KEEPING LOVE "UNDER COVER": COMMUNICATION PRIVACY MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES IN LESBIAN RELATIONSHIPS WITH VARYING LEVELS OF PARTNER OPENNESS IN THE SOUTHERN UNITED STATES

by

MARY LEE CUNILL

(Under the Direction of Tina M. Harris)

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this research study is to examine lesbian relationships in the Southern United States where one partner is more open about their sexual orientation and one partner is more private about their sexual orientation through Petronio's (2002/2012) Communication Privacy Management Theory. This study contributes to the paucity of literature on communication in lesbian relationships. I assert that being in a lesbian relationship of varying levels of openness results in boundary turbulence as sharing about the relationship gets conflated with coming out and becoming part of a stigmatized group. This is a qualitative study using in-depth, face-to-face interviewing to collect interview data from five female-identified lesbians with past partnerships where they were more open about their sexual orientation than their partner and five female-identified lesbians with past partnerships where their partner was more open about their sexual orientation than they were. Initial participants were recruited through acquaintance relationships and then through snowball sampling. Results demonstrated an increase in long term relational satisfaction by openly discussing privacy navigation prior to entering the following unsupportive environments: religious settings, hometowns, small towns in

the Bible Belt, settings where children are present, financial dependence, and unaccepting/disapproving families. Results also showed that partners in relationships with varying levels of openness experienced increased boundary turbulence when they did not communicate their privacy expectations prior to entering these or any other perceived high-risk environments. Findings also demonstrated that, if navigated effectively, boundary turbulence can serve to build trust and strengthen relationships.

INDEX WORDS: lesbian relationships, Communication Privacy Management Theory, closet, gay, private, public, open, closeted, homosexual, same-sex relational communication

KEEPING LOVE "UNDER COVER": COMMUNICATION PRIVACY MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES IN LESBIAN RELATIONSHIPS WITH VARYING LEVELS OF PARTNER OPENNESS IN THE SOUTHERN UNITED STATES

by

MARY LEE CUNILL

B. A., University of West Florida, 2002

M. A. Florida State University, 2003

A Dissertation Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of The University of Georgia in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

ATHENS, GEORGIA

2015

KEEPING LOVE "UNDER COVER": COMMUNICATION PRIVACY MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES IN LESBIAN RELATIONSHIPS WITH VARYING LEVELS OF PARTNER OPENNESS IN THE SOUTHERN UNITED STATES

by

MARY LEE CUNILL

Major Professor:	Tina M. Harris
Committee:	Kelly Happe
	Jennifer A. Samp
	Kecia M. Thomas

Electronic Version Approved:

Suzanne Barbour
Dean of the Graduate School
The University of Georgia
August 2015

DEDICATION

This project is dedicated to all those who fought the fight before me, all those who are currently fighting it, and those who will fight in the future. Thank you for your dedication, perseverance, sacrifice, and the legacy you gave for me to live life to the fullest.

And to my Lord, who never left my side, except to carry me.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First and foremost, thank you to my advisor. In a world filled with horror stories, you are my angel. Each and every day for the past four years you have supported and encouraged me above and beyond your advisorly "duties." I am here today because of you. Thank you for helping me discover my voice as a scholar, teacher, and person. I am confident in myself today because you always had confidence in me. Thank you for the sleepless nights you spent editing my work, the last minute meetings you would fit into your busy schedule to calm my nerves and help me meet deadlines, and for always taking the time to call, text, email, or FaceTime to let me know you believed in me. You are the best, and I truly believe God chose you for me.

Thank you to my committee, Kelly Happe, Jennifer Samp, and Kecia Thomas for sharing your knowledge, talents, and skills with me. This paper is a compilation of interests that started in your courses: Feminist Theory, Relational Communication, and Psychology of Prejudice. For your constant support and encouragement, you have my deepest appreciation.

To my parents, Lynn and Buddy Cunill, who have always loved me deeply and supported me in each of my hair-brained schemes. Thank you for your willingness to lovingly support my recent endeavors even when it was incredibly challenging and required growing pains of our whole family. I always strive to make you and God proud by the seeds I plant in this life. Dad, thank you for planting the seed for my love of communication. From the time I was a toddler, you have taught me the value of talking things out. You instilled the gift of logic through playing games and quizzing me regularly as I grew up. Thank you for always working so hard to provide for our family; I got my work ethic from you. Mom, thank you for being my first, best, and

favorite teacher. You taught me to be creative, make learning fun, and were (and are) infinitely patient with me while teaching me how to discipline and harness my often distracted "giftedness" into productivity. Thank you for raising me around so many diverse individuals; I got my love of diversity from you.

Thank you to my grandparents, Marion and E.W. "Bill" Lee of Chipley, Florida. You taught me to love and give back to my community. Papa, you showed me that humble beginnings, perseverance, and integrity equals a life of great success. You and dad gave me an incredible gift by financially providing so that mom could stay home with me as a child. It was my foundation, and I can never thank you enough for establishing it so firmly and lovingly. Mam'a, you taught me love matters above all else: "Your Papa's family didn't have money or a car, but they would hug my neck and tell me they loved me every time we visited." My Mam'a and Papa loved their biological children, foster children, step-grandchildren, and son-in-law (my father) as their own. They taught me that family are those we choose to love and embrace. This lesson is the foundation of my scholarship. Thank you to Esther Cunill (Aunt Esther) and Vivian Cunill (Aunt Bebe). You instilled in me a love of learning and travel and taught me that everyone deserves love, even those who hurt you deeply. This is the foundation of my life. I am proud to carry the name of "Lee" and "Cunill" as I publish my scholarship.

To Deborah Robson, my boss at Valdosta State University, who encouraged me to return to school and facilitated me getting an assistantship; you made this possible. To my writing buddies: Miriam Brown Spiers, Amanda Thorson, and Brittany Brown for helping me persevere. To my counselor, Michelle Swagler, and my best friend, Angela Turner, who helped me love and respect myself unconditionally. To all those classmates, teachers, and colleagues at UGA who both accepted me exactly as I am and encouraged me to strive farther; I am living a full life

thanks to you. May God bless and reward you abundantly. To all those past teachers, camp counselors, youth ministers, friends, family, and colleagues who have made me who I am today; I can never repay you. May all I do make you proud and pay it forward.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Page

LIST OF TABLES

Page

LIST OF FIGURES

Page

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Southern Born,
Southern Grown.
The Southern Life
Is all I've Known

Is always ready to share the news but keeps the family secrets.
--'Rules for being a Southern Lady'

My Life as a Lesbian 'G.R.I.T.S'

"*They're called Sweet Potato Queens, Steel Magnolias, Ya-Ya Sisters, and Southern Belles, but at heart they're just plain G.R.I.T.S.—Girls Raised in the South!*

Born and raised in the south, "southern values" were instilled in me from a very young age: God, family, country; in that order. My mom and Mam'a constantly reminded me that "Growing up Southern is a privilege." My dad shares stories of when he served in the marines and was asked by women around the world to speak because they were enthralled with his accent. "What are you from?" they would ask, with baited breath. "L.A. ladies... lower Alabama."

I was warned about the "fruits and nuts" in California and those "Yankees with their unsweet tea." I was taught "if you can't say anything nice, don't say anything at all." I was taught that "we keep secrets among family." Even as I write this I can imagine my mom holding her head and telling me "Mam'a and Papa are rolling over in their graves." I wonder if earning a "PhD" can garner forgiveness.

I remember one time as a child getting "fussed at" for telling the neighbor my mother was irritated with his cat eating our birds. I learned then it was better to live with a problem than vocalize it, even if the problem was real. This lesson is one I have struggled with for a majority

of my life, and particularly these past seven years since I began dating women. I envision my parents cringing as they read this, my spilling of our private stories onto a public stage. It may be even more shameful than when I started dating a butch woman, a no-no in the south where femininity is based on being gentile and meek while graciously accepting men's chivalry. As a **G**irl **R**aised **I**n **T**he **S**outh (GRITS), my truth was that no amount of sweet tea and hospitality could paint over me being G-A-Y.

I love the hospitality of the south and desire to live in this area. However, ideologically, I stick out like a sore thumb. I am social constructionist (Pascale, 2010). I believe that there is no universal truth. I also believe, as Foucault (1990) observed, that all knowledge is both socially constructed and historically and culturally situated to produce and reproduce particular discourses, systems of signification, and power, including heteronormativity (Pascale, 2011). I recognize that social science research is a system of power and that "science" is a cultural activity. While I assert that none of the systems that have been created are objectively real, I recognize that the impacts and implications of these systems are "real" for those who find themselves constructed by them. Looking at this phenomenon systematically, we understand that systems, like relationships, are fluid entities characterized by change. In the yearlong course of following these 10 interviewees, one of the women who firmly identified as lesbian during her interview broke up with her partner three months later and has dated a man for the past six months. This speaks to the fluidity of these identities and relationships. My goal in this scholarship is to operate within this constructed system in an effort to provide resistance.

Born an able-bodied, middle class, white woman, I lived a fairly privileged existence until I came out as a lesbian at age 29. Raised in a conservative, religious, Southern household where I knew being a lesbian was unacceptable, I kept my identity and my romantic relationships

a secret. My then-partner lived a quiet and private life, only disclosing her sexual identity and our relationship to her closest friends who lived in another state. So, the fact that neither of us wanted to live openly was not an issue in our relationship. A few years and another relationship later, I began dating a woman who lived very openly as a lesbian. Her physical presentation was stereotypically butch, and whenever I was with her in public, I observed many people, whom I assumed would be cruel towards lesbians, treat her with kindness. However, because I still lived in fear, I was not able to be open about our relationship. My many efforts to keep my sexual identity private and, as a result, the relationship, led to much hurt, which ultimately played a large part in the ending of the relationship. In reflecting on the deterioration of both these relationships, I realized that competing realities-- one partner's world being a world of rejection and stigmatization, while the other partner's world was a world in which her sexual orientation did not strongly effect the way others related to her-- resulted in patterns of behavior that were harmful for both partners. As I sought reference material on how to work through this relational challenge, I noticed that none existed.

The awareness of the lack of communication scholarship on this topic and my desire to formally address this as a real communication issue has led to my pursuit of this research project. Toward this end, Chapter One of this paper will introduce the topic of inquiry by situating the current project within existing communication literature related to lesbian relationships, particularly focusing on indicators of success and failure (Beals, Impett & Peplau, 2002; Caldwell & Peplau, 1984; Connolly & Sicola, 2005; Day & Schoenrade, 2000; Haas & Stafford, 1998; Julien, Chartrand, Simard, Bouthillier & Bégin, 2003; Kurdek & Schmitt, 1986; Lannutti, 2008; Peplau, Cochran, Rook, & Padesky, 1978; Peplau, Padesky, & Hamilton, 1982). This thorough review of literature will provide the solid foundation upon which to build a rationale

for a study on this underresearched topic and communication phenomenon. Then, I will provide an overview of the trajectory of privacy in the field of communication, including how this phenomenon is defined and understood within the confines of Sandra Petronio's (2002/2012) Communication Privacy Management Theory (CPMT). Finally, I will discuss areas of possible challenge in privacy negotiation, in terms of how sharing relational status gets conflated with revealing of one's sexual identity, ultimately articulating an argument for the use of Communication Privacy Management Theory as the most appropriate theoretical framework. This theory will be critical to identifying communication skills/tactics that lesbian couples with varying levels of openness about their sexual orientation can use to navigate boundary conflict in a constructive manner that yields a mutually agreed upon outcome that the couple is committed to maintaining.

In Chapter Two, you will find a thorough description of the qualitative method used to gather this information, which included 10 in-depth, semi-structured interviews with female-identified lesbian adults from the Southern United States. In Chapter Three, I present a thematic analysis of the findings from the in-depth interviews with participants about these interactions and their experiences with these identity tensions. I argue that the findings will provide understanding of how self-identified lesbians who are either out or private best negotiate their identities. Ultimately, the findings will hopefully offer comfort to those struggling with this situation and recommendations on how to work together as a couple to use communication privacy navigation challenges to strengthen, rather than damage, intimate relationships. Finally, in Chapter Four, the Discussion, I will address the findings, their meanings, and the implications they have for future research regarding communication about lesbian identities within romantic and other relational contexts.

By using the theoretical lens of Communication Privacy Management Theory (Petronio, 2002/2012), I have been able to reveal a unique communication phenomenon that has yet to be explored in past research within the communication discipline. The communication strategies that partners choose to navigate these identities and relational issues is a rule-based system for managing private information. Through these in-depth interviews, data has been generated that can inform the proposal of both a new theory and new model to be explored in future research on this under researched phenomenon. These future efforts will be explored with a sense of urgency, as I strongly suspect, through previous studies, current legal changes, and this research study that, for lesbians, navigating privacy is a universal individual requirement and, depending on communication factors, has the potential to either strengthen or challenge lesbian relationships.

Problematizing the Closet

In doing this study that examines lesbians' openness in their romantic relationships, I want to take care to not recenter or reempower heteronormativity or "the closet." The societal expectation to subscribe to and navigate heteronormativity adds undue stress to Queer relationships that does not exist in straight relationships. Beyond societal expectations, subscribing to and navigating heteronormativity are sometimes life-preserving necessities. While this study focuses on couples in the United States of America, it is important to note that, as of 2014, homosexuality is punishable by death by public stoning in 10 of the world's countries, an increase from 5 countries in 2009. Other punishments in an additional 66 countries include fines, short and lifelong prison sentences, forced psychiatric treatment, banishment, whippings, and hard labor (International Lesbian Gay Bisexual Trans and Intersex Association, 2014). As this paragraph is being written, the Georgia Legislature is in the process of passing a bill that would legalize anti-gay discrimination. On March 6, 2015, the Senate passed the "Georgia Religious

Freedom Restoration Act" (Senate Committee on Judiciary, SB 129) a bill that secures the right of persons, including businesses, individuals, and state employees, to refuse service to LGBTQ Georgians and anyone else who “offends” their religious beliefs. A similar law was recently passed in Michigan that has already been used to deny emergency health care to LGBTQ individuals ("Religious protections Bill passes Michigan House," December, 4, 2014). Given the current state of affairs for LGBTQ rights in the United States, it is argued that while the closet is a social construction, it exists performatively, strongly affecting those who must navigate it (Butler & Fuss, 1991; Sedgwick, 1990; Seidman, Meeks, & Traschen, 1999). With this in mind, recent Queer and feminist theorists have focused on deconstructing the closet as well as other terminology that privileges heterosexuality over homosexuality (Sedgwick, 1990). For instance, I will use the term "straight" rather than heterosexual within this paper in order to disrupt the heterosexual/homosexual binary. Indeed, this binary has been deeply problematic, as it has historically been used to pathologize queer individuals, viewing "homosexuality" as a "neurosis" and "congenital abnormality" (Ellis, 2004). It is only by the creation of "homosexuality" as abnormal that "heterosexuality" came into being and defined as "normal." I will also use the acronym LGBQ rather than LGBTQ as is most commonly used in society to center this discussion on sexual orientations, in particular lesbian, gay, bisexual and queer, which were identifiers used by my participants during their identity development. I exclude “T” for trans* individuals, as this is a gender-related label, rather than a sexual orientation (trans* is the appropriate way to address all transgender individuals. The astrik promotes acceptance regardless of how they identify). This is not to say that trans* lesbians are not affected by similar privacy negotiation challenges but just to center this discussion on romantic relationships between same-sex attracted, female-identified individuals.

I use and avoid the aforementioned terms in an effort to disrupt linguistic determinism, or the idea that language and linguistic structures limit and play a deterministic role in human knowledge and thought processes, such as how we categorize people, places, and events, commit these to memory, and perceive the world around us. Essentially, since language plays a major role in defining our thought processes (Whorf, 2012), linguistic limitations contribute to and reinforce an oppressive culture. With a lack of language to describe varying aspects of lesbian relationships, it is difficult for lesbians to share their experiences. Likewise, this lack of language choices limits society's ability to recognize and comprehend the realities of lesbian relationships. While there have been challenges to the linguistic determinism hypothesis as being the sole cause of oppression, there is strong empirical evidence of a correlation between language and oppression (Ahearn, 2001), which is also supported by the personal accounts of participants in this study.

Kramarae (1981, 1984) observed a similar effect with Muted Group Theory (MGT). The primary premise of MGT is that language is bound by culture, and those who are in power have greater influence over language, resulting in dominant-biased language and etymology (Henley & Kramarae, 2001; Kramarae, Schulz & O'Barr, 1984; Lazar & Kramarae, 2011; Zhang & Kramarae, 2014). When the dominant group creates the words and meaning for the culture, it allows for the expression of their perspective and experiences. By extension, subjugated groups are excluded from meaning creation and without a simple means by which to express their unique perspectives and experiences. This leaves members of subjugated groups muted, or as "muted groups."

MGT examines language and its use through four structural frameworks: muted group framework, reconstructed psychoanalysis framework, speech styles framework, and strategy

framework. Kramarae argues that from a muted group perspective, those within marginalized communities do not have the appropriate language within the majority language system to effectively capture their existence. Essentially, language guides LGBQ individuals through the eyes of a heteronormative culture, rather than from the internal perspective of being LGBQ. The remaining three frameworks touch on the effect of this muting. Given that language is not designed from their perspective, those within marginalized groups, in the case of this study, lesbians, are left to attempt to discuss their experiences using language that frames them as the object rather than the subject. This limitation of speaking about oneself through an external lens as opposed to a self-created one affects an individual's comfort level with the primary language within their community (Kramarae, 2005).

The concept of applying linguistic relativism to address how society perceives women was originally forwarded by Ardener (1975) in social and cultural anthropology, and it was built upon by Kramarae (1981) to address language issues related to gender, particularly how, through language, sexism frames social interactions and evaluation of language use by men and women. MGT has been applied and used to explain specific linguistic phenomena in several areas, including gender, power, and miscommunication (Henley & Kramarae, 2001), language and power (Kramarae, Schulz, & O'Barr, 1984), and gender and power in discourse (Lazar & Kramarae, 2011). Over time, the theory has proven to be heuristic in its application to other oppressed groups due to such characteristics as race (Orbe & Allen, 2008; Rhodes, 1994), culture (Orbe, 1998a; Orbe, 1998b), and literacy level (Devine, 1994). MGT is also effective in explaining out-groups' inability to use the dominant culture's language to describe and understand their experiences and to communicate with other in-group members. MGT can encompass any individual whose thought processes cannot be conveyed with the given language.

It has even been used as foundational for Feminist Standpoint Theory (Wood, 2005) and Co-Cultural Theory (Orbe, 1998a; Orbe, 1998b). The microcultural group member's mutedness is due to the dominant group's deafness, or their refusal, unwillingness to accept, or ignorance of how their language may marginalize those outside their group. Members of the dominant group do not recognize the problem due to the language being compatible with their emotions and understandings of the world through the hegemonic perspective; as a result, they have the words to express themselves fluidly and clearly. In the case of sexual orientation, advantages such as these are termed heterosexual (Feigenbaum, 2007; Simoni & Walters, 2001) or "straight privilege" (Rocco & Gallagher, 2006).

Another demonstration of straight privilege is the overwhelming majority of relationship communication research focusing on heteronormative relationships. There is minimal communication research seeking to understand how lesbian relationships situated within a heteronormative world impact the relationships and self-concepts of those within those relationships. Being straight carries major privileges within our society, such as employment and housing protections and equal access to marriage and family benefits (Legate, Ryan & Weinstein, 2012), while the act of "coming out" as non-straight carries both calculated and unknown risks (Coleman, 1982; Corrigan & Matthews, 2003; Griffith & Hebl, 2002; Legate et al., 2012; McKenna & Bargh, 1998). Lesbian individuals understand that "outing" themselves is not simply revealing an identifying characteristic. Rather, "coming out" disclosures are irrevocable, and they often entail sacrificing social power by shifting oneself from the normative (straight) to socially stigmatized (gay) group. Particularly in the Southern United States, coming out realigns one from the normative, celebrated, and promoted class to a commonly stigmatized and systemically oppressed class. While individuals have their own purposes for coming out,

they do so with both conscious and unconscious knowledge that they are sacrificing their hetero-privilege and exposing themselves to possible danger. While one may come out in a seemingly safe environment, legal changes, such as the aforementioned "Georgia Religious Freedom Restoration Act" (Senate Committee on Judiciary, SB 129) currently moving through Georgia's legislation, can create a shifting political climate where a lesbian may be protected one day and left vulnerable the next. Even more common is the fact that individuals are protected in one geographic area, such as in metropolitan cities or diversity-embracing corporations, but left vulnerable when moving to areas that offer less or no protections for LGBQ individuals. Regardless of one's disclosure status, the act of managing sexual identity information causes uncertainty, stress, and tension (Cato & Canetto, 2003; Gramling, Carr, & McCain, 2000).

Individuals who choose not to disclose their sexual orientation also experience stress (Cato & Canetto, 2003). The decision to disclose is not a one-time choice, but a choice that must be navigated day-in and day-out over the course of lesbian individuals' lives. Each disclosure involves a risk-reward evaluation of these two stressful situations. Reasons for wanting to refrain from disclosing sexual identity vary among individuals, including loss of relationships (Gramling et al., 2000), disappointment from the listener, lack of familial and social support, and unpredictable reactions (Beaty, 1999). In lesbian relationships, partners who desire to be private about their sexual orientation may recognize that, by publicly acknowledging their partner, they are also covertly disclosing their sexual orientation. Open partners, or lesbians who are less private about their sexual orientation, may want to publicly recognize their relationship and even be inconvenienced by their inability to do so. Research suggests that the most common benefits of disclosing sexual orientation include improving current relationships (not just romantic)

because one is no longer hiding (Beaty, 1999) and cultivating a stronger sense of identity (Floyd & Bakeman, 2006), among others.

With this in mind, it was the goal of this study to concertedly avoid terminology that reinforces heteronormativity, including the term “closeted,” which implies that lesbians are rhetorically situated in a secretive space that is physically and visually separate from straight individuals (Sedgwick, 1990). It is also important to note that this research study strives for inclusion and respect. Among lesbian individuals, we are not giving preference to being open over being private about one’s sexual orientation. Rather, it is asserted that current dominant gender and sexual rhetoric limits fluidity in sexual preference and insists on categorizing individuals along a hetero/homo binary. Since straight sexuality is the presumed and protected sexual orientation status in American culture, in order for lesbian couples to receive recognition, each partner is faced with the dilemma of having to disclose potentially damaging and stigmatizing information. Thus, it is imperative to explore what privacy navigation rules individuals and couples are using to effectively maneuver this heteronormative culture.

Realizing the current heteronormative culture where most are presumed heterosexual until disclosing otherwise, it may be assumed that most, if not all, lesbian individuals will face the challenge of having to decide if and when to disclose their sexual identity to others (Legate et al., 2012). Additionally, this is not a single disclosure, but one that must be enacted over and over in various social contexts and relationships in order for the individual to receive full recognition within society. While it is recognized and understood that the "closet" is a social construction (Sedgwick, 1990), it does not negate the fact that it exists performatively. By extension, efforts to navigate this difficult terrain potentially add stressors to lesbian relationships that do not exist in straight relationships. Therefore, it is the goal of the current

study to understand these stressors and aid partners in identifying communication strategies that will assist them in alleviating challenges. Optimally, these communicative strategies will ultimately lead to increased personal and relational satisfaction for lesbian individuals as well as healthy romantic and non-romantic relationships within their social network.

Literature Review of Communication Privacy Management Theory

Communication Privacy Management Theory (Petronio, 2002/2012) is a rule-based theoretical approach that provides a system for examining the way people make decisions about balancing disclosure and privacy. This theory is practical and designed for application in explaining communicative issues about privacy faced on a daily basis. To illustrate the division between being public and private, CPMT uses a boundary metaphor. The metaphor of "boundary" is used to frame disclosures of "private information." CPMT uses this approach, with the understanding that "private information" is kept within the boundary (Petronio, Ellermers, Giles, & Gallois, 1998), rather than examining “privacy” as a phenomenon.

Defining Privacy, Private Information, and Private Disclosures

Schoeman (1984) asserted that privacy is a "claim, entitlement, or right of an individual to determine what information about himself or herself may be communicated to others” (p. 3). Communication Privacy Management Theory (Petronio, 2002/2012) confirmed Schoeman's assertion and was built around this perceived "right to privacy." Petronio (2002/2012) argued that people consider private information something they possess and own, and, as such, over which they desire control. With this in mind, they both reveal and conceal information in an effort to manage risk. Likewise, people feel violated when others share their information without their permission (Johnson, 1974).

CPMT has defined privacy as, “the feeling that one has the right to own private

information, either personally or collectively; consequently boundaries mark ownership lines for individuals" (Petronio, 2002, p. 6). Petronio has asserted that, "personal boundaries are those that manage private information about the self, while collectively held boundaries represent many different sorts of privacy boundary types" (Figure 1. Communication Privacy Management Diagram. Petronio, 2002, p. 7). Private disclosures occur at the intersection of managing one's public persona while preserving the dignity of one's private life (Westin, 1967). As such, collective private boundaries mean private information is co-owned by dyads, groups, families, organizations, or even societies. The collective has been defined by those who are "selected to become privy to the information that is about the group" (Petronio, 2002, p. 6) further explained:

> The theory of CPMT represents a map that presumes private disclosures are dialectical, that people make choices about revealing and concealing based on criteria and conditions they perceive as salient, and that individuals fundamentally believe they have a right to own and regular access to their private information. In order to fully grasp the nature of private disclosures, we not only have to consider the individual who is revealing or concealing, but we also must focus on how the decision affects other people. Thus, unlike previous research on "self" disclosure, CPMT assumes that others are also central to discerning the tension between being public and private. (p. 2)

As the literature has suggested, CPMT examines boundaries between relational partners as well as within groups, such as families, colleagues, and church friends (Petronio, 2002/2012).

Privacy as Tool for Hiding a Stigmatized Identity: Lesbianism

Privacy is valuable because it allows us to distinguish ourselves from each other. Privacy is tied to autonomy, maintaining personal dignity, and safeguarding oneself. While this is an

individual freedom or liberty, literature suggests that ownership rights are enmeshed in an ongoing legal debate (Alderman & Kennedy, 1997; Gavinson, 1980). Schoeman (1984) has observed that, despite legislative attempts to delineate ownership of information by offering clear boundaries between information that is public access versus that which is protected, there are ongoing legal controversies over personal and relational information. Regardless of the legal stance on private information, individuals still claim a violation of privacy when they feel someone attempt to take control over information they believe they own. This is particularly true in the United States' individualistic culture, where we value ownership and control (Bellman, Johnson, Kobrin, & Lohse, 2004; Krasnova, Veltri & Günther, 2012). Because the information belongs to us, we want to determine who is and is not privy to it. "Control… is one way of setting the conditions which make up privacy or for determining the content of the private activity" (Wolfe & Laufer, 1974, p. 13). When facing the situation of sharing or withholding private information, we are actually weighing the demands of the specific situation or relationship with our own needs.

Because of privacy's cultural value, people are willing to work hard to regain control of their information (Bellman et al., 2004; Krasnova et al., 2012; Schoeman, 1984). They may, for instance, cancel subscriptions, change doctors, change credit cards, use pseudonyms on social media, and, as this study argues, even change partners. Since being straight is the presumed, accepted, and celebrated norm in U.S. culture, a straight person's sexual orientation is not considered private information as we have defined it (Petronio, 2002/2012). However, since being lesbian, gay, bisexual, pansexual, omnisexual, queer, or any label other than straight is outside the privileged category, revealing these identities could be seen as private information. It depends on how the disclosing individual perceives the disclosure. If the lesbian lives a very

open life, then this disclosure may not be perceived as very risky for her. Or she may have come to grips with the risk and decided it is one she is willing to take. For the lesbian who is more private, this disclosure may be very risky and one to rarely be undertaken, as the real or perceived consequences may be dire (e.g., loss of job, familial rejection, physical harm).

Understanding that openness and privateness are fluid identities, I assert that the majority of lesbians lie somewhere in the middle (Legate et al., 2012). Based on previous literature and the stories of participants in this study, a segment of the lesbian population has identified some circumstances where they feel safe being open and others where they will either withhold this private information or not confirm their label if it is assumed by others. The desire to understand how individuals navigate their own private information within the context of a romantic relationship that, by its presence, upends each individual's privacy about their sexual orientation, is the basis of this study.

Co-Navigating Privacy: The Dialogic Nature of CPMT

3 secrets to speaking like a Southern Lady
1. Take your own sweet time.
2. Bat your eyelashes slowly and speak at the same tempo.
3. Add syllables whenever possible.

Petronio (2002/2012) has used the term "private disclosures" as opposed to self-disclosures to highlight the fact that CPMT centers/frames "private information" at the heart of the disclosure. This term has also drawn attention to the dialogical nature of private disclosures, as they are communicative, particularly in terms of negotiating boundaries, rather than monologic or about the self. In order to better understand the foundational theory of this research study, we will now examine the basic assumptions underlying CPMT.

CPMT makes three assumptions "[a]bout human nature congruent with rules and systems" (Petronio, 2002/2012, p. 87) First, humans are choice makers. CPMT is an evidence-

based theory about how individuals manage their own and others' private information. This assumption has argued that we choose what we want to keep private and what we want to disclose. Petronio further explained that, "[r]elational or personal needs are met by giving access or revealing private information, thereby creating a collective privacy boundary with others. Concealing information from others retains a personal privacy boundary, which works to protect an individual's privacy (2002, p. 87)."

Secondly, humans are rule makers and rule followers (Petronio, 2002/2012). Rule development is essential when considering the exchange of private information. CPMT suggests that people learn rules through processes of socialization and by negotiation with others. Rule properties, or "[t]he characteristics of a rule that reveal how stable or changeable it is (Petronio, 2002, p. 12)", help determine how much or how little information is shared. The theory's boundaries and boundary rules ultimately function to guide a variety of behaviors within different types of relationships.

Thirdly, humans' choices and rules are based on a consideration of others as well as themselves (Petronio, 2002/2012). Depending upon how comfortable one feels, the choices and rules may change. For instance, a person may feel more inclined to share delicate information because of their affinity for the individual, perceiving certain nonverbal symbols as signs of openness (i.e., a car with a Human Rights Campaign sticker), perceiving the environment as welcoming (i.e., at a Gay Pride event), or based on the previous positive interactions they have had with a particular person. These situations may work together to make the concealing individual feel more open to sharing because they feel less risk, and therefore are less cautious or guarded about the specific private information.

CPMT is also a dialectic theory, in that it subscribes to some similar assumptions as does Relational Dialectics Theory (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996). This includes the belief that relational life is characterized by change; one's interpersonal or social life may differ from another's due to certain revelations and experiences. Since not everyone experiences similar events, people, and opportunities, our relational lives are most likely different. Also, CPMT, like Relational Dialectics theory, keeps as foundational the assertion that contradiction is a fundamental aspect of relational life.

These assumptions illustrate a constitutive approach to communication. According to Baxter and Montgomery (1996), a constitutive approach to communication means that communication is a basic building block of social entities and is responsible for meaning creation and social construction of relationships and society. In the case of CPMT, when a person uses such an approach to their relationships, it functions to clarify how interpersonal communication defines and constructs the world around us, including ourselves and our personal relationships (Baxter, 2004; Holquist, 1990). Philosopher Mikhail Bakhtin argued that, "I achieve self-consciousness, I become myself only by revealing myself to another, through another and with another's help.... Cutting oneself off, isolating oneself, closing oneself off, those are the basic reasons for loss of self" (as translated by and quoted in Todorov, 1984, p.108). Baxter and Montgomery (1996) clarified this further:

> From the constitutive perspective of relational dialectics, relationships are close not because preformed selves get revealed but because selves are defined, or authored, in the interaction between relationship parties. Relationships are close to the extent that they enable selves to become. (p. 3)

As these scholars have suggested, the self is authored within relationships, and according to

CPMT, humans are intertwined, and it is this dialogic nature that ultimately shapes our communication (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996; Holquist, 1990). Baxter (2004) has further explained that, "the self, then, is invisible to itself and *dependent* (emphasis added) for its existence on the other. Self cannot be a unitary, autonomous phenomenon, according to dialogism; rather, it is a fluid and dynamic relation between self and other" (p. 109).

Critiques and Clarification of CPMT: Dualism versus Dialects

Baxter and Montgomery (1996) framed CPMT as being dualistic rather than dialectical. They argued that CPMT treats the opposing forces of privacy and disclosure as static in nature and independent of one another rather than being dynamic and coexisting in a parallel form. While earlier versions of CPMT have focused on equilibrium and balance and appeared more dualistic, CPMT in its current form is framed as a dialectical management system that takes into account the regulation of privacy, which simultaneously regulates the disclosure of private information (Petronio, 2000). According to Baxter and Montgomery (1996), there are four shared assumptions of dialectical perspectives: contradictions, dialectical change, praxis, and totality. Most dialectical theorists have focused on contradictions (Altman, 1981; Baxter & Montgomery, 1996; Rawlins, 1992), which are defined as "the dynamic interplay between unified oppositions" (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996, p.8). Baxter and Montgomery (1996) explain the two types of opposites: logical and functional.

> Logical opposites are defined as X and not X. Functional opposites, on the other hand, are identified as X *and* Y, where both X and Y are distinct features that function in incompatible ways such that each negates the other. (Baxter and Montgomery, 1996, page 8).

This differentiation is significant, as Petronio (2002) has asserted that CPMT uses the functional rather than the logical approach to opposites. As such, CPMT is not claiming that there is a contradiction between private versus not private, which is similar to Baxter and Montgomery's Relational Dialectics theory. Rather, CPMT suggests privacy and disclosure are functional opposites, as they have distinct features that are distinct from one another and function and incompatible ways. "Disclosure is not privacy and privacy does not represent the act of disclosure. Nevertheless the two concepts reflect polar opposites" (Petronio, 2002, p. 14). For open partners, there are minor and transparent privacy boundaries. When dating a private partner stress may be added to the open partner by asking them to manage both their own boundaries and another's boundary. Additionally, this situation can call for a stronger personal boundary where a transparent or weak one previously existed.

Another aspect of contradiction is the unity of opposites. This is defined in two ways. The first definition of the unity of identity suggests that each opposition "presupposes the existence of the other for its very meaning" (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996, p. 9). CPMT has adopted this perspective by arguing that disclosure is meaningful only in relationship to privacy; if no private information exists, then no disclosure can occur. The second definition of CPMT has also expanded to include interactive unity to address the privacy/disclosure opposition in relationships as well as other multiple other privacy dialectics including public/private, autonomy/connectedness, privacy/deception, and openness/closedness. While it may seem that the ideal would be equilibrium, a balance consistent with the underlying theory behind dialectics (a constant push and pull tension), Petronio (2002) offers that balance can be defined in terms of relative strengths. This means that building upon existing areas of openness in either partner while likewise respecting and adhering to desires for privacy, can provide a balanced and

mutually respectful relationship. To that end, this exploratory study seeks to examine which balance frameworks lesbian couples with varying outness are utilizing and what strategies are effective for producing and protecting long-term intimacy.

Balance Frameworks for GRITS

We greet one another with bits of gossip, not salutations. -Southern Belle Secrets

The reason southern belles have such big hair is because of all the gossip and secrets stored up in there. -Southern Belle Secrets

Achieving privacy navigation in a culture that simultaneously promotes family secret-keeping *and* gossip is challenging (Cohen, Vandello, Puente, & Rantilla, 1999). This dynamic is particularly challenging for women, as communicative forms of socialization are a gendered expectation in the south (Judge & Livingston, 2008; Powers, Suitor, Guerra, Shackelford, Mecom, & Gusman, 2003; Rice & Coates, 1995). With this in mind, it may be argued that lesbians are presented with an even greater challenge than those in straight relationships in terms of being expected to reveal private information to establish rapport. In terms of communication strategies, there are several balance frameworks that can be used to achieve balance when dialogically navigating private information. The first of these is polarization, or "disclosure, privacy, and secrecy as dominant forces that guide decisions about public access" (Petronio, 2002, p. xiv). In this sense, complete disclosure or complete secrecy prevails over the alternatives of disclosing in a balanced or meted out manner. People may keep secrets when they want to protect against offenses or worries. When secrets take over, there is a polar shift restricting access to this information. For example, there may a considerable shift from silence to full disclosure, or total openness without compromise. In either case, decisions are made that privilege either privacy *or* disclosure as the primary decision-making determinant in privacy navigation.

A second type of balance is equilibrium (Petronio, 2002, p. xiv). This kind of balance evolves when there is an attempt to develop stasis between disclosure, privacy, and secrecy. This is the more traditional view of balance. The amount of disclosure is equal to the amount of privacy and secrecy. This scenario is hard to maintain over the long-term because the disclosure may not be equal with that of privacy and secrecy. Keeping secrets requires a conscious effort (Wegner & Lane, 1995). According to the Preoccupation Model of Secrecy (Lane & Wegner, 1995; Wegner & Lane, 1995), when individuals strive to restrict access to secret information, they become preoccupied with mentally suppressing the information. This preoccupation causes mental exhaustion and challenges morality because people feel as if they are lying. "Secret-keepers are often placed in the unnerving position of having simultaneously to think about their cover-up and not to think about it" (Wegner & Lane, 1995, p. 31).

The third balance framework is weighted proportions (Petronio, 2002, p. xv). This refers to balance that gives more weight to some options and less to other options. This is different from polarization in that there are times when disclosure of some information is weighed more heavily than keeping it private or secret. Similarly, privacy might be more heavily weighted than disclosure or secrecy. The calculated risk of not disclosing and keeping the information private is considered in relationship to the risk of revealing.

Petronio (2002/2012) proposes that individuals use one of the aforementioned frameworks to control their privacy and disclosures, and by disclosing private information, we allow the listener to become co-owner in the information and share a co-boundary. In the case of lesbian relationships, when a lesbian who is more private about her sexual orientation enters into a relationship with a partner who is more open about her sexual orientation, it becomes necessary for the partners to renegotiate these personal boundaries, which have now become relational. For

the more open partner, she may view her sexual orientation as somewhat private information. For example, in the current study, several participants in the study identified as "open," yet no one claimed 100% openness. Most claimed being open from 70% to 99% of the time. Therefore, for a more open partner, sexual orientation could be public information, but it may also be somewhat private, just most likely less private than the "private" identified partner. For the private partner, she may view her sexual orientation as private information that she might sometimes share, thereby making it public. In the case of an open partner who does not perceive their sexual orientation as private, they become the co-owner of the private partner's private information: her sexual orientation. However, they also become co-owner of their relationship status, and, in order to respect the private partner's boundary of not disclosing her sexual orientation, information related to the romantic relationship now becomes imbricated with the private partner's sexual orientation. These choices ultimately make the romantic relationship private information for the private partner, but not the open partner. As such, the individuals are primed for what is considered “privacy boundary turbulence” (Petronio, 2002, p. 6), or the desire for both parties to have control over the private information boundaries with the understanding that revealing or concealing private information may lead to feeling vulnerable. Consequently, control is also important to ward off the potential for vulnerability (Petronio, 2002). Within these relationships, interpersonal struggles for control over private information can cause power struggles or power imbalances, depending upon how the couple navigates their communication.

Privacy Rule Management Processes

Hanna's Top Five Tips for Channeling Southern Charm

1. *Entertain as much as possible. There is never too small a cause for celebration.*
2. *Treat everyone as a dear friend. Chances are their mother has tea with your boyfriend's very opinionated aunt.*
3. *Expect a gentleman to open your door, order your drink, hail your cab, and pull out your chair*

4. *Use your fine china on weekdays, even if it can't go in the dishwasher.*
5. *Be a gracious and lively guest. Hostess gifts, genuine conversation, and thank you notes are a must.*

CPMT has asserted that we are taught privacy navigation rules through culture and interpersonal interactions. Being a rule-based theory, CPMT has further asserted that there are three rule management processes (Petronio, 2002/2012). The first rule is that people exercise control by implementing privacy rule foundations. Essentially, rules are formulated based on multiple variables that effect decision criteria. These include, but are not limited to, cultural, gendered, motivational, and contextual criteria. In the case of lesbian relationships in the Southern United States, there are conflicting criteria for revealing information (being a woman in the south) and remaining private (sexual orientation is a taboo topic). These criteria can be mandated within a dyad, small group, or larger community.

The second rule argues that as people reveal personal information, they view those to whom they disclose as co-owners of the information (Petronio, 2002/2012). CPM proposes that the primary private disclosure is a catalyst for boundary coordination because of unexpected guardianship of the information that is assumed by both the disclosed and the recipient. It can be inferred that this responsibility for shared information is an added stress on the collective relationship, as it requires the coordination of these collectively owned boundaries. Given the South's propensity to encourage gossip more so than other regions of the United States (Cohen et al., 1999), this provides an additional challenge to southern disclosers. Both personal and collective privacy management use three rule management operations: boundary linkage, boundary co-ownership/ownership rights, and boundary permeability. Boundary linkages represent connections forming boundaries, and specifically, boundary alliances, or the level of commitment a person has to negotiate rules for privacy management. In the case of this study, a

partner would have a strong allegiance and boundary linkage, while a stranger who observed a lesbian couple walking down the street may have a boundary linkage but no allegiance. Boundary ownership references the rights and privileges individuals perceive they have when others make them as co-owners of private information. However, boundary co-ownership begs negotiation, for with rights and privileges come felt obligations and expectations. Finally, boundary permeability relates to the degrees of revealing and concealing private information, from “open access (thin boundaries) to closed access (think boundaries)” (Petronio, 2002, p. 31).

Collective coordination patterns may vary and involve inclusive boundary coordination, intersected boundary coordination, and unified collective boundary coordination. Inclusive boundary coordination is where "person A knows more about person B's private information than person B knows about person A's” (Petronio, 2002, p.33), often resulting in a power differential that must be managed. Intersected boundary coordination is where person A and B share equitably. In unified collective boundary coordination, multiple individuals are held accountable and responsible for withholding private information. This may occur within families, small groups, or organizations. Within collective privacy patterns, co-owners determine rules that regulate linkages, permeability, and ownership as defined above. The difference is that instead of two people navigating the privacy, several are involved.

The third and final rule is that, while the objective is coordination, the outcome is often asynchrony (Petronio, 2002). When this occurs, it is called boundary turbulence, or discordant coordination, where owners or co-owners of private information need to take corrective action to reestablish synchronous boundary management. If both or all parties involved in privacy navigation maintain the rules established and agreed upon, then turbulence may not occur. However, given that this is challenging, particularly in today's age of technology where

information is sometimes shared unintentionally, boundary turbulence, or friction caused by a break in the privacy navigation rules, is quite common.

Managing Co-Boundaries

Southern girls don't gossip. We just tell it like it is.

Southern girls don't repeat gossip, so listen close the first time.

CPMT argues that boundary regulation occurs on two interrelated levels: personal management and collective systems (Petronio, 2002). When we control access to information on a personal level, managing private information belongs to us and the information is singularly owned. Collective management systems represent when we co-own private information. When we disclose private information to someone, whether the recipient wants to hear it or not (i.e., reluctant confidant) (Afifi, 2003), he or she is expected to take on a certain level of responsibility for managing the information revealed (Petronio, 2000). The challenge with the private disclosure of sexual orientation is that it is impossible to reveal a romantic relationship with someone of the same sex and not have that implicate the personal information of one's sexual orientation.

When we are told private information by others, we enter into a contract of responsibility to be co-owners of the information (Petronio, 2012). Control does not only serve to preserve ownership, but it also implies the notion of potential for vulnerability. According to CPMT, when we exercise varying levels of control of private information, we can have fixed boundaries resulting in high control or numerous secrets (Petronio, 2012). When an individual is used to maintaining moderate boundaries, given the nature of disclosure, these boundaries may eventually evolve into transparent boundaries with more openness and less control. Because we manage these boundaries with rules that we have developed and negotiated individually,

relationally, or in a collective system, if our individual or personal habit is to maintain transparent boundaries, shifting our day-to-day activities to maintain thick boundaries requested by a relational partner may prove challenging. This shift may even cause the more open partner to feel as if her personal rights are being infringed upon.

In a similar but vastly different situation, partners living with thick boundaries, or maintaining a strong sense of privacy, may experience challenges in adapting to more transparent, or more open, boundaries (Petronio, 2002). The choice to share information is based on a risk-benefit ratio. The perceived possibility of increased risk heightens the significance of trying to control boundaries in privacy management. For private individuals, the risks may seem too great to warrant disclosure. There is the possibility of losing family, friends, religions, jobs, or relationships. As such, maintaining these boundaries not only puts pressure on one's partner, but creates an overreliance by the private partner on the open partner to meet the relational and intimacy needs that are either less intimate or no longer existent.

While we understand that sexual orientation is private information within a personal boundary, the interpersonal nature of a romantic relationship can create a situation where revealing the romantic relationship inherently reveals the sexual orientation of both partners. Without careful discussion of these co-boundaries, the open partner can unintentionally usurp the power in the relationship by this revelation. Knapp and Vangelisti (2005) offer that as our relationships intensify, friends and family often observe the new relationship. Part of relational development is the shift in language from “you” and “I” to “we” (Seider, Hirschberger, Nelson & Levenson, 2009). As "we" language increases, particularly for friends and family of the more open partner, there is the risk that it is implied for the private partner. By recognizing the lesbian romantic relationship at all, the private person's sexual orientation becomes public. Even with

awareness of a partner's desire to remain private, if both partners cannot come to consensus on a co-boundary, then an imbalanced power dynamic can occur, thus causing boundary turbulence. On the other hand, partners can come to a consensus and use privacy rules and methods for withholding private information to maintain agreed upon levels of privacy and disclosure.

Methods for Withholding Private Information

Given the risks associated with disclosure, people might choose alternatives to managing personal information that include a focus on privacy, secrecy, and even deception (Petronio, 2012). Bok (1982) has defined a secret as a high-risk incident that might cause shame, threat, or severe embarrassment. The fact that a disclosure is defined as a "secret" highlights the risk related to revealing (Schneider, 1992). Secrets also carry a high risk due to the "fear of the real or imagined repercussions the hidden information would bring with exposure" (Lane & Wegner, 1995, p. 237). In addition to the shame and guilt often associated with keeping a secret (Karpel, 1980), deception is problematic in Western civilization because our moral education leads us to abhor anything less than the truth. While there are some cultures where deceit is the norm (Turnbull, 1972), cultures that hide truths are often considered dysfunctional by Western standards. We see this perceived deception in mainstream discussions of with trans* (trans with an asterisk used here is the current language in the LGBTQ community to denote any transgender individual in any stage of transition or identity development) or LGBQ individuals who hide their "authentic" selves by remaining private (Halberstam, 2005; Sedgwick, 1990). Even communicators with the best of intentions are not always completely truthful in situations where honesty could be uncomfortable (O'Hair & Cody, 1994). The three primary ways individuals keep information secret or private are using lies, equivocations, and/or hints (Petronio, 2012).

A lie is a deliberate attempt to hide or misrepresent the truth (Petronio, 2012). In a study in which respondents were asked to keep track of the truthfulness of their everyday conversational statements, only 38.5% of statements proved to be totally honest (Turner, Edgely, & Olmstead, 1975). DePaulo, Kashy, Kirkendol, and Wyer (1996) found that people lie daily for five main reasons: 1) to save face; 2) to avoid tension or conflict; 3) to guide social interaction and to make everyday relationships run smoothly; 4) to facilitate or reduce interaction with others; and 5) to gain power.

Equivocation involves communicating messages that are vague or have two or more meanings. A study by Metts, Cupach, and Imahori (1992) found that equivocation can help a person save face in difficult situations. For instance, when receiving unwanted sexual advances from a person whose feelings were important to them, the majority of participants viewed diplomacy as being more face saving and comfortable than a direct statement. In another study (Bavelas, Black, Chovil, & Mullett, 1990), respondents had to choose between a face-saving lie, the truth, or an equivocal response. Only six percent chose the lie, between three and four percent chose the hurtful truth, and more than 90% chose the equivocal response.

Hints are more direct than equivocal statements (Petronio, 2012). While an equivocal message is not necessarily aimed at changing another's behavior, a hint is intended to get a desired response from the other person (Petronio, 2012). Motley (1992) suggests that some hints are designed to save the receiver from embarrassment, while others are meant to save the *sender* from embarrassment. In any case, the success of a hint depends on the other person's ability to pick up the unexpressed message (Petronio, Reeder, Hecht, & Mon't Ros-Mendoza, 1996).

Open vs. Private: Privacy Negotiation in Lesbian Relationships

Because lesbians live in a heteronormative culture, the issue of managing heteronormativity and, in particular, negotiating privacy boundaries within their relationship, is crucial. This is a critical research study because we exist in a society that is hegemonic. As a result, individuals who do not conform to the norm are systemically oppressed and have very few ways to express their true identities. As a muted group, lesbians, among other groups, are in need of opportunities that facilitate emancipation for those in romantic relationships from societal oppressions (Horkheimer, 2002) that silence them in myriad ways. While the process of emancipation includes advocating for social change, such as pushing for anti-discrimination legislation, the primary goal of the current study is to identify unique communication strategies lesbians use as they determine how to manage identity information and expression within and outside of a romantic relationship. This study has great potential to generate additional CPMT and MGT research that will further illuminate the real tensions present within some lesbian relationships as well as an awareness and understanding of the privacy navigation challenges faced by LGBQ couples. In understanding the challenges unique to LGBQ couples, communication strategies and tools can be shared to help couples overcome misunderstandings from lack of clearly negotiated and managed privacy co-boundaries. Ultimately, it is hoped that the findings will have practical implications. By heightening the awareness of the critical role that communication plays in their identity expression, lesbians in various types of relationships (e.g., open-private, open-open, and private-private) will become more skilled in managing potential tensions in their relationships, particularly those where one or both partners are reticent to disclose their sexual orientation to others. Similarly, communication scholars can conduct workshops with professionals, such as marriage and family counselors, so that they will have

knowledge and practical skills to be shared with their clients dealing with these exact identity and relational issues. In sum, the primary goal will be for the research to have practical application in formal (e. g., training and counseling) and informal settings.

Communication is a dynamic field in which each scholar emerges from varying traditions. The primary theoretical lens utilized *a priori* is Sandra Petronio's (2002/2012) Communication Privacy Management Theory. My exploration of this phenomenon was also informed by feminist theory, queer studies, prejudice studies, communication studies, and my personal and fellow LGBQs' experiences. Interviews were designed to explore these communicative events of privacy navigation through this theoretical lens, and questions were created to facilitate a healthy discussion of participants' self-defined lesbian identities and how they have used communication to navigate varying levels of privacy within their lesbian relationships of varying levels of openness.

The Significance of Privacy Navigation in Lesbian relationships

This research study focused on how lesbians in romantic relationships navigate communicating private information to those outside their relationship, which is becoming an increasingly important area of inquiry due to the shifting social climate for queer Americans. Since the Civil Rights, Chicano, Feminist, and Gay Liberation movements of the 1960s and 1970s, marginalized groups have experienced major social change. Most recently, for the LGBQ community, from 2004 to 2014, 19 states within the United States have legalized same-sex marriage (as of September 11, 2014), and, in June of 2013, the U. S. Federal Government overturned the Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA) of 1996 (*United States v. Windsor*, 2013), thereby federally recognizing same-sex marriages. Despite these gains in LGBQ equality, 29 states do not have laws that prohibit discrimination based on sexual orientation (National

Conference on State Legislatures, July 2013). The conflicting social dynamic caused by these inconsistencies between and across the state and federal governments coupled with the vast majority of relational research focusing on straight partnerships speaks to the timeliness and imperative nature of such a study.

During the time of this writing (May 2013-February 2015) the United States, and particularly the south has made major and conflicting legislative changes regarding LGBQ individuals' rights such as recognizing same-sex marriages while bringing "Religious Freedom" bills to their legislature that allow for anti-gay discrimination. While increases in same-sex marriage are progressing at an unusually fast rate, marriage equality is still lacking in 15 states (as of January 15, 2015). Additionally, every southern state that has gained marriage equality has had counties that refused to provide marriage licenses and ultimately brought forth a lawsuit to overturn this ruling which has made its way to the Supreme Court. Because of this pattern, the Supreme Court has set a date when it will hear arguments on this issue once and for all, April 28, 2015. The fight for equality for LGBQ individuals also goes far beyond marriage. Even those couples that get married still lack a vast majority of the privileges awarded to straight couples related to finances, family rearing, and medical issues. These include, but are not limited to, a lack of employment protections, discriminatory family planning laws, and, while this is situated within the US, there is always the threat of physical violence and, in some extreme countries, death.

While Obama's role as the first president in favor of gay marriage rights played a critical role in terms of the turning the tide on LGBQ rights, we must remember the relative newness of this support is. The President "came out" about his support when it would be an advantage to him in his 1996 run for Senate, but then "went back in the closet" on the issue in 2008 when he

was running for president ("Obama comes out in favor of same-sex marriage," 2012). It was in his second term of his presidency with no more elections to win that Obama came out in full affirmation of gay marriage. I call attention to this phenomenon because it is indicative of trends in LGBQ relationships when couples have to navigate being public about their relationships, then being private or denying them, and then being public about them at a later date.

The rights, protections, and research regarding this social group are pivotal, as their population grows daily. According to data from the 2013 National Health Interview Survey (NHIS), out of 34,557 adults aged 18 and older, 1.6% identified as gay or lesbian, 0.7% identified as bisexual, and 1.1% identified as "something else." When these individuals who did not self-identify with the terms gay, lesbian, or bisexual were questioned further about the decision to choose "something else," 30% said they had not yet determined their sexual orientation (Ward, Dahlhamer, Galinsky, & Joestl, 2014). With the United States population being 317 million and growing daily (The 2014 US and World Populations, 2014), even 1.6% of the population would be 5,072,000 Americans who identify as gay or lesbian. Even if we guess that 50% are gay and 50% are lesbian, there are still 2,536,000 lesbians in the United States. Even this conservative estimate based solely on half of the 1.6% identified as gay or lesbian reflects a larger population of people than exists in 14 of the states in the US and the District of Columbia. If we included the LGBQ populations of Vermont, Wyoming, North Dakota and South Dakota in our estimations, they would account for *half* the population of lesbians and gays living in the US, or approximately all the lesbians (USCensus.gov, 2014). This is a significant number of individuals. This does not include some of the bisexual individuals who might be in same-sex relationships, identify as fluid, or who have not yet been open about their relationship due to stigmatization.

In a 2012 study conducted by Gallup Poll Editor-in-Chief Frank Newport and UCLA scholar Gary J. Gates, researchers acknowledged that calculating the number of individuals in the LGBQ community has been a subject of debate. To date, this study is the largest population-based survey to include state-by-state measurements of LGBQ identification. Gates explains the tremendous challenges facing counting the LGBQ community due to stigmatization.

> As a group still subject to social stigma, many of those who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender may not be forthcoming about this identity when asked about it in a survey," researchers pointed out in the study. "Therefore, it's likely that some Americans in what is commonly referred to as 'the closet' would not be included in the estimates derived from the Gallup interviews. Jim Key, a spokesman for the Los Angeles Gay and Lesbian Center, agreed that the study probably underrepresented the number of LGBQ people nationwide. "There are people who don't identify with any of the letters, L, G, B or T," he told The Times. "Many are young people who don't see themselves as gay or lesbian, but simply as people who are in love with someone of the same sex. ("Nationwide gay and lesbian population count breaks new ground," 2012)

Gates and Newport (2012) also observed that, "while LGBQ communities are clearly present nationwide, their visibility is generally higher in states with greater levels of social acceptance and supportive LGBQ legal climates." Understanding that accepting climates play a role in a lesbians' ability to be open about their sexual orientation or relationships, it is vital that we study the effect of feeling the need to remain private on both the individual and their relationship.

Consider the following example. From December 28, 2014 through January 6, 2015, my home state of Florida had its gay marriage ban overturned. The Attorney General asked for a

stay, Judge Clarence Thomas accepted the stay, and then it was overturned within 24 hours; therefore, couples were able to marry on midnight January 6, 2015. These legislative actions effected my decision to visit my family in Florida over the holidays. Since my family disapproves of my sexuality, I chose to not visit while LGBQ rights were getting so much press. Despite not being physically present, I watched as both support and protests played out in both mass media as well as my Facebook where both my friends and family from my hometown in Florida discussed (or refused to discuss) this topic. Additionally, as I am on the job market and trying to remain close to my family, the legalizing of same-sex marriage in southern states has affected my professional future. I am now able to get health benefits for my partner at some universities in Alabama, Florida, and South Carolina, where this was previously not possible, but still not in the state that has been my home for the last six years: Georgia. Finally, I predict (on January 1, 2015) that within the coming months, all three states from where my participants hail will have overturned their bans on gay marriage: Florida (January 6, 2015), Alabama (March 4, 2015), and Georgia (in progress). The conflicting social dynamic caused by these shifts and inconsistencies between and across the state and federal governments coupled with the vast majority of relational research focusing on straight partnerships make this social issue both timely and imperative.

Past research has examined real and hypothetical relationships where one partner is a member of a marginalized group, while the other partner is a member of the dominant group in terms of race (Field, Kimuna & Strauss, 2013; Harris & Kalbfleisch, 2000*;* Herman & Campbell, 2012; Lienemann & Stopp, 2013; Troy, Lewis-Smith, & Laurenceau, 2006). The findings from these interracial relationship studies offer evidence of how people actually and potentially behave and respond when considering socially taboo relationships. The aforementioned studies

suggest that partners face challenges that are both similar to and different from lesbian relationships, thus prompting the current inquiry. However, in the case of Queer relationships, both partners may simultaneously be members of privileged (e. g., White/European American) and marginalized groups (LGBQ), which means that each partner is very likely identifying more with their status as a microcultural (e.g., marginalized) group member since they are not conforming to heteronormativity. These tensions ultimately may cause unique challenges and difficulties that the couple must sort through together. With regard to racial identities, there is an assumption that there is a form of solidarity within the family, as all members within it have shared experiences with racial oppression, much like a culture, thus making them relatable to each other (Gilroy, 1993). Research on racial identities demonstrates that race is an aspect of a person's identity that is biologically based and, in most cases, cannot be changed or concealed (Alcoff, 2005; Collins, 1998). While it is not being argued that one's racial identity is to be hidden, the reality remains that their identity or understanding of self as a racialized being is the result (in large part) of race as a social construction. As such, we are socialized by society to have certain beliefs about and attitudes towards different racial/ethnic groups (Cunningham, Preacher & Banaji, 2001; McConnell & Leibold, 2001). In short, we are primed to activate those beliefs and attitudes when we encounter members of those groups, thus impacting our interactions and shaping their self-perception.

Similarly, people with LGBQ identities have a self with which they are born. In the case of some LGBQ individuals, this identity is chosen or fluid. Because sexual orientation is an invisible identity, individuals can choose to perform culture markers of heteronormativity and attempt to pass as straight, despite no desire to pass, or they can make their sexual identity more visible by performing cultural markers that denote membership in the LGBQ community (Pharr,

2007; Sedgwick, 1990). While one's sexual identity is not always visibly recognizable within society (Pharr, 2007; Sedgwick, 1990), there is a need for connection to and relational intimacy with others with shared cultural experiences. For sexual minorities, unlike racial minorities, there may be an isolation that occurs since biological family members often do not share queerness (Peters, 2003).

In addition to societal pressures to conform to the macrocultural (e. g., dominant/mainstream) society and heteronormativity, the identities of LGBQ individuals are further compromised or challenged due to the lack of legal protection in a vast majority of situations (e. g., employment, housing, healthcare, etc.) (Amnesty International, "About LGBQ Human Rights," 2014). The social movement for marriage equality is gaining ground and should, in theory, empower LGBQ individuals and provide some sort of identity affirmation; however, identity negotiation within this context is very complex due to the choice an individual has to express or not their identity as an LGBQ person. This issue of identity expression is further complicated when we consider the role of communication in this process. While there are myriad other communication issues involving this growing marginalized community, it is imperative that attention be directed towards the communication processes involved with identity negotiation as both an individual and relational phenomenon. By conducting research that is inclusive of these experiences, we can better understand how individuals and couples navigate this turbulent dichotomy of identifying as LGBQ as an individual and in relation to a partner, both of which are unexamined areas of communication scholarship. Research in general is needed on this microcultural group due to the dearth of attention given their identity formation process, the complexities therein, and the effects of marginalization on lesbian romantic relationships.

Participants' Historical Context

In order to better understand the context the participants in this study grew up in, I offer a short historical timeline of LGBQ related events that preceded and occurred throughout the lifetime of these participants. The first sodomy laws were introduced under Henry VIII with the Buggery Act of 1533, making gay sexual relations punishable by hanging (D'Emilio, 1983; 1993; 2012). These sodomy laws traveled to the new colonies under British rule and were instituted in the US, both federally and from state to state, establishing an anti-gay legal system where committing sodomy, or "being homosexual" was an criminal offense (*Lawrence v. Texas*, 539 *U.S.* 558).

Social movements in the late 1960s, including Civil rights and Women's Liberation resulted in the establishment of multiple homophile groups across the United States who worked to increase education and awareness with the goal of gay assimilation (D'Emilio, 1983; 1993; 2012). This culminated in the police raid of the Stonewall Inn in New York City on June 28, 1969. This evening led to violent demonstrations by members of the gay community, demanding that they be allowed to live openly without fear of arrest or police brutality. The Stonewall Riots are widely considered to be the most pivotal event leading to the Gay Liberation movement in the 1970s and served as a catalyst for the modern fight for LGBQ rights with the United States. Stonewall was the event that determined the higher end age parameter for this study, as I chose not to interview anyone who was over the age of five during Stonewall.

The 1970s were known as Gay Liberation, a time of increased public awareness of gay issues. In 1973, the American Psychiatric Association removed homosexuality from its official listing of psychiatric disorders (DSM-II) (Spitzer, 1981). Despite this advance, this decade was followed by the 1980s, which, for both gay and straight individuals, was marked by the AIDS

epidemic, originally referred to as Gay Related Immune Deficiency (GRID), establishing stigma, particularly toward the gay male community. In the 1990s, “Don't Ask, Don't Tell” was instituted in the military in 1993 and the federal government instituted LGBQ history month in 1994. It seemed to be a time of both increased awareness of LGBQ presence, but also a desire to keep the topic somewhat quiet. This decade ended with the murder of Matthew Shepard in 1998 and the release of Boys Don't Cry (1999), an Oscar award-winning romantic drama of the real-life story of Brandon Teena, a trans* man who was beaten, raped, and murdered by his male friends when they discovered he was anatomically female in October 1999. These two events were indicative of both the increase in hate crimes toward LGBQ individuals as well as the increasing empathy for these individuals who received such horrible treatment.

In the late 1990s and 2000s, there was an increase of comedic representations of LGBQ characters in entertainment media (Dow, 2001), and a very publicized string of LGBQ youth suicides ("Suicides Put Light on Pressures of Gay Teenagers," 2010). The first same-sex marriages occurred in 2004 (Lannuti, 2005; 2007), which strengthened the legal power of LGBQ legal and social groups (e.g. Human Rights Campaign, PFLAG, GLAAD) to advocate for marriage equality in many states. In 2003, the United States Supreme Court ruled in the case of *Lawrence v. Texas* that "the liberty protected by the Constitution allows homosexual persons the right ... [of] intimate conduct with another person” (2003). While the Supreme Court's 6–3 ruling struck down all anti-sodomy law in the country, stating that it was unconstitutional to ban consensual sex between adults, calling it a violation of the 14th Amendment, Sarah Warbelow, legal director for the Human Rights Campaign, a national gay rights organization, explained that despite the Supreme Court ruling, as of April 2013, anti-sodomy laws remain on the books in Alabama, Florida, Idaho, Kansas, Louisiana, Michigan, Mississippi, North Carolina, Oklahoma,

South Carolina, Texas and Utah ("12 states still ban sodomy a decade after court ruling," April 21, 2014). In the 2010s, there were several laws passed that might increase LGBQ visibility, including the repealing of "Don't Ask, Don't Tell," the overturning of the federal Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA), and additional increases in legal recognition of same-sex marriage.

The significance of providing this historical summary of the last 50 years is to contextualize some of the major events that occurred in LGBQ history from 1969 to the present. Participants in this study were born between the years of 1964 and 1993. This study recognizes the varying experiences of these individuals, and it does not claim that any of these events were recognized by participants as having had a direct effect on them; however, a more critical approach to their experiences may reveal a larger contractual influence on participants and their gender identity formation as a result of these events, particularly in the South.

The Benefits of Research on the Navigation of Privacy

Petronio (2002/2012) argues that boundary turbulence while creating, negotiating, and navigating privacy boundaries has the potential to increase both trust levels and stress levels in relationships, depending upon how these boundaries are negotiated. I offer that boundary turbulence occurs because private information about self (one's sexual orientation) gets conflated with others' private and public information in the presence of a lesbian relationship. Essentially, the public acknowledgment of a lesbian partner implies the person in the relationship is gay. Because of this disclosure being imbricated with disclosing a socially stigmatized identity, the act of publically acknowledging one's partner can potentially cause her harm.

Both the advances in equality as well as the retreat into the closet are symbolic of the daily lives of LGBQ individuals in the United States. It is a dynamic that is simultaneously empowering and defeating, hopeful and frustrating for those either actively perusing or patiently

waiting around to get the rights they are promised under the Constitution. In some cases, attempts to achieve certain social goals are unattainable due to discriminating legal codes that are achieved and then revoked. Such was the case of LGBQ couples in California who were granted the right to marry from the California Supreme Court in June of 2008, only to have their rights revoked in November 2008 with the passing of Proposition 8, a constitutional amendment banning gay marriages (*Hollingsworth v. Perry*, 2013). The state of Florida has recently gone through a daily change in where things stand with marriage equality. With discriminatory and inconsistent laws, those in same-sex relationships, even with "marriage equality," are at a distinct disadvantage.

This constant fight to maintain heteronormativity can be explained through Antonio Gramsci's (1971) concept of cultural hegemony, or the domination of a diverse system by the ruling ideology. This is also recognized as a belief system that is so ingrained in society that it becomes naturalized (Gramsci, 1971). Essentially, the dominant group's discourse gets written in such a manner that it is seen as “natural” or “normal” (Laqueur, 1992). It is then adopted and reproduced by the majority of the culture and subsequently viewed by both macrocultural and microcultural groups as a measure of normativity. As such, gays and lesbians whose gender expressions conform to societal norms are typically presumed straight until s/he discloses otherwise. For this reason, the act of being in a partnership can get imbricated with disclosing one's sexuality, colloquially termed "coming out," based on the hegemonic discourse of the closet, and sacrificing certain societal privileges (Sedgwick, 1990). With this in mind, we are able to offer evidence of the effect of heteronormative social structures on communication within lesbian relationships through scholarly inquiry.

My goal in this study is to understand this phenomenon that is an effect of social constructions of our gendered and sexual identities. As culture and society establish meaning that serves to create and reproduce power, I am interested in working to deconstruct heteronormative systems of power through what may be perceived as individual acts of resistance (e.g., private vs. public). This act of resistance may actually function to help lesbians develop healthy communication strategies for navigating their identity in a heteronormative society. This research study is exploratory, examining a small group of individuals with certain common elements. By interviewing individuals in relationships that have lasted over time and individuals whose relationships ended, we can gather information about the effect that privacy negotiations might have on relational success. The current study will aim to understand this phenomenon as a contributing factor either to the success or failure of the relationship, according to the self-report on these relationships by the interviewees.

In instances where one partner desires to remain private about their sexual orientation, the private partner who owns the rights to their private information (sexual orientation) must or is at least expected to request to her partner's permission to create a co-boundary around the relationship disclosure due to it implying her sexuality. Therefore, while both partners own the relational information, establishing these boundaries can be challenging as well as stressful to maintain, particularly if the open partner has been open about her sexual orientation for some time and does not see her sexual orientation as private information. Since sharing relationship status can get conflated with "coming out," or placing oneself in a stigmatized group, being in a lesbian relationship can carry a different level of stress than being in a straight relationship. However, if communication occurs and these boundaries are navigated effectively, there is a unique opportunity to establish a deep-seated mutual respect within the relationship.

Caron and Ulin (1997) conducted a study entitled "Closeting and the Quality of Lesbian Relationships," which examined the relationship between an individual being closeted and her relationship with friends and family. They also examined the link between openness and romantic relational satisfaction, arguing that there was a relationship between openness and relational satisfaction. They defined openness in two forms: cognitive openness (i.e. "My family is aware I am a lesbian") and behavioral openness (i.e. "My family includes my partner in social events"). While they concluded that an increase in relational satisfaction led to an increase in openness, this finding is debatable based on the methodology as well as additional studies in this area. Respondents in Caron and Ulin's (1997) study offered that revealing their sexual orientation to their parents had a positive impact on their primary relationship, but the level of support, or approval, did not significantly affect the relationship. This finding is confirmed by Eldridge and Gilbert (1990) and they note that closeting does not correlate with relational satisfaction. For some private lesbians, the perceived reality is that disclosing the private information of their sexual orientation or relationship status may lead to job loss and financial instability. A study by Day and Schoenrade (2000) observed that

> Since sexual orientation is not a protected class at the federal level, gay and lesbian workers in many jurisdictions are not protected from discriminatory practices. Indeed, in a study of 203 lesbians, three-fifths reported that they expected job discrimination if their sexual orientation was known. Of these, most (75 percent) anticipate problems with their immediate supervisors, two-thirds expected termination and 13 percent expected harassment. Ninety percent anticipated taunts, ostracism, or even violence (Levine and Leonard, 1984)... In

> order to avoid public knowledge of their orientation, many lesbians and gay men conceal their lifestyles. (p. 347-348)

Day and Schoenrade's research also identified several methods of avoiding publicly disclosing sexual orientation (McNaught, 1993; Woods, 1994) by engaging in heteronormative activities, such as sexual innuendo about the opposite sex, creating imaginary opposite-sex partners, or inviting non-romantic opposite-sex friends to company functions (Levine, 1980; Levine & Leonard, 1984). While these patterns of secrecy have been demonstrated to create stress and anxiety for lesbian workers (Griffith & Hebl, 2002; Kronenberger, 1991; Levine & Leonard, 1984; Seal, 1991; Wrenn, 1988) due to the effort expended to conceal their orientation, I offer that, in certain cases, disclosure can be equally stressful and finding a partner who supports one's non-disclosure is the ideal situation.

The primary reason Caron and Ulin (1997) attributed the increased relational satisfaction to "increased openness" is that open lesbians had increased access to social support, which positively influenced individuals' physical and psychological health (Anderson, 1993; Cohen & Wills, 1985; Thoits, 1995). They also noted that openness contributed to the initiation, development, and maintenance of couple relationships (Bott, 1971; Lee, 1991; Notarius & Pellegrini, 1984; Surra, 1988). Caron and Ulin's (1997) study defined social support within the context of "friends and family with whom partners interact and who contribute to the couple's sense of identity" (p. 413). Building upon the findings of this study, these researchers offer that, in certain instances where being open is not an option, a private romantic relationship can still receive social support and thrive.

With this in mind, I also offer that the current relationship between privacy and sexual orientation is far more nuanced than can be accounted for using Caron and Ulin's (1997) research

method. The method included measuring relational satisfaction using questions such as, "My (family/extended family/friend/work associates) know I am a lesbian" and "Those (family/extended family/friend/work associates) who know I am a lesbian approve of this." These were ranked from "1 (strongly agree) to 9 (strongly disagree)" (p.415). Since 1997, there have been major shifts in the social climate regarding issues of both sexual orientation and gender identity and expression. Likewise, the advent of social media, including internet sites such as Myspace, Facebook, Instagram, and twitter, as well as technological advances of smart phones and digital cameras. These tools serve to reduce privacy on the whole both via personal sharing and the constant presence of recording and tracking devices in everyday interactions. For this reason, I assert that disclosing private information becomes more nuanced and privacy management takes more time, energy, and strategic ambiguity to navigate than in pre-new media eras. With this in mind, this current study examines the following:

RQ1: What real or perceived social sanctions against lesbians/lesbian relationships influence the creation of privacy boundaries among lesbians in romantic relationships?

RQ2: What specific communication behaviors are/were used by either or both partners to navigate privacy within and outside of the relationship?

RQ3: What specific communicative behaviors used to navigate privacy lead to constructive relational outcomes?

My hope is that these findings can be applied in future studies to examine larger numbers of lesbian relationships, perhaps in a quantitative or mixed method approach. This should be increasingly easier in the future with same-sex marriage being legal, as additional lesbian relationships may be recorded in public record, increasing their visibility.

Project Overview

Thus far, I have addressed the current sociopolitical climate for LGBQ individuals in both the United States and the Southern States, where this study is geographically and culturally situated. I have also discussed the problem with reempowering the certain terms, such as "homosexual" and "closet," explaining their lack of presence in this paper. This chapter also offered a road map for this research study, demonstrating its purpose and vital nature. Moving on from this point, in Chapter Two, I will explore the communication literature on lesbian relationships as well as self-disclosure and privacy management in an effort to explain my theoretical and methodological selections for addressing the aforementioned research questions.

In Chapter Three, I will describe in depth the methodical use of qualitative inquiry as a method for exploring the communication behaviors associated with lesbians navigating privacy, particularly related to their sexual orientation, while being in a romantic partnership. Finally, in Chapter Four, I will conduct a thorough analysis of the data collected from the interviews of ten lesbian women, five who self-identify as the private partner and five who self-identify as the more open partner in a lesbian relationship. I will share the privacy navigation themes that emerged throughout our discussions, including six contexts consistently perceived as high risk, ways to privately demonstrate affection in these high-risk environments, and tools for effectively navigating high risk situations prior to entering them. I will highlight the limitations of this study and offer recommendations for future research, which is both vital and timely in that while writing this dissertation, same-sex marriage bans have been overturned in all three states that my participants hailed from. I am anxious to do a follow up on this study and see the effect this decision has made, if any, on how these individuals view themselves and interact with their environment in terms of privacy.

Figure 1. Communication Privacy Management Diagram (Petronio, 2002, p.4)

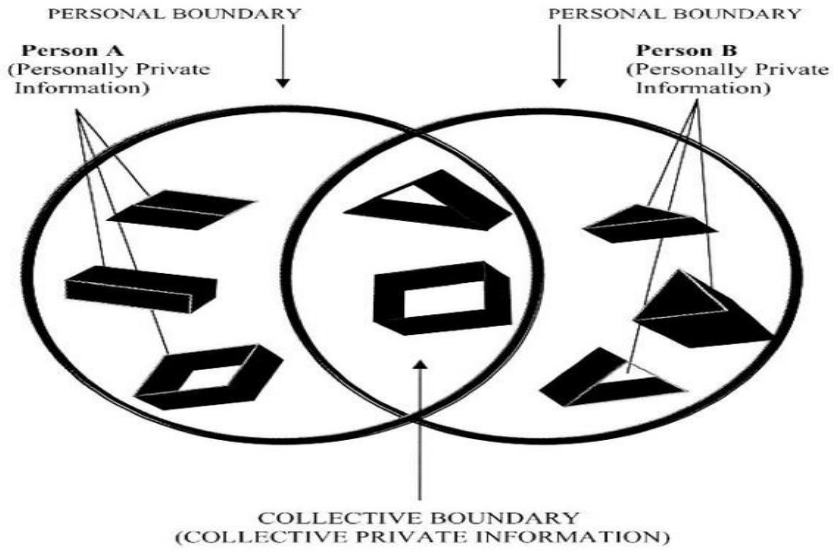


Figure 2. Collective Boundary Module (Petronio, 2002, p.7)

CHAPTER 2: METHODOLOGY

A critical examination of this phenomenon is timely and imperative due to both the lingering and expedited strategies by which gay rights are won. On the one hand, we just celebrated the 10-year anniversary of legalizing same-sex marriage in Massachusetts. Legally sanctioned same-sex marriage in the United States began on May 17, 2004 as a result of the ruling in *Goodridge v. Department of Public Health* ("Gay marriage story drew headlines worldwide," 2004). Fast forward to September 2014 when I began writing this paper and 19 states had legalized same-sex marriage. That is 19 states in a little over 10 years. As of this writing in January, 2014, less than 100 days later, 36 states have legalized same-sex marriage. That is 17 states in 100 days. While there is a benefit to these fast moving legal changes, there is also a drawback. Most states, despite legalizing same-sex marriage, do not have laws that prohibit discrimination based on sexual orientation (National Conference on State Legislatures, July 2013). This constant shifting and watching some legal rights grown quickly while others creep forward is "just another week in a lesbian's life" in current culture. Methodologically, I explore this phenomenon in an effort to understand how couples, both new and old, are navigating these legal and social changes that effect their privacy boundaries and rules.

In order to best understand the communication strategies of public-private partnerships, a critical approach to understanding how partners negotiate their sexual identities within romantic relationships was used in the current study. This study is critical in nature as it seeks not only to understand a phenomenon, but to potentially have practical application for partners and

professionals in social work and counseling can use to create and maintain healthy, long-lasting relationships. I purposed to employ a method of inquiry that sought to identify specific communication behaviors that ultimately translate into effective strategies. The ultimate goal of this study is to offer lesbians in romantic relationships opportunities for addressing the challenge of simultaneously balancing disclosure of the very private and intimate identity of sexual orientation and navigating a prejudiced and discriminatory culture and legal system.

According to post-structuralists (e.g., Barad, Derrida, Deluze, & Foucault), we must examine systems of power, such as heteronormitivity, if we are to work to deconstruct and recreate these systems with a more equalized power structure (Foucault, 1990) is to occur. As such, these interviews are being analyzed with the understanding that heteronormative power is productive (Foucault, 1990) and constantly moving within relationships, all in an effort to establish or remove the vulnerability necessary for intimacy (Derlega, 1977).

As a study of privacy management within an under researched relational context (lesbian couples, where one partner is more open about their sexual identity and the other partner is more private about their sexual identity) I attempt to unveil what I argue is a unique aspect of LGBQ relationships. I examined this by conducting in-depth interviews with lesbians about their perceptions of the communication that occurred within their own relationships with varying levels of "openness," or private disclosure of one's sexual orientation or their lesbian relationship. I asked them to self-reflect on if and how they and their partner communicated within their relationship about how to navigate privacy. Gathering participant responses with in-depth semi-structured interviews, I used a critical paradigm to explore the existence or lack of boundaries and rules as asserted by Communication Privacy Management Theory (Petronio, 2002) and examined the role these may play on self-reported individual or relational satisfaction.

In-Depth, Semi-Structured Interviewing

This qualitative study used in-depth interviewing to collect interview data from 10 female-identified lesbians with current or past partnerships where they were either more open or more private about their sexual orientation than their partner. The partnership had to have been exclusive and lasted a minimum of six months. To reduce recall bias, individuals had to have been in their relationship within the past five years (Glesne, 2010; Roulston, 2010). In acknowledging that recall bias existed, it did not detract from the overarching validity of the study, as part of the argument for the importance of this research is that identity development is an ongoing and shifting process, and there was a consistent report of viewing lesbianism as a stigmatized identity, a stigma that evolved primarily from a couple of common sources and had an immediate detrimental effect on the individual's relationship. This was a consistent theme among those in a current relationship and those in a past relationship, regardless of their current or past identity as "open" or "private."

Five of the interviews involved individuals who had been more open and five involved the individuals who were more private. This was to ensure that both viewpoint's, the open partner and the private partner, are carefully explored. Additionally, because the macroculture (e. g., White) and all other microcultural racial/ethnic groups construct and perform masculinity and femininity differently (Alexander, 2006), this study focuses solely on white (non-Hispanic)-identified females.

In-depth and interactive interviews were selected for the methodology because these forms of interview design are used to obtain thick, rich data, as is necessary for an exploratory and investigational perspective (Creswell & Clark, 2007; Roulston, 2010) The interview schedule was not only semi-structured to align with the goal of testing the theory, but questions

were also open-ended to allow for exploring any deviation when deemed necessary. This approach allowed participants the opportunity to provide deeper understanding of their unique experiences using their own language, which could not fully be captured or developed in surveys, questionnaires, or other quantitative approaches (Meloy, 1993). In particular, nonverbal interactions that must be enhance and establish meaning were often used by participants during the interviews; a level of meaning that can be lost in a written survey. For instance, in the interview, I can note when a participant answers while tears run down her face in a manner that is not accessible via a survey. Additionally, due to the confidential nature of this topic, focus groups might have deterred private individuals from participating.

As a result of my methodological choice, this data is not generalizable to a public outside of the individuals being interviewed (Creswell & Clark, 2007; Glesne, 2010; Roulston, 2010). This study used a combination of typical case sampling, or cases that are *not* unusual in any way (Glesne, 2010), and extreme case sampling, or cases that represent the purist or most clear cut example of the phenomena being examined. Both of these sampling types are valid in this study because I believe that the phenomenon I am looking for is typical within the lesbian community, yet only identified as a phenomenon in extreme cases, meaning that a lesbian will only self-identify as private or open if they have increased awareness that this binary or dichotomy exists within their relationship. Certain situations may set up certain lesbian partners to be more aware of having to manage privacy. I assert that living in the south is one of these situations.

Once participants self-selected and volunteered for participation in the study via email or Facebook messaging (see Appendix C), a follow-up phone call was placed to confirm eligibility (see Appendix A). After eligibility was confirmed and participants agreed to meet, an appropriate place and time were chosen to facilitate the most comfortable and private interview

environment to encourage open communication. Because participants were asked highly personal information, I offered locations such as a 5x8 foot private office on-campus, coffee shops with discrete nooks, and public parks with discrete picnic area that were safe, comfortable, and private. I also allowed interviewees the chance to pick a location that they felt most comfortable, given the condition that we meet in private, so that participants were not afraid to openly respond to question. When necessary, I traveled up to two hours one-way to meet participants face-to-face to conduct the semi-structured interviews (Roulston, 2010). Four face-to-face interviews were conducted in Athens in the 5x8 private office at the University. Three interviews were conducted in a metropolitan city two hours away in participants' homes. One interview was face-to-face in a small town, 30 minutes away, in a participant's home. Since distance prevented the interview from being conducted in person, I used Skype to conduct the final three interviews. The primary advantage to using Skype is that it allowed me to cover a greater geographic distance without the limitations of the cost of travel. Also, since participants used it in their own homes, there was an immediate level of comfort that was not evident when I interviewed in-person in participants' homes, as it felt there was a need to be hospitable (cleaning up, dressing up, getting drinks, etc.). The other advantage of Skype was that it allowed for a video recording to be made without the distraction of a recording device being pointed at the participant. Skype also reduced the temptation to touch the participant when comforting them. In face-to-face interviews, several participants cried, and my natural instinct was to want to comfort them with touch. I found this challenging, as I did not want to appear cold toward the participant, but I also did not want the interview to lose track or focus due to intense emotions. Skype mediated this. Another observation is that my Skype interviews were notably longer than my in-person interviews. I attribute this to the fact that participants allotted about two hours for

this study, and with Skype, they were able to spend a full two hours with me, versus 60 minutes each for traveling and the interview. The primary drawback to Skype is when the internet signal got weak, it could become a distraction, thus effecting the flow of the interview.

Interview Guide Design

When designing this interview guide, I was interested in how lesbian partners managed the boundaries of private information (or privacy) (Petronio, 2002) regarding their relationship and subsequently their sexual orientation and identities. Semi-structured interviewing was selected because it involved the use of pre-planned open-ended questions while allowing for the development of new questions and following unexpected topics that emerged during the course of interviewing. Data gathering was done by leading with an open-ended question and following up with depth-probing based on participants' responses, such as, "You mentioned your grandmother's reaction. Can you tell me more about that?" This approach was designed to allow for the understanding of an occurrence in its fullest complexity, as the elaborated responses from participants provided the "affective and cognitive underpinnings of the respondent's perception" (Glense, 2010, p.134). This strategy captured how participants felt about each of the following topics and clarified how participants explained or accounted for these phenomena.

Interview questions were developed based on DeVault's (1990) recommendation of "[u]sing the terms and categories used by women (in this case, participants) in their daily lives, rather than the research 'topics established by the discipline,'" (p. 101). Thus, questions were formulated clearly to encourage the sharing of three specific aspects of privacy rule management processes: (1) privacy rule foundations; (2) boundary coordination operations; and (3) boundary turbulence (Petronio, 2002). Petronio argues that using communication to navigate these relational aspects of privacy is deemed critical to participants' self-concept, partner's self-

concept, and relational satisfaction. These included asking subjects to identify situations in which they felt safe to be open about their sexual orientation and relationship, situations where they felt it best to remain private about these topics, and how they and their respective partners did or did not communicate about how to effectively handle these situations. Questions were also included to differentiate between verbal and nonverbal, or language and paralanguage, forms of communication (see Appendix G).

The interview protocol included 33 questions focused on and designed to create a healthy discussion on lesbian self-identity and the navigation of varying levels of privacy about one's sexual identity within lesbian relationships (see Appendix G). Questions 1-3 of the interview aimed to gather demographic information from participants; questions 4-7 asked participants to provide some history of how they came to identify as lesbian, and questions 7-9 examined the participants view on LGBQ individuals prior to their identification. An aspect I considered during each interview was the fluidity of each participant's identity as the "more open partner" and the "more private partner." By participants agreeing to be interviewed, they recognized their connection to one of these identities, but in several cases, they were navigating both identities simultaneously depending on the context of the interaction. Since identities are fluid, we cannot label one partner exclusively "open" or exclusively "private." However, I was able to listen for commonalities in experience when a participant was identifying as "open" or "private", and document, and tie them to themes using the *a priori* theories.

Once demographics and relational background were established, questions 10-20 specifically focused on how communication occurred, or what specific communication behaviors either or both partners used to maintain private information within the relationship. Questions 10-18 examined verbal communication behaviors while 19-20 explored paralinguistic and

nonverbal communication behaviors. Questions 21-22 explored how lesbians defined communication effectiveness in terms of privacy, or what criteria partners were using to determine successes and/or failures (misunderstandings) of remaining within those boundaries. For instance, partners may view having a privacy rule as cumbersome and frustrating, but they also recognize that utilizing it reduces misunderstandings and would be effective communication. Questions 23-31 examined the extent to which real or perceived social sanctions against the relationship influenced the creation of the boundaries and what was the motivation for either partner to keep information private or public. In accordance with Face Negotiation Theory (Ting-Toomey, 2005), Questions 18 and 29, out of order to best suit the flow of the interview, examined which, if any, accommodating strategies partners chose to employ in response to their partner's expressed (or implied) request for privacy. Finally, questions 31-33 asked participants to discuss the ways in which these communication behaviors individually and collectively contributed to the success or failure of their relationships.

Table 1: Range of interviews (Roulston, 2010, p. 15).

Table 1.1 Range of interviews

Structured interviews ↔	*Semi-structured interviews* ↔	*Unstructured interviews*
The interviewer follows scripted questions in a particular sequence	Interview protocol is used as a 'guide' and questions may not always be asked in the same order; the interviewer initiates questions and poses follow up 'probes' in response to the interviewee's descriptions and accounts	Both interviewer and interviewee initiate questions and discuss topics
The interviewee chooses responses from a range of fixed options that are coded quantitatively; responses are provided by interviewer	The interviewee selects own terms to formulate answers to questions; responses are guided by the interviewer's questions	The interviewee selects own terms to participate in free-flowing conversation
Asymmetrical structure	Asymmetrical structure	Possibly less asymmetrical structure
Data analyzed via deductive analysis for hypothesis testing in multivariate studies[a]	Data analyzed via inductive analytic methods for descriptions and interpretations in interpretive studies	

Note: [a]Alford (1998: 38) explains that multivariate arguments attempt to measure factors that explain a 'particular social phenomenon', while 'interpretive' arguments are those that 'combine an empirical focus on the language and gestures of human interactions with a theoretical concern with their symbolic meanings and how the ongoing social order is negotiated and maintained' (1998: 42). Interpretive arguments may also 'focus on ideologies, discourses, cultural frameworks' (1998: 42).

Semi-structured interview involves formatting and direction while allowing for conversational flow. The interview is led by the interviewer rather than as a discussion between the interviewer and interviewee (Roulston, 2010). This approach differs from structured interviews where the interviewer asks each participant the same questions, verbatim, and in the same order, in an effort to maintain consistency (Roulston, 2010.) Semi-structured interviewing allows for the adjusting of questions as needed throughout the interview (see Table 1). When possible, the interview questions were asked in their original order in an effort to maintain consistency. The exception was instances where the natural flow of the conversation transitioned the interviewer or interviewee out of order. In conversations where this occurred, I worked to

maintain the focus of the interview while encouraging interviewees' contributions through subtle conversation management strategies.

While conducting the interviews, I maintained a strong sense of self-reflexivity or "examining one's personal and theoretical commitments to see how they serve as resources for generating particular data, for behaving in particular ways ... and for developing particular interpretations" (Schwandt, 1997, p. 136). The purpose of this was to ensure I listened carefully to all aspects of the interview and not just those that supported my theoretical assumptions.

At the beginning of each interview, I greeted each participant, explained the purpose of the study, and went over the Consent Form, which had been previously emailed to them (Appendix E), clarifying and answering any questions about the study. I also confirmed with participants that they were comfortable being audio taped prior to recording them. Two different digital recorders were used to record the interviews to safeguard against technical glitches. In the case of Skype interviews, sometimes earphones were necessary to avoid feedback in the microphone which served as a distraction. This challenge made it difficult to use a digital audio recorder to record the interview for transcription. As such, CallNote and Evaer, or screen-capturing software was used as well as a digital recorder to record the interview (Glense, 2010; Roulston, 2010). I reminded participants that in order to maintain their confidentiality, their identities would be concealed and all identifying information removed in both transcripts and the final document. Also, participants were informed that they would have the chance to review the final document before publication to ensure their information was properly captured as well as no revealing information included. Roulston (2010) refers to this process as member checking, which has proven to be an effective means of validating the interviewer's interpretations.

The interviews lasted between 35 minutes and two hours. Once the primary interviews were completed, participants were debriefed (see Appendix H). They were also given my contact information should they have any questions or concerns. I also encouraged them to pass along my contact information to anyone who might be eligible for and interested in participating in the study. Once the interviews were concluded, I immediately recorded my field notes of my observations such as nonverbal expressions that do not translate via audio recording, which later helped with data analysis, particularly in times of silence, which without paralinguistic notation is hard to interpret. I did an initial data analysis (Glense, 2010; Roulston, 2010) or interpretation based on CPMT's theoretical approach, writing down my preliminary thoughts and interpretations, which I then could refer to when later analyzing transcripts.

Transcribing occurred within a week of each interview in an effort to align the transcriptions with nonverbal communication cues from my field notes. Once the transcription was complete, each participant was sent an email "Thank you" note that included referral information they were asked to forward to a friend. This form of snowball sampling (Glesne, 2010) allowed me to ensure that I was recruiting participants that fulfilled all of the criteria for participation. Once initial data analysis was complete, follow-up interviews were conducted when clarification was deemed necessary.

Participants' Demographic Backgrounds

American by birth, Southern by the Grace of God

Recruitment efforts yielded 10 participants, five open partners and five private partners, with the understanding that being "open" or "private" is a somewhat fluid identity. Participants hailed from cities and towns in Alabama, Florida, and Georgia. Due to snowball sampling and Facebook, one of my participants did not currently live in the South, but all had been raised there

or lived a significant portion of their lives in the South. As previously discussed, I was able to interview this individual using Skype and Evaer and CallNote (screen capturing software) to record the interview (Glense, 2010).

All participants met the key criteria for participation in the study. They were at least 18 years of age, white and female identified, raised in Southern culture, and in a lesbian relationship where partners had varying levels of openness about sexual orientation. Ages ranged from 23 to 51. All but one was college educated, and four held advanced degrees. While I strove for diversity within this subset, as is characteristic of snowball sampling methodology (Atkinson & Flint, 2001; Glesne, 2010; Marshall & Rossman, 1999; Merriam, 1998; Patton, 1999; Vogt, 1999), idiosyncratic characteristics of participants are beyond the control of the researcher. Two participants were students at the University, and were all non-Communication Studies majors. Student volunteers were members of introductory communication courses and offered research credit to participate. Non-student participants were volunteers and were offered no compensation for their participation. Only one participant, Katie, was a student in an introductory level communication class whose participation successfully fulfilled her research requirement. All others were volunteers with no extra academic credit or other incentives provided.

Of the 10 participants, five identified as being the more private partner in a relationship of varying levels of openness. Their ages were 23, 29, 30, 39, and 51. Three were born and raised in small to medium sized towns in Georgia and Florida. Two were born up North, but have spent the majority of their lives in the South and are currently living there currently. The remaining five participants identified as being the more open partner in their relationship. Ages were 24, 30, 39, 45, and 51. All were born and raised in the south, including two in a large metropolitan city in Georgia, one in a larger city in Alabama, and two in very small towns in Georgia. One

participant was born in the north, but transplanted to the south at an early age and remained there until moving north in 2014. She identified as private in her previous relationship, but more recently chose to identify as public.

Confidentiality

Understanding that sexual orientation is not a protected category, extreme measures were taken to protect the identity of all participants. Involvement in the study was voluntary, and participants had the opportunity to choose not to participate or to stop at any time without penalty or loss of benefits. The data collected involved verbal consent and identified participants indirectly through use of a pseudonym. If participants decided to withdraw from the study, they were able to request that their information be removed, returned, or destroyed.

Test Interview

An initial round of two interviews was conducted to test the effectiveness of the questions in gathering the desired information, the audio equipment, and researcher's interviewing skills. This form of triangulation was designed to increase the validity of the study, and allowed participants to provide feedback on the interview protocol, in essence co-creating this portion of the study. Participant feedback was also gathered during the debriefing in order to help refine the interview process for future participants. These participants fit all of the aforementioned criteria, with one being 37 and private, and one being 34 and open. These participants were explained the purpose of the study and then interviewed. They were asked to provide feedback along the way regarding the wording of questions for clarity. The interviewer observed the ordering of the questions and readjusted them to assist with a naturalistic conversational flow. Through these two practice interviews, several common experiences emerged among these individuals that I incorporated into future interviews. These original interviews were based on using Goals-Plans-

Action (Dillard, 2008) as the theoretical background (Appendix F). However, after conducting these interviews, I realized this approach was too broad for one study. As a result, I chose to focus exclusively on the goal of privacy management, as this was recurring both in these interviews and in my personal interactions with other lesbians. Additionally, I had originally utilized the funnel approach to interviewing, beginning with broader topics and moving to narrower ones. However, the broader topics naturally led to the more narrow ones, such as "What was your impression of LGBQ individuals before you came out?" thus leading to personal stories of when they felt stigmatized by specific interactions. When I then tried to go back to more general questions, it seemed to devalue the significance of the participant's previous disclosure. Because of this awkwardness, participants expressed difficulty following the sequence of the interview questions; therefore, the order of the questions was restructured. Additionally, a focus was placed on privacy management as opposed to overall goal setting. This served to funnel the whole project from broad to specific and gave a narrower and more focused interview schedule (Appendix G). I also incorporated a couple of questions related to perceptions of LGBQ individuals prior to coming out, as I observed that individuals were remaining private based on their perception that LGBQ was a stigmatized category. Participants were able to share that this had been established at an early age, and were able to name specific instances where these perceptions stemmed from. These were ultimately applied to their own lives, more often than not, thus discouraging them from being open about their sexual identity. The themes of "church," "small towns," and "the south" emerged as common experiences among the first two test interviews, and I was interested to examine if this was a common theme during the actual study.

Participant Selection Criteria

If you ain't from the south, then bless your heart.

Because of the diverse events that occurred in LGBQ history across participants' lives, this study cannot and does not desire to make a causal claim regarding how these events may have shaped a person's openness. This study is interested, however, in the decision-making process individuals engage in as they contemplate when to remain private and when to be more open about their sexual identity. As Communication Privacy Management is a rule-based theory, this study seeks to understand the types of privacy rules that are established by each participant and their reasoning behind the rules. By extension, the ultimate interest is in the extent to which dyadic communication is used between couples to share, explain, and jointly establish these rules that guide privacy.

Psychology literature (Harding, Harding, & Harding, 1973) generally believes that five-years-old is the age of consciousness, or the first time a child begins to differentiate the "I" from the "not-I." This is the age that children also begin to understand that society has perceptions of groups or categories of people, and that by identifying with that group, the child gets viewed in a similar way. Relatedly, it would be around age five that children begin to understand the concept of gay and begin to get an idea of whether it is a positively or negatively valenced trait. For this reason, I attempted to select participants who ranged in age from those who were at least five-years-old at the time of the Stonewall Riots (1969) to those who were age five during the murder of Matthew Shepherd (1998). The Stonewall Riots is the event most widely accepted as the catalyst for Gay Liberation and modern LGBQ rights movement in the United States. While participants may not explicitly recall each of these events, we can deduce that these individuals have been exposed to both positive and negative representations of LGBQ individuals

throughout their lives in both entertainment and on news programming, thus making these topics socially salient and the topic of conversations as participants grew up in the south that may have affected their view of self as a lesbian. Participants confirmed this salience by sharing some specific events from the media (e.g. Ellen coming out, AIDS epidemic, etc.) and recalling discussions by their parents and community around these issues.

Participant Recruitment

While participants in this study self-identified as both lesbian and having been in a lesbian relationship with varying levels of openness, I sought input from diverse members of this social group, as lesbians are not a monolithic group, thus achieving some level of intragroup diversity. All participants were born, raised, or lived a substantial portion of their life in the Southern United States, primarily Florida and Georgia. While each state purports unique identifiers, it should also be noted that, in terms of LGBQ rights, privileges, and protections, these states have progressed more slowly than others within the United States. As previously noted, Florida is now the 36th state, and the only Southern state, to allow gay marriage, and this was achieved through a forced overturning of a state constitutional amendment by the Supreme Court of the United States ("Florida becomes 36th state to legalize gay marriage", 2015).This occurred despite State Senator Marco Rubio's and State Attorney General Pam Bondi's continued fighting to keep the same-sex marriage ban ("Rubio: Bondi should continue fight against gay marriage in Florida," 2015).

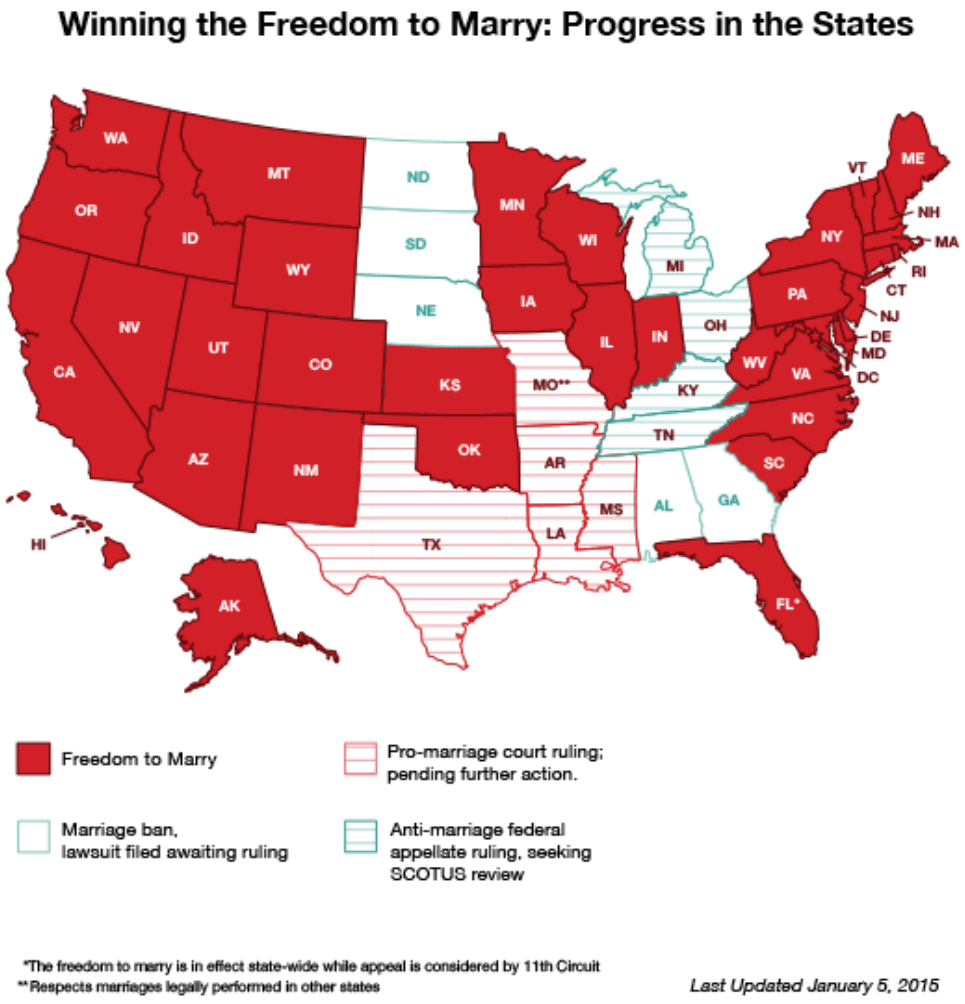


Figure 3: Winning the Freedom to Marry: Progress in the States (freedomtomarry.org, January 5 2015)

To initiate the search for lesbians in this unique relational situation on a small scale, the recruitment documents: Recruitment Phone Script (see Appendix A), Recruitment Email Script (see Appendix B), Recruitment Facebook Post (see Appendix C), Email Interview Confirmation (see Appendix D), and Consent Form (see Appendix E) were shared in three venues in fall of 2013. I began with this convenience sample (Glesne, 2010) based on coursework, volunteerism

and involvement in the local LGBQ community. First, participants were recruited via the Communication Studies research pool at a large southern university; this convenience sample returned no participants. Second, a recruitment email was sent to the LGBQ Resource Center at a large southern university. This recruitment method also returned no participants. My third and final recruitment attempt was via a post on my Facebook page, where I have a significant number of personal contacts that consider themselves LGBQ individuals. This approach yielded five participants. I also recruited two participants face-to-face via daily interactions at a large Southern University. By asking these seven individuals to identify other lesbians they knew who would fit the study's criteria and refer them by sharing the study and my contact information, I was able to gather three additional participants. This is known as chain, network, or snowball sampling (Atkinson & Flint, 2001; Glesne, 2010; Marshall & Rossman, 1999; Merriam, 1998; Patton, 1999). Snowball sampling is (Atkinson & Flint, 2001; Vogt, 1999) a strategy for recruiting additional research participants through individual that have already participated in the study. The participant coordinated communication between the researcher and the potential participant in hopes that s/he will be available and interested in being interviewed. Because of the concern for maintaining confidentiality and particular sensitive to the very private nature of this study, I had participants give the referred individuals my information and asked them to contact me, rather than asking the participant to reveal their identity without their prior permission. This strategy was used to overcome the challenges of sampling a concealed population (Faugier & Sargeant, 1997), in this case particularly those lesbians who identified as very private.

Snowball sampling is a process that assumes a link exists between the initial sample and others in the target population, allowing referrals to be made within a circle of acquaintance

(Berg, 1988). Due to the pervasiveness of social media such as Facebook in everyday life, I was able to recruit "acquaintances" beyond current social circles and from one-time meetings, professional associations, and previous acquaintances with whom I would not have remained in contact without Facebook. For this reason, in addition to a snowball approach, there was the use of a convenience sample within my own Facebook circle (see Appendix C). The individuals I approached spent at least eight of the last 10 years in the South and self-identified as Southerners. They were also active in various lesbian communities throughout the states of Alabama, Florida, and Georgia, and were able to refer participants from these areas, particularly those who identified as more private, which their information that would not be public, hence the importance of this recruitment strategy.

Since the primary purpose of this study is exploratory and descriptive, snowball and convenience sampling are sufficient and appropriate (Ritchie, Lewis, Nicholls & Ormston, 2013). These are naturalistic and non-probability samples that are appropriate since this study does not generalize to a broader population (Ritchie et al, 2013). When using snowball sampling success in finding, it is important to note that some of these participants' social circles might overlap or have overlapped at some point in the past. As Browne (2005) noted, snowball sampling success in finding hidden individuals both includes and excludes participants based on social networks. Thus, its primary strength in this study is the use of diverse social networks and recruitment of individuals with whom I was somewhat familiar, but who had limited or no interactions with each other. This also served to protect their identities.

The following are the individuals who were recruited via the Facebook post and the manner in which these individuals were known to me: Madison was a classmate in a study abroad program. Jess was the director of the LGBTQ Resource Center at my University, and we

met at an LGBTQ faculty gathering. I met Samantha through Plenty of Fish, a dating web site that I had joined early in my "coming out" process in an effort to create an LGBQ community for myself. Lily was a student of mine at a mid-sized southern university in 2010, and we have stayed in touch via Facebook. Jamie was a referral and is Lily's wife. Lauren was a referral. I was her church youth minister in 2002, and she was referred by another former youth group member who came out to me via Facebook in 2006. At the time Lauren and I first met, we both identified as straight. Karen was a referral via Facebook; a personal friend referred her. We had never met prior to the interview. Finally, Debby was known to me via a very private ex-girlfriend. Two participants were recruited face-to-face. Amanda was a classmate in a graduate level qualitative course and was verbally recruited. Katie was a student of mine at a large southern University in 2013, and she participated after the course was complete.

All potential participants received an email (see Appendix B) or Facebook message (see Appendix C) sharing with them the details of the study and ensuring that they fulfilled the participation criteria. Once participants affirmed their participation, an interview was scheduled and they were emailed a Consent Form (see Appendix E) prior to their participation in the interview. Due to the sensitive nature of the topic and LGBQ being a protected category, verbal consent was given in lieu of written consent, which was approved by the university's Institutional Review Board. Participants were also informed prior to participation that they would be audio recorded and the recordings would remain confidential through transcription and use of a pseudonym. Also, they understood that audio recordings would be eventually destroyed. Once participants confirmed their participation, they were contacted via email to confirm the location and time of the interview (see Appendix D.)

Initially, the goal of the study was to recruit six to 10 female identified lesbians, half of which were the more open partner in a relationship and half of which were the more private partner in a relationship. The focus on the southern United States was due both to convenience and based on the aforementioned understanding of LGBQ legal and social history. A year of recruitment yielded 10 individuals whose ages ranged from 23 to 51, female-, lesbian-, white-, and southern-identified and members of relationships with varying levels of openness regarding sexual orientation. The following section is a brief description of participants provided in an effort to depict these women's backgrounds. These descriptions are not all-inclusive, but they are based on the demographic and other significant information volunteered by the participants.

Demonstrating Quality within this Qualitative Study

While there is great debate primarily stemming from variance in paradigms (e.g. positivists, interpretivists, post-structuralists), over the standards by which qualitative inquiry should be assessed (Freeman, Preissle, Roulston & Pierre, 2007), there are specific strategies that are frequently used to demonstrate quality, not only in relation to qualitative studies, but also specifically in relation to qualitative interview studies. Roulston (2010) explains that, "I use the term quality in the sense of demonstrating excellence, although many competing terms are used within the field of qualitative inquiry. These include, but are not limited to, validity, reliability, rigor, trustworthiness, credibility, transferability, and plausibility (p.83)." The following parameters were put in place to increase the quality and validity of this research study. First, theoretical triangulation was used "in which different theoretical perspectives of the data are compared" (Roulston, 2010, p.84). These phenomena were analyzed through positivist, interpretivist, critical, and post-structural theoretical approaches (Freeman et al., 2007). I also included a detailed subjectivity statement in the introduction of this paper outlining the subject

positions I occupy. Including this reflective background of myself allowed me to recognize and consider my own biases, which also affords readers the privilege of doing the same (Pillow, 2003; Roulston, 2010). To further ensure that my bias did not skew the findings, I conducted member checks to assure that I was properly representing each individual within the study (Roulston, 2010; Seale, 1999).

Post-positivistic qualitative philosophy argues that inquiry is hermeneutic, or relying on explanation and interpretation, and that subjectivity and objectivity cannot be completely separated. Once all data was transcribed and double verified by the primary researcher for accuracy, a total of 150 pages of data were generated. Once analysis was completed, member checks were conducted. This involved sending a copy of Chapters 1 – 4 to participants (Glesne, 2010) with the intent of getting their feedback of my interpretation. Four responded, with only two asking for changes to be made to names of individuals mentioned within the document. Once I had their response data, it was analyzed, confirming that the themes and interpretations emerging did reflect the use of CPMT in their relationships. This also led to making the few name changes requested. I again followed up with all participants, sharing these few adjustments until all participants were satisfied with the finalized document.

As will be discussed in Chapter Three, a malleable yet standardized method was used for analyzing, interpreting, and understanding the data collected from participants. I will discuss how Owen's (1984) categories of recurrence and forcefulness proved to provide the best approach for analyzing these interviews, particularly those with more private participants, as they often used paralinguistic cues for communication. This methodology was deemed most appropriate to preserve the richness of the data given the sensitive nature of the topic. Chapter Four follows by describing the emergent themes observed within these 10 completed interviews.

In Chapter Four, I have both evaluated and theorized the data and its contributions to and implications for lesbian relational communication scholarship.

CHAPTER 3: RESULTS

Mason (2010) argues that, in the case of dissertations, researchers should work from the concept of saturation. He argues that too often doctoral students draw too much data in an effort to give the appearance of increased validity through large sample sizes and ultimately do not analyze it effectively or well. Similarly, there is a strong theoretical basis for this position, which argues that qualitative inquiry should be focused on the concept of saturation, rather than dependent upon arbitrary sample sizes. Dey (1999) suggests that the longer a researcher examines, familiarizes him/herself with, and analyzes the data, the greater there is potential for new findings. Saturation, as defined by Dey (1999), is reached when the research becomes counterproductive, or it hits significantly diminished returns. Essentially, the new themes that are discovered do not add anything substantial to the overall findings, model, theory, or framework.

In choosing 10 individuals, I found that I hit a saturation point, or no new information being produced in the ninth and tenth interviews. This is Dey's recommendation: to complete two additional interviews once you have noted the same themes emerging repeatedly. Additionally, this *N* is in alignment with other recent studies that utilize semi-structured interviews that focused on LGBQ individuals and perceived stigmatized identity (Grodensky, Golin, Jones, Mamo, Dennis, Abernathy, & Patterson, 2015; Heintz, 2012; Jeffery & Tweed, 2015; Moore & Jenkins, 2012; Nielsen & Alderson, 2014; and Skinta, Brandrett, Schenk, Wells, & Dilley, 2014). Several examples of similar research completed within recent years are detailed below, including those that relate to self-disclosure, self-concept, and relationships. In the

following studies, we see sample sizes of 10, 8, 8, 15, 8, 15, or an approximate average of 10, which is consistent with the current study.

Nielsen and Alderson (2014) examined the phenomenon of Lesbian and Queer professors disclosing in the classroom using semi-structured, in-depth interviews with 10 self-identified lesbians from Canada. In another study, eight self-identifying clinicians were interviewed regarding self-disclosure or concealment in therapeutic relationships (Jeffery & Tweed, 2015). Similarly, Moore and Jenkins (2012) examined the perceived risks and benefits of self-disclosure of sexual orientation by gay and lesbian therapists to their clients by interviewing a non-random, purposive sample of eight counsellors and psychotherapists in current practice. Grodensky, Golin, Jones, Mamo, Dennis, Abernathy, and Patterson (2015) interviewed 15 women (13 African American and 2 Caucasian) in HIV care regarding the role of relationships, spirituality, disclosure, stigma and shame for older women living with HIV and seeking support in the south. Skinta, Brandrett, Schenk, Wells, and Dilley (2014) explored shame, self-acceptance and disclosure in the lives of gay men living with HIV. They interviewed eight men from a community HIV clinic to participate in an intervention and then interviewed three men about their experiences. Heintz (2012) examined work-life dilemmas emerging from lesbian executives' narratives in his study through using snowball sampling, and recruited 15 self-identified lesbian women executives, of whom 12 disclosed their sexual identity and three concealed it at work. Heintz also noted the challenge or recruiting very private lesbians in his research. Also similarly to this current study, Heintz actually recruited 25 individuals initially, but lost ten due to time commitments and concerns over revealing their sexual identity.

In addition to the precedent set by the aforementioned studies, there is a strong theoretical basis for this position, which argues that qualitative inquiry should be focused on the concept of

saturation, rather than dependent upon arbitrary sample sizes. Dey (1999) suggests that the longer a researcher examines, familiarizes him/herself with, and analyzes the data, the greater there is potential for new findings. Saturation, as defined by Dey (1999), is reached when the research becomes counterproductive, or it hits significantly diminished returns. Essentially, the new themes that are discovered do not add anything substantial to the overall findings, model, theory, or framework.

I used theoretical triangulation, which is means that "different theoretical perspectives of the data are compared" (Roulston, 2010, p. 84). Thus, I analyzed the data on this phenomenon through positivist (Dillard, 2008), interpretivist (Goffman, 1958, McDermott, 1981), critical (Horkheimer, 2002; Kramarae, 2005), and poststructural (Butler, 2006; Foucault, 1990) theoretical approaches. The use of a variety of paradigms increases the legitimacy of the assumptions advanced by this proposed theory. To ensure that my personal biases did not skew the results, I scheduled member check interviews with each participant for the purpose of getting their feedback of the interpretation and ensuring accuracy (Creswell & Miller, 2000; Denzin, 1978; Glesne, 2010; Lincoln & Guba, 1985/2001; Pillow, 2003; Roulston, 2010). Once the interviews were conducted and transcribed, I analyzed the data thoroughly in an effort to ensure that all critical themes were identified and categorized. The next section provides the analytical tool, Owen's (1984) Categories of Recurrence and Forcefulness, which was used to ascertain themes that emerged during participant interviews

Applying CPMT to the Data Using Owen's Categories of Recurrence and Forcefulness

CPMT proposes that individuals manage multiple boundaries through privacy coordination (Petronio, 2002/2012). For the purpose of this study, we explored how lesbian couples 1) managed their individual private information (set personal boundaries), 2) managed

private information co-owned by both partners (set collective boundaries), 3) used communication to navigate privacy, and 4) experienced the effects of these communication strategies and tactics on themselves as individuals and the relationship. As such, in-depth interviews were conducted in order to understand the experiences of these women as fully as possibly.

The Interviews

Each interview was recorded and the audio recordings were transcribed personally by the researcher. Both the audio/visual recordings and transcriptions served as the primary data for analysis. These were analyzed using Owen's (1984) categories of recurrence and forcefulness. Owen explains that,

> Recurrence is observed when at least two parts of a report had the same thread of meaning, even though different wording indicated such a meaning...Forcefulness, refers to vocal inflection, volume, or dramatic pauses which serve to stress and subordinate some utterances from other locutions in the oral reports. (p.275)

Using this form of data analysis allowed salient themes to rise to the foreground, while others that were not as vital fell to the background. When transcribing the interviews, I listened for forcefulness, and I reviewed each recording multiple times to make sure I did not miss any information participants may have emphasized as being valuable. I then coded the transcribed data for recurrence. While a number of primary themes emerged, those reported in the following analysis represent only the responses that clustered around the themes related to the research question, which examined self-concept, parasocial interactions, and third-person effects.

To increase validity, my initial interpretation of the data was written up and a copy was sent to the participants. I then scheduled member check interviews with each of them for the

purpose of getting their feedback on the interpretation (Creswell & Miller, 2000; Denzin, 1978; Lincoln & Guba, 1985/2001). Once their response data were received, they were analyzed and my interpretation was revised.

Participant Histories

In total, there were 10 participants. In the following paragraphs, each participant and her personal history are described. This description is based upon information she shared prior to, during, and after our interview as well as my assessment of her behavior during our interaction (e.g. outgoing, shy, etc.). Each has been given a pseudonym to protect her identity.

Katie is a shy, quiet, 23-year-old lesbian undergraduate from a small town in South Georgia (current pop. 9,000). When asked to describe herself, Katie explained that she has a strong southern identity, collects guns, and enjoys hunting. She identifies her dress as tomboyish, often wearing polos or basketball shorts. At the time of interview, she was in a 6-month relationship, which has since ended. She and her partner were seniors studying Risk Management at a large southern university where she says most of her friends knew about their relationship. However, only her two best friends from her hometown know, and she wants to keep it that way. She identifies as private and is insistent on concealing her relationship from her parents. While she states that she would share her sexual orientation with her family if she were financially independent from them, she also states throughout the interview that she fears harming her parents' reputation in their small town and has considerable concerns with being rejected by her family. Katie met her first open lesbian at age 20 and had never met anyone in a lesbian relationship prior to dating her current partner.

Madison is a sweet, friendly, outgoing, and feminine 24-year-old lesbian from a small town adjacent to Atlanta, Georgia (current pop 2,700). At the time of interview, she was in a 6-

month relationship with her partner who works as a financial planner. Madison works as a Sales Development Agent for a national company and currently lives in San Antonio, Texas. At the time of the interview, Madison identified as more private, though she has been opening up more since moving to a new state. She met an open lesbian for the first time at 8-years-old (in 1999) and had never met anyone in a lesbian relationship prior to dating her first girlfriend in 2012. She describes that relationship as challenging because her partner wanted to be more openly affectionate and it made Madison feel very uncomfortable.

Lily is an outspoken 30-year-old lesbian with a rainbow colored feminist fist tattoo on her forearm and a passion for social justice. She loves to laugh and dye her hair a different color every month. Her education is in mass media, but she has been working as a nanny and hopes to return to graduate school soon for social work. Lily was born in a more conservative suburb outside of Atlanta, Georgia (current pop. 29,000). She currently resides in Atlanta with her partner Jamie whom she met while at college in Southern Georgia. Jamie was serving in the Air Force and stationed near Lily. At the time of the interview, both partners identified as out 70% of the time, an identity that is relatively new for them due to the repeal of "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" (DADT). Prior to that, Jamie was 100% closeted with the exception of when they traveled over an hour outside their city. Out of respect for Jamie, Lily behaved as if they were just friends prior to DADT's repeal.

Jamie is Lily's partner and is a kindhearted, more reserved 29-year-old lesbian. She is now ex-Air Force and attending school for engineering. She has a rainbow ring tattooed on her left ring finger to represent her commitment to Lily, a tattoo she excitedly she got the day after DADT was repealed. She was born and raised in a small southern town in California (current pop 13,000). She lived there until she was 18 when she married to her high school sweetheart,

Nathan, and moved to Georgia. For the three years during their marriage, she also had a girlfriend, of which Nathan was supportive. During that time, she identified as bisexual. Eventually, a friend confronted her and said, "You aren't bi. You are gay." Jamie reflected on this and realized she had married Nathan due to pressures of being Mormon and wanting to get out of her small town. They amicably divorced. Within a couple of years, she met Lily, and they have been together for six years. Six months prior to the interview, they had a small wedding with six guests in New York: Lily's brother, best friend, aunt, and their dates. They married outside their home state because gay marriages are neither legal nor recognized in Georgia Neither participant's parent approved of, assisted with, or attended the wedding. Both Lily and Jamie were 17 when they met their first open lesbian. For both of them, it was a high school friend who was then heavily chastised by their fellow students. Neither had met another lesbian couple before their first relationship.

Lauren is a talkative, activism-oriented 30-year-old lesbian who was born, raised, and now lives in a mid-sized city in Florida (current pop 52,000). Her educational and work backgrounds were based in the Catholic faith, including having a master's degree in Theology from a top Catholic college. She met her partner Sarah at a Catholic summer camp five years ago. She had only dated men prior. Three years ago, they eloped, and two years ago, they both quit their jobs working for the Catholic Church so that they could live openly. Lauren now works as a digital content editor for a public radio station, and Sarah works for the Humane Society. Both ladies went from being almost 100% private several years ago, including not even acknowledging being in a relationship while at their respective jobs, to openly disclosing to others about their relationship, wedding, and even having a local ceremony for their parents to attend. Lauren still struggles with her family. Her identical twin sister refuses to speak to her

partner and will not allow her to visit her home. Until last year, Lauren's mother assumed that though she and Sarah were married, they were not "sleeping together" (i.e., having sex) in accordance with the Catholic church's teachings which state it is not a sin to be gay as long as one does not engage in sexual activity. Neither woman still identifies as Catholic. Lauren met her first open lesbian as a junior in high school and had met a couple of lesbians in relationship before dating Sarah. Sarah and Lauren were plaintiffs in the ACLU's lawsuit to overturn the gay marriage ban in Florida, which has been overturned since the interview. Unfortunately, they are still fighting logistical red tape to gain equal benefits.

Jess is a bubbly, bright, outgoing 38-year-old lesbian originally from Michigan who has lived in the South on two different occasions, including during her early college years when she came out as lesbian. She lives a very open life, but there are still areas, primarily familial, where she remains private, including never telling her now-deceased father about her identity. Jess was the LGBQ Resource Center Director at a large Southern University and now works as a radio show host and public speaker on gender issues. She and her partner have been together for seven years and married for the last two. During their first three years together, she and her partner were lesbian-identified. For the last four years, her partner identified as transgender and began transitioning. Because he currently identifies as male, Jess explains that she, herself, now identifies more as queer than lesbian since she is now married to a man. Despite dating a woman at age 19, she never met a lesbian living openly until she was 24.

Samantha is a soft-spoken 39-year-old self-described “Butch lesbian” with a low voice and powerful laugh. She was born and raised in a small southern town in Georgia (current population 2,600) and has spent her whole life there, with the exception of one year in California. Samantha is a medical doctor who went away to college and fell in love with a

woman at age 18. She had never met an open lesbian prior to this experience. She also had minimal negative stereotypes from her family or religion, so she came out quickly with minimal negative response. Since then, she has lived 100% openly except when dating a private woman who was not open with her family or child. She identifies as single and dating after recently amicably divorcing from her female partner of 11-years. They were not married but had legally entered into a domestic partnership while in California.

Karen is a laidback, relaxed 45-year-old lesbian who identifies as 100% open. She was born and raised in a small town in mid-Georgia (current pop 13,000). She owns her own business as a handy-woman and is married to a high school teacher who manages Advanced Placement testing. They have been together for 13 years and recently got married, just the two of them, at a courthouse in Asheville, NC, about six months after conducting our interview. Being from Georgia, they had to get married outside their home state. They announced their wedding via a picture of them at the courthouse on Facebook. While Karen identifies as public and has done so most of her life, she became much more private for about 10 years due to her current partner having small children and her husband attempting to remove them from the home because they were gay. In her interview, she tells a story of how private investigators hired by her partner's ex-husband followed her and her partner around to "catch them in the act." She also shares how her partner's custody agreement legally forbade Karen from staying overnight in her own home when her partner's teenage daughter spent the weekend. Karen met her first open lesbian at age 18, a childhood friend who encouraged her to come out. She explains that she hated the sound of the word lesbian because of the way her mother spoke negatively about gay individuals, but once she embraced it, she did so loudly.

Debby is an outgoing, active, personable 51-year-old lesbian from a small town in South Georgia (current pop 2,400). She currently lives in a very liberal suburb east of Atlanta where she owns her own company as a business consultant and is actively involved as a board member and officer in multiple education-related organizations. At the time of the interview, she was in a two and a half year relationship with a partner who is ex-military. Debby identifies as open in 99% of her life, with the one exception being her father, whom she has never told. He has always been kind to her partners, but she treats them as her friends in his presence because, if he learned she is gay, his religion would require him to cut all ties with her. He is her only living parent, and they are very close. The first open lesbian Debby met was her high school basketball coach in 9th grade. She had never met anyone in a lesbian relationship prior to falling in love with her first girlfriend as a freshman in college. She states that, after witnessing violence toward other gays and lesbians, she learned that being out in her small town in the Bible Belt was dangerous.

Amanda is a quiet and reserved 51-year-old lesbian originally from a small suburb of New York who identifies as very private. If asked about her partner by someone she does not know well, then she will say she has been in a committed relationship for 20 years. If pushed, then she will say, "My partner just happens to be a woman." She does this to avoid judgment, as she does not believe she is stereotypically gay (i.e., she can pass as straight), although her partner is. She moved to the south at a young age, returned to New York for her undergrad, and then back to the south for her career and graduate school. She is employed as a Registered Nurse and an Assistant Professor of Nursing. She and her partner have been together for over 20 years and entered into a domestic partnership via a large ceremony in New York several years back. Her parents were not in attendance, as she is not out to them, but her siblings were. Her partner

started out as a friend that turned into more, and she had never met an open lesbian prior to their relationship.

Now that participants have been properly introduced (see above and Table 2), I will move through the five suppositions and three privacy rule management process that Petronio in her model of CPMT. As we move through each aspect of the theory, we will examine themes that emerged by applying an a priori analysis of interviews and transcripts. CPMT proposes five basic suppositions that underpin the rule management system. These suppositions are: (1) CPMT focuses on the revelation of private information, allowing a focus on how privacy and intimacy are separate yet fundamentally related to the act of disclosure; (2) CPMT uses the metaphor of boundaries to illustrate the division between public and private information; (3) CPMT asserts that individuals feel they have a claim or right to own and control their private information; (4) CPMT uses a rule based management system to provide a structure for handling private information; and (5) CPMT is dialectical in that it assumes that people experience tensions between opposites and contradictions in their social life; in this case, public-private, open-closed, and disclosure-privacy (Petronio, 2002/2012). Using these suppositions as a frame, themes that emerged from the interview data were sorted according to the supposition with which they best aligned.

Table 2: Summary of Participant Demographics

Name	**Age**	**Identity**	**Age first "came out" as lesbian**	**Age at first meeting of an open lesbian**	**Exposure to same-sex relationship prior to their own? G=gay, L=lesbian**	**Exposure to lesbian relationship prior to their own?**
Katie	23	Private	23	20	Yes- 1 G	No
Madison	24	Private	22	8	Yes - 2 G	No
Jamie	29	Private	21	17	No	No
Lauren	30	Private	26	17	Yes; 8 G, 2 L	Yes
Lily	30	Public	21	17	Yes; 3 L	Yes
Jess	38	Public	31	24	No	No
Samantha	39	Public	18	18	No	No
Karen	45	Public	18	18	No	No
Amanda	51	Private	31	31	No	No
Debby	51	Public	19	15	No	No
Average			**23**	**18.4**	**40%.**	**20%**

Sexual Identity as Private Information

CPMT's first supposition argues a concentration on private information. When analyzing these interviews through the lens of CPMT, it is vital to note that the theory focuses solely on communicative interactions specific to private information (Petronio, 2002/2012). CPMT defines private disclosure as "concerning the process of telling and reflects the content of private information about others and us" (Petronio, 2010, p. 6). Petronio differentiates between private disclosures and self-disclosures. By focusing on private information as the content of the disclosure, we can explore privacy and intimacy as separate but fundamentally related to the act

of disclosure. Essentially, rather than arguing that self-disclosing creates intimacy, the goal was to determine if the process of privacy management, such as concealing information for the good of one's partner or the establishment of a process for co-navigating privacy boundaries, can work to establish intimacy.

Public/Private Boundary Development

The second supposition of CPMT asserts the use of a boundary metaphor to illustrate a public/private demarcation in relationships. In addition to rejecting the label of lesbian as seen in Supposition 1, all participants implied that they used a public/private boundary for physical touch and both verbal and nonverbal public displays of affection. It seems that, as a result of the challenges listed above, all participants were fully comfortable with displaying affection privately (one-on-one), but 9 out of 10 were uncomfortable with and, in some cases, feared public displays of affection. Even lesbians who identified as more open regularly monitored their physical interactions with their partners in public contexts.

As Petronio (2002) explains, boundaries can be transparent, moderate, or thick. The level of permeability is related to the amount of control of private information present in a relationship. For instance, in a moderate boundary, both participants might feel slightly comfortable and reveal they are in a relationship, but temper their displays of affection. In the present study, Jess, a director at a university LGBQ Resource Center who lives quite openly, shares her experience with expressing affection openly to a woman she dated who looked very stereotypically gay. While both women were openly gay and comfortable being seen with each other as a couple in public, Jess's awareness of the moderate privacy boundary heightened with a couple of events. First, multiple people mistook her female partner for a man. Secondly, while,

her partner displayed visible symbols of being lesbian, she was still uncomfortable being physically affectionate in public. Jess states that,

> I was with somebody who looked very masculine, like sometimes got "sired." And that I think sometimes made me, not uncomfortable about our relationship, but it made me more aware or made me more on guard about being out in public and about how people responded to her or to us. I remember one time we were in Atlanta. I think we went for a basketball game. And we were walking down a street outside the arena, and I went to hold her hand, and she kinda pulled away, and she was like, "You're going to hold my hand right now?" I said "Uh, *YEAH*." She was really uncomfortable with it, and I said, "We're in Atlanta. A) You're not in Podunk, Georgia. B) I can promise you, you wouldn't get a second look because of the way you are dressed, the way you appear, people see what they want to see. They are gonna walk by and they are going to see me holding hands with a man. That's what they are going to see. They just are." So I don't know if it was necessarily discomfort because I was with somebody who was really masculine, but it seemed like it was being more aware in situations where I think they might read them as masculine and then realize that's a woman, that people might treat us a little bit differently.

Through Jess's comments, we can see that her cues for revealing her relationship and identity are not being in a small town ("We aren't in Podunk, GA) and the fact that she and her partner are able to pass as straight ("They are gonna walk by and they are going to see me holding hands with a man."). However, her partner is still uncomfortable with the public display of affection. In this instance, Jess's boundaries are more moderate, maybe even transparent, while her partners' are thicker. The result, as we can see from Jess's final sentence, is an increase in Jess's

discomfort. That feeling that she "wasn't able to put her finger on" is what Cass (1979) would refer to as incongruence in one's self-concept: Jess took pride in her relationship, yet she was also aware that people were judging her partner. Jess felt comfortable and happy, and her natural response to that was to express affection. When this was rejected by her partner, Jess's perception of a "good date" (i.e., fun, romantic, affectionate, and comfortable) was disrupted. In this instance, conflicting boundaries were there but not discussed in advance of the date, which resulted in unclear expectations for expressing affection that reduced and perhaps even counteracted the purpose of hand-holding's (i.e., displaying affection/increasing intimacy).

In another instance, and perhaps one of the most extreme cases of navigation between the public and private dynamic in this study, was with participant Lauren and her wife, Sarah. Lauren has a master's degree in Theology from Villanova University, a Catholic college. She and Sarah were both actively involved in conservative Catholic movements, worked for the Catholic Church, and were employed at a Catholic summer camp in Seattle when they met. As employees of the Catholic Church, an institution that actively discourages gay relationships, they both remained closeted. Then, Sarah quit her job and went to work in a secular non-profit, where she began living openly. However, Lauren remained working at Catholic charities and chose to live closeted at work to keep the job she loved. During that year of remaining closeted, not only did Sarah and Lauren live together, but they also got married. Lauren explains how, throughout that year, she used omission or strategic ambiguity to conceal their relationship from people at work. Because Lauren's twin sister was also active in the Catholic Church and openly disapproved of her and Sarah's relationship, Lauren kept the marriage a secret from her family as well. As such, Lauren negotiated this boundary, which caused her to transition through the different stages

during that time in their life. When asked how she acknowledged Sarah at work when she was closeted, Lauren explained that,

> I wouldn't. The people I worked with thought I was single. Whenever I had events that you could bring a date to, I had a guy friend who also worked at the diocese, and we would just go together. They didn't know I was in a relationship because even my boss was having a tailgate party and said, “You know you can bring a boyfriend or something,” and I was like, "Uhhh… not seeing anyone.” So. But actually we got married when I was working there and I think I did start wearing my wedding ring and was just like, fuck it.

When asked how she was able to navigate getting married while staying closeted, Lauren explained:

> We eloped. I guess that's the answer to that. Actually, we didn't even tell my parents until after I had left that job. Ironically, we had planned a trip to DC around a work trip that I was taking to Baltimore and that's when we applied for our marriage license and then we made a second trip to actually go have the ceremony.

Since a wedding is a public display of one's commitment, I was interested in how Lauren and Sarah navigated concealing their relationship while also holding a public ceremony. Lauren explained that she and Sarah were allowed to invite 15 guests to Washington, D.C. where they were married. They had a full house, but none of their family was in attendance. When asked why family did not attend, Lauren explained,

> We didn't tell them we were going. Sarah told her parents the next day. I didn't tell my parents for months. In fact, my mom had to confront me because she had noticed that we were wearing wedding rings, and I was like, “Well, I was going to tell you together, but

> yeah, we got married." And I'm sure her feelings were maybe a little hurt, but if they were, she never said anything about it. We have some communication issues in my family like many families, but you know, they [parents, but not siblings] came to our second wedding and participated [Sarah and Lauren hosted a second, larger celebration in their hometown a year later].

While Lauren and Sarah's family knew about their relationship, Lauren still desired to remain private about their wedding, as she knew her family did not fully accept their relationship. Her privacy boundary allowed her to share the relationship, but not the wedding or marriage. When asked if she was private with her family, she explained,

> About getting married I was. What I told people at the time, and I still think this is true, is that I just think your wedding day should be a day where everyone is happy for you and if people aren't going to be happy and if them knowing about it is enough for them to be unhappy, then I'm just not going to tell them. Because I want everybody to be happy, and everybody there was really happy.

Through Lauren's story, we see that she shares her relationship with her family, but not her marriage. Later in the interview she reflects on how frustrating it was to not be able to share the excitement of her engagement and wedding day with everyone she loved. More recently, after having had the second wedding, her twin did not attend either ceremony and still refuses to allow Sarah, her partner, in her home. This is a case of forced privacy by a reluctant confidante (Afifi & Guerrero, 1998; Afifi & Guerrero, 2000; McBride & Bergen, 2008; Petronio, 2000), or one who is the recipient of a disclosure that they did not want to hear and do not want to co-own and protect the private information. It may be inferred from Lauren's story that her sister loves her, but does not want to hear or know about her romantic relationship. The difference between

Lauren's story and Jess's story is that Lauren and her wife openly discussed their privacy boundaries before entering a situation where privacy would have to be navigated while Jess and her partner did not.

In the final example, we will look at another couple: Jamie and Lily. They were interviewed separately to ensure privacy and as much disclosure as possible about their relationship. One experience they had together that reflects the public/private demarcation occurred when Jamie's attempt at a public display of affection was rejected, thereby causing disappointment for both her and Lily. Lily shares a story of a date with Jamie that occurred early in their relationship. Jamie was an airman during the time of Don't Ask, Don't Tell. Lily explains that Jamie always feared she was being watched, even during seemingly private moments.

> I remember one time we were in a movie theater waiting for a movie to start. We were the *ONLY* two people in the movie theater, and I reached over and touched her hand and she grabbed it from me because she was convinced that people were following her because people knew and stuff (SIGH). So, situations like that, we did have discussions about, but, I mean, I think that I was always a very understanding person, and we came to a conclusion that I would call her J or I would give her male pronouns if I was talking to somebody about her that didn't already know that she was a woman. And I think that was mostly to protect her occupationally.

When Lily is asked to describe their conversation following this encounter, she offers the following explanation:

> It looked kind of like, I was definitely hurt. I was hurt. And I didn't understand because it was a dark theater, we were the only two people there, but she explained to me afterwards

> that the military had basically beaten into her that somebody is always watching her and there was a lot of paranoia that came along with being gay and in the military during DADT. And I think that actually happened early on in our relationship, and I understood it and it was very difficult, but you know, she was in the military. It's not like you can quit the military.

From this experience, Lily and Jamie became aware of the need to formally establish rules that would help them navigate and maintain their privacy as a lesbian couple. This phenomenon will, however, be discussed further later.

Attention will now be directed towards pre-privacy navigation discussion, which ultimately proved to be successful since Jamie and Lily have gotten married. The couple's privacy rules and expectations crystalized when Jamie was nearly "outted" by her staff sergeant. Lily was able to support Jamie during this very difficult time during her journey. Jamie and Lily lived in a mid-sized southern town in Georgia where Lily was in school and Jamie served in the military. Jamie and Lily were unable to secure a one-bedroom apartment due to housing discrimination. During their individual interviews, they each shared that, repeatedly, when landlords saw two female names' on the lease, they would call for clarification and then say they could not rent to them. For this reason, they were forced to find a roommate in order to legitimize their rental. This meant renting a 3-bedroom, 2-bath apartment, with the third bedroom being rented by a male airman who was in Jamie's squadron who was aware of their relationship. Although this man knew, the women chose to continue keeping their relationship private. They were forced to be even more secretive when a fellow airman observed the way Lily and Jamie looked at each other across the room while at a military picnic. Jamie explains that she talked to Lily about the man's observation, and they agreed to alter their expressions of affection to reduce

the risk of being caught. They also decided that Jamie was to never acknowledge Lily as her partner in their hometown, despite them being engaged. Instead, she calls Lily her "roommate."

Jamie recalls one incident where she believes her military career was nearly ruined. She had offered to dog sit for her staff sergeant. As the female sergeant arrived at their home to drop of the dog, Jamie and Lily had to be very strategic in hiding all of the artifacts and mementos (e. g., photos) that would signify their romantic relationship. Jamie describes the encounter in greater detail:

> This one time, me and Lily were living together, and we had pictures and stuff of us in the living room. And the staff sergeant was coming over because she was dropping off her dog. I did not expect her to want to come in. I just thought I'd just go to the car and get the dog, get the stuff, and it would be over. But she wanted to come in. She said, "Oh, let me get the dog, I'll bring it in." And I was like (whispers) "Oh shit she's coming in" (looks panicked). So I had to basically run in the apartment and said [to Lily], 'Sergeant McNeal's coming in!' and Lily said, 'Oh no, we have all these pictures!' So she had to run around the apartment and get all these pictures and put them in the bedroom before Sergeant McNeal could make it to the door. It was a little intense, just being like, ugh, she can't see that stuff.

Jamie stops laughing after sharing the story and quickly brings it back to the hard truth.

> You know with DADT, you'd lose your job and get kicked out of the Air Force. A dishonorable discharge is really tough to get out of, even post-military, because people ask about your service, and if you give them a 214 that says dishonorable they are going to assume the worst about you. So that was a real concern.

As Jamie's story indicates, there would have been serious consequences if her sexual identity were disclosed. She was in danger of losing her job due to military law, which was something she was unwilling to risk.

Jamie, Lily, and several other participants are managing their own boundaries based on several internal and external factors, which we will discuss in the next section. Ironically, most boundaries were externally erected, either by a system of oppression or a reluctant confidante, yet these boundaries were then taken up as self-regulation to control stigma. As environments, situations, or self-perceptions changed, participants either removed themselves or actively fought against the heteronormative systems that held them in a stigmatized role. For instance, Jamie and Lily left the small town and moved to a metropolitan area. Out of the 9 participants who had been religious, all but Jess disengaged from church involvement, and Jess attends a gay-friendly church. As these stories demonstrate, as participants became more comfortable accepting and embracing their identity as a lesbian, their willingness to increase their openness with accepting and supportive straight individuals ultimately decreased the amount of stigmatization they felt in general with being a part of a marginalized group.

Ownership and Control of Private Information

Supposition 3 of CPMT relates to two aspects of control. First, people believe their private information is owned, so they want to be in control of setting the boundaries and second, revealing or concealing private information may lead to feeling vulnerable (Petronio, 2002/2012). In the current study, all participants consistently cited being raised in small southern towns with strong religious roots as the reason for wanting to control one's identity as a lesbian. Bible Belt teachings strongly affected the self-concept of all participants and planted seeds of internalized homophobia. Because being lesbian was conflated with isolation, invisibility, and

exclusion, participants appear to have been socialized by family, friends, and society to conceal their lesbian identities. However, when participants did start to have relationships, they took measures to hide the relationships, such as strategically hiding affection and treating partners as friends rather than romantic interests. This was a common tactic used to avoid directly revealing one's sexual identity to those who were perceived as unaccepting or unsupportive.

This strategy of concealing is reinforced by a lack of visibility of LGBQ individuals, especially lesbians, as well as the topic of being gay being treated as taboo during the participants' childhoods. Samantha explains that, "I'd grown up in a small town. I actually didn't... I probably knew less than a handful of gay and lesbian people. I didn't... I don't know if I even knew a lesbian person." Samantha went on to explain that she came out prior to Ellen DeGeneres' public coming out in 1998; therefore, her only exposure to gay people was through dramatic reality TV shows, like *The Jerry Springer Show*. Similarly, Jamie also describes feeling like gay people were outsiders because, "especially pre-*Ellen*, TV wasn't very nice to homosexuals. They were often pictured as either victims of AIDS or these weird people that did weird things." As their disclosures indicate, the "othering" of LGBQ individuals has a direct effect on the participants' desire to embrace their lesbian identity.

When participants were asked to consider how they viewed LGBQ individuals before coming out, 9 out of 10 said they felt they were supposed to treat them differently. To that end, it can be presumed that these participants would also feel they would be treated differently upon coming out. Additionally, 8 of the 10 participants said they did not meet any openly gay people until they were in high school or college. None knew any openly gay individuals growing up. The earliest reported instance of meeting someone who was openly lesbian was at age 8, and the most recent or latest was at age 31. The average age of meeting an open lesbian was 18.4 years

of age. The average age for "coming out" as defined by participants was 23 years of age. To give a quick overview of participants's first experience meeting an open lesbian and their first experience witnessing a same-sex relationship, see Table 2.

Jess explained that she had not met an openly gay lesbian prior to her first same-sex relationship, which was at the age of 24. Even her own partner was not open and certainly had not witnessed a lesbian relationship either. According to Jess, exposure to the media affected her own interactions with her first girlfriend. After describing her romantic relationship with a woman when they both worked at Disney, Jess was asked to elaborate further on having never met a lesbian, with her only exposure being through the media, and how that affected her perception of her first partner:

> No. Definitely not in person. Obviously I think references on TV, but I think they were things like *Jerry Springer*. They were very stereotypical, this is what a lesbian looks like. And I only know that because when I first found out that somebody I was working with at Disney was gay, I was like, "What?" She looked like this porcelain doll, beautiful, the most feminine thing I'd ever seen. And I was like, huh? I just didn't get it. So I know in my mind somewhere I had an idea of what that actually was supposed to look like, and I think that was actually the media and things like that.

The lack of contact with open lesbians until participants' late teens demonstrates how their understandings of being a lesbian were not based on personal experience, but rather media depictions of what lesbian relationships were perceived to be. Unfortunately, during the time when these individuals were coming out, this was primarily in a negative manner. The combination of negative media representations and a lack of actual interpersonal contact with lesbian individuals served to reinforce participants' fears of publicly disclosing their sexual

orientation to others. Because this topic was considered taboo, several participants who were even suspected of being LGBQ were stigmatized, and the reality of society being silent about this topic or only speaking in whispers confirmed their beliefs that a perceived risk exists around being lesbian or LGBQ.

Three participants, Debby, Karen, and Lauren, reported that they felt that visibility was a generational issue, which is a belief that younger generations are immersed in a society more accepting of LGBQ individuals and have an increased likelihood of feeling more accepted within society than those who are older. Visibility can be defined as witnessing LGBQ individuals in diverse (including positive) representations in the media as well as interacting interpersonally. Essentially, a removal of the taboo tied to LGBQ sexual orientation. The experiences of the study participants demonstrate a limited relationships between generation and age of coming out. Further, even when LGBQ exposure is increased, the nature of the exposure, particularly in the Bible Belt, can actually serve to increase perceived risks related to disclosing sexual identity. Often times, because of the environment in which participants were raised, increased exposure to and discussions of LGBQ issues actually created a place to establish stigma towards this group that otherwise may not have been discussed. In Debby's case, for example, she references feeling uncomfortable being in a small town because of how her high school basketball coach living as an open lesbian created the situation for her parents to openly express their disapproval of her coaches "lifestyle." By refusing to allow Debby to play on her coach's team because her parents didn't want her around "those people", Debby, despite adoring, looking up to, and empathizing with her coach, learned from her parents that being lesbian was unacceptable. Debby then further perpetuates this prejudice as she conceals her own identity from her extended family in her

childhood hometown. Regarding efforts to explain her lesbian identity to them, she offers that it is not worth her even trying.

> They're not going to understand. They really can't get their heads around it because they weren't raised with it. Nobody was present, and because it is different, it evokes that weird little fear piece in people that says, “Ohh, you're different,” and that's old brain stuff. You can't, I mean it takes a long time to get somebody to rewire that part. There are some things that we have created and we continue to propagate. It's kind of like teaching your children to hate, you know because kids don't come out of the womb hating.

This was Debby's experience in the 1960s. However, because of this experience, we can see that Debby has not come out to her family. This challenges the assertion participants make that the next generation has increased exposure to lesbians. If lesbians like Debby's coach come out and are stigmatized, and then individuals like Debby conceal their identity in similar situations, the taboo and prejudice is propagated. This is demonstrated by Madison's experience a half century later in 2013.

Madison is one of only two participants who reported having seen a number of same-sex relationships prior to having entered her own same-sex relationship. When asked if the visibility of gay relationships helped her in disclosing her own relationship, she said, “No” because there was minimal lesbian presence, and she does not believe the exposure to gay male relationships influenced how she has been able to navigate her relationship.

> No, and I think that's because the majority of same-sex partnerships I had seen were males, and I feel like in Georgia, and in Athens in particular, and I am sure you can attest to this, the amount of lesbian women is like, “Where are they?” So I hadn't really been

> exposed to the female side of it, and it's just, women are very different and so I was only exposed to gay guys.

From Madison's statement we see that, even 50 years later, there is not a tremendous increase in visibility in certain areas of the country, particularly small Southern towns, and the visibility for her is also gendered, favoring male same-sex relationships as opposed to female same-sex relationships. As Madison will discuss later, being in an area where she fears stigmatization and does not see others like herself has affected her perception of risks related to disclosing her sexual orientation to others.

In addition to a lack of visibility leading to a desire to control one's private information, religion and small southern towns (i.e., Bible Belt) were primarily cited as reasons for remaining private about relationships and sexual orientation. All participants reported religion as having an effect on their perception of identifying as lesbian. The negative perceptions played a role in slowing participants' self-identification as lesbian in general and within their social circles. Debby, a participant who identifies as "99% open," refuses to tell her father due to his religious biases.

> I grew up and was raised in a fundamentalist Christian church where I was told no matter how good you are, no matter how many wonderful things you do, you are on greased skids. Going to hell because... Yeah, you're just.... Sorry, they just keep spraying Pam on the bottom of them every time you go back to church. I thought, OK... Ehhh... Well.... (shrugs shoulders and shakes head). So that was an internal conflict for sure, and I was the good kid, trying to please my parents, trying to please my community, trying to fit in, and I pretty much felt like an Emperor penguin standing in a cow pasture on a regular basis. I felt pretty awkward.

As Debby's story demonstrates, and for several other participants, Christian beliefs of family members are often referenced as the reason for not accepting a participant's lesbian identity or partner.

In the case of Jess, her disclosure to her family was not her choice. Rather, her father confronted her on several occasions. While Jess was religious, her father, whom she had never known to be religious, used religion to condemn her dating a woman.

> So my dad confronted me. I had never heard my dad mention the Bible in his life. Never. And the very first thing he brought up was the Bible. The very first thing. The Bible. I'm going to hell. It's wrong. It's a sin. It's unethical. He said, "I always prayed you would never come home and tell me that you were pregnant but I wish that's what you were telling me." I'd rather you were strung out on drugs or killing people because that can be rehabilitated.

Although this is Jess's experience, it is reflective of the strong beliefs many participants' families and friends espoused that ultimately shaped their self-concept. Religious teachings, among other factors, are believed to have strongly affected all participants and planted seeds of internalized homophobia. When participants did start to have relationships, they took measures to hide the relationships, such as strategically hiding affection and treating partners as friends rather than romantic interests. Using strategic ambiguity was a common tactic.

One example of this strategy is evidenced in Debby's knowledge that disclosing her identity as a lesbian to her father will result in damaging and possibly ending their relationship. To avoid this, she has strategically navigated her lesbian relationships over the past 40 years. This is because she knows that verbally disclosing, or even confirming his suspicion, and

removing the ambiguity will result in him choosing relational termination as a solution to their own relational discord.

For those raised in the Bible Belt, especially small towns, any discussion of lesbian individuals tended to be tainted with stigma. As such, several participants were willing to go to great lengths, including marrying men, in an effort to deny being lesbian. When asked when Jamie knew she was a lesbian, she describes how she felt an attraction to women, but tried to deny it due to her upbringing as a Mormon from a small town. She was asked to elaborate and identify the reasons for her denial.

> Partially religious. Growing up Mormon, being gay is obviously *NOT* accepted at all. And then my parents, and just being from a small town, all the lesbians I knew, which was one, and she was pretty much ostracized at school and stuff and people called] her names, and they were mean to her and stuff, so I think maybe it was just a really uncomfortable to be gay. I did have one male gay friend who got relentlessly harassed. To the point where people would throw cups of soda at him. They'd drive by and he'd be walking home and they threw their sodas at him and call him a fag and beat him up and all kinds of stuff, it was terrible.

This specific experience is unique to Jamie, but all 10 participants share similar experiences with the negative effect living in small towns has had on their feeling discomfort. Even Debby, Lily, Jamie, and Lauren, participants from towns that appeared to be more accepting of LGBQ individuals, explain that there is often a strong heteronormative response to any embracing gestures between gay partners.

Lauren's city hosts one of the largest Gay Pride festivals in Florida, but she reports that she still feels stigmatized. When asked from where that belief stems, she explains:

> I feel like from church, and you know the southern culture down here is so unaccepting. In Pensacola, during Memorial Day there's a huge gay party out at the beach, like we're talking tens of thousands of people and I grew up hearing people say, "Don't go out to the beach that weekend." But you don't hear people saying that in the same derogatory about spring break crowds, which is basically the same thing. A few years back the mayor of Pensacola did an official proclamation, proclaiming that Gay Pride Week is Gay Pride Week here in Pensacola. The city is 12 square miles within the county, and the county commissioners held this rally stating we are not for this. And you're like, come on, so that's how backwards some of the leaders in our community are, and the ones who are for equality are sometimes afraid to speak up as allies.

Another major aspect of privacy management that emerged from the interviews relates to managing one's public image or "face." In the situations where participants are members of religious organizations that denounced being lesbian, they often feel cognitive dissonance. All but one participant identifies as being raised religious; however, out of the nine participants who had identified as religious, eight responded to this tension by dissociating from their religious identity. Only one remains active in her church. In some instances, leaving the church meant losing their career.

Lauren explains how she experienced a major loss in her identity as a Christian. Since she had been pursuing a career in Catholic work, she lost her job, her mentors, her future career, and her faith all at one time.

> In addition to losing my job, I lost my career path, I mean that can't be understated. I had been set to be a parish administrator or an RCIA teacher (Right of Christian Initiation of Adults) or catechist or a religion teacher or work for Catholic relief services or work for

> Catholic charities or work at a Catholic university, and I felt like all of that was closed to me. I would say that was the biggest loss; I lost a large part of my identity at the time, which was very... Catholicism was very much a part of my identity at that time, a certain kind of Catholicism I should say. I lost friends, which, I would say, at this point, I lost my mentors too, and that was huge. I had a religious brother who was a huge mentor to me that I spoke with regularly. I mean these are people that I turned to in major life decisions to help me make major life decisions. I had a theology professor that was a huge mentor to me. I had my psychologist, he was a "pray the gay away" guy who was a huge mentor to me. I mean those were like fathers to me, and all of them, across the board, rejected me. It was like, ok, I'm losing the future I thought I planned for myself, I'm losing the people who've helped to guide me towards making decisions in the past. So I guess, I think it's an experience some people have sooner in life than I did which was basically like, "Ok, you're on your own. You have to make decisions on your own, you have to be responsible for yourself," and I felt like I had to do all of that, at least emotionally and psychologically all at once.

In addition to identities as Christians, participants express frustration with their roles within their family of origin being pitted against their roles in their romantic relationship and the challenge of negotiating these two competing identities. Several participants explain how when their partners were not welcome in family members' homes or visitation of nieces and nephews was withheld due to the family member being a "negative influence," a family dynamic was established that disallows individuals to achieve their highest self-actualized identity both within their current family unit and their family of origin.

Rule Based Management for Boundary Regulation

CPMT's fourth supposition proposed that rule management processes regulate the degree of concealing and revealing private information within our relationships (Petronio, 2002). Individuals use rules to determine who receives access to private information as well as how much, when, where, and why (2002). Rules also establish situations where private information is protected. Once rules are established, CPMT offers three rule management processes that capture how these rules function (2002). The first process in rule management is privacy rule foundations. This step focuses on the way rules develop and includes examining the criteria individuals use to establish privacy rules. Individuals acquire rules from their family, community, and society, as well as establishing their own rules based on personal privacy concerns. The second rule management process, once privacy rules have been developed individually, is boundary coordination operations. This aspect of the process is when two or more individuals come together to form a collective privacy boundary. Either they share information with each other, or they mutually experience an event where they both perceive themselves as owning that private information (e.g. a first date, an engagement). This process requires communication to coordinate boundaries effectively. The third rule management process is boundary turbulence. This occurs as negotiated privacy boundaries are broken, intentionally or unintentionally. If steps 1 and 2 in the privacy management process are not thoroughly discussed or effectively communicated among a couple, then there is a greater chance of boundary turbulence occurring.

In the following section, I will identify themes around privacy rule foundations related to privacy negotiation and the rules regarding communication about identities and relationships that were common across participants. Then, section two will explain specific contexts for discussion

and communication strategies and tactics that have been used to develop, maintain, and evaluate these rules when necessary within the relationship. Section three will include a discussion of instances of boundary turbulence, and how couples' responses to this phenomenon can strengthen or harm relationships (See Image 3 of Rule Management Process).

Rule Management Stage 1: Privacy Rule Foundations. Privacy rule foundations possess two main features: rule development and rule attributes or characteristics (Petronio, 2002). Development refers to how the rules developed through an individual's assessment of certain criteria, including but not limited to cultural expectations, gender, context, power motivations, and risk-benefit ratios, deemed salient by the discloser. The second feature of rules, attributes, focuses on a rule's four properties: (1) they are stabilizing, becoming routinized; (2) they may become so permanent that they form a basis for one's privacy orientation; (3) they may change; and (4) there are sanctions instituted to control their use (Petronio, 2002). The following section highlights several overarching themes that were identified across all participants. It is followed by a discussion of common rules identified across interviewees.

A primary finding that emerged from the interviews is the perpetual or constant privacy maintenance that appears to both frustrate and relieve participants. There is frustration due to the feeling of constantly having to navigate one's identity via privacy navigation, but there is also relief when one's partner knows privacy navigation expectations and works with the individual to maintain her privacy. All participants note that privacy is constantly being maintained, daily even, in interactions that are seen as relatively trivial to most individuals (e.g., "What did you do this weekend?"). All participants share that day-to-day conversations with family, friends, colleagues, or even strangers can get tedious when constantly hiding their sexual orientation or romantic relationships. It must be noted that these interactions are very mundane or non-

controversial (e.g., neutral) and might typically be considered low risk. However, for those who cannot acknowledge a significant other, engaging with day-to-day life can become a chore of managing omission, or purposely not disclosing to others one's sexual and relational identities. Jamie shares how hiding in day-to-day life is exhausting:

> Any time I want to talk about my personal life. If I want to, in peer situations, you know people are talking about what did you do this weekend or what you are doing this weekend, whether I want to say, "Oh, me and my wife did this," or whether I want to say, "Oh, nothing." Just avoiding certain conversations. Like avoiding conversations about significant others or, like, somebody would be talking about their boyfriend or whatever, and I'd just be like, "Oh, that's nice," versus having some story that's similar to tell about my significant other, you know because I can't. So, you know, just not having that end of the conversation and also feeling a little bit like you are lying. That you're lying to people around you. Lying by omission, but still it's still hiding the truth. You aren't able to be 100% yourself. You have to feign interest in Channing Tatum and stuff like that. You know, I don't care. "Oh Jamie, isn't that guy hot?" "Yeah...sure." Yeah, you can't say some things you are thinking. You have to censor yourself a little bit. And even with making new friends… there was a barrier there. I had to be really sure that I wanted that person to be my friend to even talk to them about anything because I had to be sure that I could tell them stuff. So, I couldn't just be as outgoing as maybe I would have been otherwise.

In addition to finding this process of small talk exhausting, Jamie expresses how not being able to open up and share about her daily life with colleagues impedes the development of other social relationships. This concern was fairly common among participants and illustrates how not

only is privacy management challenging, but it can result in reducing social support by limiting the individuals to whom one feels safe disclosing low risk information.

Displays of Affection Were Adapted for Subtlety

A second emerging theme that arose is the act of limiting public displays of affection and, in some situations, all interaction with one's romantic partner. In some instances, these were eliminated, and in others, they were coded such that only partners could understand their symbolic significance (i.e., play fighting versus holding hands, painting the finger nail on one's left ring finger with a partner's favorite animal since wedding rings couldn't be worn).
All participants but one expressed that they were "naturally" not big on public displays of affection.

The only participant who admits to enjoying PDA was Samantha, who comes from a relatively accepting familial background. Karen explains her concerns regarding displaying public affection, not only with her partner, but even with female platonic friends. She shares that several of her friends have that same feeling that by revealing her sexual orientation, she might be admitting an attraction to them.

> I told my high school friends, you know, because it was after I graduated that I crossed the line or opened up or whatever term you wanna use. It was weird the reactions I got. Some of them were very supportive; some of them were like (makes awkward face). This is my favorite. I got this from a lot of them: "Well, Karen, I hope you don't think of me that way (emphasis implying a sexual attraction)." No! No I don't. I don't think of you that way at all. Then it's like, "Well why not?" Then they're like, "Well why aren't you attracted to me?" and I'm like. (shrugs) I just never thought of you that way. But I lost friends because of it.

In explaining this, Karen also shares how looking stereotypically gay, female strangers have occasionally misinterpreted friendly affection or conversation as flirting, which has caused her to adapt her behavior to be less expressive in certain contexts.

In line with limiting public displays, all participants express feeling overt or subtle pressure to minimize or suppress their romantic relationship in certain contexts, particularly in religious settings, hometowns, small towns in the Bible Belt, settings where children are present, financial dependence (e.g., employers, supervisors, or parents) and unaccepting/disapproving families. This means that these participants are making concerted efforts to hide their sexual orientation from others due to the potential negative consequences. This suppression is the primary guideline that emerged: Increase long-term relational satisfaction by openly discussing privacy navigation when entering the aforementioned unsupportive environments. As with most informal norms and rules, these have been passed down both through living in a heteronormative society and the mediums that provided for internalized homophobia (as discussed in supposition 1). It is within these physical and relational contexts that participants feel increased pressure to conceal their true identities, hence the development of rules allowing them to manage their privacy information.

Environments Identified as Heightening Privacy Management Status

Each of the following settings, contexts, or environments serve as triggers for all participants in terms of increased privacy negation and management. All participants noted these, including participants who, for instance, were open with their family. These participants discussed certain family members who weren't accepting, or even partner's family members who weren't accepting that forced them to increase focus on their own privacy boundaries and negotiation.

Religious settings. All 10 participants describe a process of reading cues of religiosity from individuals as unwelcoming and judgmental. Religious language, symbols, and ritual were the first factor listed by all participants as communicative cues not to disclose their sexual orientation. This is most often attributed to traumatizing religious events related to their sexual orientation as a child. As Karen notes, her negative experiences with the Christian church have been very traumatic for her.

> I still have trouble with the Baptists because of it. If I find myself in a wedding or a funeral, I know that I am being judged by the people around me. I know this. I can feel it. I can feel the eyes staring at me.

When asked to consider what makes her feel uncomfortable, every participant responds with "church." Jess even explains how people presume her to be straight, despite being the director at a University's LGBQ Resource Center, because she is Christian. She shares that, "I had a necklace that I wore that had a cross on it. People would assume that I wouldn't be a Christian and be gay, so I must be straight!"

Hometowns. The theme of hometown refers to the city, town, or metropolis in which participants were raised. This theme emerges when participants consistently report feelings of being surveilled by people in their hometowns.

The youngest participant, Katie (age 23), expresses the most fear of being publicly identified as a lesbian, particularly by people from her small hometown in Georgia. This is an instance of overlap between hometowns and the next category, small towns in the Bible Belt. Despite currently living over four hours from her hometown, which is made up of only 9,000 people (out of the nearly 10 million people in Georgia), she lives in daily fear of being seen

publicly with her girlfriend and it being reported back to her parents. When asked about her openness, Katie explains that,

> My parents and family have no idea. Two of my best friends from home know. And most people up here know (in her current city). I still have to be careful because people from [Hometown] are up here, so...

She was asked to clarify the meaning of "careful."

> I graduated with five people from my class that went to this college. And then other classes after that have come up here too. Whenever I told my best friend from home, she said, "Oh I have actually heard about that, but I wasn't sure if it was true or not, and so I told the person, "No, she's not (gay)." And then I told [her I was gay], and she was like, "Oh"… And I asked her who she had heard it from, but she said she couldn't remember. I don't know. So, it may be going around [home town], so I mean being careful of holding hands and who sees us.

Katie goes on to explain that her fear began from their first date. Their first date consisted of purchasing a chicken plate at a sorority fundraiser and eating with friends. Katie knew it was a date because her now-partner called it one, but there were no public displays of affection on the date.

When Katie was asked to explain how she felt going on the date, she shares that she was "nervous" about "being in public together, I guess…I didn't really know what she expected of me because we had never been in front of anybody else before." She continues to share that expectations from her partner such as "[s]tanding close together, proximity and holding hands and what not" made her anxious because they would reveal the nature of their relationship. When asked if there were any expectations she was excited about when preparing for the date, she

makes it clear that her anxiety was overriding the excitement about the date. When asked if she was excited, she states, "Not really, because I was nervous about... because there were people from my hometown in that sorority, and I already knew that so I couldn't..." When asked if she and her partner had discussed her concerns prior to the date, she explains, "I am pretty sure we had talked about people from [hometown] before, I don't know if I actually told her there were people in the sorority or not."

Jess shares Katie's concerns, explaining how living outside of her hometown was pivotal for even considering dating someone of the same-sex, stating she would not have pursued her first same-sex attraction had she not been living across the country from her family. When asked why the distance mattered, she states that:

> Because it was removed. Which I think is a big part of why I let myself even "go there" [date a woman] in the first place. Right? Like I don't know how much longer it would have taken me if I had been in [Hometown]. Like if the first woman I met and had been in love with was in [Hometown], I feel like it may have been harder because, then it's all right here, and I can't really ever escape it.

Jess was then asked to clarify what she meant when she said, "it would have taken me much longer" had she been in her hometown. She clarifies:

> Because I think that I kind of, like, in a lot of ways I only told who I had to, so I would have never told my dad if he hadn't confronted me. I can't say never because at some point, I'm sure I would have. But we would never have had the conversation we had when we had it had he not confronted me. So, with her [first girlfriend] being in [distant state] there was only so much access to me. So if it had been somebody in [hometown], I think there would have been a lot more pressure to reconcile whatever was going on. I

> feel like it could have been a lot harder. I feel like there was some comfort with me with the distance both when I was in [distant state], the distance from my parents, and I felt like they are not going to find out what is on, and I can feel comfortable exploring this. And then also, coming back, the distance from her and not feeling necessarily the pressure from her to deal with things with my parents or that kind of thing.

Jess explains later in the interview that her relationship with her family in terms of privacy management was and is an ongoing challenge; however, living with a bit of geographic distance allows for a privacy buffer.

Small towns in the Bible Belt. The term Bible Belt was coined by social critic and reporter for *The Baltimore Sun*, H.L. Mencken (1927) in response to observations regarding his first trip to Dayton, Ohio. This area was known for social conservativism and evangelical Protestantism playing a strong and active role in society, culture, and politics. The term gained popularity in 1961 when it was used by American cultural geographer Zelinsky who delineated the region by its strong influence from Protestant denominations, especially Southern Baptist, Methodist, and evangelical, are the predominant religious affiliation. The Bible Belt is generally thought to cover most of the Southern United States, though there are areas which are claimed to be excluded due to having been strongly Catholic or immigrant settled. Ironically, despite claims of exclusion, participants in this study do not differentiate between religions in terms of prejudice. As a matter of fact, Jamie was raised Mormon and Lauren Catholic, yet both of them experienced similar religion-based discrimination to all other Protestant participants. Additionally, participants associated all sects of Christianity with "religious settings."

There is some overlap between religiosity and hometowns within this category. Even those from larger metropolises in the South comment on not feeling safe being open about their

identity and relationship in small towns. Participants describe dating in a small Southern town as being a challenge due to familiarity with everyone in the town and the public nature of dating. Cues of southernism, or behaviors specific to the south, particularly narrow or close-mindedness, or "very redneck and very judgmental," as Lily describes her college town.

Participants' biggest concern is feeling that everyone is watching the couples' interactions and is able to deduce their sexual orientation. Research has suggested that people's attention tends to be drawn to that which is different, so there could be validity here. This could also be a misperception based on perceiver-threat, or the stigma-threat hypothesis (Blascovich, Mendes, Hunter, Lickel, & Kowai-Bell, 2001) where, much like Karen explains, participants have internalized their homophobia and, therefore, perceive themselves to be stigmatized, different, or any negative term used to describe participants' childhood-based perceptions of LGBQ individuals. Depending on their physical context as well as their stage in identity development, participants may perceive themselves as stigmatized, inferring that perception from others whether it is present or not (Blascovich et al., 2001). Likewise, because they behave as stigmatized, they may evoke stigmatized treatment from others, which potentially creates a complex, emotionally draining cycle.

Amanda, a 51-year old lesbian who identifies as quite private about her identity, talks about going on her first date with a woman.

> It was definitely scary, and definitely the fear of: everybody knows and everybody is watching, and they are gonna figure it out. Because then we were going to be together out in public. I think that step from private to public causes a lot of stress. Especially because of the family that I came from, so stressful.

Seeking clarification, Amanda was asked, "How did you feel during the date?"

> I think I was glad that it was over (laughs). The first one was done. And it...I guess it kinda helped alleviate some of the stress of how the encounter [first same-sex date] would be, and I think I was more concerned at that time with the "others" (points to people that would be around them) than necessarily with the person, so it was hard. After that, I was able to focus more on the individual versus everybody out there.

As her quote indicates, Amanda has a strong fear of being watched or recognized, which was something that is experienced for younger participants as well. While seven of the 10 participants state that they no longer fear physical harm, three do express concern for their safety and feel physically vulnerable if seen in public with their partner. Lily, Jamie, and Debby discuss how public displays of affection not only decrease their comfort, but also their feelings of safety. Despite identifying as 70% open, Lily still fears small towns. This fear of being identified as a lesbian stems from having been victimized in the past. She explains that:

> It can hurt when you want to hold someone's hand or you want to give them a kiss and for all you know there's someone that's driving by that's going to throw a rock at you, which actually happened with one of my exes. We weren't even kissing. We were just in a mall parking lot in rural Georgia, and this girl drove past in a BMW, and picked up a ton of gravel and chucked it at us and screamed profanity and slurs, and that was before I even really came out to anybody.

This desire to stay private for fear of being judged, stigmatized, or harmed was consistent for all participants.

Settings where children are present. Samantha, Lauren, Katie, Madison, Jamie and Lily all demonstrated a concern for public displays of affection, or even discussing lesbian relationships, around children**.** As for Jamie, she recognizes that this is a taboo topic, speculating

that this social norm stems from her own experience growing up. She specifically remembers a friend her mom had whom she now believes is gay.

> My mom had this guy friend who was really, really gay. Like, looking back on it, this guy was flaming. Like, really flaming. And I think, looking back on it, my mom never addressed it. She ignored it like it wasn't a real thing. Like he was a straight guy. I remember that distinctly.

After being probed about why her mother seemingly ignored her friend's sexual identity, Jamie says she does not know and attributes it to being too young to understand what was going on. She then suggests that

> I think I didn't even know he was gay. We just didn't even address it. But now obviously, now that I am grown up, I'm like, "That guy was really gay." I'm like, "How did we not talk about that? How did that never come up?"

She concludes this thought by assuming that her mother might not have thought sexual orientation was an appropriate conversation to have with children. Interestingly, all participants describe it as inappropriate to expose children to behaviors that reflect coming out about lesbian relationships and exhibiting same-sex public displays of affection (e. g., holding hands).

Karen describes how she began dating her long-term partner and the effect that had on her partner's children. Having never dated a woman before, Karen's partner Paige was excited and very open about their relationship, which began in 2002. Karen explains how that quickly changed after her partner's children began sharing with her ex-husband about their new relationship with Karen

> She (Paige) was telling people at work about it, and I had to go, "Wait, slow down." She decided within three months that she was in love and that was it. And um... (pause. looks

sad). Her kids loved me. Within two weeks, her kids were begging me to move in. But then her ex-husband found out about me. And then things went (crushing sound) straight down. And it was all about closing up. She had to close up. She had to protect herself. She had to protect her children. We had to go to court. He sued her for being involved in a meretricious relationship. He tried to take both kids away from her. I mean, it was bad. And I went from a person who was out and about and fuck you if you don't like it" kinda thing—but not militant—to having to not only hide who I was, but deny what we were making together. And that was really *hard*. **REALLY HARD**. I almost bolted several times. It made me feel useless. Dirty. (starts to cry) Ugly. Child of Satan. Unworthy of her attention. So that's where the confusion came in. Why are you hanging onto me so hard if... I mean, she lost her daughter over it. (long pause) But [partner's Son] loves me.

This pattern illustrates a possible reason for why 9 out of 10 participants did not meet an open lesbian until age 17 or later. Despite Karen's experience with her partner's custody battle, both of the children fell in love with Karen and became her major supporters and allies. Unfortunately, now that the children are adults, their daughter's husband is very anti-gay, and Karen is not allowed around the grandchildren.

Karen brought up the topic of looking stereotypically gay. Since in this instance, she perceives she cannot hide her identity, I asked her if she thought the fact that her physical expression of her sexual orientation played a role in some of the challenges she experienced related to being seen as "inappropriate" around children. Karen confirms that she believes her image mattered to the child custody judge,

If I was fuckable... to a guy... would it have made a difference? Yes. Yes. I truly believe that if the lawmakers out there, instead of picturing two guys kissing when they think

> about passing gay marriage, if they think about two beautiful lesbians kissing, that it would be (snaps) passed like that. I mean cause, like [partner's daughter] was our biggest advocate, she moved out, went to college, met an asshole, ended up getting pregnant by him, but I'm not allowed to be around the kids because I'm gay. But it's ok for Paige to be around them because she's fuckable.

When asked to clarify what she means by "fuckable," Karen explains that Paige is more feminine, stating, "She's beautiful. She's... she's... she's gorgeous. Absolutely. I married up. There's nobody... you could never look at her and say, "My God she's gay." Never ever, in a million years assume it." Challenges like Karen's are confirmed by all participants. All but one participant says they did not meet any openly gay people until they were in high school or college. We see a similar trend among current participants; despite being "open," all of them admit to hiding their sexual orientation from children.

Even Samantha, who is self-described as 100% open, modified her rule for a past partner who had a child. She explains that, for the first time in her life, she became more private about her sexual orientation to protect a partner's children and her relationship with their family. Samantha was welcome around her family, but she was not seen as a partner and was forbidden from expressing affection for her in their presence. As she explains the situation, she begins to realize her behavior may have been perceived as odd or off-putting.

> She had a child, so I wanted to make sure that.... I mean, obviously you don't want somebody's child to walk in on you making out with somebody, but even talking about lesbian things. And she lived a little bit closer to family, and her family didn't technically know, I mean it was probably one of those, "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" things, but it was

> something that, like, there couldn't be any affection, and I couldn't really mention anything, and those are probably the two main things.

As can be seen from her comments, the inability to be affectionate and open affected the way both Samantha and her partner saw their relationship, not to mention those external to the relationship. Samantha's explanation demonstrates that, despite being involved in this relationship and enjoying her partner's company, she is aware that there were issues related to balancing openness of sexual identity.

Financial dependence. Another theme that emerged from the data is that of not disclosing to an authority in charge of the participant's financial or other resources (e.g., housing, education) for fear of jeopardizing financial resources that directly benefit both partners and the relationship. This fear of current and future resources being lost due to sharing one's sexual orientation was prevalent for all participants. They explain that they remain private, despite their desire to live publicly, in order to maintain access to financial resources.

Katie, my youngest and most private participant who fears being outted by someone from her hometown explained how she and her partner discussed how to navigate sharing their relationship with their respective parents. She stated that the threat of her parents withdrawing their financial support from her is a significant motivator for using this strategy. When asked what her concerns are with her parents, Katie explains that her hesitation is about

> Whether or not they still want to talk to me. And whether or not they will…. Well, they bought me a new car, and daddy buys me guns and stuff like. Whether or not I will have… Well the car is more practical than the gun anyway, but whether or not I'll actually have sufficient means of actually living after I tell them, I guess. Because

> otherwise they would probably already know, but I am completely dependent on them and I don't have a job at all.

Katie further explains that if she were **"**paying for everything," then yes, she would have told her parents about her girlfriend. While it is not surprising to hear this from a private participant, this theme is present in all interviews, including the one with Samantha, my most open participant.

Samantha shared that her late-grandmother was one of the only people she feared sharing her sexuality with due to her being religious. Her fear wasn't due to being disowned; rather, the fear was centered on lost financial resources. Samantha explains:

> It was a little bit of an issue to come out to my grandmother. Just to kind of risk [financial loss]… she wouldn't disown me or anything, but just kind of her disapproval. A little bit of monetary issues in college. They (grandparents) wouldn't fund certain things that they would have otherwise. They ended up doing it, it was fine.

Similarly, Lauren withheld sharing her identity at her work for over a year after getting married. When asked what prompted her change, she states that, "Being fired from our respective jobs. That's the bottom line. I thought it would only take the wrong person writing to my boss or to the bishop and it would be like, bye." Lauren and her partner ultimately avoided being fired by quitting and coming out to their bosses. In both cases, their bosses wanted them to stay, but knew that they could not work for the church and live openly.

Collectively, these responses demonstrate that, for these participants, younger lesbians or when lesbians are younger, they may be more likely to withhold disclosing their sexual orientation or relationship status from their families due to fear of withheld financial resources. However, as they got older, they may withhold their relationship status at work or use strategic ambiguity (e.g., inviting their partners to events but not identifying them as such) to negotiated

their lesbian identity. For participants who are further along in identity development, they often state that they would choose to forgo working at a job if they could not be their authentic selves.

Unaccepting/Disapproving Families. Similar to a relational cost-benefit analysis, participants who had a positive experience in their early disclosures continue to reveal this private information to others whenever they perceived them to be accepting. However, participants who had an early "coming out" disclosure that resulted in familial or close friend rejection often chose to conceal for an extended period of time, usually one to two years, until either they could reframe their self-concept to handle the rejection or the other party pursued them with a request for information.

Lauren explains that she did not wish to share with other friends and family after her twin sister and best friends reacted so negatively to her disclosing about her girlfriend. As a result, she felt profound rejection from those closest to her.

> I lost friends, and then I also feel like I distanced myself from other friends who maybe wouldn't have left me but I was so sick of feeling rejected that I just didn't reach out to them. I had friends who I later, literally years later, I went like two years without talking to them, and basically when I talked to them again, I just said I couldn't deal with any more rejection. My closest friends had rejected me, and I didn't need my second tier friends also rejecting me. A lot of them said I would not have responded that way, but, I'm also like, you had two years to get used to the idea, and if you had been in that first wave of people I talked about this with, you might have been more reactionary.

Jess also shares how in being rejected by her family caused her to feel socially isolated. This was also shared by 9 out of 10 participants.

After being confronted by her father, Jess shares her fears regarding disclosing to any additional close friends.

> My dad actually confronted me right after I got home and so I kinda talked to [my best friend], confided in [my best friend] because I was dealing with them, and I didn't have anyone else, I didn't know what to do because my dad had said really horrible things. I felt really scared and alone, so I don't know if I can remember exactly what I said as much as how it felt talking to her because I was so scared that she was going to have a negative reaction like he did. I mean, he was my dad. You're like, when people who are supposed to love you unconditionally don't love you unconditionally; it's really scary to risk that with someone else who is your best friend.

Much like Jess, all participants describe not only the feelings of isolation, but feelings of having to be independent and handle challenges on their own. This was further confirmed by limited social support due to resistance to coming out following the initial rejection of family. Beyond not disclosing to family members, participants also suppress relational joy by concealing it from non-supportive family members.

Participants describe having to suppress their excitement about their relationships, engagements, marriages, babies, major milestones, and even minor day-to-day events because, in sharing their elation, unsupportive family, friends, or colleagues would minimize their relational happiness. According to Lauren,

> [People's reactions] really infuriated me when we started dating. Not the general public, but people I knew, because I said, "If she were a guy, you all would be so excited for me. She's Catholic. She has a job. She's educated. She's attractive, but because she's a woman, you are freaking out and losing your shit." To me that was so stupid. It was so irritating to

me that people who would have been happy for me if I was dating the same person in a different gender were rejecting me because she was a woman.

Lauren goes on to describe how all while remaining private at work, she got engaged and eloped. Neither she nor Sarah told any family about their wedding prior to getting married. They were allowed to have 15 guests, and they invited supportive friends. Lauren explains why she chose to keep it a secret:

> [W]e didn't tell them we were going. Sarah told her parent's the next day. I didn't tell my parents for months. In fact, my mom had to confront me because she had noticed that we were wearing wedding rings, and I was like, well, I was going to tell you together, but yeah, we got married. And I'm sure her feelings were maybe a little hurt, but if they were, she never said anything about it. We have some communication issues in my family like many families, but you know, they came to our second wedding and participated.

When asked why Lauren chose to conceal her marriage, despite her parents already knowing about her dating Sarah, she explains,

> [Y]our wedding day should be a day where everyone is happy for you and if people aren't going to be happy and if them knowing about it is enough for them to be unhappy, then I'm just not going to tell them. Because I want everybody to be happy, and everybody there was really happy.

Ultimately, Lauren's desire to be open about her marital bliss led to her quitting her job, as she knew she could not be openly gay and work for Catholic Charities. She expresses her frustration over when she and Sarah each disclosed their sexual orientation to their respective bosses. While Lauren’s boss begged her to stay, Sarah's boss, when she came out to him told her she could remain at her job if she would just remain closeted.

> It was increasingly hard when I worked at Catholic Charities, both to be in the closet because you know, as our relationship grew more serious and we got married. it's like, come on, you know who doesn't want.... most people when they get married, they tell everyone and everyone is happy for them. And that just wasn't the case for us. You know I don't think I ever put pictures up of us on Facebook. There was just that fear and that feeling that I cannot be who I want to be. I cannot pursue my happiness in my life as long as I am constrained by this, and that's one reason why I don't know how these people who have been in the closet forever can even do it. I just don't. I don't understand... I guess it's just part of their life at this point. I just can't. Life is so much better when it's not hidden like that. I have this source of happiness. The best thing. This is the best thing in my life and I can't tell anyone about it. To me, that's just really sad that you'd have to have to hide the best thing in my life.

While it might seem drastic that Lauren chose not to tell anyone about her engagement prior to getting married, this is a fairly common theme for the participants. Since they cannot get married locally, they travel to another state for "vacation" and take the plunge while there.

Lily knew her family was not supportive of her relationship with Jamie and preferred not to share about their engagement. Jamie felt that her parents deserved to know, so together, they discussed the situation and decided to reveal this important life event to them. Lily describes this experience as "the worst six months of my life." She shares, in a frustrated and hurt tone, how she announced her big news to her parents:

> We walked into the house, and the entire way to my parents' house, we were like, alright we are just going to walk in and we are going to tell them. So I walked in and I said, Jamie proposed to me, and mom said that's not legal. Is that a cute shirt? That's a cute

> shirt, is that a new shirt? And I said, yeah, we got it from world of coke the day she proposed to me. And she just kept on changing the topic. And my dad kind of rolled over and he looked at me and said that's *stupid* and he rolled back over and went back to sleep. And so, very hard time.

Similar frustration and feelings of having to be ambiguous or omit relational joy exists among participants who lived and worked in areas without legal rights and protections for LGBTQ individuals. Jamie expresses being frustrated by having to remain secretive because of Don't Ask, Don't Tell.

> Just the lying by omission kind of a thing. I think that was the hardest part, you know not being able to tell people, I'm in love with this amazing girl, and just tell everybody, you know how you first get a significant other that you are really excited about, you just tell everybody, you know you're just like I met this girl and la la la la la la. It's all you can talk about, you know, I couldn't do that. So the hiding. The deception. It's hard. It sucks.

Even in situations where a participant was very open, she was quick to accommodate family of origins rules for privacy. Whether implicit or explicitly stated, the rules were understood and abided by. A phenomenon related to this was the reframing of family of origin relationships as less intimate. This seems to have been done to downplay the hurt related to lack of acceptance and support.

Another phenomenon was focusing on small victories, or subtle displays of increased acceptance. I explored this regarding Jamie and Lily's relationship. Despite Jamie having identified as open 70% of the time, she describes one of the times she struggled with having to be private despite wanting to be open out of respect for Lily and Lily’s family.

> I think at first with her parents. I didn't really understand why we couldn't be us around her parents, I mean first meeting them, first getting to know them, I didn't really know what to expect, and her mom... her mom was very interesting the first time I came up. Lily's feet were hurting or something, and Lily asked, “Please rub my feet,” so I was on the couch and I was rubbing her feet and her mom walked in and said, "NO! That is not allowed." I was like, “OK.” (makes motion of holding hands up)

When asked if Lily’s mother knew she and Jamie were partners, Jamie discusses the limits Lily’s family enacted for her and Lily’s relationship; limits that did not apply to Lily’s brother and his girlfriend who openly cuddled on the couch together and slept in the same bed. Jamie shares,

> Lily asked if she could bring me to Thanksgiving, and her mom was like, “Well you guys gotta sleep in separate rooms” and all these other rules. It's like yeah... that was interesting. So that's pretty much the only circumstance where Lily's less open than I am. She's in general a lot more open than me.

When asked how this first interaction and those that followed effected Lily and Jamie being open around Lily’s family, Jamie clarifies how they have communicated about reducing their affection in her parent’s presence, despite now being married.

> Even now, we don't really hold hands or anything around her parents. We keep the “babes” and “huns” to a minimum and stuff like that and just kind of act like roommates or friends or whatever her parents want us to have instead of, versus... if you were to take a split screen of Josh, her brother, and Sam, his girlfriend, and us, it's completely different. You know Josh and Sam can be touchy feely whatever, and Lily and I are always like (puts hands on legs and looks very stiff, scooting away) scoot over, you're too

close to me on the couch or like... We're not allowed to cuddle, leave room for the Holy Ghost or something

Both women are frustrated by the situation, and think it is "ridiculous, but at the same time, they're old and it's just not worth it." Both women feel that because it is Lily's parents' home and their rules, they will respect them, but neither feels this is fair treatment.

In instances where their families were not accepting, a Karen, Lauren, and Jess, attempted to accommodate, but as they grew more comfortable with their lesbian identity, they grew tired of accommodating and began to distance themselves from their families. Jess describes being engaged to her partner and then being told by her sister that she did not agree with her "choice" to date women. Jess spent six months writing a letter to her sister that ended with, "I am here when you are ready to talk." She never heard from her sister. Jess continued to send gifts for every holiday to her nieces and nephews, and still heard nothing from her sister for a year. Filled with frustration, she vents her hurt during the interview:

I feel like, it's all or nothing. It's not this "You can come around my kids if x, y and z." No. This is who I am and you either love me or you don't. You either respect me or you don't. You don't even have to fucking agree with my life. There's nothing for you to agree with. I'm not asking for your approval. Right? So that's where I am at with my sister.

Despite her anger, hurt, and frustration, Jess still states that she is willing to forgive and forget everything that has happened if they can just move forward in their relationship. She also expresses sadness with lost family time, and her desire to start fresh with her sibling.

I've considered reaching out to my sister. My sister recently contacted me when she saw I was moving home. Never mentioned the letter, which was fine with me. I don't even need you to say, "I'm sorry." If we can just move forward, ok great. So I thought about

> reaching out to her and saying, “I'm thinking about coming for Thanksgiving with mom, would that be ok?” Because, at some point, somebody's going to have a conversation. And if I have to be the one to initiate, ok. But I feel like, what am I doing in the meantime? Just wasting time. Losing time with those kids and losing time with my family. So... that is probably the only area of my life where I still feel... where I feel really uncomfortable about my identity.

While Jess’s frustration distances her from her family, Katie’s fear pushes her further into social isolation and privacy to protect her family. She explains how she adores her father and remains private about her identity in an effort to protect his reputation. Being aware of how lesbians are perceived in her small town, she shoulders the burden of her entire family’s legacy.

> I don’t want to be the reason why our last name has a bad connotation in our home town because I live on the same land as my great grandparents, at least, if not further back than that, so our names kind of known around [hometown] and Daddy is high up in, well, not high up in, but he is well known within the court system, but he is a judge, and very well liked in the community. Daddy's not really a manly man because he has a sensitive heart, but I worry about his friends, that they would pick on him.

Similar to Katie, Amanda explains that she did not disclose her relationship to her parents in order to preserve her parents’ lifestyle, especially due to their religious convictions. When asked what her goal was in concealing her relationship, she explains that

> Protecting my parents, and also respecting that they lived their lives... They were religious, but they practiced what they preached. They weren't superficial about it. They really truly believed and practiced many of the things, and I respected that very much. So,

> I think it was more out of respect for them and protecting them from a label that they didn't really know that much about.

Lauren shares how she brought her partners home to meet her family, and her parents attempted to be accepting despite their discomfort. While this effort was greatly appreciated, family members were often leaking cues of heteronormativity that could be hurtful. Lauren shares a discussion she and Sarah had with her parents when planning their wedding ceremony or reception after they had already been married. Referring to her mother, Lauren says,

> She was really nervous, when we were planning my second wedding, and Sarah will say this was the most awkward moment of her life. But it was me and my dad and Sarah and my mom all in the car, and we'd had brunch or something, and my mom said, "We don't really know what's happening at this wedding thing because, you know, what's happening," she said, "You know we've never been to a gay wedding, and I said, "Mom, I've never been to a gay wedding, so we are both in the same boat on that and it's going to be just like every other wedding you've been to I imagine, ...and my mom said, "Are you guys going to kiss? What if people freak out? What if someone's like GASP (covers mouth with hand)? And Sarah and I were both like, "What?" and my mom even said, "What if I'm like that?!" and I was just like, "I don't know what to tell you mom." She just reveals that she's uncomfortable.

Lauren was very understanding of her mom's discomfort and appreciates her efforts to share in her joy. She can relate to same-sex affection being unfamiliar and even having a reaction to it. Lauren did express hurt, though, about how, in their unguarded moments, her parents reveal their lack of comfort with her identity and relationship.

While Lauren's approach to her parents' challenges was to keep showing up and validating her relationship with her partner Sarah in a public manner, Debby's approach was to bring her partners around her family but never verbally share her sexual orientation with them. She finally disclosed to her mother when she was in her 40s, which was only in response to her mother directly asking her if she is lesbian. In contrast, she has never shared this with her father. Debby explains why her father is the only person to whom she has not disclosed this large part of her identity.

> Oh no. It's a clear delineation. It's my father. It isn't anybody else. That's it. There's not... I can't even imagine anybody else in the world that we would even have the conversation, but that's just one piece that we just don't talk about it, and there is nothing good that is going to come of it, and I actually know that, so it's just like, just... ok. And, at this point, I don't think it would be like some gigantic shock to him. I mean, I am 51, unmarried, in his eyes anyway, and clearly not planning on it. So he's not expecting grandkids out of me, let's put it that way.

Debby further explains that she and her father never had a direct conversation about her identity, even though there are subtle hints in their conversations that he knows but is choosing to not have an explicit discussion about it. When asked during the interview if there were any subtle hints in their conversations that her father knows but is choosing to not have an explicit discussion knows about her sexuality, she explains

> [H]e's been very kind and very welcoming to anybody I have ever brought home. He still asks about Julie, which is funny at this point because you know that ended a long time ago, but he still asks about her. I mean, the man's not stupid. But it's a lot easier for him also to not initiate that conversation because then he has to make a hard choice. Because

> according to the religion to which he ascribes (fundamentalist Christian), he would have to disown me and never see me again, and so he's clearly not going to do that to the apple of his eye, and so yeah... It's an interesting balance.

Although she has wanted to share this information with her father, Debby has chosen not to because of the risks that come with such a disclosure. She states that,

> There have certainly been times where I would much have rather have been able to share... all of me... essentially, but under the circumstances, you know, discretion is sometimes the better part of valor, right, and you kinda go ok.... there's nothing good gonna come of this. And forcing the hand doesn't do any good. I have never questioned my father's love I assure you. There's just... sometimes you have to look at equations and say there is no upside to this. There's... this is as good as it's going to get.

Debby's observation that there is no upside and "this is as good as it is going to get" is a sentiment frequently expressed across several others participants-- Amanda, Katie, Jamie, and Karen. Naturally, none of them like the tensions between their families, living in fear, being fired from their jobs, or being rejected. However, they also recognize that, due to the bigotry toward lesbians, there is little they can do to change the situation, hence the implementation of privacy rules.

Environments Identified as Reducing Privacy Management Status

Just as there are specific environments that trigger partners to increase privacy navigation, there are specific situations that promote increased openness, or increasing transparent boundaries. A powerful phenomenon that encourages disclosure is empathy from a confidante. When participants feel that their friends and families empathize with them, they are

much more apt to disclose than when they fear judgment or rejection. Thus, all participants place considerable weight on the importance of empathy in situations such as this.

To illustrate the importance of this criterion, Jess shares her friend's reaction as she prepared to disclose to her about her first lesbian relationship.

> She didn't know what I was going to say, but I think she could sense that I was really scared about it. And I know that I was very hesitant. It's hard for me to even begin to imagine the words that I used. There was a whole lot going on in terms of being afraid of being judged, so I feel like I was very deliberate in the words I choose in making it as easy for her to hear as I could. I don't really know what the words were really, I just remember the feeling about it. And I remember her reaction was... and [my best friend]... her name is [my best friend]. [My best friend] 's a really emotional person, she's a very empathetic person, and I can remember seeing her eyes welling up with tears when I told her about the conversation with my dad. It was the best possible reaction that she could have in terms of really feeling understood. And even if she didn't understand it, it hurt her that I was dealing with what I was dealing with my family.

As this quote demonstrates, despite her best friend not knowing what to say, she shared in Jess's pain and cried along with Jess. Seeing the tears well up in her friends eyes served as a nonverbal cue of acceptance for Jess.

In addition to empathy, reciprocal disclosure also prompts participants to share more openly. In the case of Katie, when she shares her experience of disclosing to her best friend, she only does so after the risk is significantly reduced when her friend disclosed a similar attraction to women. She explains:

> I was talking to the second best friend from home face-to-face and she was telling me about this girl that she kind of halfway maybe liked a little, like that, she was just kind of laughing a little bit and she said, and I said, "Do you want me to make you feel less embarrassed?" And she said, "Sure." So I said, "So you know the girl on my profile picture?" She said, "Yeah." And I said, "Well, that is my girlfriend."

In this case, the fear of judgment is neutralized by the friend expressing a non-judgmental or accepting attitude about her own disclosure. Both Katie and her friend are from the same small town, so they both stood to lose a great amount by being "outted," which served to equal the disclosures.

In polar opposition to concealing identities in one's hometowns, every participant shares that her comfort level with being openly affectionate with her partner increases when she is in larger cities that are geographically distant from their hometown. The distance that seems to provide comfort is around 50 miles or about an hour's drive from their residence. Lily and Jamie explicitly created this rule. Whenever they travel out of town as a couple, they set their odometer such that when they hit 50 miles, they would hold hands. This phenomenon was not only among older participants, but was expressed by participants of all ages. Madison, Jess, Amanda, Debby, and Samantha used cities as markers. Madison shared that she would travel from her small college town to the biggest metropolitan city that also happened to be 50 miles away to feel safer holding hands with her partner.

Through the interviews, it was learned that several participants gain benefit by living more openly as a result of legal protections for LGBQ individuals. For instance, the repeal of DADT affected Jamie, giving her the legal protection she needed to openly live as a lesbian in the military. She explains that the day after DADT was repealed, she not only came out at her job

in the military, but she had a rainbow wedding ring tattooed on her wedding finger. She shares how she showed up at work the next day, marched into the Human Resources department, and validated her relationship by sharing about her fiancé, she shared that, "I changed all my stuff to list Lily as my point of contact. And I put 'fiancé' on everything, and I was just like, 'I'm gay!'" When asked if she was afraid of disclosing this private information, Jamie replies, "Oh yeah, I was scared a little bit, mostly of losing relationships or people thinking maybe differently about me or maybe being upset that I had sort of lied to them. But everybody was really cool." When asked about the fervor with which she added Lily, Jamie explains her reasoning for moving quickly:

> Just in case anything happened to me, so that Lily would be recognized officially as somebody who's important to me. So that was really important because, you know, stuff happens on military bases, you know even stateside, and mostly that's pretty much why. I just wanted her to be covered as my fiancé, just like any other military couple. And also I was just tired of hiding. I was just sick of it. And it was such a relief just to be like I can talk about Lily and I don't have to say my friend or my roommate. I can say my fiancé, or my girlfriend, or whatever. I don't have to avoid talking about stuff. I don't know, it was like a weight got lifted for sure.

Karen also confirms that when her child custody situation shifted and there were no legal ramifications (i.e., removal of children from their home) for being open, she and her partner shifted from being more private to more open again about both their sexual orientation and their relationship. While they had young children, Karen's partner's ex-husband had the legal system intervene which prevented them from living openly. Karen's partner's daughter lived with her father during the week and would spend the weekends with them. On those visitation weekends,

Karen could not spend the night in their home. She would literally leave her own residence on the weekend evening and spend the night elsewhere in order to abide by the courts' rulings so she and her partner would not lose custody of her son who lived with them or lose visitation rights for her partner's daughter. Karen explains that the shift from public to private occurred due to parental custody laws, which had a direct impact on how their relationship patterns changed.

These relational changes were directly related to court documents preventing Karen's partner from having "overnight guests" while her daughter was staying with her after both her partner's children grew up. The children's father went to extreme measures to attempt to gain full custody, including having them followed.

> We worried about being followed by private investigators. I mean, we worried about that. We couldn't even...no touching, no PDA of any kind. I had to stand 3 feet away from her-- my decision-- you know to make sure that [partner's son] was protected. Because it's just kinda free for all and slumber party over at his dad's house and he really needs structure that we could provide for him here. So it's all about worrying about her kid's future.

Karen clarifies that protection was from child protective services removing the children from the home and forbidding visitation. She also reemphasizes how once the law was no longer involved, both she and her partner happily lived more openly. She explained, "We are all fine now. We are all cool. We're way cool. We hug and partially make out in the front yard." She also explained how she felt the judge was partial to her ex's husband and would not have allowed the children to remain in the home if he knew they were lesbian. She stated that, "If the judge had half an inkling that [partner] was gay, he would have removed both of them [the children]. We had that

warning from everybody in the community." Karen's story further confirmed the effect legal protections have on the ability for lesbian couples to live openly.

Lauren offers a third example of the effect of lack of employment rights and protections for lesbians in romantic relationships. Lauren and her partner, Sarah, eloped in Washington, D.C. in 2013 because same-sex marriage was banned in the state constitution in their home state of Florida. While current legislation for same-sex marriages in the South has been shifting, there is a lag where lesbians and gays do not receive employment, financial, medical, and other rights and protections under federal law. There are also inconsistencies across geographic and legal boundaries. Lauren explains her frustration with the inconsistencies in rights and protections, and how she and Sarah have actively fought for equal rights in their home state:

> I don't know if you know this, but Sarah and I are plaintiffs in the case of Florida to have our marriage recognized, so we are very attuned to that case because we are in it. It's frustrating, we are literally losing money every month paying this insurance that we shouldn't have to pay. It's frustrating when people are like, oh it's going to happen. It's so stupid. It makes me so angry at our state. You know our state is spending this money to defend a ban that they have to know is eventually going to fail. There's no way it's going to stand. It probably won't stand another two years, but it definitely won't stand another ten years, and how much money are we putting into fighting something you know is going to fall? How much is the state of Florida losing because gay people don't want to live here? I just feel like it's such a loss, and the fact that, yeah, it's your political strategizing, and it's my life. So I guess I would say that is what is very frustrating. So how do I feel about the laws? Yeah, I think the laws are going to change, but it's

> frustrating when you hear people talk about this in the abstract, that's not an abstract philosophical question to me. It is my bread and butter daily life.

Lauren has particularly felt financial discrimination by a lack of spousal healthcare benefits for her partner. Sarah, Lauren's partner was diagnosed with ovarian cancer last year, after their wedding but before Florida recognized their marriage. As such, Lauren has constant concerns that Sarah is not on her health insurance. Instead, Sarah pays for her own health insurance every month, a plan with less coverage and more expenses than if she received the same benefits as other Florida spouses.

Despite having previously been private for her job, once Lauren quit and began living openly, she explains her only concern about being a lesbian is her "concern about the injustices perpetrated against us, but in terms of what other people think, I am very rarely concerned." Prior to this interview, Florida had recently had elections and elected an anti-gay rights governor. Lauren laments:

> After this election cycle when Rick Scott (Florida governor) was reelected and they are going to appeal our ruling (Supreme Court removed Florida's gay marriage ban) until the end of time apparently, until the Supreme Court rules again. It's very frustrating because there is like there was the specter that maybe that was going to be changed very soon. and Sarah's just like I want to go to a fucking doctor and not feel like it's gonna cost me an arm and a leg because I'm on this crappy insurance when I could easily be on your insurance.

Through these quotes, one can sense Lauren's frustration with a legal system that is infringing on her and her partner's ability to equally access the same rights as other Florida spouses. Although the Supreme Court overturned the same-sex marriage ban in Florida shortly after this interview

was conducted and their marriage has been legally recognized for five weeks in their home state, Sarah is still not on Lauren's state health insurance.

Rule Management Process 2: Boundary Coordination

CPMT's second rule management process is boundary coordination (Petronio, 2002), which refers to the fact that private information has boundaries at the personal and dyadic levels and centers on efforts to establish rules for guarding private information. In addition to personal private information that has been willingly shared with another who has become a co-owner, there are also co-constructed experiences, or private information that was mutually created and is therefore co-owned by both parties (Petronio, 2002). In either instance, one expects her partner to act responsibly with the private information, protecting it based on a specific set of expectations that are sometimes communicated but often times not.

Another challenge with boundary coordination is its multidimensional focus (Petronio, 2002). In addition to managing private information individually and as a couple, boundaries also exist with family members, close friends, acquaintances, social groups, and organizations by which they are employed. According to Petronio (2002), "The challenge is to coordinate a set of rules that manages the boundary around this information that is satisfying to all parties" (p. 28). In the current study, rules were revealed that are specific to each couple and others that reflect a general pattern of behaviors commonly experienced by several participants as they attempt to manage privacy within their relationships.

Based on participants' accounts of navigating privacy in their relationships, I have condensed their accounts of both guidelines they used that resulted in effective navigation as well as attempts at navigation which were ineffective where they noted what could have improved the situation. This compilation of guidelines reflects participants' experiences with rule

development and negotiation. While all participants describe disliking rules and the need for boundary coordination, they all recognize (1) it was pragmatic; (2) the process was effective in reducing boundary turbulence; (3) when communication privacy planning was practiced prior to entering one of the above contexts, it reduced both interaction related and post-interaction stress; but (4) all individuals discussed that privacy negotiation, while both necessary and constant, feels deceptive and increases feelings of identity incongruence.

Rules and Boundary Coordination was pragmatic. The first theme that emerged in terms of boundary coordination is that needing to have rules at all is a pragmatic communication maneuver, but making and managing them are generally disliked. While all participants agree that boundary management is necessary, they share that neither partner enjoys having the privacy boundaries. In the majority of situations, not only did they frustrate both partners, but they also left them feeling hurt.

Despite rules being facilitated by the private partner, participants who self-identify as private typically hate the rules even more than the open partner, which is not surprising. According to Debby,

> I don't think it's comfortable for anybody to live in a dichotomy. Right? That isn't a lot of fun but I think that is probably the worst part of it is trying to remember which way am I supposed to be? What am I supposed to be doing right now? Is it ok if I do this, or is it not ok that I do this? Anytime we reinforce what I call the "water cooler effect," where when you go to work you park, and as you are getting out of the car, you shed all the things that aren't acceptable inside the doors, and then when you come back and you stand at the water cooler you don't talk about any of those things, unless it's somebody that looks a lot like you, and you can maybe talk about it a little bit, but then you gotta

> put it away again. Then when you leave work, you pick them up in the parking lot, and you put on the rest of you again and you go home. That is one of the most unhealthy ways in the world to live, and we have a lot of people who still live that way. And it's hard. It's HARD.

Despite neither Debby nor Jamie wanting them, rules were developed in their relationship in an effort to reduce the uncertainty related to managing privacy boundaries in their relationship.

Boundaries most often arise to accommodate systems or individuals who are external to the relationship but provide necessary resources to the partnership. For instance, in Jamie and Lily's relationship, boundaries were used to navigate Jamie's military career where revealing that she was a lesbian would result in a dishonorable discharge and prevent future employment opportunities. For Karen and Paige, whose relationship involved a legal situation and child custody, laws were heteronormative and revealing that Paige was a lesbian would result in removal of the children from homes; thus, both women had to minimize and hide their relationship.

Younger lesbians seem more willing to accommodate for their families of origin while they are sorting out their own sexual orientation than are older lesbians. A theme of recognizing same-sex attractions as a young woman, but fearing identifying as a lesbian is common across all participants; however, once individuals accept their own identity, it seems they were better able to share it with parents. The exception occurs when resources are being shared. When a young lesbian is financially dependent on family members, she is willing to accommodate parents until she can become more financially independent.

There is also a pattern of accommodating the family of origin until relational commitment shifts from the biological family to the partner. Such is the case with Lauren. When

she and Sarah got married, they learned to navigate the public proclamation of getting married while also accommodating their families by remaining private about their relationship. Lauren does share that there were in fact challenges involved as she attempted to respect the discomfort family members felt with her identity while also fulfilling her desire to be recognized as the wife of her significant other. When asked how she and Sarah communicate when navigating these privacy boundaries, particularly in terms of toning down displays of affection in from of her family, Lauren explains that her partner, Sarah,

> [D]oesn't like it. We've talked about that. She feels like I keep her more at arm's length. Which has gotten better, I think it used to be worse. But I also am just... that's part of why we eloped. And we did talk about it a little bit... I was just... she was really wanting to get married, and I was less into the idea for several reasons. That was a time when I was considering getting married in the church, so I was sort of like, if we are just going to have a civil ceremony then I don't see what the big deal is. And I said, my family isn't ready, and she also said your family is never going to be ready. They're just never going to [be ready]. Or are we going to put our lives on hold while they get ready in some way, so that is where our elopement and later celebration was a compromise because they were forced to get used to the idea. it had already happened, and so it was, ok, it's already happened, but it's happening again you have a year or more, around a year to prepare for the idea, because when we told them we eloped, we told them we were going to have another celebration. Ok, you've got 10 months of prep for that at least, come on, ya know?

Lauren explains how this is an ongoing challenge in her relationship with both Sarah and with her family. Lauren's attempts to prioritize Sarah's desires to be fully recognized within her family

while balancing the rejection of her family of origin provide unique challenges the couple has to navigate. For instance, Lauren refers to Sarah as "Mrs. Sarah" in the presence of her niece and nephew as opposed to "Aunt Sarah." She fears that if she does not take this approach, then her twin sister will refuse to allow her to see her children. This coping strategy is understandably hurtful to Sarah.

Sarah also expresses frustration with the way that Lauren's sister's behavior hurts Lauren. For instance, she refused to attend her sister's wedding, but Lauren offers, "She did come to the reception, which she had a terrible attitude the whole time, but at least that is something." Lauren's sister also refused to speak to Sarah both at the wedding and all other times when she is in her presence. Lauren acknowledges that Sarah is right about her sister's behavior, but feels her hands are tied.

> I just feel like it would take a third party to call my sister out on her behavior it it's to be productive. So Sarah and I can talk about it and I can say I know you are right, but other than pick a fight with my sister, I don't know what I can do. And Sara doesn't want me to pick a fight with [my sister], but on the other hand, she does because she feels like I don't stick up for her [Sarah] enough.

When asked if Lauren thinks these conversations were productive, she explains, "I don't think it's unhealthy, but we are at an impasse because we both want my sister's behavior to change, but is it in our power to make that happen? No."

Though the conversation about her navigating privacy within Lauren's family of origin was challenging, both Sarah and she remain open and honest, not only about their desires for privacy or openness. There is also frustration with the limitations set upon the relationship by external factors. We can concluded that neither person desires the rules or is satisfied with them,

but they feel it is a necessity in order to accommodate others' heteronormativity or homophobia. For Lauren, while it may not be an ideal outcome, "We both have to settle for a status quo that neither of us is happy with." Her experience suggests that the process of learning to effectively discuss challenging and emotional topics based on external force can enable partners to grow together if communication is respectfully navigated.

Respectful and cooperative communication is key in the boundary coordination process (Petronio, 2002/2012). When partners had previously openly discussed their desires for privacy, it led to increased stress and mutual frustration. One of the reasons for disliking the rules is that treating the relationship like private information that cannot be shared in certain situations leaves partners feeling hurt and isolated. Communication was effective when partners worked together, thus directing their energy to effectively navigating privacy boundaries rather than blaming each other for the situations necessitating privacy management. Interviews suggest that privacy navigation fails when the more open partner directs her frustration toward her partner rather than at the situation.

Katie shares a situation where her partner desired to be more open about their relationship during a New Year's celebration. At the time, Katie was unable to be open due to the fear that her family would find out and withhold financial resources from her. This frustrated Katie because both she and her partner who wanted to be more open; however, Katie was unable to do so because of the perceived threat of disclosure to her parents by people from her hometown. When asked to share the details of this instance, Katie's fear becomes very apparent. She shares how this fear affected her date with her girlfriend.

> That time downtown when we got upset with each other. We were sitting around with Chelsea, Lily, and Alex. And Chelsea and Lily are straight girls and Alex is our gay guy

> friend. I looked over and I saw this guy that I barely even knew, like I don't even know if he knew my name or not, but I know that he's from [hometown]. So I leaned over and I told [girlfriend] and she kinda looked sad. She went to put her arm around me five or 10 minutes later, and she stopped herself. I guess then she kind of got upset or sad because I barely knew the guy, but he was still from [hometown], and he might know me. And if you see one [hometown] person, there's likely that there is more than one [hometown] person, and then a minute later I saw a second [hometown] person that I knew better.

Katie admits that she was personally embarrassed because she too wanted to express affection and was frustrated at her own fear. Both she and her girlfriend had the same goal: to be open in public. They also both had the same frustration: the inability to be open in public. In Katie's case, her girlfriend took out her frustration on Katie. As we can see, both partners seemingly had the same goal and desire, but they were unable to achieve it due to perceived limitations. Again, the key element here is to engage in pre-planning and discussion so that both parties are aware and working together on the privacy management.

Amanda confirms how these open discussions keep her and her partner effectively navigating privacy in their relationship for the past 20 years. She shares that she and her partner

> [A]re pretty frank and open with each other and kinda speak it how it is. Because I think when you start hiding that even leads to more trouble and self-esteem issues for... I know the times that I felt like I was not honoring our relationship were very devaluing to me and I felt myself kinda going down. She was so proud and I was like, well why can't I be that way? And a little bit of envy too. I mean, she's so comfortable, why can't I be that way. What happens that she was just like, "Whatever" (throws up hands like she doesn't care). You know, how do you get there?

Again, we hear Amanda's frustration with feeling like she has to remain private and that the efforts to remain private are hurtful to her partner. She is experiencing feelings similar to Karen, which suggests that uselessness and shame may occur as one fears she may potentially harm her partner by being in a relationship. This may ultimately prove detrimental both to these partnerships and the individuals' self-esteem.

Rules and Boundary Coordination as Interaction Stress Reduction. While no participants enjoy the boundaries or the rules, they do acknowledge that communicating in order to establish, maintain, evaluate, and update rules has a positive long-term effect on their relationships. Also, by communicating about the desire to be affectionate in public while not being able to, some couples are even able to develop secret "coded" displays of affection that would only be understood by the couple. This allows them to display affection without incurring risk. There were three primary themes that emerged from the data regarding pre-planned boundary interaction as stress reduction.

When couples anticipate stressful situations and discuss them ahead of time, it tends to reduce the stress of the interaction. This process allows both parties to communicate and clarify with each other their concerns and expectations. It also reduces uncertainty and makes the couple feel as if they are working with and for each other rather than against each other. To further illustrate this theme, let us consider two instances that Jamie and Lily offer independently of each other, one early in their relationship and one later as they were engaged. You can see the same instance through both their perspectives.

Lily shares how she and Jamie had an open discussion about Jamie having to remain private due to DADT before they even began dating. When navigating privacy began to cause hurt, Lily and Jamie established clear rules to guide their behaviors. In doing this, it reduced

uncertainty and therefore, instances of rejection and hurt. Lily explains that, "Our rule was 50 miles outside of [hometown]. We would clock the odometer from leaving our house and once it hit 50 miles, we would hold hands in the car." While Lily confesses to being frustrated by privacy management, she describes how having previously negotiated the rule eliminated guessing at how to behave:

> I didn't like it, but I understood it… it definitely made understandable boundaries and parameters for our relationship. And actually I think that that built our relationship over time, like learning how to set boundaries with each other and with people in our lives.

Jamie confirms Lily's thoughts on the privacy rules they set together as a couple. While both women interviewed separately, they both share the same story when asked about how setting rules strengthened their relationship. Now that Jamie and Lily live in a larger city, they do not feel the same pressure to remain private. An interesting observation is that Jamie and Lily remembered the rule differently. Jamie said it was 25 miles outside of their hometown while Lily said 50 miles, yet both women positively recollect the communication they used to establish the rule. They recognized that the desire for rules was necessary; as such, they were developed collaboratively, and for the benefit of reducing anxiety and increasing affection for both partners.

Jamie brings up the rule when asked how she expresses affection to Lily when trying to remain private. She explains,

> During DADT, we had a rule that was like, anywhere within 25 miles of [hometown] there was no PDA, there was a space this big (holds out arms) separating us, but outside of that, like when we came up to [big city] or whatever, we could be all over each other and it didn't matter.

Jamie offers that neither she nor Lily liked the rule, but they both recognize that it served the purpose of protecting the financial resources of their relationship: Jamie's job. Jamie laments:

> It sucked. Yeah, it was hard. You know, especially at first because Lily was, ya know, she wants to hold her girlfriends hand. She wants to be able to lean up against me or whatever, you know, randomly kiss me or whatever, but that was just no because if a mass sergeant or officer saw us then god forbid, I could use my job.

For Lily and Jamie, establishing the ability to navigate privacy early on in their relationship means they are able to apply these management behaviors to more challenging situations. Now that years have passed since the "[hometown] rule," as they referred to it, it was not the specifics of the rule that last in terms of strengthening their relationship, but the feeling both women have of working together for their mutual good and feeling mutually respectful in this less-than-ideal and challenging situation.

Both women also shared how establishing these positive communication strategies early in their relationship allows them to navigate other challenging environments later in their relationship, such as their unaccepting families. Lily explains how she and Jamie discussed sharing their engagement with her parents. Jamie proposed to her and wanted to share this with Lily's parents, but Lily wanted to keep their engagement private because her parents had not been supportive of her and Jamie's relationship. Wanting to respect Lily's parents and form a good relationship with them, Jamie strongly encouraged Lily to share the news with them. Lily gave in and shared the information, and her parents' reaction was strongly negative. After witnessing this, an in future instance, Jamie not only respected Lily's desire to remain private, but even encourages her to reconsider sharing with her parents when she thinks there is the possibility of

Lily getting hurt. Lily shares how this negotiation occurred and how it has affected future private disclosures with her family and communication between her and Jamie

> So she proposed to me in June of 2010, and my parents, even though I had been out for several years and they knew we were together, we were staying at my grandmother's house, and I had this big fat diamond ring on my finger. She said, "We have to tell your parents." And I said, "I don't want to," and she said, "its not fair not to. They have to know. They deserve to know, they're your parents." And so I gave in, and that led up to probably the worst six months of my life, just because of the way my parents reacted. So I gave in to it. I wish I hadn't given in to it. and recently I actually had another conversation with her in which I wanted to tell my parents something that's exciting about us (fostering a child with the intent of adoption), and she's (Jamie's) flipped it now, and said, "Let's not tell your parents because they are going to crap all over it." So it was definitely a learning experience, but I didn't want to tell my parents, she did, so we told my parents. We agreed on that and it turned out really badly.

Both parties knew the intent in sharing the engagement was positive, which was, "to be open and honest about our relationship." Lily explains that while Jamie's desire was "to build a relationship with" and "share our happiness with my parents," Lily knew that in that instance, her parents were not capable of sharing in their joy.

Minimizing Sharing Relational Joy. This sentiment is also expressed by Lauren and Amanda who justify why they did not tell their parents about their weddings. Madison confirms not disclosing her relationship to her friends for the same reason. Relatedly, a theme of minimized sharing of relational joy emerged as well. In the new situation of fostering children, Lily describes how,

> Jamie is understanding that I am really excited about this new step in our life, and that it's best to keep it close to our chest and not really tell people that we know are going to shit all over it because I want to remain happy about it.

Lily finishes her thoughts on how these instances of privacy navigation strengthen her and Jamie's relationship.

> I think that we balance each other out. Especially when telling people about aspects of our relationship or things that are going on or choices that we have made together as a couple is a learning experience, and I think that we keep each other in check because when she wants to tell somebody something, I'm like no maybe not, and when I do, she's like well maybe you should think about this... and we always come to a mutual conclusion on who to tell what so it's always a cohesive effort.

Lily also confirms that these discussions were not about control but protection. Jamie had witnessed her "get hurt so deeply by telling very personal or sharing very personal choices with other people and getting a blowback from it," and she shares her concerns about Lily's desires to disclose to protect her from further pain.

Jamie and Lily offer a great example of how communication about revealing private information ahead of time can help to set expectations and guide rules for future interpersonal interactions both within and outside the relationship. Through their experiences, we see how they, as a couple, work to prioritize being together and working on managing their privacy together over the limitations of the rules.

Communication about Rules and Boundary Coordination prior to the interaction served to reduce boundary turbulence. Moving into the third part of the boundary management process, we see the effect of the communication or lack of communication regarding privacy

boundaries. It is in this step that the couple can use breaks in privacy boundaries to work together and strengthen their relationship or to pass blame and work against each other, becoming self-protective as opposed to relationship-protective.

Rule Management Stage 3: Boundary Turbulence

Collectively, co-owning private information necessitates the coordination of rules related to revealing and concealing (Petronio, 2002). Because coordination occurs on many levels and is affected by countless personal, relational, situational, and cultural factors, turbulence often erupts while navigating the coordination process. This can occur when rules are misused or violated, but it can also occur in the rule development stage, particularly is partners perceive varying levels of risk related to certain disclosures.

Madison offers an example of how she felt disrespected by her partner who refused to honor her desire to remain more private in public. She explained to her partner that she was not comfortable with public displays of affection, but her partner continued to attempt to touch her and hold her hand, making Madison highly uncomfortable. While privacy management was challenging, what ultimately made Madison leave this relationship was the frustration she felt when the boundaries she asked for were not respected. While venting, she shares that,

> She was much more affectionate and would want to hold my hand and be more affectionate but I just wasn't cool with it and sometimes I would get really tense and be pushing her away. Like literally pushing her away. And there were multiple times that I could just see the hurt in her face. And I just said, "Look, you just have to understand that I am not there yet." So that was something that we were trying to work through because of her being more ok or comfortable than I was.

Madison explains that her desire to minimize public displays of affection was not for lack of attraction or desire, but "to maintain the perception that we were just two girlfriends hanging out. Nothing funny to most Georgians." Madison experienced privacy boundary turbulence when her partner owned the private information about their relationship and Madison's sexuality and refused to maintain the boundary Madison desired.

Samantha expresses another area of boundary turbulence that resulted from her and her partner not openly communicating their privacy boundaries prior to an uncomfortable environment for her partner. Samantha realized that, by the shift in her partner's demeanor, she was uncomfortable and attempted to read her partner's nonverbal behavior. Because her partner was fearful of revealing their relationship and her identity to her parents and they did not openly discuss how to navigate this familial environment, both Samantha and her partner experienced hurt, frustration, and misunderstandings. Without clear rules or understanding of intent, Samantha resorted to observing and interpreting her partner's nonverbal cues. This was complicated by the fact that expectations for behavior were unclear, which resulted in Samantha erring on the side of always being private, so much so that it felt awkward. As she reflects on these accommodations, she realizes they were almost off-putting. When asked how she nonverbally adapts to protect her partner's privacy, she explains that she,

> Probably sat further away. Less eye contact. Less small touching. If I was really trying to hide it, probably standing far far away. Yeah, I think when I was really nervous about the first one, I really did stand very far away. Which is very off putting.

As she reflects on their interaction, Samantha laughs and explains that she gave her partner so much space that, not only did they not appear to be together romantically or even just friends, but someone looking on might think they were not "even acquaintances, or had met each other."

Samantha expresses feeling anxious during these situations, as did her partner. She explains that, "[her partner was] also very anxious, that was definitely a good cue I was picking up**,** so it was making me more uncomfortable and wanting to do whatever would make it better."

Samantha also confirms that these behaviors negatively affect their relationship, "putting a spotlight on the differences and that this wasn't ideal." While Samantha again confirms the common theme of hiding lesbianism in front of children, she also explains how not having negotiated a safe space in their relationship to be affectionate highlighted the relationship's dysfunction.

> If things needed to be hidden, and again, you're not going to make out in front of the kid, but just if any sort of affection is going to need to be hidden, then there's obviously something deeper going on that needs to be addressed.

In contrast to these negative experiences, a positive effect of boundary turbulence is that those involved attempt to correct the boundary break by integrating new information into the rule management system. Utilizing this new information, couples attempt to make adjustments, shifting the rules to fit their needs and new situations, or even reevaluating old patterns, in an effort to achieve coordination. Because the success is in effectively navigating boundaries, it does not matter to what degree each partner is open. What matters is that the partners have mutually agreed in a consensual manner to respect the established boundary.

When turbulence increases communication and understanding of the logic behind boundaries and expectations, privacy negotiation can serve to strengthen relationships. It should be observed that this strengthening might be negated by the unnecessary stress placed on these couples. Lily explains how the conversations regarding privacy management served to help her and Jamie develop a step-by-step routine for handling challenging conversations, which has

enhanced their relationship. She offers that being in this type of relationship was ultimately positive as

> We have definitely learned how to navigate conversations and now we approach everything in a logical, rational, step-by-step thing and I think several years ago, it was like, OK, I wanna do this! So it's created definitely self-discipline, and it's also made our relationship stronger and more positive.

Lily explains the step-by-step approach she and Jamie have established that helps reduce rash privacy disclosures and laid the groundwork for being able to reduce anxiety by collectively establishing privacy boundaries.

> We find each other in a calm space, and we always preface with, I'm going to tell you something, I don't want you to respond immediately. I want you to sit on what you think for a couple of minutes, and then I need you to express your feelings without emotion. And so we kind of let our analytical sides take over and regardless of what that is, whatever it might be, so that we both go into a decision making cool and calm. And if it makes one of us angry, then we say, "That decision made me angry. I'll talk to you about it tomorrow."

In sum, while none of those interviewed desire to have to label their relationship as private information and navigate it, they all recognize that there are environments where it is most respectful to their partner and best for their relationship to do so. More important than the rules are the communication patterns that are used to discuss, navigate, and develop the boundaries. It is these interactions that seem to strengthen the relationship, as described by Lauren, Amanda, Debby, Lily, Jamie, and Karen or damage the relationship, as described by Katie, Madison, Samantha, and Jess.

Karen, who recently married her partner of 15 years confirms that, despite the frustration along the way, the relationship and the open communication are well worth it.

> If somebody finds themselves in this situation, or that situation that I was in, you just gotta to be patient and you gotta be honest... with yourself and your partner. And that is the hardest thing too... to be honest with yourself and your partner at the same time.

Omission as Deception or Inauthenticity. The final theme associated with constant privacy management is the challenge of participants feeling as if they are being unethical, immoral, or dishonest by their concealing strategies and behaviors. Earlier in the interview, Jess mentions how once she had disclosed to her mother about being in a same-sex relationship, she felt more comfortable within herself. This seems counter-intuitive because Jess also mentions that her mother was not accepting of her dating a woman. When asked to explain why she felt better after disclosing this to her mother despite her rejection, Jess shares that,

> I think for me it was a relief of knowing I didn't have to worry about hiding it. Like it's out, they know. It would be great if they were supportive, but they weren't, but the point is I don't have to worry about something getting back to them, I don't have to worry about saying the wrong thing. Whatever, because they know. For me it was more like I could let my shoulders down. This is who I am.

Much like Jess, Amanda also feels deception when concealing her identity from others. She explains that she not only feels she was lying to those she cared about, but she also feels she was being disrespectful of her partner by publicly denying their relationship. Amanda explains that she feels she was devaluing her partner by her concealment of their relationship. She even expresses a desire to be more similar to her open partner, who is able to reveal their relationship without concern for others' opinions.

When asked about a time when she brought a male friend along to a family event rather than her partner due to fear of revealing their relationship, Amanda shares how she felt by hiding her relationship.

> Like I was lying. Like I was living a lie. That I should be proud, and I'm not. And I'm being deceitful. And that I was hurting the person that I loved by not acknowledging and not bringing forward.

When asked how her partner may have felt in these situations, Amanda explains that while she understood the need for Amanda to remain private, the concealment was hurtful. She further shares that her partner wanted them to have equal recognition.

> She wanted, I think, she wanted me to be recognized. And I think she wanted to be recognized. That she wasn't just a fly by night thing. That we were in a committed relationship, and that relationship should be recognized and respected even if they didn't agree with it. Like family pictures, what do you do? And I think it was very hurtful at times the way my family treated her, and I allowed it. (long pause) So, [I feel] a lot of guilt.

As previously mentioned, while omitting information often leads to feelings of deception of inauthenticity for participants, they all also recognize that knowing privacy rules and how to manage them is necessary for navigating daily interactions and protecting themselves and their partners. While they are committed to maintaining privacy, they also are committed to expressing love to their partner.

Privacy and Disclosure are Dialectical

Petronio's (2002) final supposition about CPMT is that it is dyadic in nature. This final supposition is vitally important as there must be another from whom information is being

withheld or shared in order for privacy and openness to exist. As has previously been noted throughout prior sections, every single participant confirmed through her personal stories that privacy and openness are dyadic in nature, or negotiated between the partners. Even participants who identify as completely open share examples of times and places where they either remain private or use strategic ambiguity, letting others assume but not clarifying, to maintain face, gain resources, or remain safe. Additionally, all five private participants claim to have certain areas of their lives where they are more open and have a desire to be more open. Even Debby who identifies as 99% open explains that, "Sometimes it's not a balanced thing, and I can certainly speak to that between jobs and family and two people basically having the yin and yang position." This explanation seems appropriate, as she describes privacy negotiation with her partner. Debby is totally open at work but private with family. Her partner is totally private at work but open with her family. Depending on the context, one minute they are more open and the next minute more private.

Another important observation is the constant shifting between guidelines for concealing and revealing private information. Because environment and relationships are dynamic, there is the need for continuous reevaluation of rules. For instance, Karen shares in her interview how her partner's daughter was unaccepting of their relationship; therefore, they kept it private. This was managed by Karen leaving the house when the daughter came to visit. Surprisingly, the daughter later became their greatest advocate. Then, once she married, the daughter married a very conservative man. Now, Karen is not allowed around her grandchildren. This demonstrates the difference between "coming out" and living openly.

Lauren explains how her partner, Sarah, was tired of navigating her privacy, but her boss was not. He serves as a reluctant confidante (Afifi & Guerrero, 1998; Afifi & Guerrero, 2000;

Guerrero & Afifi, 1995; McBride & Bergen, 2008; Petronio, 2000) which means that, when she revealed her lesbian relationship, he asked her to conceal it again. Lauren and her partner decided to quit their jobs due to not being able to be out at work. Sarah's boss handled the situation the best he could given the parameter of not being able to employ a lesbian at the Catholic Archdiocese. Lauren describes the conversation that ensued after her partner, Sarah, disclosed their relationship to her boss.

> She quit at the arch diocese without having a job lined up, but after hours she went out to dinner with her boss and told him, and he said, "You can come in on Monday and we cannot have had this conversation." It was basically like, you can stay, but you have to stay in the closet.

In explaining this, Lauren acknowledges Petronio's dialectic and emphasizes its importance in their relationship. Being able to maintain privacy is a tension. A "coming out" is not a one-time event where you are either open or private. Rather, it is a constant negotiation of to whom you will reveal your sexual orientation or relationship, how you will reveal it, and how you will manage the constantly changing dynamics that occur as a result of increased or decreased sharing. Understanding this dynamic requires not only both parties in the partnership, but the revealer and the receiver, to mutually negotiate privacy and also to decide if they want to participate in the negotiation.

In the case of Sarah and Lauren, they are done participating in the negotiation that requires them to remain quiet about their relationship at work. Despite Sarah's boss giving her the chance to remain private at work, Lauren explains how remaining private can wear on a person.

> There is just that fear and that feeling that I cannot be who I want to be. I cannot pursue my happiness in my life as long as I am constrained by this, and that's one reason why I don't know how these people who have been in the closet forever can even do it. I just don't. I don't understand... I guess it's just part of their life at this point. I just can't. Life is so much better when it's not hidden like that. I have this source of happiness. The best thing. This is the best thing in my life and I can't tell anyone about it. To me, that's just really sad that you'd have to have to hide the best thing in my life.

All participants confirm these feelings. They recognize that there is a privilege that comes with the privacy/openness dialectic in that it allows individuals to ebb and flow within their comfort levels and according to the context or situation. We have learned that once a disclosure has occurred, there is not a static shift in relationships; rather, it is in the negotiation of this dialectic, its management, turbulence, and recovery from the turbulence where relationships experience success or struggle.

CHAPTER FOUR: DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDTIONS

There came a time when the risk to remain tight in the bud was more painful than the risk it took to blossom. – Anais Nin

This qualitative semi-structured interview study explored privacy navigation within 10 lesbian romantic partnerships where partners espoused varying levels of openness. The following three research questions were proposed for three reasons. First, they are not answered in the paucity of current literature on either lesbian relationships or lesbian relational communication. Secondly, with the social climate in the Bible Belt of same-sex marriage being recognized while accompanying religious freedom laws allow for legalized LGBT discrimination, understanding how lesbians within this environment navigate privacy through communication is timely and important. Finally, the advent of social media has made it possible for a social issue to travel the world in a matter of minutes. These tools both reduce privacy and have been effectively used to spread concerns within and among the LGBQ community.

Given the current socio-political climate for lesbians in the southern United States, I assert that examining privacy navigation within lesbian relationships is vital to the long-term success of these relationships. I also offer that the current relationship between privacy and sexual orientation is far more nuanced than can be accounted for in previous research methods (Caron & Ulin, 1997) which were survey-based and not context specific. The following section will summarize the findings from this in-depth interaction with 10 lesbians of varying backgrounds, ages, and social circles, who share the connection of having dated and spent substantial portions of their life living in the south.

Findings

Southern girls: We like our watermelon juicy, and our gossip juicier.

Research Question 1 asked, "What real or perceived social sanctions against lesbians/lesbian relationships influence the creation of privacy boundaries among lesbians in romantic relationships?" This question was posed to understand the extent to which external forces may place undue pressure on self-identified lesbians to deny their true identities and involvement in a socially taboo relationship.

The social sanctions these participants identified as pressuring them to conceal their identity as lesbian and their relationship were diverse, but they included one major overlap. Each woman identified multiple environments where she experienced heightened perceived risks related to disclosure and triggered increased privacy negation communication (See Table 3).

Table 3: Participant's Discussion of High Risk Contexts

Privacy Self-Identification	**Private-Identified Participants**					**Public-Identified Participants**						
Participant Name	**Katie**	**Madison**	**Jamie**	**Lauren**	**Amanda**	**Lily**	**Jess**	**Samantha**	**Karen**	**Amanda**	**Debby**	**Total % of Participants Reporting Theme**
Age	23	24	29	30	51	30	38	39	45	51	51	------
Religious Settings	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	100%
Hometowns	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	100%
Small Towns in the Bible Belt	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	100%
Settings Where Children are Present	---	---	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	80%
Financial Dependence	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	100%
Unaccepting/Disapproving Families	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	100%

X=reported in interview by participant in both forcefulness and recurrence.

Findings demonstrated that openness about one's sexual orientation or lesbian relationship tends to be related to the degree of stigma associated with being gay by a system, whether that system is family, religion, military, or legislation. Participants tended to believe that the greater the stigma within the contexts of religious settings, hometowns, small towns in the Bible Belt, settings where children are present, financial dependence (e.g., employers, supervisors, or parents) and unaccepting/disapproving families, the greater the perceived risk.

For instance, in the case of religion, Lauren was able to live openly and not be rejected by her parents, as their church taught that being gay was not a sin; rather, it was just the act of premarital sex that was deemed inappropriate. However, in Debby's case, she knew being gay went against her father's religion and the result would be him disowning her. It was in his church's rules. Since the cost and risk were greater, she was more motivated to hide both her identity and her relationship.

Losing "Our Father": GRITS and God

Straight Americans need... an education of the heart and soul.
They must understand - to begin with - how it can feel to spend years
denying your own deepest truths, to sit silently through classes,
meals, and church services while people you love toss off
remarks that brutalize your soul.
Bruce Bawer, The Advocate, April, 28, 1998

While the six environments seen as high risk by all 10 participants were covered extensively in Chapter Three, one deserves additional discussion due to it being the environment named first and most forcefully by all participants. Religious settings were by far the strongest carrier of stigma among participants. When asked in what environment they felt unsafe or unable to be open, the first response of all 10 participants was "church." For 9 out of 10 women, this was related to hurtful comments and actions that they witnessed prior to disclosing their identity

and stigmatizing comments that were visited upon them post-identity or relational disclosure. Regardless of identifying as more open or more private, all participants identified religion as a trigger for remaining private. Participants explained that the severity of repercussion for being gay was informed by a religious person's dogma, which was also strongly related to the need for privacy navigation. This theme also indicated that the stricter the ramifications for being gay, the less the chance of a participant disclosing her identity or relationship status to others.

These findings are quite troubling for several reasons. First, they were consistent across denomination, meaning that Protestants, Catholics, Mormons, and even non-religious participants had felt aversion toward churches. Second, with the exception of one woman, all other participants had been raised in a religious home and espoused a strong faith-based identity until she felt rejected by individual's that used a religious framework to respond to their loved one's sexual identity. Thirdly, since religious symbolism and language triggered rejection and discomfort for lesbians, there were clear reservations by participants to be in a religious context or environment. Their reported experiences indicate that there is no easy way for them to differentiate between religions with anti-gay rules and rhetoric and religious individuals who are members of gay-friendly churches. Because of this uncertainty and a perceived need for self-preservation, all of the nine participants chose to dissociate from their religious identity.

GRITS and Legal Rights: Legislation as Drawn Out as Southern Drawl

The Southern character is opposed to haste.
Safety is of more worth than speed, and there is no hurry. -Maria Mitchell

A second indicator of increased openness worth discussing is protective legislation, particularly laws that protect an individual or a couple's material resources (e.g., housing protections, job protections, etc.) and family (e.g., partner health benefits, hospital visitation rights, gay adoption laws, etc.). With the South currently experiencing extensive legislative

changes related to LGBTQ legal protections, it is worth noting that a relationship was recognized between increased protections and openness, while decreased legal protections resulted in more privacy or even active denial regarding one's relationship.

The interviews also revealed a pattern of becoming more public once the perceived risk was removed. This is evidenced in Lily's described account of having lost much due to being in a lesbian relationship: "I've been fired a couple of times because I was gay. So I've lost jobs, I've lost income, I've lost housing, lost funding, I lost friends, I lost family." She was also able to eloquently describe how she reframed these losses, which involved focusing on them as positive, allowing her to live a more authentic life filled with supportive relationships. She explained that, "I've lost it all, so I've kind of gotten to the point where I'm like ehhh (shrugs)... if it's not gonna stick around, it's not worth having." This reframing of a loss as a gain was a strategy used by nine out of 10 participants who struggled against stigma, which resulted in a recalibration and reevaluation of their self-worth. While they still expressed hurt from the judgment and rejection received from loved ones, they were able to bounce back from the pain. However, it is important to note that this was not always the case. Those who participated are individuals who are open and willing to share about their lesbian identity. Others whose fear may be debilitating or foreclose on their identity would probably not volunteer for this study.

GRITS' Communication Privacy Management Accommodation

Southern girls greet one another with bits of gossip, not salutations.

Research Question 2 asked, "What specific communication behaviors were used by either or both partners to navigate privacy within and outside of the relationship?" The findings suggested that strategies used to navigate privacy were developed by lesbians primarily to accommodate heteronormativity. Couples primarily used both verbal and

nonverbal methods of concealing their sexual identity and relationship status. Verbally, they would conceal their identity by changing their partner's pronoun or omitting any acknowledgment of having a partner. Nonverbally, public displays of affection related to romantic relationships, for example, were minimized, sometimes to the point that participants admitted to actively avoiding touching, making eye contact with, or standing far away from their partner when the environment called for privacy. Often, participants reported feeling so much anxiety related to being "outted" that they did not enjoy public encounters with their partner. Some even resorted to primarily dating at home to avoid stress.

The pressure participants felt to accommodate heteronormativity was not unfounded. While a recent poll asserts that 63% of Americans support the freedom to marry as a Constitutional right for gay couples, even 51% of citizens in states lacking marriage equality (CNN/ORC, 2015), a 2014 study in the American Sociological Review demonstrates that prejudice towards same-sex public displays of affection and commitment still exists (Doan, Loehr, & Miller, 2014). Essentially, individuals believe gay couples should have constitutional rights; they just do not want to see visuals, such as hand holding or even kissing on the cheek. This attitude was both overtly and covertly felt by participants, as they noted that (1) privacy navigation was constant, and (2) less stigma was associated with reduced public displays of relational joy and affection.

In their study of perceptions of LGBQ relationships compared to straight relationships, Doan et al (2014) instructed more than 1,000 participants (male and female, gay and straight) read a short story about a gay couple, a lesbian couple, or a straight couple living together but were not married. After reading the scenario, each participant answered questions about the

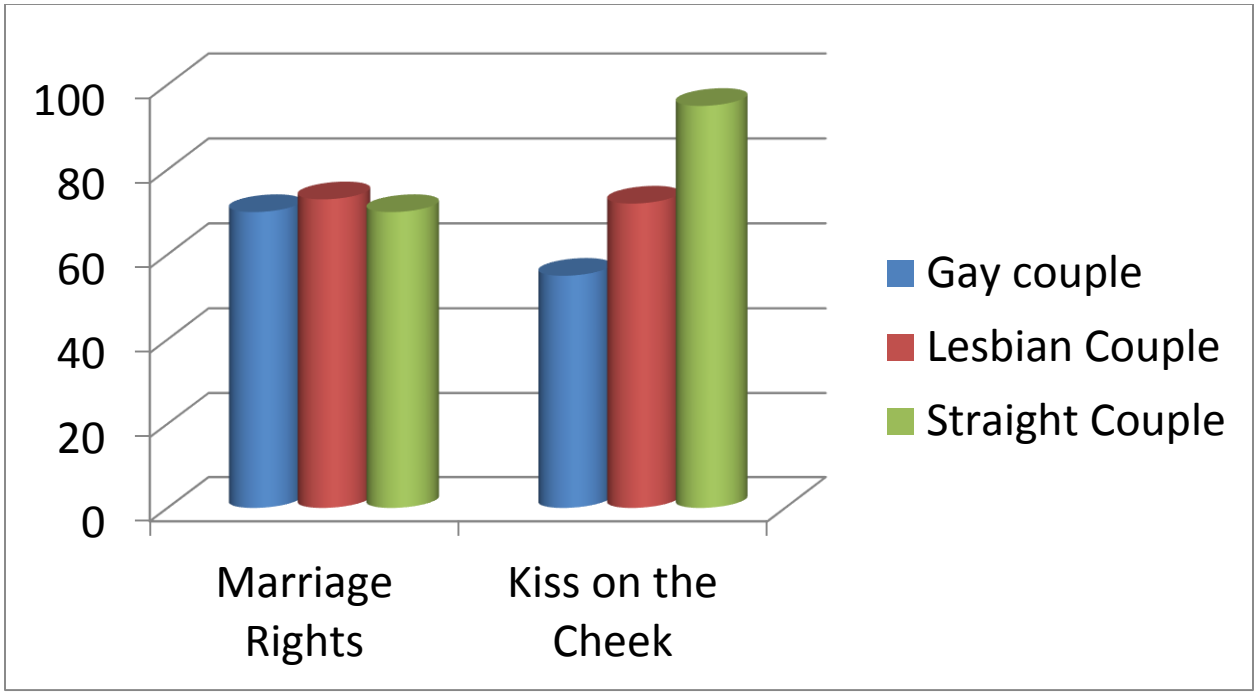
couple. Results showed that, while participants were equally supportive of same-sex legal and marriage rights (i.e., 70% approved rights for straight couples, 70% approved rights for gay couples, and 73% approved rights for lesbian couples), straight participants were notably negative in terms of granting informal privileges to same-sex couples. Of the study participants who read the scenario about a straight couple, 95% approved of the couple kissing on the cheek in comparison to just 55% who approved of a gay couple kissing on the cheek and 72 % who approved of a lesbian couple kissing on the cheek. In an interesting display of horizontal hostility, even gay and lesbian participants were generally positive about all same-sex privileges, except for PDA (Doan et al, 2014). These attitudes suggest that people desire to be "fair," but also they desire for gay and lesbian relationships to remain unseen or private.

An interesting similarity between this study and existing research is that, while 72% of straight individuals approved of lesbian same-sex PDA, only two participants, or 20% acknowledged that she regularly displayed public affection to her partner. In the current study, three more participants displayed affection once their material and familial resources were protected. Half of participants chose to conceal public displays of affection. Perhaps this is an effect of five participants identifying as more “private” partners, though it begs the question, “Are these individuals private by choice or by social pressure?” If they are private due to social pressure, the study suggests that perhaps they do not need to be quite so private. This is of particular import for those in Florida and Alabama where same-sex marriage bans were recently overturned, legally allowing and recognizing both same-sex marriages and weddings.

Doan et al's (2014) research supports the findings in this qualitative study. This approach to women’s identity management via communication privacy management offers a greater depth of understanding of the "why" behind reduced support for public displays of affection (PDA), at

least among the lesbian population (See Table 3). Doan et al (2014) speculated that lack of support for same-sex PDA is related to safety concerns and the results are gendered, as people are more tolerant of lesbian PDA than gay PDA. This current study not only confirms Doan et al's (2014) speculation, but also illuminates the realness of the expressed fear of being watched, "outted," and lost resources participants experience as a result of prejudicial systems. While only three of the participants feared physical harm, it is undeniable that many lesbians and lesbian couples live in fear, a fear that is somewhat justified. These findings also support current prejudice literature that moves away from overt prejudice toward covert acts or microagressions (Pharr, 2007).

Table 4: Equal Rights vs. Visibility (Doan, Loehr, & Miller, 2014)



Southern girls deal with their problems in a discreet and graceful manner

The third Research Question explored, "What specific communicative behaviors used to navigate privacy lead to constructive relational outcomes?" The differentiating factor between constructive and destructive relational outcomes was not as related to verbal or

nonverbal behaviors within a specific context, as it was to having communicated about privacy boundaries and privacy navigation expectations prior to the context that encouraged concealing. Based on this, I offer the following recommendations for improving the health and prosperity of lesbian relationships with varying levels of privacy.

Implications and Recommendations

"You have to understand that women in the South, women of Southern blood, just don't partake in scandalous adventures--- and when we do, it's in a discreet manner. We have reputations to consider, after all." ~ Blake O'Hara Heart in The Sassy Belles

Based on the results of this exploratory qualitative study, it is apparent that all lesbian couples purpose to openly discuss privacy management, particularly prior to entering any of the six unsupportive and, as a result, perceived high risk contexts: religious settings, hometowns, small towns in the Bible Belt, settings where children are present, financial dependence, and unaccepting/disapproving families. In addition to these settings, any contexts which either partner perceives as having a high risk for rejection, humiliation, or loss of resources if their lesbian identity or relationship is discovered needs to be discussed at length and rules for privacy navigation established.

In addition to negotiating privacy boundaries very explicitly, including to whom they can disclose, how much information they can share, and under what circumstances they should remain private, I recommend that partners establish coded forms of affection so that they can express endearment and support to each other in challenging situations. For instance, since hand holding may be off limits, a partner may explain that when they fold their own hands, it is when they were wishing they could hold their partners hand. Another example might be subtly tapping one's finger on the table three times representing the words "I love you." These strategies not

only serve to support the partner but serve to facilitate symbolic convergence within the couple, strengthening their relationship.

Along with coded displays of affection, partners should have an exit word and exit strategy that they use to signal to their partner they have tolerated the challenging situation as much as they can. By using this exit word strategy, partners don't have to predict other's frustration tolerance thresholds, and they can support their partner and reduce contextual friction that may be building by helping facilitate a smooth exit from the situation.

These recommendations can be used to assist those in struggling lesbian relationships as well as providing prevention by reducing boundary turbulence before it occurs. If boundary turbulence does occur, assume the best of your partner, wait until you are able to speak calmly and respectfully, and describe to your partner not only the breach of privacy, but why you believe this information should have remained concealed. Based on the developmental model of communication, we can better understand an individual and communicate with them effectively when we understand their behaviors on an explanatory and predictive level as opposed to simply descriptive. By striving to understand how one's partner navigates their own privacy boundary, you may be able to better predict your behavior if faced with a new or surprising privacy navigation context. However, in a new and surprising situation, the best approach is to err on the side of privacy.

I am proud to be a Southerner. I think Southern hospitality is very... I don't think it's just a term. I think it really exists. You can come to Savannah, and the people are so sweet and so nice.
--Paula Deen

A final recommendation would be for lesbians to not ignore the environmental cues for the six high-risk contexts, but also consider that there are individuals within these contexts that do not fit the judgmental bigot stereotype they might fear. As a **G**irl **R**aised **I**n **T**he **S**outh, I love

the hospitable, relaxed culture of the South. For the most part, Southerners are as warm, sunny, and beautiful as the weather. I also navigated my own coming out journey through a small town in Florida (pop. 3,500), a mid-sized city in Florida (pop. 186,000), and three cities in Georgia (pop. 56,400), (pop. 119,800), and (pop. 447,800). This journey was incredibly difficult, and like the participants, I found smaller towns in the Bible Belt harder to be my full self in more so than the mid-sized or larger towns. However, once I was able to overcome my own fear and find a good LGBTQ community, of which there are many in the South, I began to blossom and feel whole.

I love the South so much that as I finalize this dissertation, I limited my job search to universities within the states of Georgia, Florida, South Carolina, and North Carolina. This being said, a strong recommendation is to listen for cues of empathy and test the waters by bringing up situation external to yourself to gain a better understanding of their thoughts on LGBQ individuals. Study participants noted that as media coverage of LGBQ events increased, both local and national, conversations (or silence) around their homes, the water cooler, and eventually on social media provided them a tool for passively observing how people felt about LGBQ individuals without having to divulge their own identity. Being LGBQ in the South may have challenges, but practicing some of the effective communication strategies touted by participants within this study, perhaps day-to-day interactions for lesbian GRITS can flow more smoothly.

Limitations and Future Research

Qualitative methods were used to expand interpersonal communication based understanding of lesbian relationships and situate the privacy management phenomenon through the lens of Communication Privacy Management (Petronio, 2002/2012). As such, this was an

exploratory study, delving deep into the privacy navigation experiences of ten individuals to gather a greater understanding, rather than sampling a larger set in order to make predictions. The inability to make predictions is a strong limitation of this study. Future research should examine larger numbers of lesbian relationships, perhaps in a quantitative or mixed method approach.

The goal of qualitative research is not to apply findings to a general public; instead, this type of inquiry functions to offer insight into a phenomenon that is unique to specific participants (Creswell & Clark, 2007; Glense, 2010; Roulston, 2010). While this serves as a limitation of this study, it also sets up future research to examine this phenomenon on a larger level, possibly through the use of quantitative inquiry, to see if it can be generalized. This type of study might be done at a Southern LGBQ Pride gathering in order to increase access to a larger population, particularly to those who are the more "private" partners. However, even examining this study quantitatively would face the challenge of identifying private lesbians, particularly the *N* necessary for statistical power in a quantitative study. Hopefully, lesbians from southern states will become increasingly more accessible as same-sex marriage bans are overturned and lesbian relationships are recorded in public record.

A recruitment challenge I encountered was having several lesbians express interest, but not identify with having been in a relationship with varying levels of openness. Despite them not identifying as a member of this specific relationship category, nearly each person who contacted me about the study explained how there were certain situations in which they felt safe and comfortable being "themselves" (openly gay) and there were other situations where they did not feel safe or comfortable (they would not disclose or avoid these situations altogether). The difference seemed to be that some lesbians embraced the identity of being "more open" or "more

private" while others (not included in this study) saw this as a fluid part of life rather than an identity. Since they would not claim an identity, they were ineligible to participate in this study, but their refusal to claim being “out” or “closeted” speaks to the possible stigma related to those terms across the LGBQ community. I also observed during interviews that even participants who did embrace an identity as “open” or “private” treated it as fluid, often shifting based on context. This reinforces the challenge of viewing LGBQ research through a positivist or even interpretive paradigm, as its fluidity better fits a poststructural paradigm.

Another limitation of this study is the use of snowball sampling. While it is considered valid and used most frequently to conduct qualitative research on hidden or hard to access populations, especially through interviews, it does have limitations. Snowball sampling was applied as a more formal methodology for making inferences about this population of individuals who have been difficult to enumerate through the use of descending methods such as household surveys (Snijders, 1992; Faugier & Sergeant, 1997). As Glesne (2010) noted, using snowball sampling to find “hidden” individuals both includes and excludes based on social networks. With this in mind, I attempted to draw across multiple social networks. No single participant recommended more than one additional participant.

A challenge I encountered during data collection was the inability of participants to put into words certain experiences. This was particularly challenging when asking them what it was about a “comfortable and safe” environment that made them feel comfortable to disclose or “unsafe” to, where they would conceal their relationship. The natural use of paralanguage as an indirect method for expression is so deeply imbedded in our interactions that when asked to verbally define or clarify nonverbal cues, participants often found themselves at a loss and unable to put the nonverbal symbol into words.

Part of this may be due to language limitations, such as is asserted by Kramarae's (2005) Muted Group Theory. Kramarae believed that "words constantly ignored may eventually come to be unspoken and perhaps even unthought" (p. 465). Part of it might be based on Politeness Theory (Brown & Levinson, 1987), as the speaker seeks to help themselves, their partner, or certain social groups save face by not being direct and open or "bald on record." Since I am asking pointed questions about a group that is seen by some as stigmatized, participants may seek to reduce face threats (Mills, 2003) by using paralinguistic cues to deliver their message. Or it could be that these individuals have never taken it upon themselves to verbalize these thoughts, meaning it may take practice to effectively put them into words. Or perhaps, participants realized as they were speaking that their language sounded judgmental, which was the very thing they were often feeling toward themselves, so they reconsidered going on record, remaining silent to mitigate face threats (Mills, 2003).

A final observation that is both limitation and an advantage was that 9 of the 10 participants were known to me, but not intimately. Because we were casual acquaintances, there seemed to be a level of comfort that was established relatively quickly during the interview. However, I also know that by me being in a social circle, even distantly, may have affected individuals' willingness to fully disclose. In this situation, I considered gathering a secondary interviewer, but I felt that my familiarity with the theoretical background and the participants comfort with me outweighed any possibility that they may hold back, particularly because we are so loosely socially connected.

While the purpose of this study was to examine lesbians navigating relationships within Southern culture, further research should examine the effect of varying levels of outness on lesbian relationships in varying geographic areas, such as different states or even rural versus

urban. *The Journal of Homosexuality* (Wienke & Hill, 2013) released a study that indicated that rural gays and lesbians are no worse off than those living in urban meccas. Exploring this through a qualitative lens could examine nuanced aspects of these individuals daily life to see if privacy navigation differs due to increased populations. This would coincide with literature citing increased stigma in rural areas, as was asserted by Preston, D'Augelli, Kassab, Cain, Schulze, and Starks (2004), since this study argues that an increase in perceived stigma increased needs for privacy management.

Other studies should also examine similar relationships within a community that is more progressive in LGBQ acceptance and support. Since the high risk situations included both malleable rejection (disapproving families) and firm rejection (religious dogma and legislation), it would be interesting to see the effect these two have on each other (e.g. do same-sex marriage states always demonstrate more familial LGBQ acceptance?). Also, if there is a competing situation, such as legal recognition combined with family rejection, how do individuals evaluate which social sanction to honor?

Conclusion

As a relatively young yet growing discipline, communication studies and interpersonal communication are fields of study that have offered considerable evidence that relational and emotional connections to others are a critical part of who we are as humans. To date, there is a dearth of communication research specifically focused on lesbian romantic relationships, which is highly problematic given the constant changes in legislation designed to empower partners in historically marginalized relationships. While LGBQ relationships are becoming more normative in current society, in terms of societal sanctions privacy, identity, and relational challenges have real world ramifications indeed. Evidence suggests that knowledge of how these interpersonal

relationships are initiated, maintained, and negotiated is critical for both scholars and the public in terms of developing prosperous and healthy relationships (Reynolds & Herman-Kinney, 2003). To this end, research on this specific and underresearched relational landscape is of utmost importance. This study builds upon and enhances previous understandings of lesbian relationships and applications of Communication Privacy Management by offering a new area through which to view Petronio's (2002/2012) theory: lesbian relationships with varying levels of openness. To that end, this study serves as a foundation for better understanding privacy negotiation within lesbian couples and paves the way for future research which can further empower and enhance these partnerships.

References

(n.d.). CNN/ORC poll. Retrieved from http://i2.cdn.turner.com/cnn/2015/images/02/19/rel2f.obama.and.domestic.issues.pdf.

(2003). *Lawrence v. Texas 539 U.S. 558 (2003).* Retrieved from https://supreme.justia.com/cases/federal/us/539/558/case.html.

(2013). *2013 National Health Interview Survey*. Retrieved from http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/nhis/nhis_2013_data_release.htm.

(2014). *Amnesty International. About LGBT Human Rights.* Retrieved from http://www.amnestyusa.org/our-work/issues/lgbt-rights/about-lgbt-human-rights.

(2014). *12 states still ban sodomy a decade after court ruling.* Retrieved from http://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2014/04/21/12-states-ban-sodomy-a-decade-after-court-ruling/7981025/.

(2014). *2014 Census*. Retrieved from http://www.census.gov/hhes/samesex/data/decennial.html.

(2014). *Annual Report International Lesbian Gay Bisexual Trans and Intersex Association*. Retrieved from http://ilga.org/what-we-do/annual-report/.

(2014). *The 2014 US and World Populations.* Retrieved from http://www.prb.org/Publications/Datasheets/2014/2014-world-population-data-sheet/data-sheet.aspx.

(2014). *Religious protections Bill passes Michigan House.* Retrieved from http://www.detroitnews.com/story/news/politics/2014/12/04/religious-protections-pass-michigan-house-committee/19888669/.

(2015). *Regular Session - SB 129 Georgia Religious Freedom Restoration Act; provide for the preservation of religious freedom.* Retrieved from http://www.legis.ga.gov/legislation/en-US/Display/20152016/SB/129

(2015). *Winning the Freedom to Marry: Progress in the States*. Retrieved from freedomtomarry.org

(2015). *Florida Set to Become 36th Gay Marriage State as Judicial Hold Expires.* Retrieved from http://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/florida-set-become-36th-gay-marriage-state-judicial-hold-expires-n279896.

Afifi, T. D. (2003). 'Feeling caught' in stepfamilies: Managing boundary turbulence through appropriate communication privacy rules. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, *20*(6), 729-755.

Afifi, W. A., & Guerrero, L. K. (1998). Some things are better left unsaid II: Topic avoidance in friendships. *Communication Quarterly*, *46*(3), 231-249.

Afifi, W. A., & Guerrero, L. K. (2000). Motivations underlying topic avoidance in close relationships. In S. Petronio (Ed.), *Balancing the secrets of private disclosures (pp.* 165-180). London, UK: Routledge.

Ahearn, L. M. (2001). Language and agency. *Annual Review of Anthropology, (30)* 109-137.

Alcoff, L. M. (2005). *Visible identities: Race, gender, and the self*. London, UK: Oxford University Press.

Alderman, E., & Kennedy, C. (1997). *The right to privacy*. London, UK: Vintage Publishing.

Alexander, B. K. (2006). *Performing Black masculinity: Race, culture, and queer identity*. Lanham, MD: Rowman AltaMira.

Altman, I., Vinsel, A., & Brown, B. B. (1981). Dialectic conceptions in social psychology: An application to social penetration and privacy regulation. *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology, 14,* 107-160.

Anderson, D. A. (1993). Lesbian and gay adolescents: Social and developmental considerations. *The High School Journal*, *77*(1/2), 13-19.

Ardener, S. (Ed.). (1975). *Perceiving women*. Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons.

Atkinson, R., & Flint, J. (2001). Accessing hidden and hard-to-reach populations: Snowball research strategies. *Social Research Update, 33*(1), 1-4.

Bavelas, J. B., Black, A., Chovil, N., & Mullett, J. (1990). *Equivocal communication*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.

Baxter, L. A., & Montgomery, B. M. (1996). *Relating: Dialogues and dialectics*. New York, NY: Guilford Press.

Baxter, L. A. (2004). A tale of two voices: Relational dialectics theory. *Journal of Family Communication*, *4*(3-4), 181-192.

Beaty, L. A. (1999). Identity development of homosexual youth and parental and family influences on coming out process. *Adolescence, 34*(135), 597-601.

Beals, K. P., Impett, E. A., & Peplau, L. A. (2002). Lesbians in love: Why some relationships endure and others end. *Journal of Lesbian Studies, 6*(1), 53-63.

Bellman, S., Johnson, E. J., Kobrin, S. J., & Lohse, G. L. (2004). International differences in information privacy concerns: A global survey of consumers. *The Information Society, 20*(5), 313-324.

Berg, S. (1988). Snowball sampling—I. *Encyclopedia of statistical sciences*. Published online 2006. doi: 10.1002/0471667196.ess2478.pub2.

Blascovich, J., Mendes, W. B., Hunter, S. B., Lickel, B., & Kowai-Bell, N. (2001). Perceiver threat in social interactions with stigmatized others. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *80*(2), 253-267.

Bok, S. (1982). *Secrets.* New York, NY: Pantheon.

Bott, E. (1971). *Family and social network.* London, UK: Tavistock.

Boys Don't Cry [Motion picture]. (1999). 20th Century Fox Film Corp.

Brown, P., & Levinson, S. (1987). *Politeness: Some universals in language usage*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.

Browne, K. (2005). Snowball sampling: Using social networks to research non-heterosexual women. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology, 8*(1), 47-60.

Butler, J. (2006). *Gender trouble: Feminism and the subversion of identity*. New York, NY: Routledge.

Butler, J., & Fuss, D. (1991). Inside/out: Lesbian theories, gay theories. In D. Fuss (Ed.), *Imitation and Gender Insubordination* (pp. 13-31). London, UK: Routledge.

Caldwell, M. A., & Peplau, L. A. (1984). The balance of power in lesbian relationships. *Sex Roles*, *10*(7-8), 587-599.

Caron, S. L., & Ulin, M. (1997). Closeting and the quality of lesbian relationships. *Families in Society: The Journal of Contemporary Social Services*, *78*(4), 413-419.

Cass, V. C. (1979). Homosexuality identity formation: A theoretical model. *Journal of Homosexuality*, *4*(3), 219-235.

Cato, J. E., & Canetto, S. S. (2003). Attitudes and beliefs about suicidal behavior when coming out is the precipitant of the suicidal behavior. *Sex Roles*, *49*(9-10), 497-505.

Cohen, S., & Wills, T. A. (1985). Stress, social support, and the buffering hypothesis. *Psychological Bulletin, 98*(2), 310.

Cohen, D., Vandello, J., Puente, S., & Rantilla, A. (1999). "When you call me that, smile!" How norms for politeness, interaction styles, and aggression work together in southern culture. *Social Psychology Quarterly, 62*(3), 257-275.

Coleman, E. (1982). Developmental stages of the coming out process. *Journal of Homosexuality, 7*(2-3), 31-43.

Collins, P. H. (1998). It's all in the family: Intersections of gender, race, and nation. *Hypatia, 13*(3), 62-82.

Connolly, C. M., & Sicola, M. K. (2005). Listening to lesbian couples: Communication competence in long-term relationships. *Journal of GLBT Family Studies, 1*(2), 143-167.

Corrigan, P., & Matthews, A. (2003). Stigma and disclosure: Implications for coming out of the closet. *Journal of Mental Health, 12*(3), 235-248.

Creswell, J. W. & Clark, V. L. (2007). Designing and conducting mixed methods research. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Creswell, J. W. & Miller, D. L. (2000). Determining validity in qualitative inquiry. *Theory Into Practice, 39*(3), 124-130.

Cunningham, W. A., Preacher, K. J., & Banaji, M. R. (2001). Implicit attitude measures: Consistency, stability, and convergent validity. *Psychological Science, 12*(2), 163-170.

Day, N. E., & Schoenrade, P. (2000). The relationship among reported disclosure of sexual orientation, anti-discrimination policies, top management support and work attitudes of gay and lesbian employees. *Personnel Review, 29*(3), 346-363.

D'Emilio, J. (1983). Sexual *politics, sexual communities. The making of a homosexual minority in the United States, 1940– 76*. London, UK: University of Chicago Press.

D'Emilio, J. (1993). *Capitalism and gay identity*. In H. Abelove, M. A. Barale, & D. M. Halpern (Eds.), The lesbian and gay studies reader (pp. 467–476). London, UK: Routledge.

D'Emilio, J. (2012). *Sexual politics, sexual communities*. London, UK: University of Chicago Press.

Denzin, N. (1978). The research act: A theoretical introduction to sociological methods. New York, NY: McGraw-Hill.

DePaulo, B. M., Kashy, D. A., Kirkendol, S. E., Wyer, M. M., & Epstein, J. A. (1996). Lying in everyday life. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *70*(5), 979.

Derlega, V. J., & Chaikin, A. L. (1977). Privacy and self-disclosure in social relationships. *Journal of Social Issues*, *33*(3), 102-115.

DeVault, M.L. 1990. Talking and listening from women's standpoint: feminist strategies for interviewing and analysis. *Social Problems*, *37*(1), 96-116.

Devine, J. (1994). Literacy and social power. In B. Ferdman, R. Weber, & A. Ramirez (Eds.). *Literacy Across Languages and Cultures* (pp. 221-237). Albany, NY: SUNY Press.

Dey, I. (1999). *Grounding grounded theory: Guidelines for qualitative inquiry* (Vol. 282). San Diego, CA: Academic Press.

Dillard, J. P. (2008). Goals-plans-action theory of message production. In L. Baxter & D. Braithwaite (Eds.). *Engaging Theories in Interpersonal Communication: Multiple Perspectives* (pp. 65-76). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Doan, L., Loehr, A., & Miller, L. R. (2014). Formal rights and Informal privileges for same-sex couples evidence from a national survey experiment. *American Sociological Review*, *79*(6), 1172-1195.

Dow, B. (2001). Ellen, television, and the politics of gay and lesbian visibility. *Critical Studies in Media Communication*, *18*(2), 123-140.

Eldridge, N. S., & Gilbert, L. A. (1990). Correlates of relationship satisfaction in lesbian couples. *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, *14*(1), 43-62.

Ellis, H. (2004). *Studies in the psychology of sex.* Retrieved from http://archive.org/stream/studiesinthepsyc13611gut/13611-8.txt).

Faugier, J., & Sargeant, M. (1997). Sampling hard to reach populations. *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, *26*(4), 790-797.

Feigenbaum, E. F. (2007). Heterosexual privilege: The political and the personal. *Hypatia*, *22*(1), 1-9.

Field, C. J., Kimuna, S. R., & Strauss, M. A. (2013). Attitudes toward interracial relationships among college students: Race, class, gender, and perceptions of parental views. *Journal of Black Studies*, *44*, 741-776. doi: http://dx.doi.org.ezproxy.uvm.edu/10.1177/0021934713507580

Floyd, F. J., & Bakeman, R. (2006). Coming-out across the life course: Implications of age and historical context. *Archives of Sexual Behavior*, *35*(3), 287-296.

Foucault, M. (1990). *The history of sexuality Vol. 1: The Will to Knowledge*. London, UK: Penguin.

Freeman, M., Preissle, J., Roulston, K., & Pierre, E. A. S. (2007). Standards of evidence in qualitative research: An incitement to discourse. *Educational Researcher*, *36*(1), 25-32.

Gavinson, R. (1980). Privacy and the limits of law. In F. Schoeman (Ed.), *Philosophical dimensions of privacy: An anthology* (pp. 346–402). Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Gates, G. J., & Newport, F. (2012). Special report: 3.4% of US adults identify as LGBT. *Washington, DC: Gallup*.

Gilroy, P. (1993). *Small acts: Thoughts on the politics of black cultures*. London, UK: Serpents Tail.

Glesne, C. (2010). *Becoming qualitative researchers: An introduction.* White Plains, NY: Longman.

Glionna, J. Nationwide gay and lesbian population count breaks new ground. (2013, February 15). Retrieved from http://articles.latimes.com/2013/feb/15/nation/la-na-nn-gay-population-numbers-20130215.

Goffman, E. (1958). *The presentation of self in everyday life.* Edinburgh, UK: University of Edinburgh, Social Sciences Research Centre.

Gramling, L. F., Carr, R. L., & McCain, N. L. (2000). Family responses to disclosure of self-as-lesbian. *Issues in Mental Health Nursing*, *21*(7), 653-669.

Gramsci, A. (1971). *Selections from the prison notebooks*. New York, NY: International.

Griffith, K. H., & Hebl, M. R. (2002). The disclosure dilemma for gay men and lesbians: "Coming out" at work. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, *87*(6), 1191-1199.

Grodensky, C. A., Golin, C. E., Jones, C., Mamo, M., Dennis, A. C., Abernethy, M. G., & Patterson, K. B. (2015). “I should know better”: The roles of relationships, spirituality, disclosure, stigma, and shame for older women living with HIV seeking support in the

south. *JANAC: Journal of the Association of Nurses in AIDS Care, 26*(1), 12-23. doi:10.1016/j.jana.2014.01.005.

Guerrero, L. K., & Afifi, W. A. (1995). Some things are better left unsaid: Topic avoidance in family relationships. *Communication Quarterly, 43*(3), 276-296.

Haas, S. M., & Stafford, L. (1998). An initial examination of maintenance behaviors in gay and lesbian relationships. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships, 15*(6), 846-855.

Halberstam, J. (2005). *In a queer time and place: Transgender bodies, subcultural lives*. New York, NY: NYU Press.

Harris, T. M., & Kalbfleisch, P. J. (2000). Interracial dating: The implications of race for initiating a romantic relationship. *Howard Journal of Communication, 11*(1), 49-64.

Heintz, P. A. (2012). Work-life dilemmas emerging from lesbian executives' narratives. *Career Development Quarterly, 60*(2), 122-133.

Hendriks, V. M., Blanken, P., Adriaans, N. F., & Hartnoll, R. (1992). *Snowball sampling: A pilot study on cocaine use*. Rotterdam, ND: IVO.

Henley, N. M., & Kramarae, C. (2001). Gender, power, and miscommunication. In F. Juschka (Ed.). (2001) *Feminism in the Study of Religion: A Reader* (pp. 34-60). London, England: A&C Black.

Herman, M. R., & Campbell, M. E. (2012). I wouldn't, but you can: Attitudes toward interracial relationships. *Social Science Research, 41*(2), 343-358.

Hollingsworth v. Perry (2013). Retrieved from https://supreme.justia.com/cases/federal/us/570/12-144/.

Holquist, M. (1990). Introduction: The architectonics of answerability. In M. Holquist & V. Liapunov (Eds.), Art and answerability: Early philosophical essays by M. M. Bakhtin (pp. ix-xlix). Austin: University of Texas Press.

Horkheimer, M. (2002). *Dialectic of enlightenment: Philosophical fragments*. Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press.

Jeffery, M. K., & Tweed, A. E. (2015). Clinician self-disclosure or clinician self-concealment? Lesbian, gay and bisexual mental health practitioners' experiences of disclosure in therapeutic relationships. *Counselling & Psychotherapy Research*, *15*(1), 41-49. doi:10.1002/capr.12011.

Johnson, C. A. (1974). *Privacy as a personal control.* In *EDRA; Proceedings of the Annual Environmental Design Research Association Conference* (p. 83).

Judge, T. A., & Livingston, B. A. (2008). Is the gap more than gender? A longitudinal analysis of gender, gender role orientation, and earnings. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, *93*(5), 994-1012.

Julien, D., Chartrand, E., Simard, M. C., Bouthillier, D., & Bégin, J. (2003). Conflict, social support and relationship quality: An observational study of heterosexual, gay male and lesbian couples' communication. *Journal of Family Psychology*, *17*(3), 419-428.

Jurowitz, M. Gay marriage story drew headlines worldwide. (2004, May 19). Retrieved from http://www.boston.com/news/local/massachusetts/articles/2004/05/19/gay_marriage_story_drew_headlines_worldwide/.

Karpel, M. A. (1980). Family secrets. *Family Process*, *19*(3), 295-306.

Knapp, M. L., & Vangelisti, A. L. (2005). Relationship Stages: A Communication Perspective. Interpersonal communication and human relationships (pp. 36-49). Boston, MA: Allyn and Bacon.

Kramarae, C. (1981). Women and Men Speaking: Frameworks for Analysis. Rowley, MA: Newbury House Publishers.

Kramarae, C. (2005). Muted group theory and communication: Asking dangerous questions. *Women and Language*, *28*(2), 55-60.

Kramarae, C., Schulz, M., & O'Barr, W. M. (1984). *Language and power*. New York, NY: Sage Publications, Inc.

Krasnova, H., Veltri, N. F., & Günther, O. (2012). Self-disclosure and privacy calculus on social networking sites: The role of culture. *Business & Information Systems Engineering*, *4*(3), 127-135.

Kronenberger, G.K. (1991). Out of the closet. *70*(6), 41-44.

Kurdek, L. A., & Schmitt, J. P. (1986). Relationship quality of partners in heterosexual married, heterosexual cohabiting, and gay and lesbian relationships. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *51*(4), 711-720

Lane, J. D., & Wegner, D. M. (1995). The cognitive consequences of secrecy. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *69*(2), 237-253.

Lannutti, P. J. (2005). For better or worse: Exploring the meanings of same-sex marriage within the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered community. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, *22*(1), 5-18.

Lannutti, P. J. (2007). The influence of same-sex marriage on the understanding of same-sex relationships. *Journal of Homosexuality*, *53*(3), 135-151.

Lannutti, P. J. (2008). Attractions and obstacles while considering legally recognized same-sex marriage. *Journal of GLBT Family Studies, 4*(2), 245-264.

Laqueur, T. W. (1992). *Making sex: Body and gender from the Greeks to Freud*. Boston, MA: Harvard University Press.

Lazar, M. M., & Kramarae, C. (2011). Gender and power in discourse. In T. Van Dijk (Ed.). (2011) *Discourse Studies: A Multidisciplinary Introduction* (pp. 217-240). New York, NY: Sage.

Leary, A. (2015, January 7). Rubio: Bondi should continue fight against gay marriage in Florida. *Tampa Bay Times.* Retrieved from http://www.tampabay.com/news/politics/rubio-bondi-should-continue-fight-against-gay-marriage-in-florida/2212848

Lee, D. J. A. (1991). Can we talk? Can we really talk? Communication as a key factor in the maturing homosexual couple. *Journal of Homosexuality*, *20*(3-4), 143-168.

Legate, N., Ryan, R. M., & Weinstein, N. (2012). Is coming out always a "good thing"? Exploring the relations of autonomy support, outness, and wellness for lesbian, gay, and bisexual individuals. *Social Psychological and Personality Science*, *3*(2), 145-152.

Levine, M. P. (1980). Privacy in the tradition of the western world. In W. C. Bier (Ed.), *Privacy: A vanishing value?* New York, NY: Fordham University Press.

Levine, M. P., & Leonard, R. (1984). Discrimination against lesbians in the work force. *Signs, 9*, 700-710.

Lienemann, B. A., & Stopp, H. T. (2013). The association between media exposure of interracial relationships and attitudes toward interracial relationships. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology, 43,* E398-E415.

Lincoln, Y. S. & Guba, E. G. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry*. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.

Marshall, C., & Rossman, G. B. (1999). The "what" of the study: Building the conceptual framework. In C. Marshall & G. B. Rossman (Eds.), Designing qualitative research (pp. 21-54). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Mason, M. (2010). Sample size and saturation in PhD studies using qualitative interviews. *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung/Forum: Qualitative Social Research*, *11*.

McBride, M. C., & Bergen, K. M. (2008). Communication research: Becoming a reluctant confidant: Communication privacy management in close friendships. *Texas Speech Communication Journal*, *33*(1), 50-61.

McDermott, J. (Ed.). (1981). *The philosophy of John Dewey.* Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

McConnell, A. R., & Leibold, J. M. (2001). Relations among the Implicit Association Test, discriminatory behavior, and explicit measures of racial attitudes. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, *37*(5), 435-442.

McKenna, K. Y., & Bargh, J. A. (1998). Coming out in the age of the internet: Identity "demarginalization" through virtual group participation. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *75*(3), 681-694.

McKinley, Jesse. (2010, October 3). Suicides Put Light on Pressures of Gay Teenagers. Retrieved from http://www.nytimes.com/2010/10/04/us/04suicide.html?_r=0.

McNaught, B. (1993). *Gay issues in the workplace.* New York, NY: St. Martin's Press.

Meloy, J. M. (1993). Problems of writing and representation in qualitative inquiry. *Qualitative Studies in Education*, *6*(4), 315-330.

Mencken, H. L. (1927). *Journalism in America. Prejudices: Sixth series*. New York, NY: Knopf.

Merriam, S. B. (1998). *Qualitative research and case study applications in education. Revised and expanded from "Case study research in education"*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass Publishers.

Metts, S., Cupach, W. R., & Imahori, T. T. (1992). Perceptions of sexual compliance-resisting messages in three types of cross-sex relationships. *Western Journal of Communication, 56*(1), 1-17.

Milbank, D. (2012, May 9). Obama comes out in favor of same-sex marriage. Retrieved from http://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/obama-comes-out-in-favor-of-same-sex-marriage/2012/05/09/gIQA1RPCEU_story.html.

Mills, S. (2003). *Gender and politeness*. Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press.

Moore, J., & Jenkins, P. (2012). 'Coming out' in therapy? Perceived risks and benefits of self-disclosure of sexual orientation by gay and lesbian therapists to straight clients. *Counselling & Psychotherapy Research, 12*(4), 308-315. doi:10.1080/14733145.2012.660973.

Motley, M. T. (1992). Mindfulness in solving communicators' dilemmas. *Communications Monographs, 59*(3), 306-314.

National Conference on State Legislatures (July 2013). Retrieved from http://www.ncsl.org/.

Reynolds, L. T., & Herman-Kinney, N. J. (Eds.). (2003). *Handbook of symbolic interactionism*. Lanham, MD: Rowman AltaMira.

Nielsen, E., & Alderson, K. G. (2014). Lesbian and queer women professors disclosing in the classroom: An act of authenticity. *Counseling Psychologist, 42*(8), 1084-1107. doi:10.1177/0011000014554839.

Notarius, C. & Pellegrini, D. (1984). Marital processes as stressors and stress mediators: Implications for marital repair. In Duck, S. (Ed.). *Personal Relationships: Vol. 5. Repairing Personal Relationships (pp. 25-47).* New York, NY: Academic Press.

O'Hair, H. D., & Cody, M. J. (1994). Deception. In W. R. Cupach & B. H. Spitzberg (Eds.), *The dark side of interpersonal communication* (pp. 181–213). Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.

Orbe, M. P., & Allen, B. J. (2008). "Race matters" in the journal of applied communication research. *The Howard Journal of Communications, 19*(3), 201-220.

Orbe, M. P. (1998a). An outsider within perspective to organizational communication explicating the communicative practices of co-Cultural group members. *Management Communication Quarterly, 12*(2), 230-279.

Orbe, M. P. (1998b). *Constructing co-cultural theory: An explication of culture, power, and communication*. New York, NY: Sage.

Owen, W. F. (1984). Interpretive themes in relational communication. *Quarterly Journal of Speech, 70*(3), 274-287.

Pascale, C.M. (2010). Epistemology and the politics of knowledge. *The Sociological Review, 58:* 154–165. doi: 10.1111/j.1467-954X.2011.01967.x

Patton, M. Q. (1999). Enhancing the quality and credibility of qualitative analysis. *Health Services Research, 34*(5, Park II), 1189-1208.

Peplau, L. A., Cochran, S., Rook, K., & Padesky, C. (1978). Loving women: Attachment and autonomy in lesbian relationships. *Journal of Social Issues, 34*(3), 7-27.

Peplau, L. A., Padesky, C., & Hamilton, M. (1982). Satisfaction in lesbian relationships. *Journal of Homosexuality, 8*(2), 23-35.

Peters, A. J. (2003). Isolation or inclusion: Creating safe spaces for lesbian and gay youth. *Families in Society: The Journal of Contemporary Social Services, 84*(3), 331-337.

Petronio, S. (2002). *Boundaries of privacy.* Albany, NY: State University of New York, Albany.

Petronio, S., Ellermers, N. Giles, H., & Gallois, C. (1998). Miscommunicating across boundaries: Interpersonal and intergroup considerations. *Communication Research, 25*(6), 571–595.

Petronio, S. (2000). The ramifications of a reluctant confidant. In A.C. Richards & T. Schumrum (Eds.), Invitations to dialogue: The legacy of Sidney M. Jourard (pp. 113–150). Dubuque, IA: Kendall Hunt.

Petronio, S. (2012). *Boundaries of privacy: Dialectics of disclosure*. Albany, NY: SUNY Press.

Petronio, S., Reeder, H. M., Hecht, M. L., & Ros-Mendoza, T. M. T. (1996). Disclosure of sexual abuse by children and adolescents. *Journal of Applied Communication Research, 24*, 181-199.

Pharr, S. (2007). Homophobia as a weapon of sexism. In P. S. Rothenberg, (Ed.). (2014). *Race, class, and gender in the United States: An integrated study* (pp. 168-177). New York, NY: Macmillan.

Pillow, W. (2003). Confession, catharsis, or cure? Rethinking the uses of reflexivity as methodological power in qualitative research. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education, 16*(2), 175-196.

Powers, R. S., Suitor, J. J., Guerra, S., Shackelford, M., Mecom, D., & Gusman, K. (2003). Regional differences in gender—role attitudes: Variations by gender and race. *Gender Issues, 21*(2), 40-54.

Preston, D. B., D'Augelli, A. R., Kassab, C. D., Cain, R. E., Schulze, F. W., & Starks, M. T. (2004). The influence of stigma on the sexual risk behavior of rural men who have sex with men. *AIDS Education and Prevention, 16*(4), 291-303.

Rawlins, W. K. (1992). *Friendship matters: Communication, dialectics, and the life course*. Piscataway, New Jersey: Transaction Publishers.

Rhodes, P. J. (1994). Race-of-interviewer effects: A brief comment. *Sociology, 28*(2), 547-558.

Rice, T. W., & Coates, D. L. (1995). Gender role attitudes in the southern United States. *Gender & Society, 9*(6), 744-756.

Ritchie, J., Lewis, J., Nicholls, C. M., & Ormston, R. (Eds.). (2013). *Qualitative research practice: A guide for social science students and researchers*. New York, NY: Sage.

Rocco, T. S., & Gallagher, S. J. (2006). Deconstructing heterosexual privilege with new science metaphors. In *Proceedings of the 47th Adult Education Research Conference* (pp. 312-317).

Roulston, K. (2010). *Reflective interviewing: A guide to theory and practice*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Schneider, B. E. (1992). Lesbian politics and AIDS work. In K. Plummer, K. (Ed.). (2002). *Modern homosexualities: fragments of lesbian and gay experiences* (pp. 160-174). London, UK: Routledge.

Schoeman, F. D. (Ed.). (1984). *Philosophical dimensions of privacy: An anthology*. London, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Schwandt, T. A. (1997). *Qualitative inquiry: A dictionary of terms*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Seal, K. (1991). Sexual orientation becomes workplace issue for the 1900s. *Hotel & Motel Management, 206*, 2-29.

Seale, C. (1999). Quality in qualitative research. *Qualitative Inquiry*, *5*(4), 465-478.

Sedgwick E. (1990). *The Epistemology of the Closet*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

Seider, B. H., Hirschberger, G., Nelson, K. L., & Levenson, R. W. (2009). We can work it out: Age differences in relational pronouns, physiology, and behavior in marital conflict. *Psychology and Aging*, *24*(3), 604-613.

Seidman, S., Meeks, C., & Traschen, F. (1999). Beyond the closet? The changing social meaning of homosexuality in the United States. *Sexualities*, *2*(1), 9-34.

Simoni, J. M., & Walters, K. L. (2001). Heterosexual identity and heterosexism: Recognizing privilege to reduce prejudice. *Journal of Homosexuality*, *41*(1), 157-172.

Skinta, M. D., Brandrett, B. D., Schenk, W. C., Wells, G., & Dilley, J. W. (2014). Shame, self-acceptance and disclosure in the lives of gay men living with HIV: An interpretative phenomenological analysis approach. *Psychology & Health*, *29*(5), 583-597.

Snijders, T. A. (1992). Estimation on the basis of snowball samples: how to weight? *Bulletin de Méthodologie Sociologique*, *36*(1), 59-70.

Spitzer, L. (1981). The diagnostic status of homosexuality in DSM-III: a reformulation of the issues. *American Journal of Psychiatry*, *138*, 210-215.

Surra, C. A. (I988). The influence of the interactive network on developing relationships. In R. M. Milardo (Ed.), *Family and social networks (pp.* 48-82). Newbury, CA: Sage.

Thoits, P. A. (1995). Stress, coping, and social support processes: Where are we? What next? *Journal of Health and Social Behavior*, Extra Issue, 53-79.

Ting-Toomey, S. (2005). The matrix of face: an updated face-negotiation theory. In W. B. Gudykunst (Ed.), *Theorizing about Intercultural Communication* (pp.71–92). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Todorov, T. (1984). Mikhail Bakhtin: The dialogical principle. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Troy, A. B., Lewis-Smith, J., & Laurenceau, J. P. (2006). Interracial and intraracial romantic relationships: The search for differences in satisfaction, conflict, and attachment style. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships, 23*(1), 65-80.

Turnbull, C. M. (1972). *The Straits Settlements, 1826-67: Indian Presidency to Crown Colony*. London, UK: Athlone Press.

Turner, R. E., Edgley, C., & Olmstead, G. (1975). Information control in conversations: Honesty is not always the best policy. *Kansas Journal of Sociology, 11,* 69-89.

United States v. Windsor. (2013). Retrieved from https://supreme.justia.com/cases/federal/us/570/12-307/.

Vogt, W. P. (1999). *Dictionary of statistics & methodology.* (2nd ed.) Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Ward, B. W., Dahlhamer, J. M., Galinsky, A. M., & Joestl, S. S. (2014). Sexual orientation and health among US adults: National Health Interview Survey, 2013. *National health statistics reports*, *15*, 1-10.

Wegner, D. M., & Lane, J. D. (1995). From secrecy to psychopathology. In J. W. Pennebaker (Ed.), Emotion, disclosure, & health (pp. 25– 46). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association

Westin, A. (1967). *Privacy and freedom*. New York, NY: Atheneum.

Whorf, B. L., Lee, P., Levinson, S. C., & Carroll, J. B. (2012). *Language, thought, and reality: Selected writings of Benjamin Lee Whorf*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Wienke, C., & Hill, G. J. (2013). Does place of residence matter? Rural-urban differences and the wellbeing of gay men and lesbians. *Journal of Homosexuality*, *60*(9), 1256-1279.

Wood, J. T. (2005). Feminist standpoint theory and muted group theory: Commonalities and divergences. *Women and Language*, *28*(2), 61-64

Woods, J. D. (1994). The Corporate Closet: The Professional Lives of Gay Men in America. New York, NY: Free Press.

Wolcott, H. F. (2008). *Writing up qualitative research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Wolfe, M., & Laufer, R. (1974). The concept of privacy in children and adolescence. In D. Carson (Ed.), Man–environment interactions: Evaluations and applications: Privacy (Part 2, Vol. 6, pp. 29–54). Washington, DC: Environmental Design Research Association.

Wrenn, S. B. (1988). Gay rights and workplace discrimination. *Personnel Journal*, 67, 91-102

Zhang, W., & Kramarae, C. (2014). "SlutWalk" on connected screens: Multiple framings of a social media discussion. *Journal of Pragmatics*, *73*, 66-81.

Appendix A

Recruitment Phone Script

Good morning! My name is Mary Lee Cunill. I am a doctoral student at the University of Georgia in the Department of Communication Studies, and I am returning your call regarding a the LGBT communication research study. The purpose of this research study is better understand lesbian relationships where one partner is more open about their sexual orientation and one partner is more private about their sexual orientation. More specifically, I aim to understand the extent to which this has any impact on the individual, her partner, and their relationship. We hope that this study will help us better understand the unique challenges of these relationships and ultimately provide people with the skills and information necessary for improving the quality of their relationships. Do you think that you might be interested in participating in this study? at study?

{If No}: Thank you very much for your time.

{If Yes}: Excellent! Before enrolling you in this study, I need to ask you a few questions to determine if you are eligible for participation. So, what I would now like to do is to ask you a series of questions about your identity. This should only take about 2 minutes of your time, and at the end of this interview, if you do not qualify, all the information you gave me will be immediately destroyed.

There is a possibility that some of these questions may make you uncomfortable or distressed; if so, please let me know. You do not have to answer those questions if you do not want to.

All information that I receive from you during this phone call, including your name and any other information that can possibly identify you, will be strictly confidential and will be kept under lock and key. Remember, your participation is voluntary; you can refuse to answer any questions, or stop this phone interview at any time.

Do I have your permission to ask you these questions?

What race do you identify with?
What gender do you identify with?
What sexual orientation do you identify with?
Are you currently a lesbian relationship?
Have you been in a lesbian partnership at some point in the past five years where either you or your partner were living a more private life in terms of your sexual orientation and the other was living a more public life in terms of your sexual orientation?
As a member of that partnership, do/did you identify as a more private or more public member of the relationship?

{If the person fulfills the qualifications.} Thank you! You are a great fit for our project. I would like to set up a time to sit down and have a face-to-face interview with you. This interview will be about an hour. If you are willing to do this, I can email you a document with

time slots on it, and you can pick the one that is most convenient for you. Also, is there a place you would prefer to meet? A quiet, private venue is best. I use a small meeting room at the library at the university, but if there is another place you would prefer, I am happy to meet you there.

Thank you. If you have any questions about this research project, please feel free to call me at 850-508-2595 or Dr. Tina M. Harris at 706-542-4893. Questions or concerns about your rights as a research participant should be directed to Institutional Review Board, 629 Boyd GSRC, Athens, Georgia 30602-7411; telephone (706) 542-3199; email address irb@uga.edu.

Appendix B

Recruitment Email Script

Good morning! My name is Mary Lee Cunill. I am a doctoral student at the University of Georgia in the Department of Communication Studies, and I am writing you regarding your interest in the LGBTQ communication research study. The purpose of this research study is better understand lesbian relationships where one partner is more open about their sexual orientation and one partner is more private about their sexual orientation. More specifically, I aim to understand the extent to which this has an impact on the individual, her partner, and their relationship. We hope that this study will help us better understand the unique challenges of these relationships and ultimately provide people with the skills and information necessary for improving the quality of their relationships.

In order to make sure you qualify for participation in the study, I need to ask you a few questions regarding your identity. It should only take a couple of minutes, and, if it turns out you do not qualify, all the information you gave me will be immediately destroyed. Please give me a call at 850.508.2595 at your earliest convenience so we can discuss your eligibility for the study, or if you would prefer I call you, please reply with your phone number. Thank you in advance!

If you have any additional questions about this research project, please feel free to call me at 850-508-2595 or Dr. Tina M. Harris at 706-542-4893. Questions or concerns about your rights as

a research participant should be directed to Institutional Review Board, 629 Boyd GSRC, Athens, Georgia 30602-7411; telephone (706) 542-3199; email address irb@uga.edu.

Appendix C

Recruitment Facebook Post

Good morning/afternoon! For my dissertation, I am studying lesbian relationships where one partner chooses to be private in a significant area of her life (such as family, job, church, etc.) while the other partner chooses to be open in that same area. For example, one person is "out" at their job and the other is private. I am interested in how these couples communicate and navigate their privacy. I am not sure if you have ever been in a relationship with this dynamic, but if you have, would you be willing to let me interview you about it? The questions are fairly non-invasive, just asking about how you communicated (nothing about in the bedroom) ☺. Also, if you know any other individuals or couples who have been in those kind of relationships and may be willing to be interviewed, if you could pass this info along, I would greatly appreciate it! Thank you in advance. I really appreciate it!

Mary Lee

Appendix D

Email Interview Confirmation

Good morning! Thank you for volunteering to be a part of this study examining privacy negotiation in lesbian relationships where partners have varying levels of openness about their sexual orientation.

If participant resides nearby: I have a quiet and private location at UGA where would could meet and complete the interview. I can provide parking and directions if this works for you. If not, we could meet at your home if you would prefer or anywhere you feel comfortable and provides a quiet, private venue. Let me know which dates and times work best for you. The interview will take approximately an hour to an hour and a half. Send me your ideal times, and I will choose one.

If participant resides more than 1.5 hours away: Because of the distance, would you be willing and able to hold the interview via Skype or Facetime? If so, I would use screen capturing software to record our interaction and destroy it once transcribed. If either of these venues work for you, please send me know which dates and times work best for you. The interview will take approximately an hour to an hour and a half. Send me your ideal times, and I will choose one. I will then send you my Skype identifier or Facetime address so that you know who to look for. If you are willing to send me the same, I will call you on the day of the interview.

Thank you again for your time, and I look forward to our chat. If you have any questions or concerns, please contact me with the information provided below.

Mary Lee Cunill

mlcunill@uga.edu

850-508-2595

Appendix E

UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA

CONSENT FORM

EFFECT OF BLENDED RELATIONSHIPS ON SELF, PARTNER, AND RELATIONSHIP

My name is Mary Lee Cunill, and I am a doctoral student in the department of Communication Studies at the University of Georgia, under the direction of Dr. Tina M. Harris, I am seeking your participation in this study as part of my graduate studies. The purpose of this research study is to better understand lesbian relationships where one partner is more open about their sexual orientation and one partner is more private (e. g, "closeted") about their sexual orientation and if this has any impact on the individuals, their partners, and the relationship. We hope that this study will help us gain insight into the unique challenges these partners face and to offer advice on how couples can best manage them and ultimately have a healthy, positive relationship. You are being invited to participate because you have unique experiences with this topic, and your participation is greatly appreciated.

Before you decide to participate in this study, it is important that you understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. This form is designed to give you information about the study so that you can decide whether or not to participate. Please take the time to read the following information carefully. Please ask the researcher if there is anything that is not

clear or if you need more information. When all of your questions have been answered, you can decide if you want to be in the study or not. This process is called "informed consent." A copy of this form will be given to you.

If you agree to participate, then you will be asked to do the following:

- Participate in a 1- 1 1/2 hour face-to-face interview where you will be asked to share your experience of being in a lesbian relationship where one partner is more open about their sexual orientation and one partner is more private about their sexual orientation.
- Participate in a follow-up interview if there is anything else you would like to share. I may also ask for a follow-up interview to clarify the information you shared and make sure I understood you correctly. We can conduct this in person or over the internet or phone.
- Some examples of questions that I will ask are (1) In general, how open would you say you are about your sexual orientation?, (2) When disclosing or sharing your sexual orientation with others, what language, terms or label do you use?,(3) Are there certain situations where you share your orientation more openly?, (4) What about situations where you are more private?, and (5) What factors play a role in how open you are to others about your sexual identity?

The interviews will be audiotaped. To protect your identity, your name will not be used in reporting the findings of the study.

Risks and discomforts

We do not anticipate any risks from participating in this research. While participants might experience stress, discomfort, sadness or guilt when discussing relationships, these risks are minimal. Please know that you may refuse to answer any question or stop the interview at any time. There is no risk of breach of confidentiality, as I will use pseudonyms when transcribing the interview and I will not use specifics in my report so relationships cannot be identified by third-parties.

Benefits and Incentives for Participation

The benefits of your participation are contributing to our understanding of the challenges presented in this type of relationships and to improving future relationships. Also, from a personal standpoint, discussing old relationships can lead participants to personal reflection and help in processing the events of old relationships, possibly providing greater personal understanding and closure. If you are a UGA undergraduate student, then your participation in this study fulfills the research requirement for COMM 1100 and COMM 1500. It may be worth extra credit in some upper level Communication Study courses, which is at the discretion of the instructor.

Audio/Video Recording

Audio recording devices will be used to ensure an accurate analysis and accounting of your experiences. The recordings will be transcribed for research purposes. The transcriptions will be kept confidential (under lock and key) in a filing cabinet in the Principal Investigator's office. After transcriptions are completed, the audio files will be archived in a protected file. Additionally, to protect participant identities, pseudonyms will be assigned to each participant.

Privacy/Confidentiality

The data I collect will identify you indirectly through the use of a pseudonym. The project's research records may be reviewed by myself and the Principle Researchers as well as the University of Georgia's department responsible for regulatory and research oversight. Researchers will not release identifiable results of the study to anyone other than individuals working on the project without your written consent unless required by law.

If you have questions

During the interview, Mary Lee Cunill can answer any questions you might have about this study. The main researcher Tina M. Harris and Mary Lee Cunill are available to answer any questions you might have after the study has been completed. Tina M. Harris may be contacted at tmharris@uga.edu or at 706-542-4893. You may also contact the Institutional Review Board (IRB) Chairperson at 706.542.3199 or irb@uga.edu.

Consent to Participate

To voluntarily agree to take part in this study, you must give verbal consent. Your verbal consent indicates that you have read this entire consent form and all of your questions have been answered.

Please keep this copy for your records.

Appendix F

First Draft Interview Protocol

Thank you for agreeing to meet with me today. As you know, I am interested in how varying degrees of openness about one's sexual orientation impact same-sex relationships. I will be asking you some questions about yourself and your current or most recent romantic relationship. Everything you share today is confidential. Please know that I value your story very much, and I want to be fully attentive to you and your story during this interview, Also, in order to ensure accuracy of the interview I will be recording our conversation, which will later be transcribed for analysis. Please be aware that the final write-up will not include any identifying information; therefore, your identity will be protected should you have any concerns, and because of UGA policy. Once the interview is completed, and I have transcribed it, I will dispose of the recording by deleting both files. As for the actual interview, in addition to asking you a series of questions, I will be using this interview guide as a guide so that I can focus on listening to you rather than thinking about the upcoming questions. On occasion, I will reference it to make sure I have not forgotten any important questions. Do you have any questions before we begin? (if not, start recording)

To begin, I would like to know a little about you.

INTRO

1. Can you please share with me your age, where you are from, your occupation, and your current dating status?

2. When did you first realize that you are lesbian?

3. How would you describe that experience?

4. What do you believe made it a _____ (stressful or peaceful) experience for you?

I will now ask you a series of more specific questions about how you share with others your sexual orientation as a lesbian. If at any point you do not understand my question, please ask for clarification and I will be sure to make the question clearer.

5. In what situations would you say you are comfortable being open about your sexual orientation?

6. In what situations would you say you are uncomfortable being open about your sexual orientation?

7. Are there situations or contexts you find yourself in where you are expected to or feel pressure to share your sexual orientation? Can you describe them?

8. In those instances where you choose to disclose or share your sexual orientation with others, what word choices do you make to share that information (e.g., language, terms, label)? What specific terms or phrases do you use?

9. What things do you believe play a role in how open you are? For example, … [are their situations where you are anxious about your identity before you enter into them?]

I'd like to spend a few minutes discussing one of your relationships where you kept your sexual orientation private and your partner openly shared it with those outside of the relationship. Take a minute to reflect on a specific situation when your partner wanted to reveal the romantic nature of your relationship, but you wanted to keep it a secret.

10. What emotions do you recall feeling during that scenario?

11. What was your goal (or purpose) in remaining open/private? In other words, what did you plan to achieve?

12. In this scenario, how did you and your partner's differing views on sharing the romantic nature of your relationship impact your relationship?

Thinking about this same relationship where you were more private and your partner more open, recall a time when you were invited to attend an event by someone who was not aware of your romantic relationship, and there was the expectation that you would bring a date, such as a wedding, family gathering, or work party.

13. How did you feel when you received the invitation?

14. Did you discuss the invitation with your significant other? How did you explain or present it?

15. What action did you end up taking regarding the invitation?

16. How did you feel afterwards?

17. While in this relationship, what did you say (verbal messages) or do (nonverbal messages) that allowed others to identify you as (insert their description here)? In other words what "look" or "mannerisms" did people see as clues about your sexual orientation?

18. What did your partner say (verbal messages) or do (nonverbal messages) that allowed others to identify her as (insert their description here)?

19. Thinking about the situations where *you* were uncomfortable being open about your relationship, what cues might have led others to assume that your partner identified as gay?

20. Thinking about the situations where you were not comfortable being open about your relationship, what impact did your partner's presence have whether others identified you as gay?

Now that I understand a bit more about you, let's move into discussing some of your relationships. Please do not feel that you have to share the names or specifics of your partners as we chat. I am more concerned with generalities related to the relationship than the specifics.

21. Think about a same-sex date you went on within the past five years.

22. Could you please describe the date for me? Such as how was it initiated, how was it planned, where you went?

23. How would you describe the overall experience? Was it more of a positive experience or a negative experience?

24. Why? What happened that made it that kind of experience for you?

25. What emotions were you feeling as you were preparing for the date?

    a. During the date?

    b. After the date?

Now, I would like to shift your attention and think about other lesbian relationships you have witnessed or observed.

26. How many lesbian relationships have you been exposed to? In other words, what lesbian relationships have you been familiar with where you were friends with at least of the partners? Where did you see/meet these couples?

27. Of those relationships, I would like you to think of those that you would describe as successful. Would you say that there have been many or too few? Why do you believe that is? In other words, what do you believe made those relationships more successful than others?

28. For lesbians in general, how important is it to witness firsthand how other lesbians in a committed relationship interact with each other?

29. In what ways does it help other lesbians? In other words, are there specific lessons that can be learned? If so, what are some examples?

30. Thinking about other lesbian couples that you have known, what was it about that relationship that would make it a good example of a healthy lesbian relationship?

31. How are these relationships similar to heterosexual romantic relationships? Different from?

33. In thinking about your current (or previous) partner and relationship, what behaviors from the positive same-sex relationship you mentioned did you choose to mirror in order have a positive relationship with your partner?

a. If your previously mentioned model relationship was a negative one, then what specific behaviors did you choose to avoid in your current relationship?

34. What specific lessons did you learn from that positive relationship?

a. How have you applied those lessons to your own relationships?

35. What lessons did you learn that taught you what to avoid doing in your relationship?

CONCLUSION

Thinking back on the things we discussed today, is there anything else that you want to share that is relevant to this study? Thank you so much for your time. May I call you again if I need to? Please don't hesitate to contact me. Thank you again!

Appendix G

Final Interview Protocol

Thank you for agreeing to meet with me today. As you know, I am interested in how varying degrees of openness about one's sexual orientation impact lesbian relationships. I will be asking you some questions about yourself and your current romantic relationship. Everything you share today is confidential. Please know that I value your story very much, and I want to be fully attentive to you and your story during this interview. In order to ensure accuracy of the interview I will be recording our conversation, which will later be transcribed for analysis. Please be aware that the final write up will not include any identifying information; therefore, your identity will be protected should you have any concerns, and because of UGA policy. Once the research study is completed, I will dispose of the recording by transcribing the recording and then deleting all copies. In addition to asking you a series of questions, I will be using this interview protocol as a guide so that I can focus on listening to you rather than thinking about the upcoming questions. On occasion, I will reference it to make sure I have not forgotten any important questions. Do you have any questions before we begin? (if not, start recording)

I would like to begin the interview by asking you a few questions about yourself so I can get to know a little about you.

1. Can you please share with me your age, where you are from, your occupation, and your current dating status?
2. How long have you been in your relationship?
3. How do you identify regarding your sexual identity?

I would now like to ask you a series of questions about your identity as a lesbian. As you know from my recruitment materials, I am interviewing women who self-identity as lesbian in an effort to better understand how they choose to either share or conceal their sexual identity when interacting with others. To that end, I will now ask you a series of questions about your personal journey to recognizing that you are as a lesbian woman.

4. When did you first realize that you are lesbian?

5. How would you describe that experience?

6. Would you describe that experience as being positive or negative? Why?

7. Prior to discovering your sexual identity, what were your perceptions of LGBTQ people when you were thinking about your own sexual identity?

    a. How do you believe those perceptions impacted your understanding of yourself?

8. Where do you believe those perceptions came from? Family, church, television?

    a. What specific messages did these sources Can you tell me about the messages you received from _____(the things they list, i.e. family, church, television)?

9. Thinking back to the first time you came out to another person, can you describe that experience?

a. Why do you believe you chose that person to disclose to?

I will now ask you a series of more specific questions about how you share with others your relationship. If at any point you do not understand my question, please ask for clarification and I will be sure to make the question clearer.

As I am sure you know, we all have multiple identities that make us who we are. This includes, our race, gender, sexual orientation, and class (SES), among others. These identities are fluid, or they change or become more important for us at some times more than others. I would now like you think about your sexual identity.

10. Using percentages, in an average week, what percentage of the time do you think you live openly without much concern about who is aware of your sexuality?

I would now like you to think about times when you specifically choose to share your sexual orientation with others whom do not already know.

11. In what situations do you find yourself having to decide whether or not to share your sexual orientation?

12. What specific language, terms or label do you use to disclose that information? For example, lesbian, queer, etc.

13. In what social situation(s) do you feel **most** comfortable sharing with others about your relationship?

a. What communication cues, verbal or nonverbal, do you pick up in those situations that make you feel safe to share?

b. Partners will often use touch, such as hand-holding, to be close to one another and to let others know they are a couple. In thinking about your relationships, in what ways do you express your affection to your partner [nonverbal symbols]?

14. In what social situation(s) do you feel **least** comfortable sharing with others about your relationship?

    a. What communication cues, verbal or nonverbal, do you pick up in those situations that make you feel unsafe sharing?

    b. In what ways do you express your affection to your partner in these settings [nonverbal symbols]?

15. Please describe a specific conversation you had with your partner when you shared with her the reasons why **you want** to tell others about your relationship.

    If NO, then SKIP TO 14

    a. What (and how) specific words did you use to communicate that to her?

16. Now, please describe a specific conversation you had with your partner and shared the reasons why **you did NOT** want to tell others about your relationship.

    If NO, then SKIP TO 15

    a. What (and how) specific words did you use to communicate that to her?

17. Will you please describe a specific conversation your **partner initiated** with you about why she wanted to **share** your relationship with others?

    If NO, then SKIP TO 16

    a. What (and how) specific words did you use to communicate that to her?

18. In thinking about these conversations in general, how have they affected your relationship?

19. How do you feel that discussing this effected your relationship?

Now, I would like to ask you questions about how you and your partner respond to each other's preference for being public or private about your own sexual orientation.

20. How would you describe your and your partner's identities? Are you both public, both private, or are you private and your partner public, or vice versa?

    a. In thinking about **yourself,** how would you describe your response to your partner's decision to be public/private? Was it primarily positive or negative? Why?

    b. What specific things **did you do** (verbal and nonverbal behaviors) to share your thoughts with her about her decision? For example, did you tell her that you would be fine with her concealing her identity?

    c. What specific things **did you do** (verbal and nonverbal behaviors) to communicate to her that you were rejecting her decision? For example, did you

explicitly tell her you were uncomfortable with her decision or that the relationship would not last, etc.?

d. Did **your partner** have a conversation with you about your decision to keep your identity private/public? Was her response primarily positive or negative? Why?

We are now going to shift our attention to **nonverbal expressions of coupledom** that people use when they are in a relationship. In other words, people use artifacts (e.g., rings, picture) and nonverbal behaviors (e.g., PDA) to let their partner and/or society know they are in a relationship. In thinking about this relationship, I want you to share with me the ways in which you and your partner express your romantic relationship to others.

21. What are examples of symbols or behaviors that **you use** to communicate to others that you are in a lesbian relationship? For example, some couples might dress alike, wear matching rings on their ring fingers, or maybe verbally refer to their partner as "my partner"?

    a. Why did **you choose** those particular symbols or behaviors?

        i. How did your partner respond to that? Positively, negative?

    b. What are some examples that your **partner** chose?

    Why did she choose those…?

        i. How did you respond…?

22. What symbols or behaviors did you **avoid** using to hide your relationship from others, such as referring to her as your "good friend"?

a. Why

b. Your partner

c. Why?

23. Can you recall an event or situation where you or your partner **shifted from public to private (or vice versa) in sharing your sexual orientation**? How and why did it influence a change in your behavior or how you expressed yourself?

24. How did these behaviors affect your relationship?

Now I would like to discuss the impact that people outside of your relationship, such as family members, friends, and society, have influenced your decision to be public about your sexual orientation. Because lesbian relationships are not viewed as the norm, they are often times evaluated differently than straight relationships by others. With that in mind, I want you to discuss how those external factors have impacted how you present yourself and your relationship to others.

25. Based on your personal experience, what are some examples of risks that you, or other lesbians in general, take or have taken for being in a lesbian relationship?
    a. Informal risks (e.g., social)?
    b. Formal risks (e.g., laws)?
26. What have you personally been afraid of losing by identifying as a lesbian? Why or why not?
27. What have you actually lost?
28. What rewards have you gained as a result of taking these risks?
29. Do you trust your partner to respect your decision to remain private/public?

30. Currently, there are several legal issues that are effecting the LGBTQ community. Can you identify what the laws are? What do these laws mean for you as a lesbian?

31. In your opinion, how have these laws effected society? Have they brought about positive or negative changes? How so?

Conclusion

We are nearing the end of the interview. I would now like to ask you a few last questions.

32. In general, what would you say have been the greatest benefits of being in a romantic relationship where one partner is private and the other is public about their identities as lesbians?

33. What was challenging within that relationship?

Thank you so much for your participation in this study. Your time, thoughts, and willingness to share your experiences are greatly appreciated. Is there anything else that you want to share that is relevant to this study that we did not already discuss? Or anything that you would like to add on or clarify? Thank you so much for your time. May I call you again if I need to? Please do not hesitate to contact me. Thank you again!

Appendix H

Debrief

Thank you so much for your participation in this study. As previously discussed, these recordings will be transcribed and names will be changed to protect your anonymity. Once an initial interpretation of the data has been completed, I will email you a digital copy for you review. Please take time to read over the documents and provide any feedback on my interpretation. Also, please let me know if there is anything you would like removed from the paper to protect your privacy.

Once the final project is complete, I will also make this accessible to you. Thank you for your help in completing this project. I hope the information we gather together will help lesbians who are struggling with privacy navigation and identity management. Thank you!

If you have any additional questions, please contact me at 850-508-2595 or mlcunill@uga.edu. If you would like to refer anyone else to this study, please share my contact information with them as well as the recruitment email message I sent you to prior to our meeting. Thank you!