She said they were allowed to chat with boys and girls in the lobby which was a common area, but the caretakers were always present and watching so it would have been difficult not to be seen. Students were not allowed off campus dating, however, they were allowed to go off campus on field trips as a group and to the home games of the school teams, with chaperones.

They attended the hockey, basketball, baseball, and football games. If the games were held at a public school over the weekend and her friends wanted to go see the game, they would get together and drive to the school to watch the game. P.A.'s years at the school made deep and lasting impressions on her and she still enjoys friendships with several people she befriended while at the state school for the Deaf.

I queried about Deaf Residential school versus Deaf programs in public schools. P.A. had this to say, "Thank God for the residential school!" "It was WONDERFUL!" Being in school taught her a lot about the duties and responsibilities, learning to have a schedule, especially in the dorms. The students were responsible for cleaning up, taking out their trash, mopping and other chores. There was a specific time for dinner, socialization in the common area, a time for homework and other activities. She felt she was taught how to plan well. She did not think she would have learned that if she went to a public school. She said, "I think I would be lazy!" She felt she was taught to help out with chores when she was home with her parents. She shared that her current roommate is messy. Her things are thrown around all over the house. A mess! P.A. is grateful that the residential school taught her to be neat, clean and organized. I suggested that it might be a parental influence as well. She totally agreed with me. Although she was not assigned chores at home, she automatically helped out. She would do things such as, set

the table, help with cooking, and take out the garbage. She would just do chores without being asked. She shared that it was not any problem for her to help out.

In my situation, it was different. I was the oldest and my sister and I were assigned chores. My parents both worked. My mom left for a 3 to 11 p.m. shift at the hospital and my Dad got home from the hospital about 4 o'clock p.m. so we were home for about an hour before Dad got home. We had to dust, vacuum, fold clothes, help put groceries away, help make a salad for dinner, do the dishes and keep our rooms clean. We helped with yard work too! We raked leaves, shoveled snow, and helped weed the flower beds.

I asked P.A. about differences she sees now versus when she went to school. One thing she shared was that she sees more children on medication for Attention Deficit Hyper Activity Disorder (ADHD) than before. She sees children with Diabetes too. The students have to go to the clinic in the mornings and afternoons to get their medications now. She said, "Wow! A lot of kids are on medication for ADHD! Activity would help that. When kids are active they will be successful and that is a good program."

P.A. felt that keeping children active is very helpful to them. She shared that the programs and activities the students have now are better than when she went to the residential school. She felt that the Deaf kids in public schools are failing because the information is over their heads, too fast paced and they do not understand well. She felt that sometimes DHH students' failing in public school is due to the fact that some students have learned or are learning ASL later in life and some because they need a smaller class size with a teacher of the Deaf to teach them, in a way that they can understand.

She felt strongly that Deaf kids should attend residential schools because the education is better suited for the Deaf students and the class sizes are smaller. She felt that students who are

able to use more of their hearing (Hard of Hearing students) do better in mainstream classes because they have more of a benefit of usable hearing but for students who are totally Deaf she supports residential Deaf schools. She said, “Imagine if I had to go to mainstream now, I would be frustrated, I would be lost! There is not much Deaf with Deaf mingling, association, or ASL (in public schools).”

She felt that the students who are in the public school mainstream programs have less skills, especially in ASL, than the students who attend the residential schools. They are more frustrated. Hearing parents cannot help their students much with homework because they don't sign. Deaf parents cannot help their children because many are illiterate in English. “It's a tough choice for the parents, it's tough.” “I feel for the kids.” We both agreed that we must do as much as we can to help the students.

At my high school, unlike P.A.'s, the heteronormative couples made it a point to meet in between classes passing at the bells. They were affectionate, holding hands and kissing in the halls and on the sidewalks unless a teacher happened by and they were discouraged from the public display of affection. Those who were lesbian, or gay, were much more closeted. In my sophomore year, I tried out for the softball, volleyball and basketball teams. I noticed that the women who were superior athletes seemed to be very bonded and knew each other well. Others in the school talked about them and labeled them as “lezzies.” I observed from a distance and I knew some of the women because they were in a few of my classes. I was intrigued by their independence yet feared them somewhat because I was in uncharted territory. There were rumors that they “partied” together on the weekends, clearly had the attention of the female coaches for their athletic prowess, practiced hard and won several state championships.

The guys who were thought to be gay, were closeted as well. There were a few guys who were very handsome and had girlfriends. They carried on as if they were straight. They went out on the weekends, went to dances, parties, homecomings and proms. They “passed” for straight. The saddest thing I learned after we graduated from high school is that during the AIDS epidemic of the late 1970s and early 1980s, we lost all of them to the disease.

Lesbian Identity

P.A. graduated from high school and came to Florida to attend college. She dated a guy for almost 2 years. He asked her to marry him. She turned him down and he was really upset. P.A. said, “I didn’t want to get married because I felt I wasn’t ready.” Her decision was bothering her deep inside. After she broke up with her boyfriend, a friend wanted to know why she broke up with him. She explained to her that she wanted independence and she was not ready for marriage. Much later, they sat down to discuss it further and her friend asked her if she was a lesbian. She responded with, “No, I’m not, I don’t know.” At the time P.A. did not consider herself to be a lesbian. She did not label herself. When she asked her friend why she thought that P.A. was lesbian, her friend replied to her, “Because you are always hanging out with women.” It was at that time that she began to really think about it. She started thinking about it and realized that maybe she was a lesbian, even though she did not label herself as such.

She was thinking about a time during college:

I had a friend, “a really cool girl.” We picked on each other back and forth. One evening at my apartment, we wrestled, played around, and held each other, I realized that a woman was more fun than a man. At the time I didn’t think about myself as being a lesbian. After the break up with my boyfriend, I decided to just go on about my life. In 2000 after a very dear friend of mine died, my best friend, who is a lesbian, came to visit

me. We went out to dinner and had a deep conversation. I told my friend that I was thinking and curious about dating women. My friend got really upset because she thought that she was influencing me to change my life. I assured her she wasn't, but we had a huge fight about it. We both cried and were upset.

The two women have been friends since the school for the Deaf in their home state. Her friend realized that she was wrong about the situation and apologized. P.A. explained to her friend, "I feel that women are more understanding, open minded, able to discuss things more, understand women's feelings differently, as compared to men." Her friend understood how she was feeling and they reconciled. Shortly after that, P.A. assured herself that, "If it doesn't work out, that's fine, if it does work out, that's fine, too."

P.A. started dating a "hearing" woman. Keep in mind that the local Deaf lesbian community is extremely small; therefore, unless the woman knew some ASL, she would not have been able to communicate. P.A. remembered:

I met the woman at work and the woman knew some sign language. I was afraid and nervous because it was my first experience with a woman and I had no experience. As time went on, I realized that she wasn't my type. We were together less than a year. We remained friends after we broke up. After that, I had an idea of what it was like to be with a woman.

During this interview, she seemed nervous talking about her first experience, as she was picking at her cuticles. She explained that it was after her first lover and during her relationship with her second lover when she began to tell her close friends about being a lesbian. She shared that her friends were very supportive. Some of her friends and her sister-in-law told her that it

was important for her to not worry about what others thought but to just think about how she was feeling because they just wanted her to be happy.

P.A. described a situation that happened to her. She was visiting with very good friend of hers from college. The woman had gotten married and had children. P.A. felt she wanted to “come out” to her and she did. Her friend was very accepting and happy for her. She was fine with it, she understood and had no problem. Her husband, however, said, “Wait, I want to show you something.” So, P.A. waited. He came back with his Bible and showed her a passage that pointed out lesbians and gays are not accepted in the Bible. She unyieldingly informed him that her life was none of his business. She continued, “It’s my life and it doesn’t matter what it says in the Bible! I still love God, it’s my life and you cannot control me! That’s it!”

He got still and left the room. She is still friends with them. However, she has noticed that the time they spend together is very limited as compared to before when she was not “out” to them. They are more involved in their church and their church family now. She said she is O.K. with that but she misses that time she spent with her friend.

I too dated a young man from my freshman year in high school through the beginning of my freshman year in college. Although I dated him, I also had a girlfriend whom I was with from my junior year in high school through my sophomore year in college. They knew each other but he thought she was just my “best friend,” he did not know she was my lover. He had moved 5 hours away to live with his mother and we remained in contact. We visited each other a few times and we spoke on the phone. On one trip to visit me, he came to ask me to marry him. I turned him down. I don’t recall what I actually told him, but I was not able at the time, to be totally honest with him about my true sexuality and feelings for women. I may have told him I wanted to focus on school and I did not want to get married at that time. I felt horrible! I felt as if

I was lying by omission. I hurt him. I did not know, that previously to his asking me to marry him, he had spoken with my parents to ask for their blessing. Soon after that visit, I received in the mail the “Dear Jane letter” stating that he had a girlfriend in the city where he lived, and he was breaking up with me and beginning to date her. I cried. I cried, not because we broke up but because he was a really great guy who treated me well and did not pressure me for anything, including sex. I knew we had to move on with our lives and it was not until several years later that I shared with him that I was a lesbian and that I was in a committed relationship with a woman. He was very accepting of us. He asked through a mutual friend if he could call me because he was going through a divorce at the time. He appreciated our long talks and he had always felt that I was a good listener and that I gave sage advice. We talked for several hours that day and we were both happy to reconnect as friends. We remain friends to this day.

The second woman P.A. dated was also a “hearing” woman. P.A. informed me that all three of the women she dated are hearing. Her second lover was a sign language interpreter. P.A. shared:

I learned a lot with her. She was a great communicator because she was an interpreter.

The communication between us was really good. It was easy and smooth. When we were at home I saw that she was different. She was controlling. She didn’t want me to go out with my best friends. She wanted me all to herself. She was selfish. I struggled with that.

I didn’t understand it. My friends and I thought that she was jealous of our friendships.

P.A. explained that she thought it was hard for her lover due to the fact that she was an interpreter and she felt ethically, she had to have boundaries with people within the Deaf community as far as socialization and fraternization were concerned. She did not feel she could be involved with P.A.’s friends. It was difficult for them as a couple and the relationship fell

apart. P.A. shared that it was hard for her when they broke up. She questions, “Maybe being with a Deaf woman would be better for me? I don’t know.”

“Coming Out”

The biggest conflict for the couple was that her lover wanted P.A. to “come out” to her family because she was an OUT and PROUD lesbian. P.A. thought about it and she did not like the idea because she felt her parents would have disapproved because they were older. She felt they would be upset and mad and she did not want to tell them. “I didn’t feel comfortable ‘coming out’ to my brothers and my sister,” she said. She felt comfortable with her sister-in-law and she wrote her an e-mail to tell her about her being a lesbian. P.A. reluctantly hit the send button in the e-mail and waited for a response. A few days later, she was happily surprised with her sister-in-law’s reply. Her sister-in-law told P.A. that she was not surprised. P.A. was shocked! P.A. felt her sister-in-law had intrinsically known or figured it out. She shared with P.A. that it was important for her to be happy. Now, her brothers, sister and her sister-in-law know about her identity and they accept her. She expressed this about her family,

My family doesn’t bother me about my life, never (emphasis hers)! They don’t ask questions. They don’t ask about girlfriends or my personal life. They wait for me to share what’s going on in my life with them.

Her Mom and Dad are now deceased, and her family knows that she is a lesbian. She shared that she was with her second lover for about a year and a half. P.A.’s third lover was hearing, too. She met her at the school where she worked. The woman had a 10-year-old son. She too, knew ASL, as she had taken an ASL class or two at the college. She and P.A. were able to communicate well. P.A. shared, “I taught her more signs as our relationship progressed and I taught her son sign language, too.” P.A. felt she was able to relate better with her and she was

happier. The woman came from a good family. P.A. was learning a lot of other things. Although P.A. was happy in the relationship she shared with me:

We had a good relationship, but I felt like I got hit in the face because I found out that my partner had a drinking problem. My Deaf friends urged me to try to help her through it and, to get help. I was torn emotionally. I thought she could just stop drinking. I didn't want to be with a person who was addicted. My friends told me that she couldn't just stop, that she would probably drink off and on and couldn't just quit. I was learning about addiction. After trying for a while, I couldn't handle it anymore, I was frustrated, and we broke up. I learned.

P.A. said that she has been single for 8 years. When I inquired as to what she felt was her biggest challenge being with hearing women she responded that her third lover's drinking problem was definitely a problem. She felt that her lover was dishonest and did not express her feelings to P.A. although P.A. expressed her feelings to her lover. P.A. encouraged her partner to talk with her, but her lover would not. P.A. felt her lover was secretive and she lied to her. She wanted to help her. P.A. even attended open A.A. meetings to learn about the disease of alcoholism and how it was affecting them both.

When P.A. was talking about her lover having a drinking problem, my heart became heavy as I had had similar experiences. I was in a relationship for 19 years with my previous partner. After we were together for a while, I wondered if she had issues with alcohol. I denied it for a long time. When I was in my second year of the doctoral program, the drinking and related behaviors were occurring on a nightly basis.

I am not sure why she started drinking very heavily then, because we had discussed in great depth how our lives would change while I was in the doctoral program. Due to the fact that

I never got closure after our break up, I can only make my best guess as to why. From day one of our relationship, I showered her with attention and affection. I always put her first, even to my own detriment. I was working full time and attending classes at night and often did not arrive home until after 10 p.m. When I would come in the door, she was drunk. I feel that when my focus shifted from her to my studies, she could not handle losing my full attention. I could not deal with an active alcoholic who would either totally withdraw, not speak to me for days, or who would shred me to pieces so that we would fight all night. I too became someone who I was not. My self-esteem was in the gutter. I reacted to her and fought back, instead of ignoring her and not responding. I yelled, screamed and threw things out of total frustration due being treated with indifference. I could no longer accept the way we were interacting. She showed no care, concern or compassion. She did not want to get help for herself or our relationship. Although I was attending Al-anon and counseling, it was too much for me to bear. I begged her to get help, she replied, "If you want changes, then you will have to do all the changing yourself because I am NEVER going to give up drinking!"

Consequently, in June of 2010, I ended a 19-year relationship with a woman I loved and had married. It was the hardest thing I had ever done. Fortunately, like P.A., I too had support, from my family, friends, colleagues and professors. I depended on them and my strong faith to help me get through it. I could not have gotten through it all without the support and love I was given. I know the pain of loss with someone you love. It is not easy.

In P.A.'s relationship with her second lover she found out that her lover was bi-polar. She shared that, "One minute we would be laughing and carrying on and having a great time and the next minute my lover was sad, angry and moody." This is the only lover with whom she shared

an apartment. She never cohabitated with any of her other lovers. Thus, the break-up was harder for her, because she had to move out.

P.A. “came out” to her sister-in-law about 6 months after she was with her second lover. Prior to that, she did not feel comfortable “coming out” to her family. She is “out” to trusted family and close friends. She did not feel comfortable “...coming out to the world!” She did not feel she needs to “out” herself to the world. She said that for her, “I don’t need to announce it to the world!” “I don’t need everyone to gawk at me and I don’t need to say, “Look at me, look at me, I’m a lesbian!”

For her, she did not feel it was necessary. She felt it was only important to show love and that she and her partner have a good relationship. She and her second lover had BIG (her emphasis) differences in this regard. She shared that with her third lover, she was, “...humble and together not out to everybody.” They were “out” to some people and would go out with friends. P.A. prefers it to be this way.

P.A. shared that some people in the Deaf community know she’s a lesbian and others do not. It depends on the people. People I trust. There are those in the Deaf community who suspect that I am (lesbian) but they never ask me. She said, “If someone asks me I will tell them. With students, NEVER. I won’t answer them, I have a strong boundary with them. No way!”

I personally, have not responded in that way with middle and high school students who were former elementary students of mine. In the recent past, I have had mothers of three students with whom I remain in contact, call me to ask if I was alright with them telling their children I am lesbian because the kids were asking their moms about me. The moms all have lesbian and gays friends who the children know and are aware that they are lesbian or gay. In these instances, I have given permission for the moms to share with them, that I am lesbian. I appreciated the

parents' calls and conversations because I felt respected and validated by the parents and the children. I have a fantastic rapport with these kids and their parents and hope to keep in touch with them in the future.

I asked P.A. how she responds to adults and students when she does not want to respond. She said she tells them, "It's none of your business." She stressed that she does it in a respectful way, not rudely. P.A. indicated that she hasn't seen people in the Deaf community respond to lesbians or gays. She acknowledges that some of her straight friends know that she is a lesbian and they accept and respect her. Her lesbian and gay friends know, as well. She supposes that if she and her lesbian friends are out for drinks and socializing, it may be obvious that they are lesbians.

When I asked P.A. about what she thinks influences people to respond negatively to lesbians and gays she indicated that she thinks a lot has to do with people's religious beliefs, especially those like her friend's husband. She expressed discontent with his judgmental-ness and told me that now when she invites her friend to go out for dinner or drinks, her friend tells her she has to ask her husband first. Her response to that was, "Oh my God, really?!" She shared too, that since they are so busy with their church and church family that she texts her on occasion, but they don't spend much time together anymore.

Another question I asked her was about her parents knowing if she was lesbian. She stated that she did not know if they were aware of it or not. She recalled that when she was home visiting her parents and they would be watching television. If something popped up on the news about lesbians or gays they would respond negatively. She just accepted it as their opinion and went along with what they said. She shared that they did not discuss it because her parents were older, and she did not want to upset them. Her parents did not attend church when she was little.

They began attending a church after she graduated from high school. They were retired then and they became very involved in their church. It kept them busy.

She reiterated that her sister-in-law never asks her about her love life. She does not ask if she's dating, has a girlfriend, or is in a relationship. They don't discuss her relationships. They really do not talk about her love life unless she brings up the topic to them. When she is upset about a break up, she confides in her two closest (Deaf) friends. With regard to being rejected or excluded, I asked her if people in the Deaf community who are straight have ever rejected or excluded her or any of her Deaf lesbian and gay friends. She said, "I haven't really experienced that. I've been independent for so long that I don't care what people think."

Although her words said one thing, her body language told me the opposite. She seemed uncomfortable when she was saying that she has "...been independent for so long and doesn't care what people think." She shared that the local Deaf lesbian and gay community here is very small. Without my prompting, she went back to the topic of being rejected or excluded. She recalled that when she was with her second lover, some people REALLY (her emphasis) did not like her. They liked P.A. but they did not like her lover. Why? she asked:

Because she was VERY OUT and made it known to others. It made it difficult for our dating relationship. If I went out with them (her friends) myself, it was fine, but when we went out with them together, it was different. My friends got sick of her. For example, my best friend asked me to go to the beach with her. I would say that I wanted my lover to come too. My friend would tell me that she didn't want to spend time with her. No way! She didn't want it and she didn't like her at all.

I suggested that it may have been because her lover was very “OUT “and PROUD and that P.A. and her friends are quieter about being “out” than her ex-lover. She agreed that they are “...very different for sure!”

I inquired about the sex education classes that she had in high school. She shared that most of the students were too embarrassed to ask or answer any questions of the teacher. Like most schools, they were not allowed to discuss lesbian or gay sex at all. She shook her head and told me that they NEVER discussed lesbian and gays and they were not allowed to because it was against the state board rule.

She then shared that when she tutors the high school Deaf students now, two of them in particular say to her, “You’re lesbian, you’re lesbian!” She asked them what they think. They said, “Yes!” There were other staff members who are obviously gay and out. She did not need or want the students to know, stating that, “It’s none of their business.” She felt that when they are “out in the world, later in life” it would be fine if they know but not now. She did not feel it was appropriate to discuss her sexuality with the students. She did not feel comfortable. She shared that if she sees them out in the world later, she could talk with them but not while they are students.

I asked her what she felt was her biggest challenge as a person who is both Deaf and lesbian. She responded with, “I feel awkward.” When I asked her why she felt that way she shared that, “If I tell people I am a lesbian, I don’t know if they will be O.K. with it or not. Some people have open minds, and some have closed minds.” I also asked her about being Deaf in a hearing world. She shared that it is a very small local community stating that, “We are Deaf, just let us be, leave us alone. We’re not out there mingling, we’re a small group. Just let us alone.”

I questioned her about communication being a challenge. She responded in the affirmative on that question. She said that now it is easier than before due to advanced technology including FaceTime, Skype, and video phones, yet is still a challenge. I asked her if she ever feels afraid when she goes out alone or with friends because she is Deaf and lesbian. She said that she was never afraid. I posed this question as well, have you ever been mocked, stared at or rejected when you were out in public? Her response was, “Well it’s never happened, if it did I would just tell them to stop, it’s ridiculous! I might confront them or just ignore them.”

I shared that I was curious about being ridiculed because from my experiences, I have had people say really nasty things to me, but I know because she is Deaf, she would not hear their comments, but she would notice (read) negative body expressions.

I have been in some places where people are really negative. I felt very uncomfortable and unsafe and I was walking with a group of people who were LGBT after a Gay and Lesbian Association of Choruses (GALA) Festival. I was singled out and harassed by a man who was “preaching” against us. He said something about the Bible being against homosexuals and loving Jesus. I kept walking and shouted, “You cannot simultaneously preach about loving Jesus and hating us.” He said, “Oh, a smart lesbian.” I retorted, “Yes, thanks for noticing!” Then I started singing loudly, *We Shall Overcome*, and twenty to thirty other chorus members who were behind me, joined in, right on cue, as we continued back to our hotel. Reflecting on this incident, I was really scared! I did not know what the consequences would be. I took a risk. After I verbally confronted him, I felt empowered. I was curious if she ever felt afraid or had a situation such as that one. She shared that if the person was being really “BOLD” she would just leave. She said, “It’s not worth it. I wouldn’t want to mess with them.” I agreed that it’s not worth it to get hurt. Sometimes though, I feel it is necessary to confront my/our attackers.

Religion

When P.A. and I spoke of being “out” in the community, I asked her how she responds to people when she does not want to answer the question of whether or not she is lesbian. She said, “I tell them, it’s none of your business,” in a very respectful way. I asked what she thinks influences people to be anti-LGBT and if she had experienced the backlash of that kind of negativity. She responded this way:

It depends. For example, my best friends in college and we were close friends, now they are married with children, and they are REALLY (emphasis hers) involved in their church. They never went to church growing up but now they do. I told her (my friend) about me being lesbian, she understood and is OK with it she supports me. I don’t know how her husband found out that I am lesbian, but he brought out his bible to show me. I just told him that was his decision, and this is my decision. He told me that lesbian is against the Bible. I said, “No, I don’t believe that.” I just said to him, ‘Really?’ I shrugged him off. He’s really strict with that (his religion/Bible). After I told her about myself being lesbian, and their family is crazy busy with their schedules and activities, but anyway, we keep in contact by texting. I see the boys and visit but now the boys are in high school, they go to church and worship with their church friends and do Bible Study on Wednesday nights. I tell her (her friend) that I miss her and want to go out, visit with her, get a bite to eat. Now she says, “I have to ask my husband first!” Well, Oh my God, really?! Forget it! Now I don’t text her much anymore! I let her contact me to make plans instead! A few weeks ago, we all went out with mutual friends for my birthday. The conversation switched up and they talked about their church friends and things, I just sat and listened. It was nice to visit with her, but I don’t feel as close as I did before with her

because of her husband. Before in college, we were close friends, we had fun! Now, she is more focused on her family and church. I can't force her, they are happy with their church and church family and I'm O.K. with that, but it's not the same.

I could tell by her body language that P.A. was sad. She really seemed to missed spending time with her friend. She had her head down and appeared to be nervously fidgeting with her hands.

Another question I asked her was about her parents knowing if she was lesbian. She stated that she did not know if they were aware of it or not. She recalled that when she was home visiting her parents and they would be watching television. If something popped up on the news about lesbians or gays they would respond negatively. She just accepted it as their opinion and went along with what they said. She shared that they did not discuss it because her parents were older, and she did not want to upset them. Her parents did not attend church when she was little. They began attending a church after she graduated from high school. They were retired then and they became very involved in their church. It kept them busy. In another interview she reiterated her feelings about the religious judgement on the LGBT community. She exclaimed:

Wow! They are so against, against, against lesbians and gays in society! Whoa! I hope in the future the different religious churches will respect differences of lesbian and gay people. Not lesbians and gays are awful, awful! I want to move forward without the name calling and saying we are awful. A lot of straight Christians say we are awful, bad, and they judge us. They say God does not like lesbians and gays. The Bible says nothing like that. I will respect them, and they need to respect me. If they are against lesbians, ignore them, let them be open minded themselves. It does not bother me. People need to learn to understand, respect and be open minded. I want to move forward with lesbians and gays

to have a better future. I'm not in a relationship yet. I hope I will be and have a better life with a person in a relationship. Probably "out" more. I want a "normal" life. For example, not groups/cliques where people judge and look at you and label you as lesbian, straight, people against lesbians and gays, judgement by religious groups. We don't go around telling them they need to change their religion or stop practicing their faith! No! It is important and we all need to have mutual respect for each other. That is key. Leave us alone and we'll leave you alone. We need to show each other the GOOD that we have by being respectful of each other.

For me, as a woman who grew up Catholic and attended Catholic schools for 12 years, during my "coming out" it was very difficult to come to terms with the realization that I was lesbian, and my church was "diabolically" opposed to my being lesbian, or should I say, opposed to my sexual expression of my lesbian being. I struggled intensely between my understanding of a loving and compassionate God whom I loved and the doctrine of the Catholic Church. In my heart, I KNEW, that the God of my understanding, DID NOT make mistakes. I have always felt that I am created in the image and likeness of God. I struggled with that concept for years until I finally came to accept it. I have prayed and meditated for over 40 years for a deeper understanding and relationship with my God. I persevered. I was involved in my church as a choir member at age 12 and the organist for 14 years after that. When I moved away, I no longer attended that congregation. I found a Catholic Mass for lesbian and gay Catholics that I was a member of for many years. Now, I am not a regular church goer. I do not consider myself a religious woman but a spiritual one. I pray, meditate, and try read scripture daily. I try to do good in my daily life and in society. P.A. and I are different in that, I grew up with a religious upbringing and she did not. However, she too acknowledges a higher being to whom she refers

as God, as I do. It is my belief that we are in alignment in being and doing good in the world, for the benefit of all we serve. A lofty goal perhaps, yet doable in one's daily and community life. I enjoy a deep relationship with a kind and loving God, not a vengeful one. I am hopeful and joyous with the way the church and its members are moving forward with regard to our lesbian and gay sisters and brothers. I love Pope Francis and his realistic ways and unconditional love toward the people. I would like to share two thoughts that have guided me throughout my adult life., The commandment, "Love your enemy; do good to those who hate you." The other, a quote from Saint (Mother) Teresa, "Not all of us can do great things, but we can do small things with great love." *Deo gratias*: thanks be to God.

Lesbian and Gay Marriage

With regard to lesbian and gay marriage, P.A. said:

I don't need to get married. I'm not planning to get married. A relationship, yes, and being together is fine. Now, look at the U.S. [points to different states on an imaginary map in ASL] What do you see? Lesbians and gays have the right to marry. Years ago, no, that didn't happen!

When I asked her why she did not want to get married, she responded by shaking her head in the negative and saying, "No, no, no." When asked why, she responded, "Too many people get divorced and I don't want that." "Marry, be together, I don't know it's the future, I don't know what's going to happen." I asked her, "What's your dream?" She rolled her eyes into the back of her head and continued:

I'll have to wait and see, it's a few years into the future! Right now, I don't think about it, really. I hope someday I meet the right woman. The one who is right for me. One who wants to travel and do photography with me. That's my dream.

P.A. and I have a differing viewpoint considering marriage. During my adult life, I have been an activist for LGBT and Human Rights. NEVER, did I dream that in my lifetime I would have the right to marry the woman I loved. I always had the desire to marry. I had a Holy Union ceremony in 1996 with my previous partner, but, it was not legal. Last year, on April 17th 2017, I married my love. We were married in the courthouse with our family present as witnesses. It was an incredibly, emotionally amazing feeling. I recall thinking, Oh, my God, this is REALLY happening! I welled up with tears and it was breath taking for me. I finally felt that sense of equality, that I longed to have in my relationship with my partner. I fought my entire adult life for our right to marry. We had a wonderful celebration with our family and friends three weeks later. It happened. I am grateful.

In this chapter, I presented the themes that emerged through the interview process, namely communication, Deaf identity, lesbian identity, “coming out,” religion, and lesbian and gay marriage. P.A. shared with me how her life has been affected and influenced by each one. By threading my life narrative along with hers, I presented some similarities and differences in our perceptions and how we manage life’s issues and challenges. During the interviews, we both felt vulnerable sharing with each other our “coming out” stories and yet shared a common bond of “knowing.” This was not only because we are both lesbians, but because we are both tied to the Deaf community with all its richness in culture and communication. The one phenomenon that I realized that was glaring to me after I was immersed in the videos and transcripts was that her Deaf identity was clearly obvious as her more dominant identity and my lesbian identity clearly emerged as my more dominant identity. Although, I know, use, and communicate well in ASL, it is a second language for me whereas, for her, it is her primary language. Considering that she lives and functions in the majority hearing world, communication with the majority of the

population is much more difficult for her on a daily basis than it is for me as a hearing woman in the majority linguistic culture. In contrast, my lesbian identity is more dominant than hers perhaps because I began my “coming out” process in high school and identified myself as lesbian much earlier in my life than she did. While I was fighting for my lesbian rights, she was fighting for her Deaf rights, especially with regard to equal access via communication in ASL.

CHAPTER FIVE:

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to learn how Deaf or Hard of Hearing (DHH) individuals who identify as lesbian make their way in the world living as a minority in two intersecting majority cultures, namely heteronormative and hearing. In addition to garnering this information, I chose to actively participate in the study by narrating my own related experiences as an accepted ally of the local Deaf community, as an educator of children who are DHH, as a leader and President of the Board of Directors of the Family Center on Deafness, as well as a lesbian who is “out” in the community. I chose to explore to what degree my experiences were congruent with those of my participant. The project not only helped me to understand and be reflective of the “other” but it also allowed me to better understand my “self” in relation to my participant (Chang, 2008; Ellis, 2007). The research literature with regard to this population of women is limited; therefore, I wanted to add to the academic literature base possibly providing representation for this population of women. In addressing these purposes, the following two research questions guided the study:

1. How does a Deaf or Hard of Hearing individual who identifies as lesbian understand being Deaf living in two majority cultures, namely heteronormative and hearing?
2. How does a Deaf or Hard of Hearing individual who identifies as lesbian understand being lesbian living in two majority cultures, namely heteronormative and hearing?

In Chapter Four, I focused on the experiences of P.A., my Deaf lesbian participant, from the six interviews I conducted with her regarding her lived experiences. The themes that emerged

from the data were: (a) Communication in American Sign Language (ASL), (b) Deaf Identity and growing up in the state residential school for the Deaf, (c) Lesbian Identity, (d) “Coming Out,” in both the hearing and Deaf Communities, (e) Religion, (f) Lesbian and Gay Marriage. Within the interview texts and summaries, I narrated my life experiences with P.A.’s and noted to what degree our respective experiences matched and differed. In so doing, this not only helped me to understand and be reflective of “others” but it also allowed me to understand my “self” in relation to my participant.

Communication

Communication is broadly defined as the expression to another of information or thoughts through speech, writing, or gestures (“communication,” 2018). Language is defined as the system of words or signs that people use to express thoughts and feelings to each other, any one of the systems of human language that are used and understood by a particular group of people.

In P.A.’s case, at the age of 3 she had a very basic communication system and language that consisted of invented “home signs” and minimal ASL that her parents learned, to have basic communication with her in the home. Her doctor and parents realized that if she did not have communication and begin learning a language, in her case, ASL due to her being Deaf, she would not have a language other than the home signs and gestures she was using with her parents.

According to the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (2018), a child aged 5 entering kindergarten should have an expressive vocabulary of 2,100-2,200 words and a receptive vocabulary of at least 10,000 words. This is why P.A.’s doctor and parents felt it was important for her to attend the residential school for the Deaf to learn ASL, have a language, and

to be able to communicate. During the course of the interviews with P.A., the communication theme overarched all of the conversations with her. From her learning formal language (ASL) beginning at the residential school for the Deaf at the age of 3, to communicating in ASL and developing lifetime friendships with her Deaf peers by attending school with them, living in the dorms with them, socializing outside of school with them and their Deaf families, and now as an adult woman having the ability to communicate using ASL with her lovers, friends, family, and colleagues.

Findings

In this research study, I found that we both have our own levels of comfort in disclosing our sexuality to others. P.A.'s comments reveal that she has not fully integrated and accepted her lesbian identity as of yet. According to Cass's (1979) model of LGBT Identity, P.A. seemed to fall in the Stage 4, *Identity Acceptance* category, meaning that she is accepting of herself as lesbian and is increasing her contact with the LGBT community. However, Stage 5, *Identity Pride*, represents a complete acceptance of one's sexual identity and awareness of society's rejection of lesbians and gays. Since P.A. still denies her sexual identity to some people, and it seems that she has not totally accepted her sexual identity. In order to achieve full *Identity Synthesis*, according to the scale, she would have to integrate her sexual identity into a more broadened sense of self. I find that "It depends." We (lesbians and gays) seem to move into and out of these stages in a non-linear path depending on the people, students for whom she is responsible, in her case and the situations we are in at a given time. The "Coming Out" process is a very personal one. For some of us, it can be a continuing, life long process. It is a personal choice to "come out" or to stay in the closet. It is a decision for each individual to decide when and if it is safe to "come out." Some of us are "out" in one part of our lives and not in others. I

believe this is true for P.A. In certain areas of her life, she is comfortable being “out.” In other areas, especially with people whom she knows are uncomfortable with people who are LGBT and with students she oversees, she is not “out.” This is her personal choice. There were other instances in the interviews where she discussed with me that she only shares with certain individuals that she is lesbian. The self-identity literature by Harré and Van Langenhove (1999) affirmed that people self-identify when they are ready and make a decision to do so. The works of Cass (1979), Marcia (1987), and Degges-White et al. (2000) support the idea that P.A. appears to shift in and out of the various stages of lesbian identity development, as well as how she perceives herself and others as she goes through this process. It was clear through the interview process that there were people, such as students in the after school Deaf programs with whom she works, to whom she would not reveal herself as lesbian. She felt it was “none of their business” and she was not comfortable sharing her personal information with them.

P.A. is not a teacher, I am. Although she is a caretaker in the after-school programs for DHH children, she and I have contact with students and parents. After developing a relationship with my students’ parents, I have shared with some of them that I am lesbian. One parent called to tell me that her daughter, who was a former student of mine, “figured it out” based on rings that my partner (at the time) and I were wearing. She was in middle school then and recalled that I had the same ring as her new teacher. The mom and she discussed it and the parent shared that her daughter held me in high esteem and would not do anything to hurt me or my reputation in the educational community. She stressed to her daughter that it could potentially cause me trouble if she shared the information with other students. To my knowledge, she never did. I learned that the mother has lesbian friends with whom the child knew for years and considered very good family friends. That was years ago. The student is now a married woman. Two years

ago, my partner and I were invited to her wedding. I remain in contact with her and her mom today.

I have been asked by a few students if I am married. Prior to last year when I got married, my answer was, “No.” I was asked again by a student this year and I answered, “Yes.” My students see a picture of my wife on my desk. They also see pictures of us with our family and our dogs. When they have asked who she is, I told them she is my partner and my best friend. I hold conferences and IEP meetings in my portable with parents and other professionals. My pictures remain on my desk and magnetic board. My sexuality is not something I openly discuss with my elementary students. However, I do answer the specific questions they ask me without going into great detail about my personal life. There are several lesbian and gay teachers and staff members who work at my school. We have not taken the time to discuss how they handle students questioning their sexual orientation. However, I have worked at this school for thirty years and for me, my sexual orientation has not been an issue. Last year, we invited several of my colleagues to our wedding and those who were able to attend, did. I feel validated and supported by my colleagues. I am fortunate that I work in a district that has contract language that directly supports and protects sexual orientation as well as, religious preference, gender, and persons with disabilities in the classroom as protected identities. In some states, sexual orientation is not protected in the contract language.

On Being Deaf and Communication

In the first interview, P.A. self-identified as being Deaf. I learned that in the beginning of her educational experience P.A. was a scared 3-year-old who was brought to the state residential school for the Deaf by her parents. The school was approximately thirty minutes from her home and the school’s orientation period was for two weeks with no parental contact prior to being

able to reunite with her parents again. This was a huge devastation for a Deaf child, at the age of 3 with very little formal language in ASL and not understanding why her parents would leave her there alone with strangers.

She and her parents used limited “home signs.” Home signs are a gestural communication system developed by a Deaf child who has no formal language (ASL) input models (NIDCD, 2018). Her parents could not communicate with her as to why she was being left at the residential school for the Deaf. She was scared. She had to learn a formal communication system, ASL and Deaf-World culture to “fit in” at the school. These two key factors are affirmed in the literature by Lane et al. (1996). Lane (2008) explained that Deaf means “like me” — one of us — in significant cultural ways. Home signs enabled her parents to communicate with her in their home however, if she were to communicate using their “home signs,” most likely, she would not have been able to communicate outside of her home without the knowledge of ASL because “home signs” are just that, signs created in each individual home. They are not universal to ALL homes. ASL is not universal (international) either, yet it is the formal language used and embraced by the Deaf-World culture in America (NIDCD, 2018).

Similarly, when I moved to Florida, I too entered a new school where the students predominantly spoke Spanish in their homes and with their friends at school. At my new school, I had to learn Spanish, as well as the culture and customs in order to “fit in;” however, my school was not residential. Therefore, I went home to my parents daily unlike P.A. Once we both were comfortable and learned the languages, cultures, and customs, we were assimilated into our new environments. One significant difference that was clearly obvious to me was the lack of communication between P.A. and her parents, and my parents and me. Although her mother learned some sign language to communicate with her, it was at a basic or primary level. Her

father never learned ASL. The difference in my home as compared to P.A.'s home, was that my parents and I spoke the same language. We had a good relationship and we had deep conversations even when the topics were difficult or controversial. I cannot imagine not being able to communicate with my parents, to ask them questions, to debate issues, or to get advice and guidance when I needed them. It seemed foreign to me that P.A. could not communicate with her parents with ease like she could with her friend's parents, because her friend's parents were Deaf and could communicate with her in ASL. The literature stated that "...to the Deaf, being Deaf is something positive that lies at the core of the meaning of being Deaf, and there are no implications of loss" (Lane, 2008, p. 284). The members of the culture are referred to as Deaf and the culture itself is referred to as Deaf-World. "Fitting in" or belonging is important to many, especially for students in middle school and high school.

Crip Theory (McRuer, 2006) suggests that the social constructions of able-bodied and heterosexual and homosexual/queer and disabled must be deconstructed by our resisting or rejecting the old paradigms of being invisible or "in the closet." When we resist and accept labels that in the past were considered derogatory such as: queer, lesbian, faggot, gimp, crip, disabled, Deaf, and dumb, we "come out" or "come out crip" as we are, in our own way of being, on our terms.

In this regard, P.A. has embraced the label of Deaf and is a member of the Deaf-World community by being Deaf herself, embracing the use of ASL, and associating with other individuals who are DHH. Although I do not identify as Deaf because I am hearing, as an ally of the Deaf, I do embrace the DHH communities and language (ASL) in my work and in my affiliations with organizations that provide services and referrals to other community resources available to the DHH community. In addition, being an educator of children who are DHH, I

embrace the language (ASL) and culture in the school environment daily. Likewise, P.A. and I identify ourselves as being lesbian. Both she and I have self-identified or “come out” and therefore have deconstructed the stigmas of both of our identities. With P.A. being Deaf and lesbian, and in my case being a hearing Deaf ally and lesbian, we make our place in the world by “coming out” as we are comfortable being crip-queer. McRuer (2006) stated, “[b]ut, keeping a crip eye on the horizon, we should nonetheless continue to demand access to other worlds— worlds that are public, democratic, expansive, and extraordinary” (p. 198).

In the beginning, neither of us “fit in” to our schools until we had learned new skills. At home, however, even though P.A. knew she was loved and cared for by her parents, I am not sure she ever really felt like she “fit in” or was accepted, which is why when she was older, and she went home for the weekends and holidays, she chose to spend the majority of her time with her friend and her friend’s parents who were Deaf and communicated using ASL. Newman (1997) affirmed this concept in one of her interviews with a Deaf lesbian, as the young woman also enjoyed spending time at her friend’s home because the family was Deaf and used sign language. The young woman’s parents were hearing and preferred the oral method of communication versus ASL. This is the same way that P.A. felt visiting her friend’s home. P.A. felt more “at home” because she “fit in” with their language (ASL) and Deaf-World culture. Learning ASL and growing up in the residential school for the Deaf was life affirming for P.A. From the age of 3 to the present, she has maintained several close friendships that she made while living at the residential school. Lane et al. (1996) and Lane (2008) maintained that students who attend the residential schools for the Deaf consider these friends more like family because they grew up together, they communicate using ASL, they share the Deaf-World culture and they

shared similar school experiences. Due to these factors, they have developed a very close bond more like sisters and brothers than friends. These friends have become P.A.'s "family of choice."

Communication and Lesbian Identity

Through the interviews, I understood that communication (ASL) is very important to P.A. The aspect of communication (ASL) and her being a woman who is Deaf, were overarching themes in all of the interviews, for without her primary mode of communication, ASL, she would find communicating very difficult. She is a woman who strongly identifies with Deaf-World culture and embraces ASL as her primary language. She is proud to be Deaf. Her being Deaf is primary to her being lesbian. Schaad (2015) found this to be true in her research as well. The women she interviewed identified more with being Deaf than being lesbian. When speaking of all three of her hearing lovers, P.A. mentioned that they knew some sign language and she continued to teach them more ASL to ease communication during the course of their relationship. With her second lover, P.A. mentioned that their communication was great because the woman was a sign language interpreter. I found it interesting that all three of her partners were hearing and knew some sign language. This refers back to P.A. sharing that the local Deaf lesbian/gay community is very small. If her partners did not have some ASL skills, it would have been quite difficult for them to communicate. Writing or typing/texting back and forth would have been very cumbersome and impractical, so her partners' knowing some sign language to communicate was fundamental in her relationships. Members of the Deaf-World, in which P.A. strongly identifies, rely so much more on vision (sign language) than on residual hearing. The residential schools for the Deaf were the settings in which the Deaf acquired fluent (ASL) language and socialization (Lane, 2008). In my relationships, I had no issues with communication because all of my lovers spoke my native language which is English. There is a

definite difference in being able to communicate in one's native language versus having to learn/use a second language. It makes sense then, that P.A. would naturally gravitate to someone with whom she is able to communicate in ASL with ease. The ability to sign/speak the same language creates an even playing field for both individuals. To ease the communication hinderances in her relationships, P.A. taught her lovers, and her third lover's 10-year old son, more sign language to increase and ease their communication even further. I was fortunate in my relationships that, there were no difficulties with speaking the same language between my partners and me.

P.A. was very clear on her level of being "out." She did not feel she needed to be "out" to everyone. She stated several times in the interview that she was "humble and together (with her partners), not out to everybody." In several of the interviews, she noted that I was more "out" than she is and that she is not a "strong lesbian." I took her reference to "strong lesbian" to mean that she is not "OUT" and "PROUD" that she is more closeted than others. The literature affirmed that there are differing stages of self-identity and lesbian identity as evidenced by Cass (1979, 1984), Marcia (1966, 1987), and Degges-White et al. (2000).

One other point I noted is that she seemed very naïve with regard to her third partner's alcoholism. She thought she could just "stop drinking" on her own. She seems to lack common knowledge that we, as people who hear, take for granted through our hearing. We learn information by hearing or over-hearing conversations, watching television, the news, shows, and movies. These all must be closed-captioned in order for people who are Deaf to have access to them. Since they are not interpreted in sign language, this also assumes that those who are reading the closed-captions are literate in English, which is often not the case. The average Deaf

student leaves school with only a third-grade command of English, and only one Deaf student in ten reads at eighth grade level or better (Lane et al., 1996, pp. 320-321).

Schaad (2015) affirmed that the Deaf lesbians she interviewed, lacked access to mental health services. I am not sure of P.A.'s level of awareness or knowledge of addiction. Although she did mention that she attended several open Alcoholics Anonymous (A.A.). meetings, I do not know how much information she learned about the disease of alcoholism at the meetings. She did not mention that she had read about or researched the topic, only that her Deaf friends told her that her partner would not or could not just stop drinking without help. When I was ready to confront alcoholism in my own family and in two of my previous relationships, I too attended A.A. and Al-anon meetings although I chose to research and read literature on the disease of alcoholism and codependency, as the two are in concert with one another. In addition, I sought professional help. I believe that due to being Deaf, P.A.'s ability to access counseling is limited due to the fact that in order to have access, she would need to have a sign language interpreter in the therapy session with her to interpret for her and the therapist. To my knowledge, there are only two therapists in the area who have the skills to sign for themselves in a therapeutic situation. So equal access and isolation due to communication, are issues that P.A. as a person who is Deaf, experiences on a daily basis in the hearing world with non-signers.

On “Coming Out”

During the third interview, P.A. shared that she denied to herself and to her friend that she was a lesbian. Until her friend confronted her, she claims she did not give her sexuality much thought. I found her nonchalant attitude about her sexual identity difficult to believe knowing the stress and anxiety I experienced when I came to realize I was lesbian. When she began to come to the realization that perhaps she was lesbian, she then began to question herself. In time, she

finally admitted to herself that she was lesbian. Admitting to one's-self that one is a lesbian or gay is a positive step toward acceptance of self. For one to disclose one's sexuality or "come out" to others is a process and decision that is made individually as one is ready and willing to do so. Through the process of "coming out" to others we grow and become more self-actualized individuals. The literature with regard to the Lesbian Identity Scales by Cass (1979) and Marcia (1966, 1987) confirm the shifting and questioning of oneself into and out of the various stages of identity formation. She kept her sexuality a secret and only "came out" to close friends and her sister-in-law with whom she felt most comfortable telling. When she shared her sexuality with her best friend from college, her friend was comfortable with her, accepted her and was happy for her. Her friend's husband however, was opposed to P.A.'s stated lesbian sexuality and brought out his Bible to prove to her that lesbians and gays are not accepted in the Bible. Although she remains friends with them, they are more involved with their church and church family and they do not spend a lot of time together anymore. She misses her friend and their friendship very much.

For me, the process of "coming out" was also difficult. One reason, was, I grew up in a very devout Catholic home and knew I would be rejected by my family, the church, and others. Secondly, being a lesbian or gay was not as socially accepted then, as it is now. It took a long time (several years) for me to be comfortable identifying as lesbian. The literature states that the telling/revealing of oneself or something is up to the individual as to when, how, why, where, and what they tell/reveal about themselves (Goffman, 1963; Harré & Van Langenhove, 1999). The telling or revealing of oneself is a very personal decision.

“Coming out” in the Deaf community. During this interview, P.A. shared that some people in the Deaf community know she is lesbian, and others do not. She shared that there are some folks who she suspects know that she is lesbian but never ask her. If someone asks her, she will tell them unless they are students for whom she is responsible in the teen after school program. She was adamant about not revealing herself as lesbian to them. She felt it is inappropriate to discuss her sexual identity with the students. They sometimes tease her and say, “You’re lesbian, You’re lesbian!” She neither confirms nor denies it. She respectfully tells them, “It’s none of your business.” She divulges her sexual identity only to people whom she trusts. The literature suggests that we “come out” to bring about social change, to break stereotypes and prejudices (Beck, p. 162). My thinking on this is that ideally, we should self-disclose as we are comfortable and ready with doing so. However, “It depends.” In a recent article from the Chicago Tribune dated June 10, 2018, a young male music teacher faced bias and backlash when a first grader in his music class, asked him if the Valentine’s flowers he had received were from his wife. He shared with the students that they were from his husband. According to the article, he made a few brief comments about respect, tolerance and how some kids have two moms or two dads. Only one parent complained. It can be risky to “come out” especially in the K-12 grade settings as we are often dealing with minors. Sometimes all it may take is for one parent to make a complaint and one’s career can be derailed (Schoenberg, 2018). This can also be the case if the teacher’s contract does not specifically use contract language stating that a teacher cannot be fired based on sexual orientation or gender identity. Some school districts use that inclusive language, others do not. Not being protected by one’s contract language can be a risk in disclosure of one’s sexual orientation. In colleges and universities, there may be more latitude and acceptance, as in the case of Brueggemann and Modellmog (2002, pp. 311-335) who

present and perform their identities in their classrooms at the Ohio State University. They both risk their identities as Deaf and lesbian, respectively. It is a risk they are both willing to take to “come out” to their students. They have experienced the tensions created by their “coming out” yet, they and their students have reported that their being “out” opens dialogue and thought, that would not have occurred had they not “outed” themselves. In their article, Brueggemann and Moddelmog (2002, p. 332) shared the following:

In short, we have opened up the space in our students’ minds to imagine new ways of reading texts, bodies, and identities: to think about what can happen in a classroom and what teachers can be and do; and to reconsider their own bodies, desires, and identities.

With regard to the Deaf community at large, most people are accepting of P.A. She said she only felt excluded when she was with her second lover who was very “OUT” and “PROUD.” Since she and her close friends who are Deaf seem to maintain a low profile with being “out,” her Deaf friends did not want to be in the company of her very “OUT” and “PROUD” lover. They felt her lover went overboard with her being “OUT.” They chose not to spend time with P.A. when her lover was present.

When I asked her what her biggest challenges are being both Deaf and lesbian she responded with, “I feel awkward.” The reason why, she said, was because if she were to tell someone she is lesbian, she would not know whether she would be accepted or rejected. She felt some people are open minded and some are not. The other big challenge for her was in regard to communication. She shared that it is slightly easier now with the advances in technology such as text messages, email, FaceTime, Skype, and video phones. In the past, she had to write notes back and forth with people who were hearing. Now, it is easier than before, but is still a burden when communication is difficult.

I related to P.A.'s feelings about revealing her sexual identity to others. It is a difficult decision to make as we do not know how people will respond. At one point, years ago, I was afraid to share with some people that I was lesbian as I did not want to be rejected. Like P.A. I shared my sexual identity only with those whom I trusted. I had a sense of who would accept me and who would reject me. When I first joined a lesbian, feminist chorus in 1996, I stood in judgement of the "others." There were a variety of women in rehearsals who ranged by societal norms from very feminine in dress and mannerisms to very masculine in dress and mannerisms. I recall being a bit afraid as I had not been in the company of very masculine women prior to that. It was not until I got to know the women personally, that my mind was opened and accepting of our differences. Through the group dynamics, I learned about the women in the chorus, grew as a person and became much more accepting of women who looked and acted differently. I remain friends with several of my chorus buddies today. I do not think that P.A. has the same level of acceptance for those who are at the far ends of this Bell Curve, with those who are or appear radically different. She and I are different in that regard. We differ as far as lesbian and gay marriage is concerned, as well. I happily chose to get married last year at the courthouse with my family as witnesses. A month later, Linda (my wife) and I had a spiritual union in our back yard in front of eighty-five of our closest relatives and friends.

Years ago, I would never have been comfortable in doing so. I was not fully integrated with my sexual identity then, as Cass (1979) and Marcia (1966, 1987) confirm. Now, I introduce Linda as my wife or my partner. I feel that if people cannot accept me, then it is their problem, not mine. As I belong to the hearing majority culture, I do not typically have difficulty with communication as P.A. does in spoken English. However, there are times when I too must enlist the services of Sign Language interpreters, Spanish Interpreters, Bosnian Interpreters or

Vietnamese Interpreters for my students' parents who are either Deaf and use sign language or those who speak languages other than English. P.A. uses Sign Language Interpreters or Video Relay Interpreters all the time to communicate with hearing folks who do not sign. I empathize with her when there are barriers to communication. It makes it very difficult for all parties involved.

Queer Theory

Teresa de Lauretis, who is credited with coining the term *queer theory*, indicates it pertains at least three interrelated critical projects: a refusal of heterosexuality as the benchmark for all sexual formations; an attentiveness to gender capable of interrogating the frequent assumption that lesbian and gay studies is a single, homogeneous object; and an insistence on the multiple ways in which race crucially shapes sexual subjectivities (de Lauretis, 1990). She suggests that if the three-fold critiques are drawn together under the rubric of queer theory, is possible “to recast or reinvent the terms of our sexualities, to construct another discursive horizon, another way of thinking the sexual” (de Lauretis, 1990, p. iv). Queer is by definition whatever is at odds with the normal, the legitimate, the dominant. There is nothing in particular to which it refers. It is an identity without an essence. ‘Queer’ then, demarcates not a positivity but a positionality vis-à-vis the normative (Halperin, 1995, p. 62).

P.A. identifies herself as a lesbian. I identify myself as a lesbian, as well. As P.A. stated in the interviews, she does not “come out” to everyone. She disclosed her identity to those with whom she is most comfortable sharing. She was adamant that she would not “come out” to students in her care in the after-school program for the DHH. It is a risk she simply was not willing not take. I am “out” in all aspects of my life except with my elementary students. If a child asks me a question, I answer the question without elaborating or giving information that

was not specifically asked. I keep pictures of my partner on my desk and they ask me questions about her. I have told students that she is my best friend and I love her. They seem to be OK with that response. The parents and guardians of my students probably have seen the pictures when they come in for conferences or IEP meetings, but no one has asked about them. If they did, I would tell them that she is my partner.

Deaf Identity and Schools

In this interview it was very apparent that P.A. much prefers residential Deaf school over mainstream public schools especially for middle and high school students who are severely to profoundly Deaf and have no ability to tap into any usable residual hearing. She felt mainstream programs better serve those who are hard of hearing and who are able to access auditory information with amplification. She notices that there are many more students today who have been diagnosed with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) and are taking medication. She felt the activities and programs today are better than when she was in school.

P.A. and I differ as far as education is concerned. I feel there is a lot of good that happens in all school programs. The only issue I have with the residential schools is that they are often several hours away from the child's home, family and community. In our state, the kids are fortunate to come home every weekend on the bus. For some, it is an excellent option. I feel we have excellent educators in the public schools in my district that house the Deaf education programs.

In our area, there are numerous activities and after school events and programs offered for the DHH unlike other counties. Since I have worked in the district for 32 years, I know I am biased toward our programs. When I have attended professional conferences for Teachers of the DHH in the state, I share information with my colleagues about our district's programs for the

DHH, they are shocked to know of our program design, our collaboration with an outside agency that we (teachers of the Deaf) have built with them to provide services and activities for the children and families, such as after school tutoring, sibling groups for children who have DHH siblings and how to deal with their differences, field trips, guest speakers on DHH related topics, summer camps, ASL classes, audiologists to provide information to students and parents on hearing loss, hearing aids, cochlear implants, interpreters and interpreting services and how to use them, IEPs, and how to advocate for yourself or your child. These provisions are above and beyond those which are provided by the district. My colleagues from other districts are envious of what we provide for our children and families because their districts do not have near the services and activities we provide. I am proud of the work we do with our DHH children and families.

Marriage

As far as P.A. addressing the topic of marriage, she said that if she finds the right partner, she would not get married. However, I am not sure if she will stick to this notion of marriage. She seemed unsure during the interview when the topic of marriage was discussed. She shared that she does not want to get married because there are too many people who get divorced and she does not want that to happen to her. I went through a horrible break up (divorce and lawsuit) with my previous partner and I was not sure at my age, I was 50 years old at the time, that I would find love again. Fortunately, I did. We fell in love and we got married last year. I believe in marriage and commitment. With the ruling of the Supreme Court of the United States in June of 2015, my partner and I decided that since we always wanted to get married legally, now we had the right to do so and we did. I am of the “never say never” philosophy. I think it depends on the people involved and their ideas toward marriage.

Religion

In the interviews with P.A., the topic of religion emerged several times. She felt strongly that those who deem themselves religious, should respect us (LGBT) and likewise we should respect them. She repeated several times that we need to have mutual respect for each other and to look for the good in everyone. She did not agree that the Bible is against people who are LGBT. She felt that we should all “live and let live” and if someone disagrees, to just leave her alone because she said, “...I have been independent for so long, that I don’t care what anyone thinks.”

Ideally, I agree it would be wonderful if everyone could respect the religious beliefs of others, unfortunately, I do not see that happening soon, especially in light of the current climate in which the current political administration is spewing condoning violence, hate, and greed. I consider myself to be a spiritual person versus a religious one. If we show love, compassion, and humanity toward each other and act accordingly, it would be a better world. I believe in treating others as you want to be treated and in being kind. I continue to live my life this way.

Implications for Practice

The implications for practice in educating people about individuals who are DHH are to teach about the Deaf community as being different due to their being a linguistic and cultural minority versus being disabled. In addition, I teach from the historical perspective of American Education of the Deaf that originated in France and was brought to the United States in the 1800s by Thomas M. Gallaudet. At that time, Deaf children were taught through a bi-lingual (ASL and English), bi-cultural (Deaf Culture and American Societal Culture) method also referred to as the bi-bi method. The students were exposed to this method by educators both hearing and Deaf who were using ASL as the primary mode of communication. The students used ASL and learned

English by reading and writing. For those children who were able to access spoken language with residual hearing, speech therapy was provided (Lane et al., 1996). The bi-bi method was very successful for over 60 years, until the Milan Conference of 1880, when manual communication (ASL) was outlawed internationally which had a profoundly negative effect on education of the students in the American schools for the Deaf. Oral only methods replaced the bi-bi method. The results since then have been staggering for the students. Lane et al. (1996, p. 292), “We know that one hundred years of oralism was disastrous for Deaf education.” Lane et al. (1996, p. 320) went on to state that “...the average Deaf student leaves school with only a third-grade command of English, and only one Deaf student in ten reads at eighth-grade level or better.” The above-stated reasons are why I believe in the bi-bi method of education for DHH children. My goal for my students is literacy. Sixteen out of fifty U.S. states thus far have adopted the Bill of Rights for Deaf and Hard of Hearing Children (National Association of the Deaf, 2018). This bill supports equal access for DHH children in a bi-bi educational approach, which includes early intervention programs, access to peers and professionals who use ASL, access to mainstream curriculum with accommodations and related services, access to training that promotes social and emotional health and skills, and Deaf adult role models who foster positive self-esteem and self-worth (National Association of the Deaf, 2018).

I am fortunate to work in a district where our DHH Program supports and refines these efforts. I have spent my career as an elementary school Deaf Educator, teaching, learning, and working with my students and colleagues toward insuring that the children have language (ASL and English) literacy, and grade level expectations when they leave the elementary school to be on grade level upon entering middle school. I am a founding member of the Family Center on Deafness, Pinellas County, Florida (FCD), a non-profit organization that is in collaboration with

our school district. FCD provides resources, services, classes, activities, workshops, summer camps, field trips, parent support groups, counseling services, and referrals for children and families who have DHH individuals in their households. My Deaf education colleagues and I have spent years building these programs to support the Deaf children and families in our community above and beyond what is provided to them by the district school system. In writing this section, I recalled a technical assistance paper that I was given by a mentor and former professor of mine. It was a research paper written by members of the Linguistics and Interpreting Department at Gallaudet University. I researched and found it. It is called *Unlocking the Curriculum: Principles for Achieving Access in Deaf Education* (Johnson et al., 1989). The reason I remember it so well is because it was written during a time when we, as Deaf educators were still under fire by the rule of oralism. The paper was written in 1989 about 100 years after the rule of law changed to oral only methods in the United States, due to the Milan Conference of 1880. The research paper supported the bi-bi method as the best way to reach and teach Deaf children, through the use of ASL. My professor stressed this method knowing we were in the crux of oralism. He lived it. He knew it was the right methodology to use with the children. He was a Child of Deaf Adults (CODAs). Both of his parents were Deaf, as was his brother. He had over 40 years of experience in Deaf education, as well as growing up in a Deaf family. The paper was published at a time when cochlear implants and hearing aids were touted by many oral-auralists in the medical profession (e.g., Ear, Nose, and Throat surgeons, Audiologists, and Speech-Language Pathologists) as the “end all, be all,” or “cure” for children who are DHH. We, the Deaf educators in the classrooms, knew better not only from our training in the research methods (oral versus manual) we learned but from our years of classroom experience working with the students. The publishing and reading of that paper validated, once again for me, that the

bi-bi method was the correct method to use with my students. I have not regretted using the bi-bi method and the additional therapies (speech therapy, language therapy, occupational therapy, physical therapy, and auditory training and counseling) that my individual students require to be successful in the academic environment. From then until now, in some programs across the country, there has been a shift back to the use of the bi-lingual, bi-cultural methods in the education of the DHH. In addition, students who have access to hearing via hearing aids or cochlear implants may benefit from speech therapy, language therapy, auditory training therapy in addition to the use of ASL. Learning a second language (English) is accepted in most cultures. It is not a hindrance to speech as some in the field of deafness would have us believe. Many of our parents report that several audiologists have advised them against using sign language as their “child will not learn to talk.” This is simply not true. The research paper by Johnson et al. (1989) is just one source that rebukes that misinformation. In my years of experience, I have had students who learned ASL as a first language and English as a second language. In addition, they used amplification (hearing aids or cochlear implants). The students are fluent in both languages. In addition, using the first language (ASL) to teach English and receiving speech and language therapy support them in writing in English and learning to talk. I believe that Deaf children have the right to equal access of both ASL and English in a dual language, dual cultural educational program. In my experience, when academics are presented via the bi-bi method, many of our Deaf children experience academic success and have positive self-esteem due to their success. We do not see the same level of success when the children arrive in our program having little or no language skills in either ASL, English, or any other language, especially if they enter at the age of 4 or 5. At that age, we are nearing the end of our opportune window for learning language, which ideally is birth to 5 years of age. We then we must work twice as hard to try to get them

“caught up.” This is a difficult task and is not always successful. Ideally, bi-bi with early intervention programs from birth to age 5 represent the best option for the children.

LGBT

Likewise, when discussing people who are LGBT, I would teach about our being different not mentally ill or disordered as it was once thought by mental health professionals until 1973. In December of 1973, the American Psychological Association (APA), removed being homosexual, as a mental illness from the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (Dresher, 2015). The American Psychological Association now accepts a normal variant view of homosexuality. Similarly, Crip Theory (McRuer, 2006) destabilizes disability and homosexual/queer as abnormal states of being from the former thinking of able-bodied and heterosexual as the normal states of being.

I would teach from the historical perspective of the LGBT Rights Movement in the United States. June 26th to 27th of 2018 marks the 49th anniversary of the catalyst that pushed the LGBT community forward to fight for equal rights due to the continuous police harassment and raids of the lesbian/gay bar *The Stonewall Inn* in New York City (Jagose, 1996, p. 30). Although we (LGBT) have fought and won many of our rights, including the U.S. Supreme Court decision that legalized gay marriage nationwide on June 26th, 2015. There are other issues for which we still fight, such as discrimination in housing, employment, health insurance, prison treatment, parental rights/adoption, bathroom options, schools and other public accommodations. Moreover, we experience violence/hate crimes, conversion therapy (for those who are minors), and we would like to be accepted by our families, neighbors, friends and colleagues. In June of 2018, we just celebrated LGBT PRIDE in our community. Why do we celebrate with LGBT PRIDE? We as an LGBT community have fought battles for equal rights, dignity, and respect as

a community of beings. We have been dismissed, rejected and attacked for being who we are and for loving those whom we love. We celebrate and participate in PRIDE events to be visible, have a sense of belonging and offer hope to those who may not have any, due to isolation and fear of “coming out.” We celebrate our history. For Baby Boomers like me who are LGBT, it is a reflective look back to remember from where we started and to acknowledge how far we have come, with full knowledge that there is more work to be done.

Ideally, “coming out” is preferred to staying “in the closet.” As discussed previously, “coming out” is risky; however, some of the literature supports disclosure. For example, in *Crip Theory*, McRuer (2006, p. 76) states, “[c]all me crip, but I do believe that such unlikely identifications, as well as yet-to-be-imagined (queer and disabled) cultures of downward redistribution, remain possible.” In queer theory, it is stated:

...the logics of “coming out” assume that homosexuality is not simply a private aspect of the individual, relevant only to friends and colleagues. Instead it is potentially a transformative identity that must be avowed publicly until it is no longer a shameful secret but a legitimately recognized way of being in the world. (Jagose, 1996, p. 38)

Much has changed since 1996 when Jagose wrote the above text. However, my understanding of this quote is that although disclosure is a private, personal act, in order to bring forth change, social justice and free the LGBT community from society’s oppressive nature, we must make ourselves known as “out” individuals so that we are recognized as people who are not ashamed of who we are and whom we love and that we too have a right to simply ‘be’ in the world.

Crawley (2009) stated that queer theory suggests that by self-disclosure, minds are opening “to the flexibility of sexuality, identity, and the presentation of self...” (p. 210). My

understanding of Crawley (2009) is that with self-disclosure and being “out” and visible in society, society will ‘see’ us and realize that there are millions of us, not just a few. We are here, and we will remain.

Finally, in Feminist Theory, Beck stated the following:

If she discloses who she is, particularly if [a woman] stands in opposition to the prevailing patriarchal orthodoxies (for instance, if she comes out as a lesbian), then she is using herself and her position as knower to help bring about social change and to break stereotypes and prejudices. (Beck, 1983, p. 162)

Through time, the above quotes have relevance as one takes a reflective glance back, as this is indicative of what has happened throughout the LGBT timeline to bring us to where we are in the present.

Integration of Dual Identities

Although we are alike in many respects, we too have differences. When we self-identify as Deaf lesbian or as a hearing ally of the Deaf and lesbian, we are truly integrating all aspects of our dual identities. To achieve our authentic selves, we continuously evolve into our beings through changing and becoming aware, not only of ourselves but of others and the world around us. Self-authenticity, then, is a journey and not a destination at which we arrive. We are individuals that change and evolve constantly throughout our lives depending on situations and circumstances that affect and influence us. When we move toward a more authentic sense of self, I believe that we are happier individuals, more self-confident, and have a greater sense of self-worth. This affects our relationships, our work our dreams and our goals. I know that for me, when I was able to be honest with myself and others to whom I disclosed my sexuality, it created a big difference in my life. I was not experiencing the fear and self-hate I once experienced while

I chose to stay “in the closet.” Being “out” of the closet frees us to be who we truly are. It has helped me to know, remember and understand what it **is** to be different and marginalized. To be “out” has helped me to remember what it was like to be “in the closet.” A place where I no longer want to be. By being our authentic selves, we break the prejudices and stereotypes that once bound us. Freedom and authenticity are what we want not only for ourselves, but for our friends, families, and most especially our students. The integration of our dual (all of our) identities without prejudice or judgement by others is possible. We do this through ‘self’ and ‘other’ awareness to bring forth social change and acceptance of differences. There is a place for everyone to be embraced. When once we were offended by derogatory terms and labeled as such (queer, lesbian, dyke, faggot, lezzie, gimp, crip, Deaf, Deafie, or hearie), we now accept and embrace these labels. We make the decision to “come out” or “come out crip,” when and as we are ready to do so, exactly as we are, in our own way of being, in our own time, and on our own terms.

Limitations of the Study

The first limitation of the study was that I selected one participant. Therefore, I could not compare her experiences to those of other participants to determine whether or not they would have been the same. Secondly, the transcriptions from ASL to English were time-consuming. Had I used a sign language interpreter, it may have saved time; however, I preferred to do this myself, as I was totally immersed in the data. The sensitive nature of the participant sharing her “coming out” story was a third limitation. Some emotions were evoked in the telling of her story. I believe I provided an ethos of caring and was sensitive, gentle, and kind during the interviews and her telling. Lastly, there was limited academic literature on this particular population of women; therefore, further research is needed.

Recommendations for Future Research

The current academic literature with regard to the population of women who identify as Deaf lesbians is very limited. I found only four pieces of literature that have resulted from studies that merged the two identities, or at least considered them simultaneously within a study. With this in mind, I believe that further study focused on this population would be helpful to learn more about women who are Deaf lesbians and add to the limited literature base that currently exists. Other areas that could be addressed with this population of women is learning of their needs and wants, such as quality interpreting services, accessibility and equal access issues in the workplace, community, and educational settings. One could focus on the women's access to mental health professionals and physicians, including primary care, gynecological and obstetric, dental, vision, and hospitals. In addition, one could focus on what access they have to community activities and services that are interpreted as well as LGBT events.

Reflection

When reminiscing about going through the process of this study, I arrived back at the interviews I conducted with my participant. The first interview was a bit uncomfortable for her and me because neither one of us knew what to expect as the experience was new to both of us. After we went through the formalities of the research study, we became more at ease with each other, and our conversation (in ASL) flowed more smoothly. Based on the nature of the subject matter of growing up Deaf, being the only child at home, and with no one in her family able to sign/communicate with her, her emotions were evoked. Some were happy and some were sad memories. P.A. showed happy and excited emotions when she was sharing about growing up and attending the residential school for the Deaf. By her signing, facial expressions and body

language it was obvious that after her initial shock of being left at the school at the age of 3, once she adjusted to campus life, she thrived. It was a good fit for her. Today, she remains lifelong friends with several of her peers and one coach. The interviews were more difficult for her to share what it was like for her to “come out” with her lesbian identity than her Deaf identity. She self-identifies as lesbian however she is not completely “out” in all aspects of her life. Her Deaf identity is definitely stronger than her lesbian identity. Although she seemed to want to be in a relationship and have a partner, she did not seem to get her hopes up about it nor does she pursue finding a partner. I realize that communication is a huge factor in her finding a partner who can communicate with her using ASL. She shared that she has a core group of friends who are also Deaf lesbians with whom she socializes and confides. She spends most of her free time going to parks and nature preserves and taking pictures of animals. Her other love is the beach. We share our love for the beach in common.

When I was home and working on my narrative, I became very emotional thinking back on my Nana and what an influence and impact she had on me. She was my greatest cheerleader. I had not taken the time recently to think about her and when I did, I began crying. She was my rock and my confidant for my first 19 years. I realized how much she taught me, meant to me, and how much I miss her. She loved me unconditionally and she was kind, gentle, and loving to all of those she met. I believe I learned those traits from her and my parents. While viewing and reviewing the video of the interviews and transcripts, which happened to be my favorite part of the project, I was able to reflect on my “coming out” process and how our stories were somewhat similar. I look back and recall where I was as a 17-year-old kid and where I am now. I am amazed by the journey! I began my “coming out” when I was a junior in high school. I did not disclose myself to some family and friends until several years later in college. In the beginning

of my journey, I was a “behind the scenes” activist helping out where I could to move our LGBT community forward. Fast forward to just prior to entering the doctoral program and I was in the middle of the commotion as volunteer coordinator for the Tampa International Gay and Lesbian Film Festival (TIGLFF). As the old commercial said, “You’ve come a long way baby!” I believe I have. I never thought I would be writing a dissertation on Deaf lesbian identity AND including myself in the narrative! When I arrived in the program, I had not ever heard of qualitative studies. After a few years, I knew I wanted to do qualitative work, but was learning about the “how to do” the various methods. This journey has not been easy. Through the past 8 years of being in the doctoral program, my life has taken many turns — some reality slaps and some awesome events. I went through a horrible divorce and lawsuit my second year into the program, which almost caused me to quit. I have never been a quitter so quitting seemed foreign to me, but I came very close. Something inside me and the love and support I had from many people nudged me on. My Mom’s health, surgeries, and hospitalizations took their toll and I remember bringing my books, articles and computer to her bedside and while she slept, I worked. My partner too had had two back surgeries, three knee operations, and several spinal injections to try to relieve her constant back and knee pain. I worked at her bedside, too. I persevered. It took me longer than I expected, but I continued forward. Were it not for your care and support as my committee, I do not think I would be finishing this dissertation now. We made it through the faculty changes in the college and the department. You have traveled this journey with me and I am humbled and grateful to the four of you. From the beginning of the program all of the professors kept saying “Trust the process.” It was not an easy journey yet a long, rewarding and satisfactory one for me. Conducting the interviews with P.A. was a bit frightening at first as I did not know how well we would work together. After the first interview, however, I felt that we

related well and the future interviews we more relaxed and went smoothly. P.A. helped me realize that there continues to be more work to be done, as far as education and outreach is concerned, with the Deaf lesbian population. I came to realize that due to her using ASL, P.A. is limited in gaining access to activities in which she may have an interest, due to the fact that many activities, especially those provided by non-profit organizations, are not required to provide sign language interpretation. I learned that she spends much of her free time with her best friends who are Deaf and a few who are lesbian as well. She is proud of being Deaf and she loves her language and culture. Her passion is photography and she spends time after work and on weekends going to parks and nature preserves to take pictures of flowers, plants, animals, and the water. She opened my eyes to the fact that she lacks information or common knowledge that we as hearing people take for granted. We hear and we learn through that sense. She uses her eyes and although she 'sees' she must have someone sign to her to put the language with the 'seeing' in order for her to understand and learn. Her stories of growing up in the residential school for the Deaf helped me to realize why she has a "family of choice" and how much she enjoyed being a student there. She shared that she would like to have a partner who wants to travel with her and who is interested in photography. The main issue for her with having a partner and a relationship is that that in order to communicate, the partner must be willing or must know some sign language in order to be able to communicate with P.A. As she shared in one of the interviews, she is willing to teach her partner how to sign. I learned more from her and about living in a residential school for the Deaf than I knew prior to our interviews. She has a keen sense of humor and she loves to tease and have fun. I had a difficult time getting her to elaborate on certain topics. I would ask a question and she would answer it without expanding on the answer unless I continued to probe with further questions. She was very literal as is my

experience with other Deaf people I know. I have shared her story and added to the academic literature base on the population of Deaf lesbians. I feel from our last interview together that she was becoming more open to the idea of “coming out” when people ask her if she is lesbian than she was in other interviews. She referred to me as a “strong lesbian” which I take as a compliment because I shared my story with her and she knows I am “out.” Perhaps, through this experience, she learned from me, as well. This thought made me smile because perhaps my sharing took away a little of her fear of being “out” and had a slight influence on her. I owe P.A. a debt of gratitude that I will never be able to repay. I do not know where this journey will lead me however, I know in persevering, I look forward to the next leg of the journey and I KNOW I will arrive.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Letter Advertising Study



Noël E. Cherasaro
Doctoral Candidate
University of South Florida
cherasar@mail.usf.edu
CherasaroN@pcsb.org
813-508-0640 voice/text
Study Number: Pro00031407

Dear Colleagues,
Greetings all! I hope this finds you well! As you know, I am working on completing my dissertation. My research topic is: Deaf lesbian Identity.

The criteria I will employ for selection of participants are:

- They are women
- Are 18 years old or older
- Embrace the Deaf community and culture using ASL as their primary means of communication
- Self-identify as being Deaf and lesbian
- Share their experiences about “coming out” if they are or not
- Agree to at least three face-to-face and/or Video-relay or SKYPE videotaped interviews for a minimum of 1 hour each to a maximum of 2 hours each and read relevant documents for accuracy/trustworthiness and truthfulness
- Location of the face-to-face interviews will be at a place of convenience and chosen by the participants
- Agree to reflect weekly using Google Docs to share with me their thoughts, ideas and further questions that the interviews and process may bring forth. Participation will be 30 minutes minimum to 1 hour maximum per week. I will ask the participants to reflect on thoughts that come up after the interview(s) and what they are thinking and feeling during the week. I chose to use Google Docs instead of public Blogs as I will be the only one with access to the reflections. I will have them sent to my e-mail at USF which is private and password protected

If you know of any women who would be interested in participating in my study, please have them contact me at the e-mail addresses or by phone as listed above.

Thanks in advance for your assistance with this!

All the best,

Noël E. Cherasaro
Doctoral Candidate
University of South Florida

Appendix B: Informed Consent Form



Informed Consent to Participate in Research Involving Minimal Risk

Pro # 00031407

You are being asked to take part in a research study. Research studies include only people who choose to take part. This document is called an informed consent form. Please read this information carefully and take your time making your decision. Ask the researcher or study staff to discuss this consent form with you, please ask him/her to explain any words or information you do not clearly understand. The nature of the study, risks, inconveniences, discomforts, and other important information about the study are listed below.

We are asking you to take part in a research study called:
DEAF LESBIAN IDENTITY

The person who is in charge of this research study is Noël Cherasaro. This person is called the Principal Investigator. However, other research staff may be involved and can act on behalf of the person in charge. She is being guided in this research by Dr. Phyllis Jones and Dr. James King

The research will be conducted at the University of South Florida.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to find out about your life experiences of being both Deaf and lesbian, living in a hearing and straight (heteronormative) world. In addition, to learn when you realized you were Deaf, began using American Sign Language (ASL) and when you realized you were lesbian and how this has affected/impacted you and your life.

Why are you being asked to take part?

We are asking you to take part in this research study because you self-identify as both Deaf and lesbian.

Study Procedures

If you take part in this study, you will be asked to:

Participate in at least 3 video recorded interviews that will take about an hour to an hour and a half each.

Review the P.I.'s transcriptions for accuracy.

The duration of the participation will be the 3 videotaped interviews of a minimum of 1 hour to a maximum of 2 hours each, reviewing the transcripts from the interviews for accuracy and keeping notes and questions about the process for further discussion

Agree to reflect weekly using Google Docs to share with me your thoughts, ideas and further questions that the interviews and process may bring forth. Participation will be 30 minutes minimum to 1 hour maximum per week. I will ask that you reflect on thoughts that come up after the interview(s) and what you are thinking and feeling during the week. I chose to use Google Docs instead of public Blogs as I will be the only one with access to the reflections. I will have you send the documents to my e-mail at USF which is private and password protected.

The anticipated duration of the process will be no longer than the 15-week semester. The interviews will take place at a location of your comfort and choosing however, there are certain risks to being interviewed in a public place (i.e., a lack of privacy). I will leave the location choice up to you.

The interviews will be videotaped. The only people who will have access to the video-tapes are the Deaf Certified Interpreter, my 2 Professors and me. I will keep the video-tapes for 5 years after the dissertation is completed and I graduate from USF. I will then shred the documents and delete and destroy the video-tapes.

Total Number of Participants

About 3 individuals will take part in this study at USF

Alternatives / Voluntary Participation / Withdrawal

You should only take part in this study if you want to volunteer. You should not feel that there is any pressure to take part in the study. You are free to participate in this research or withdraw at any time. There will be no penalty or loss of benefits you are entitled to receive if you stop taking part in this study.

Benefits

You will receive no benefit(s) by participating in this research study.

Risks or Discomfort

This research is considered to be minimal risk. That means that the risks associated with this study are the same as what you face every day. There are no known additional risks to those who take part in this study.

Compensation

You will receive no payment or other compensation for taking part in this study.

Costs

It will not cost you anything to take part in the study.

Privacy and Confidentiality

We will keep your study records private and confidential. Certain people may need to see your study records. Anyone who looks at your records must keep them confidential. These individuals include:

- The research team, including the Principal Investigator, study coordinators, the Certified Deaf Interpreter and all other research staff.

- Certain government and university people who need to know more about the study, and individuals who provide oversight to ensure that we are doing the study in the right way.
- Any agency of the federal, state, or local government that regulates this research the Office for Human Research Protection (OHRP).
- The USF Institutional Review Board (IRB) and related staff who have oversight responsibilities for this study, including staff in USF Research Integrity and Compliance.

We may publish what we learn from this study. If we do, we will not include your name. We will not publish anything that would let people know who you are

You can get the answers to your questions, concerns, or complaints

If you have any questions, concerns or complaints about this study, or experience an unanticipated problem, call Noël Cherasaro at 813-508-0640 voice/text or cherasar@mail.usf.edu

If you have questions about your rights as a participant in this study, or have complaints, concerns or issues you want to discuss with someone outside the research, call the USF IRB at (813) 974-5638 or contact by email at RSCH-IRB@usf.edu.

Consent to Take Part in this Research Study

I freely give my consent to take part in this study DEAF LESBIAN IDENTITY. I understand that by signing this form I am agreeing to take part in research. I have received a copy of this form to take with me.

Signature of Person Taking Part in Study

Date

Printed Name of Person Taking Part in Study

Statement of Person Obtaining Informed Consent

I have carefully explained to the person taking part in the study what he or she can expect from their participation. I confirm that this research subject speaks the language that was used to explain this research and is receiving an informed consent form in their primary language. This research subject has provided legally effective informed consent.

Signature of Person obtaining Informed Consent

Date

Noël E. Cherasaro, Doctoral Candidate

Printed Name of Person Obtaining Informed Consent

Appendix C: IRB Approval



RESEARCH INTEGRITY AND COMPLIANCE
Institutional Review Boards, FWA No. 00001669
12901 Bruce B. Downs Blvd., MDC035 • Tampa, FL 33612-4799
(813) 974-5638 • FAX (813) 974-7091

8/24/2017

Noel Cherasaro
Teaching and Learning
Tampa, FL 33620

RE: **Expedited Approval for Initial Review**
IRB#: Pro00031407
Title: Deaf Lesbian Identity

Study Approval Period: 8/23/2017 to 8/23/2018

Dear Ms. Cherasaro:

On 8/23/2017, the Institutional Review Board (IRB) reviewed and **APPROVED** the above application and all documents contained within, including those outlined below.

Approved Item(s):

Protocol Document(s):

[IRB%2520Protocol%20Revised w Footer %20Version%201%20.docx](#)

Consent/Assent Document(s)*:

[Adult Minimal Risk doc.3.pdf](#)

*Please use only the official IRB stamped informed consent/assent document(s) found under the "Attachments" tab. Please note, these consent/assent documents are valid until the consent document is amended and approved.

It was the determination of the IRB that your study qualified for expedited review which includes activities that (1) present no more than minimal risk to human subjects, and (2) involve only procedures listed in one or more of the categories outlined below. The IRB may review research through the expedited review procedure authorized by 45CFR46.110 and 21 CFR 56.110. The research proposed in this study is categorized under the following expedited review category:

(6) Collection of data from voice, video, digital, or image recordings made for research purposes.

(7) Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior (including, but not limited to, research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices, and social behavior) or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies.

As the principal investigator of this study, it is your responsibility to conduct this study in accordance with IRB policies and procedures and as approved by the IRB. Any changes to the approved research must be submitted to the IRB for review and approval via an amendment. Additionally, all unanticipated problems must be reported to the USF IRB within five (5) calendar days.

We appreciate your dedication to the ethical conduct of human subject research at the University of South Florida and your continued commitment to human research protections. If you have any questions regarding this matter, please call 813-974-5638.

Sincerely,



John Schinka, Ph.D., Chairperson
USF Institutional Review Board