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THE ROLE OF BUTCH IDENTITY IN A MODEL OF SELF-ESTEEM AMONG
SEXUAL MINORITY WOMEN

by

Katherine R. Hiestand

A Dissertation

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Major: Counseling Psychology

The University of Memphis

December 2010

Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my parents, who have supported me, in so many ways and regardless of the circumstances, for almost 38 years. It is also dedicated to my cat Jeffrey, who has been my rock for the last 15 years and who saw virtually every keystroke of this work, and occasionally tried to add his own.

Abstract

Hiestand, Katherine Ruth. Ph.D. University of Memphis. December 2010. The role of butch identity in a model of self-esteem among sexual minority women. Major Professor: Sharon G. Horne, Ph.D.

This study explored the relationship of butch gender identity to perceived social support, level of outness, lesbian internalized homophobia, and self-esteem. Previous research has supported relationships between perceived social support, level of outness, lesbian internalized homophobia, and self-esteem in sexual minority women; this study explored these relationships specifically in masculine-identified lesbians. Using data obtained from an Internet survey on lesbian gender identity, a subset ($N = 191$) was composed of individuals who considered themselves masculine and who identified as butch (127; 66.5%) and those who did not identify as butch (64; 33.5%). A path analysis was conducted to determine what significant pathways existed in the hypothesized model. As demonstrated in previous research, perceived social support and level of outness were found to have a significant positive relationship with self-esteem, and perceived social support was positively related to outness. Unlike in previous studies, there was not a significant relationship between any of the variables and lesbian internalized homophobia. Further, lesbian gender identity was not found to be significant in the model. Clinical and political implications are discussed.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Low self-esteem has been identified as a strong positive predictor of psychological distress among women (e.g., Beals & Peplau, 2005; Cassidy, O'Connor, Howe, & Warden, 2004; Corning, 2002; Fischer & Holz, 2007; Moradi & Subich, 2004; Worell, 2001; Yakushko, 2005). Consolacion, Russell, and Sue (2004) found that individuals with multiple minority statuses may experience greater threats to their self-esteem. Examining self-esteem in a sample of heterosexual and sexual minority women, Herek, Gillis, and Cogan (2009) found that both experienced barriers to positive self-esteem and psychological health, however, the homosexual women experienced greater distress than the heterosexual women. They concluded that this was perhaps due to the double-minority status of the sexual minority women. Non-conforming gender expressions (such as masculine appearing women) may be an additional factor leading to poor self-esteem. Given that masculine appearing lesbian women may be marginalized based on sex, sexual orientation, and gender expression, they may be at risk for low self-esteem; however, research exploring self-esteem within lesbian gender identities has not been examined.

Self-esteem is important as it leads to better psychological health and greater life satisfaction (Beals & Peplau, 2005; Moradi & Subich, 2004). Greater outness, greater perceived social support, and lower internalized homophobia have all been found to be linked with self-esteem (Igartua, Gill, & Montoro, 2003; Lewis, Derlega, Griffin, & Krowinski, 2003; Luhtanen, 2003). Gender has been found to be a factor impacting self-esteem, with men having more buffers against low self-esteem than women (Corning,

2002). Few studies, however, have explored lesbian gender identity (butch and femme) and lesbian gender expression (masculine and feminine) in relation to self-esteem. Because gender is a factor impacting self-esteem differences for men and women, it may also impact lesbian and bisexual women. This study adds to the existing literature by investigating how identifying as butch may serve as a protective factor, leading to greater self-esteem among butch-identified masculine lesbians.

Research pertaining to self-esteem and identity formation of lesbians was reported, as well as research and theory regarding lesbian gender identity. Based on a model of butch identity development, an argument was made that butch-identified masculine lesbians benefit from protective factors that lead to better psychological health, as measured by self-esteem. The path model tested explores whether butch lesbian gender identity has a positive effect on outness and perceived social support, which have a negative impact on lesbian internalized homophobia, which in turn will be negatively associated with self-esteem. While there may not be direct effects from butch gender identity to self-esteem, the model tested whether embracing a butch gender identity directly or indirectly leads to higher self-esteem.

History of Lesbian Gender

Butch and femme gender identities were the basis for the development of the first popular images of the lesbian communities in the United States. Faderman (1991) described the origin of the lesbian community as arising in the 1940s and 1950s and being based in a butch/femme aesthetic. Members of these primarily working class communities would adopt either a butch or femme appearance and interactional style. While femme women adopted an often exaggerated femininity, butch women took on a

masculine appearance (male clothing, short haircuts) and mannerisms. Additionally, they served as markers for romantic pairings, in that traditionally couples were composed of a butch and a femme woman. These identities also served as a sort of membership identification, at a time when being a lesbian could be especially dangerous. Frequent bar raids, high levels of discrimination and harassment (especially against butch women), and the dangers of physical assault made it imperative to be able to easily identify who was in the community. According to Lapovsky-Kennedy and Davis (1993), these two genders “were the key structure for organizing against heterosexual dominance” (p. 6).

Individuals who identified as butch or femme also did so as a way to be authentic to who they were. These identities were not simply for the benefit of creating community, as they also allowed lesbians to express an inner sense of self.

To the outside world, butch-femme relationships appeared to simply be mirroring heterosexual relationships; however, this view does not recognize the complexity of these identities, and how they were radically different from traditional gender roles (Feinberg, 1996). Whereas heterosexual relationships of the time were generally based on a patriarchal model of a male breadwinner and a female housewife often leading to inequality in marital relationships, butch-femme relationships were based on more of an equality model (Faderman, 1991). These pairings of different lesbian gender expressions were often based on an understanding that no one gender identity had more power or authority in the relationship. However, unlike in heterosexual relationships in which the financial power was held solely by the husband, femme women were often more financially stable than their butch partners. Because of their masculine appearance, butch lesbians were limited in the types of jobs they could hold, often relying on unstable job

positions such as in factories. They might lose their jobs, and while unemployed the femme partner was the breadwinner of the couple. Thus, although equality between partners might be the goal, the financial reality of butch-femme couples frequently put the financial power in the hands of the femme partner.

These lesbian gender identities were the norm within the lesbian community until the late 1960s when feminism emerged as the dominant force in gender politics (Harris & Crocker, 1997). At this time, feminists advocated for the need to escape gender norms that restricted women's access into the work force and maintained gender inequities in pay and occupation. Feminists embraced androgyny as the appropriate gender expression in order to avoid overt expressions of masculinity or femininity. As part of this re-conceptualization of gender roles and norms, feminists rejected butch-femme lesbian gender, claiming that butch women were attempting to benefit from male privilege and femme women were merely encouraging the patriarchal objectification of women. For the next two decades, individuals who identified as butch or femme found their "lives trivialized and reinterpreted by feminists who did not share our culture" (Nestle, 1993, p. 110). During these years butch and femme-identified women separated from the androgynous lesbian community, organizing into butch-femme communities that were largely invisible to the mainstream lesbian community (Nestle, 1993). Lesbian women began to reclaim butch-femme identities in the early 1980s. At this time, however, these identities developed new meanings as they were no longer a political or social necessity given that lesbian communities were now well organized and visible. Lesbians in recent decades who have claimed a butch or femme identity have done so as an act of self-

identification, expressing an internal sense of identity rather than a social requirement (Levitt, Gerrish, & Hiestand, 2003).

Recent research (Levitt, Gerrish, & Hiestand, 2003; Levitt & Hiestand, 2004) suggested that lesbian gender identity (i.e., butch-femme) is important to a substantial portion of the lesbian population today. Levitt et al. (2003) conducted a qualitative study with lesbians who identified as femme. They found that these participants strongly valued their femme identity as both a personal and political statement concerning who they were (e.g., feminine lesbians) who are generally attracted to masculinity (butch lesbians) in their partners. Many of the participants described their femmeness as an innate part of who they were, and emphasized that femme as a label indicates a strong, positive sense of feminine sexuality. The participants indicated a sense of validation in claiming to be femme, allowing them to reconcile their femininity with their lesbian identity. Because they were not easily identifiable as lesbian, the participants indicated a need to come out as lesbian as well as femme as both a personal and a political statement. The core category in this study “maintaining integrity: upholding beliefs about sexual desire and gender representation” (p. 110), described their need to uphold a sense of truth within their gender and sexual relationships.

Levitt and Hiestand (2004) conducted a similar study with lesbians who identified as butch, finding that these participants found meaning in their identity as a source for authenticity as masculine lesbians, which allowed them to break from the social norm for femininity in women. These participants also indicated that they believed their butchness (and lesbianism) was innate, much as the femme participants did. While the respondents described a distinct discomfort with femininity (within themselves), most expressed

contentment with being women. They described a sense of feeling more similar to men than to women, and of generally being more comfortable within more traditional male gender roles. However, they were adamant that they were not trying to be men, and were not constrained by gender roles (e.g., if they enjoyed cooking, they did not find that to take away from their masculine identity). They did note a struggle in reconciling their need to appear powerful and assertive (often as a means of protection) with a more caring side; most described a tendency to maintain a balance between the two, which often differed depending on the environment. The researchers noted a distinct developmental process that the butch participants shared. Many of the respondents noted instances of discrimination or harassment, based on their visible atypical gender expression. The core category in this study, “quest for authenticity” described the participants’ need to remain authentic to themselves in terms of their internal sense of gender in the face of divergent social expectations.

Hiestand and Levitt (2005) conducted a follow-up analysis on the narratives of butch participants, in which they identified a developmental model that accounted for the dual development of sexual orientation and lesbian gender identity in these individuals. They found the formation of two distinct identities, lesbian and butch. Individuals who come to embrace a butch lesbian gender identity go through an identity formation process and coming-out period that is distinct from their embracing a lesbian identity. There are several key aspects shared by the two developmental processes. In each case increased level of outness as a lesbian, greater perceived social support, and decreased lesbian internalized homophobia were steps toward the acquisition of the identity.

These two models represent a distinction between the participants' sexual identity development (lesbian) and their gender identity development (butch). Thus, butch-identified lesbians may undergo more identity exploration than women who do not identify as butch, and they may access sources of social support in the form of their butch and femme role models and from butch-femme community. Research (e.g., Beals & Peplau, 2005; Yakushko, 2005) has found a positive relationship between outness about sexual orientation, social support, and good psychological health (better self-esteem and lower depression). Beals and Peplau (2005) found that greater social support predicted higher self-esteem and lower depression in lesbians. In addition, Yakushko (2005) found a positive relationship between greater outness and higher social support for self-esteem among lesbians. Thus, individuals who have gone through two identity development phases, first coming out as lesbian and then coming out as butch, may have built up additional protective factors (greater outness, greater perceived social support, and less internalized homophobia) than individuals who have not undergone a dual developmental process.

Within this small body of empirical research one issue that has not been explored is the relationship between lesbian gender identity and psychological health variables. While these groups (lesbians who identify as butch and femme) may share some of the same experiences as the overall population, the unique concerns they have may impact their self-esteem in both positive and negative ways. For instance, membership in the lesbian community may provide a strong source of social support from other lesbians but leave them open to discrimination from the heterosexual community. Further, for

masculine-appearing lesbians, the impact of butch identity on their experience and well-being is an unexamined topic.

While butch-identified lesbians generally maintain a masculine gender expression, there are lesbians who describe themselves as masculine, yet do not embrace a butch lesbian gender identity (Halberstam, 1998). Even without identifying as butch, these masculine lesbians express a gender presentation that contrasts with that of acceptable cultural gender norms (i.e., feminine appearance). This contrast in gender presentation may expose these women to discrimination, violence, lower social support, alienation from families, and lower self-esteem. Masculine lesbians may not have gone through the dual identity development processes (identifying as lesbian and then as butch) in the way that butch-identified lesbians have. Thus, masculine lesbians who do not identify as butch may not have received the same degree of social support and affirmation as their butch-identified counterparts. While some queer communities in the United States embrace butch-femme identities, many do not. This lack of recognition of butch as a lesbian gender identity may explain why some individuals who do consider themselves masculine may not go on to identify as butch. Additionally, some individuals may refuse a butch identity as a way to avoid being labeled, as they may view this as undesirable. For this study, butch-identified masculinity versus non butch-identified masculinity was explored for its impact on self-esteem.

Mediators of Identity and Self-Esteem

Meyer (2003) originally coined the term *minority stress* to describe experiences of minority individuals who face stigma, prejudice, and discrimination based on their minority status, which can lead to psychological health problems. He suggested the

following three processes as relevant to LGB individuals: (a) external, objective stressful events and conditions (chronic and acute), (b) expectations of such events and the vigilance this expectation requires, and (c) the internalization of negative societal attitudes. Lesbian, gay, and bisexual individuals face minority stress, which may have implications on their minority identity formation as well as their psychological well-being, as measured by self-esteem in this study. Meyer found low levels of outness and high levels of internalized homophobia correlate with high levels of minority stress, which may then lead to lower levels of self-esteem. Thus, higher levels of outness and lower levels of internalized homophobia are associated with better self-esteem, which were hypothesized within the model as two of the endogenous variables. Several research studies (e.g., Beals & Peplau, 2005; Igartua et al., 2003; Lewis et al., 2003; Luhtanen, 2003; Moradi & Subich, 2004; Worell, 2001; Yakushko, 2005) have found that a positive sexual minority identity, evidenced by greater outness and less internalized homophobia, leads to better psychological well-being, as measured by increased self-esteem.

Perceived social support appears to play an important role in positive self-image. In a study of 158 women (heterosexual, bisexual, and lesbian), Moradi and Funderburk (2006) found that positive perceived social support led directly to better self-esteem, which then led to lower psychological distress in their sample of women. Potoczniak, Aldea, and DeBlaere (2007) found that positive perceived social support and greater levels of outness lead to better psychological health as measured by less anxiety and greater ego identity in lesbian and bisexual women. Jordan and Deluty (2000) found that less concealment of sexual identity led to better satisfaction in relationships and greater perceived social support in 305 lesbians. Thus, better perceived social support as well as

less concealment of sexual identity appears to be positively related to self-esteem, and was the third endogenous variable in the model.

The specific purpose of the study was to explore the potential impact that butch lesbian gender identity has on individuals who embrace it. Although the variables that were studied have been explored as they relate to lesbians in general, they have not been investigated within the realm of lesbian gender identity. The variables included in the study were perceived social support, self-esteem, level of outness, and lesbian internalized homophobia. The goal of the study was to determine whether butch identity versus masculinity without a butch identity could contribute to self-esteem as mediated by social support, level of outness, and internalized homonegativity.

Research Questions and Hypotheses

- 1) Does butch lesbian gender identity positively influence level of outness?
- 2) Does butch lesbian gender identity positively influence perceived social support?
- 3) Does level of outness negatively influence lesbian internalized homophobia as measured by ‘personal feelings about being a lesbian’?
- 4) Does level of outness negatively influence lesbian internalized homophobia as measured by ‘attitudes toward other lesbians’?
- 5) Does perceived social support negatively influence lesbian internalized homophobia as measured by ‘personal feelings about being a lesbian’?
- 6) Does perceived social support negatively influence lesbian internalized homophobia as measured by ‘attitudes toward other lesbians’?
- 7) Does lesbian internalized homophobia as measured by ‘personal feelings about being a lesbian’ negatively influence self-esteem?

8) Does lesbian internalized homophobia as measured by ‘attitudes toward other lesbians’ negatively influence self-esteem?

9) Does perceived social support positively influence level of outness?

10) Does lesbian internalized homophobia as measured by ‘personal feelings about being a lesbian’ mediate the effects of level of outness and perceived social support on self-esteem?

11) Does lesbian internalized homophobia as measured by ‘attitudes toward other lesbians’ mediate the effects of level of outness and perceived social support on self-esteem?

12) Does butch lesbian gender identity directly or indirectly impact self-esteem for lesbian women?

This research estimated one model indicating a directional relationship between butch lesbian gender identity, level of outness, perceived social support, lesbian internalized homophobia, and self-esteem (see Figure 1). The exogenous variable, butch lesbian gender identity, was the independent variable that is the first tier of variables hypothesized to affect the dependent variable. Endogenous variables are independent variables that may be influenced by exogenous variables, as well as influence other endogenous variables or the dependent variable. Endogenous variables in this study were level of outness, perceived social support, and lesbian internalized homophobia as measured by two subscales. The exogenous variable was hypothesized to have direct positive effects on two endogenous variables, level of outness and perceived social support, which constituted the second and third tiers of variables. This hypothesis was based on the theory that butch-identified lesbians have greater levels of outness and

perceived social support given their dual developmental process as opposed to non butch-identified masculine lesbians. Perceived social support was also hypothesized to have a positive relationship with level of outness.

The fourth tier was composed of two variables measuring aspects of lesbian internalized homophobia: personal feelings about being a lesbian and attitudes toward other lesbians (two aspects of lesbian internalized homophobia). Both level of outness and perceived social support were hypothesized to have negative direct relationships with each variable in this tier, based on prior research. These two variables (the internalized homophobia variables) were hypothesized to have direct negative effects on the dependent variable, self-esteem. It was further hypothesized that the endogenous variables would mediate the effects of the exogenous variable and other endogenous variables on the dependent variable. The outcome measure, or dependent variable, was self-esteem.

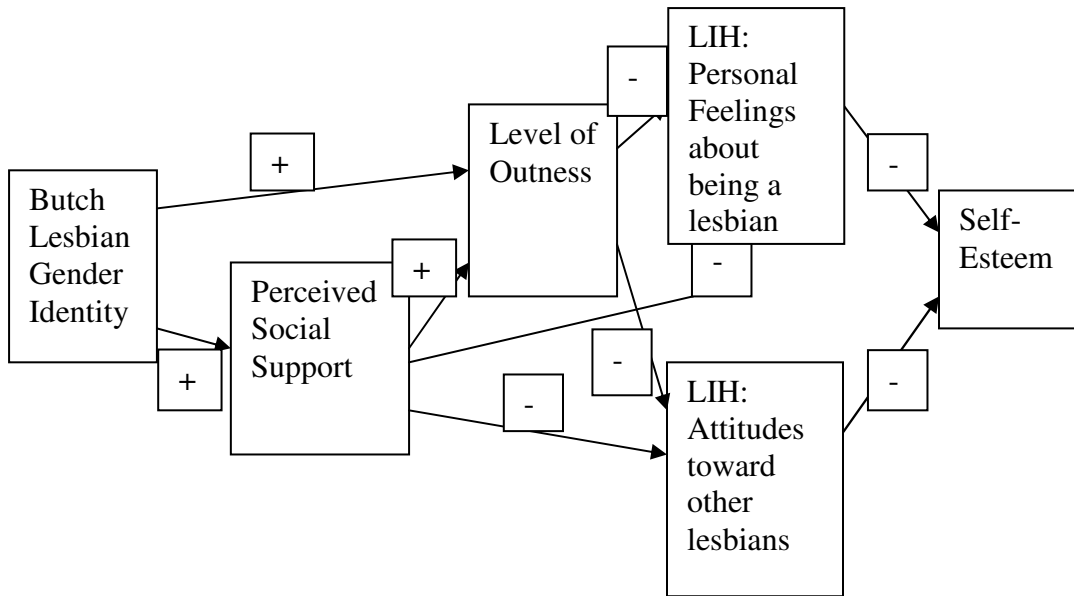


Figure 1. Theoretical Model

Definition of Terms

Several definitions may be helpful in understanding this study.

- **Lesbian Gender Identity:** Frequently there are two categories of lesbian gender identity, butch and femme. Sometimes androgynous is also considered an identity.
- **Butch:** butch-identified lesbians generally feel more comfortable with a gender expression typically viewed as more masculine in western culture (e.g., sporting short hair cuts, masculine clothing and appearance, and mannerisms).
- **Femme:** femme-identified lesbians and bisexuals generally feel more comfortable with a gender expression typically viewed as more feminine in western culture (e.g., may wear makeup and dresses), and their mannerisms more closely align with the social expectations of being female. Although butch and femme women often date each other, this is not necessarily always the case, as some butch women prefer to date other butch women while some femme women desire femme partners.
- **Androgynous:** Androgynous-identified lesbians and bisexuals present themselves as neither masculine nor feminine in terms of their appearance and mannerisms.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

The following review of the literature provides a brief overview of the most relevant findings regarding self-esteem, outness, perceived social support, and lesbian internalized homophobia. While each study included lesbians in its sample, none of the studies examined lesbian gender identity and variations on gender identity within these communities. Because the literature lacks specific references to lesbian gender identity, this general literature review on lesbian identity will serve to orient the reader to the constructs that were explored in the current study.

Lesbian Gender Identity & Butch Identity Development

While lesbian gender identity has been explored in the literature in the form of theory, biography, poetry, and fiction (e.g., Burana & Due, 1994; Butler, 1991; Halberstam, 1998; Harris & Crocker, 1997; Munt, 1998; Nestle, 1992), research focusing on lesbian gender identity is scarce. Loulan (1990) conducted perhaps the most well-known survey, and found reciprocal attraction between butch and femme-identified lesbians to be prevalent within their sample. Other researchers found an emphasis on gender expression in the search for romantic partners by examining lesbian classified ads (Smith & Stillman, 2002). Levitt and Horne (2002) conducted a survey in a lesbian separatist community in which 92% of the respondents indicated that lesbian gender was innate. Further, they found that butch women in their study became aware of their sexual orientation around the age of 15 years, while femme women became aware later, around the age of 22. This suggested that butch and femme lesbians followed different developmental trajectories in coming to terms with their sexual orientation. Singh,

Vidaurri, Zambarano, and Dabbs (1999) found that butch-identified women have a more masculine body shape (i.e., higher waist-to-hip ratios) and less desire to give birth than their femme-identified romantic partners. Additionally, butch women were found to have a higher level of testosterone than femme-identified lesbians (Pearcey, Docherty, & Dabbs, 1996).

Levitt and Hiestand (2005) found striking similarities in the identity development of their butch participants. They found that individuals who come to embrace a butch lesbian gender identity go through an identity formation process and coming-out period that is distinct from their embracing a lesbian identity. The model they developed can be compared to Cass' (1979) six-stage lesbian identity development model (confusion, comparison, tolerance, acceptance, pride, and synthesis). They noted that individuals tended to first identify as lesbian, and then later to identify as butch, although they were often aware of their gender atypicality before they were aware of their lesbian sexual orientation. Butch identity development begins during early childhood (ages 4-5); lesbian identity development generally begins later (ages 11-12), but the two models can occur simultaneously as well as sequentially. Regardless of the order in which they occur, there are two distinct developmental processes that butch lesbians go through, one to embrace being a lesbian and the other to identify as butch. In the butch identity development model butch women reported being aware of their gender atypicality at a young age (during the pre-school years), although they may not yet have been aware of their sexual orientation. The second stage represented a collision between gender conformity and sexual orientation. At this time, they experienced increased pressure to be feminine, and often were coming into the realization that they might be lesbian. At this time lesbian

identity development also begins. During lesbian identity development there are certain changes that tend to happen (increased outness, increased perceived social support, and a decrease in lesbian internalized homophobia), which are also key factors in butch identity development.

The third stage of the butch identity development model is characterized by an awareness of gender atypicality in others, which served to normalize their own experience of gender. This generally occurred as they navigated the lesbian community and came into contact with other butch-identified lesbians. Many of the respondents identified this stage as the turning point in their gender development, since for the first time they had role models to look to which provided them with a unique form of social support. The fourth stage, gender exploration, was the time during which they began a conscious exploration of their own gender identity within the context of a supportive community. This led to the fifth stage, gender internalization, at which point they began to embrace a butch identity for themselves. Gender affirmation was the next stage, during which they integrated their butch identity into their sense of self, and during the seventh stage, integration, they were able to embrace dual identities as both butch and lesbian.

Self-Esteem

A number of authors have identified gender as one potential barrier to positive self-esteem (e.g., Cassidy et al., 2004; Corning, 2002; Fischer & Holz, 2007; Moradi & Subich, 2004; Worell, 2001). For instance, Moradi and Subich (2004) demonstrated a negative relationship between high self-esteem and lower psychological distress in women. Further, Worell (2001) found that higher self-esteem in women enables them to deal with life stressors easier than individuals with lower self-esteem. They note that

higher self-esteem “functions to support individual and group strength through increased flexibility in problem identification and solution, in developing a full range of interpersonal and constructive life skills, and in developing strategies for effective community and institutional change” (p. 336). As noted by Meyers (2003), membership in minority groups may increase the level of psychological distress experienced by women with double-minority status (gender and sexual orientation). A number of researchers have examined self-esteem specifically within the lesbian (or lesbian and bisexual) population.

Beals and Peplau (2005) studied a group of lesbians ($N = 42$) to determine whether a strong lesbian identity predicted psychological well-being (self-esteem, life satisfaction, and depression). The participants provided daily reports for two weeks, and also a follow-up survey after two months. Those lesbians who reported more identity support scored higher on the well-being measures throughout the study (at initial assessment, during the two-week study period, and at the 2-month follow-up). They also found that identity devaluation resulted in more negative scores on well-being throughout the study period. Yakushko (2005) also examined how several factors affect gay, lesbian, and bisexual individual’s self-esteem. The results of a multiple regression suggested that stronger self-esteem is predicted by a greater sense of social support, as well as an overall greater sense of existential well-being. Luhtanen (2003) investigated well-being in lesbians and bisexual women; she assessed well-being by measuring self-esteem, life satisfaction, and depression. Her sample included 168 lesbians and bisexual women (as well as 152 gay and bisexual men). She found that, for both groups, having a positive gay, lesbian, or bisexual identity was the most robust predictor of psychological well-

being, and that rejecting negative stereotypes predicted a positive gay, lesbian, or bisexual identity.

All of these studies found that self-esteem can be predicted by a positive identity as lesbian. The current study built on these findings by investigating whether a butch identity directly and positively relates to self-esteem, as mediated by increased social support, greater outness, and lower internalized homophobia.

Internalized Homophobia

Studies on the relationship between internalized homophobia and psychological well-being are well-represented in the literature. Igartua et al. (2003) examined internalized homophobia among gay men and lesbians in terms of whether it is a useful predictor of depressive and anxious symptoms, suicide, and substance abuse. In a sample of 220 participants, they found that internalized homophobia accounted for 18% of the variance in depressive scores and 13% of the variance in anxiety scores; internalized homophobia did not predict suicide independently from depression. The current study will build on this study, as it will determine whether a butch identity predicts reduced internalized homophobia.

Szymanski, Barry, and Balsam (2001) examined internalized homophobia and how it relates to a series of psychosocial factors. They found that high levels of internalized homophobia correlated negatively with level of outness and perceived social support. From their work they also developed the lesbian internalized homophobia scale, which has been utilized by other researchers investigating lesbian internalized homophobia (LIH). Rotondi (2007) studied the effects of having positive role models on lesbians' experiences of LIH. She utilized two scales from the lesbian internalized

homophobia scale (Szymanski & Chung, 2001), Personal Feelings about Being a Lesbian and Attitudes Toward other Lesbians. She found that satisfaction with the role model was negatively correlated with both subscales, indicating lower levels of lesbian internalized homophobia. Lewis et al. (2003) studied the relationship between stress and internalized homophobia on depressive symptoms. In their sample of 204 participants (110 male, 91 female, 3 did not specify), they found that internalized homophobia and gay-related stress were both significantly positively associated with depressive symptoms and negatively associated with self-esteem; further, they found that gay-related stress accounted for unique variance. Therefore, research has found a negative relationship between lesbian internalized homophobia and psychological well-being, as measured by depressive symptoms and stress; the current study used self-esteem as the measure for psychological well-being.

Outness

Koh and Ross (2006) conducted a study to examine psychological health in a sample of women of different sexual orientations; their sample included lesbians ($n = 524$), bisexual women ($n = 143$) and heterosexual women ($n = 637$). They found that lesbian and bisexual women had a higher probability of experiencing emotional stress; further, whether they were open about their sexual orientation affected the probability of stress. Lesbian and bisexual women who were not out were more than two times more likely to experience suicidal ideation, and were more likely to have attempted suicide as compared to the heterosexual women. The results from this study suggest that coming out as lesbian or bisexual may provide a buffer against emotional stress that may result from the experience of being a sexual minority. The current study utilized level of outness as

lesbian as a potential buffer against low self-esteem that masculine lesbians who do not identify as butch may not have.

Perceived Social Support

Perceived social support has been found to have a consistent positive relationship with self-esteem across gender and sexual orientation. Moradi and Funderburk (2006) used a university sample of 158 women (heterosexual, 78%; mostly heterosexual, 11%; lesbian, 5%; mostly lesbian, 4%; and bisexual, 2%) and found that positive perceived social support led directly to better self-esteem. Potoczniak et al. (2007) also performed a path analysis with a sample of 347 lesbian, gay, and bisexual individuals. They found that positive perceived social support and greater levels of outness lead to better psychological health as measured by less anxiety and greater ego identity. Thus, better perceived social support as well as less concealment of sexual identity appears to be positively related to psychological health, and as such is the third endogenous variable in our model. Thus we hypothesized that perceived social support, internalized lesbian homophobia, and level of outness would serve as the mediators between lesbian gender identity and self-esteem.

Chapter 3

Method

Participants

This study was conducted using archival data from an internet-based survey that explored issues of gender identity among lesbian women. A nonrandom sample of participants was secured from across the United States and Canada through extensive advertising of the survey on lesbian and bisexual related Internet websites, and through snowball sampling by encouraging individuals to pass the survey on to interested others. The full sample consisted of 1,084 participants; the sample for this study consisted of 191 respondents. The criteria used to select the sample are described in the measures section.

In the full sample most participants indicated they were born female (98.7%, $n = 1070$), and the rest identified as born intersex but raised female (1.3%, $n = 14$). Most participants also identified as female (90.7%, $n = 983$), while the rest identified as transgender but not male-identified (9.3%, $n = 101$). The majority of the sample identified as lesbian, homosexual, gay, or dyke (64.4%, $n = 698$) but included participants who identified as bisexual (25.1%, $n = 272$), woman-loving-woman (2.9%, $n = 31$), and “other” (7.6%, $n = 83$). In terms of lesbian gender identity 23.2% ($n = 252$) identified as butch, 31.2% ($n = 338$) identified as femme, 15.1% ($n = 164$) identified as androgynous, and 30.5% ($n = 331$) did not identify with a lesbian gender identity. The sample was primarily Caucasian (78.9%, $n = 855$), with other participants identifying as African American (3.6%, $n = 39$), Latina (3.1%, $n = 34$), Asian / Pacific Islander (2.2%, $n = 24$), Jewish (4.1%, $n = 44$), Native American (.6%, $n = 7$), and Biracial / Multiracial (7.4%, n

= 81). The mean age of the sample was 31.89 years (range = 18-73 years). Respondents represented 47 states and 9 Canadian provinces.

In terms of the highest level of education attained 11% ($n = 119$) had a high school or vocational school diploma, 25.1% ($n = 272$) earned an undergraduate degree, 19.7% ($n = 214$) earned a master's degree, 5.1% ($n = 55$) earned a Ph.D., and 3.1% ($n = 34$) earned a professional degree. Examining occupation, 40.9% ($n = 443$) held a professional job, 4.5% ($n = 49$) held a clerical position, 2.6% ($n = 28$) were skilled laborers, 2.6% ($n = 28$) worked in the service industry, 27.7% ($n = 300$) were students, 1% ($n = 9$) were retired, and 6.3% ($n = 68$) were not working at the time they took the survey. In terms of personal income, 32.1% ($n = 348$) made less than \$10,000, 26.9% ($n = 293$) made between \$10,000 and \$30,000, 24.7% ($n = 268$) made between \$30,000 and \$50,000, 13.3% ($n = 144$) made between \$50,000 and \$80,000, 1.8% ($n = 20$) made between \$80,000 and \$100,000, and 1.3% ($n = 14$) made over \$100,000 annually.

In terms of the subset of participants included in this study, most identified as female (81.2%, $n = 155$), and the rest (18.8%, $n = 36$) identified as transgender (all participants were born and identified as women). This sample was composed primarily of individuals who identified as lesbian, homosexual, gay, or dyke (89.5%, $n = 171$) but included participants who identified as woman-loving-woman (1.0%, $n = 2$), and "other" (9.4%, $n = 18$). The sample was primarily Caucasian (81.2%, $n = 155$), with other participants identifying as African American (2.6%, $n = 5$), Latina (4.7%, $n = 9$), Asian / Pacific Islander (1.0%, $n = 2$), Jewish (4.2%, $n = 8$), Native American (.5%, $n = 1$), and Biracial / Multiracial (5.8%, $n = 11$). The mean age of the sample was 33.22 years (range = 18-60 years). Respondents represented 41 states and 3 Canadian provinces.

In terms of the highest level of education attained 6.8% ($n = 13$) had a high school or vocational school diploma, 27.7% ($n = 53$) earned an undergraduate degree, 23% ($n = 44$) earned a master's degree, 5.8% ($n = 11$) earned a Ph.D., and 6.8% ($n = 13$) earned a professional degree. Examining occupation, 50.8% ($n = 97$) held a professional job, 2.1% ($n = 4$) held a clerical position, 6.2% ($n = 12$) were skilled laborers, 3.7% ($n = 7$) worked in the service industry, 29.3% ($n = 56$) were students, 1% ($n = 2$) were retired, and 5.8% ($n = 11$) were not working at the time they took the survey. In terms of personal income, 16.2% ($n = 31$) made less than \$10,000, 27.8% ($n = 53$) made between \$10,000 and \$30,000, 30.9% ($n = 59$) made between \$30,000 and \$50,000, 15.2% ($n = 29$) made between \$50,000 and \$80,000, 3.1% ($n = 6$) made between \$80,000 and \$100,000, and 1% ($n = 2$) made over \$100,000 annually.

Instruments

The Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support

The Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (Zimet, G. D., Dahlem, N. W., Zimet, S. G., & Farley, G. K. (1988) is a self-report measure used to assess social support. It is composed of 12 items on a 5-point Likert type scale and includes three subscales (family, friends, and significant other), each of which has been found to have strong factorial validity. Sample questions include “there is a special person who is around when I am in need”, “my family really tries to help me”, and “I can count on my friends when things go wrong”. A full-scale score was calculated by assessing the mean across all 12 items. A higher score indicated higher perceived social support (range = 1-5). Internal consistency reliability was reported for the total scale ($\alpha = .88$) as well as for the additional subscales of friends ($\alpha = .85$), family ($\alpha = .87$), and significant

other ($\alpha = .91$) as was test-retest reliability over a 3-month period ($\alpha = .72$ to $.85$). Further, high levels of perceived social support were associated with low levels of depression and anxiety symptomatology as measured by the Hopkins Symptom Checklist. The full-scale reliability for this sample was $.89$.

Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale

The Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (Rosenberg, 1979) is a self-report scale composed of 10 items on a 4-point Likert type scale designed to measure global self-esteem as a single construct. Sample questions include “I feel that I have a number of good qualities”, and “I feel I do not have much to be proud of”. After reverse-coding the appropriate items, a single score was obtained by summing the ten items; the higher the score, the higher the self-esteem (range = 10-40). Internal reliability has been shown to be adequate for the scale, with alphas ranging from $.74$ - $.87$ and test-retest reliabilities ranging from $.63$ to $.91$. Scores on this scale have been negatively associated with depressive affect, anxiety, and interpersonal insecurity. For the present study, the internal consistency coefficient alpha was $.90$.

Lesbian Internalized Homophobia Scale

The Lesbian Internalized Homophobia Scale (LIH; Szymanski & Chung, 2001) is a 52-item scale composed of five subscales, designed to measure level of internalized homophobia specifically within a lesbian population. The full scale consists of five subscales; two of the subscales (8 items each) were utilized in this study. The Personal Feelings about Being a Lesbian subscale has been shown to have a Cronbach alpha = $.83$, and is measured by questions such as “I hate myself for being attracted to other women” and “I am proud to be a lesbian”. In the current sample the Cronbach alpha = $.86$. The

Attitude Toward other Lesbians subscale has shown adequate internal consistency, (Cronbach alpha = .89), and is represented by questions such as “I have respect and admiration for other lesbians”, and “They make lesbians as a group look bad.” For the current study the Cronbach alpha = .83. Responses were measured on a 7-point Likert scale (1= Strongly Agree and 7 = Strongly Disagree). Research findings have demonstrated both the reliability and the validity of the LIHS in assessing internalized homophobia in lesbians. These two subscales were selected based on findings by Rotondi (2007) in which the scales negatively correlated with satisfaction with a role model, indicating lower levels of lesbian internalized homophobia.

Level of Outness

Level of outness was measured by a single question “I am out to:” with the following possible responses: No one, A select few people, Some friends only, Some friends and family, Almost all friends and family, and All friends and family. For this variable higher scores on level of outness indicate higher level of outness.

Butch Lesbian Gender Identity

Butch lesbian gender identity was assessed with three questions. Participants were asked “how would you describe yourself now (check the answer that best applies)”; the options were: Butch (soft butch, hard butch, stone butch, boi-but, etc.), Femme (high femme, stone femme, etc.), Androgynous (kiki), and None of the above. Within the larger sample, participants who identified as femme ($n = 382$) were removed. Participants also responded to a question designed to measure their gender expression: “Even if you don’t identify as butch or femme, on a butch-femme scale from 0-10 which category most accurately describes your current gender expression? The term butch refers to feeling

comfortable with a gender expression style typically considered more masculine, while the term femme refers to feeling comfortable with a gender expression style typically considered more feminine.” The participants were able to rate themselves on a scale with the following designations: most butch, quite butch, butch, butch-androgynous, androgynous-butch, androgynous, androgynous-femme, femme-androgynous, femme, quite femme, and most femme. In this question the terms ‘butch’ and ‘femme’ refer to gender expression, not lesbian gender identity.

Because the current study will focus only on the individuals who identified as having a masculine gender expression, only those participants who identified themselves as most butch, quite butch, butch, butch-androgynous, and androgynous-butch will be included in the study (this includes individuals who also self-identified as butch (lesbian gender identity) as well as those who did not. Individuals who identified themselves as androgynous, androgynous-femme, femme-androgynous, femme, quite femme, and most femme ($n = 384$) were also removed from the sample. The sample then consisted of the following: 66.5% ($n = 127$) identified as butch and expressed masculine gender expression, 14.7% ($n = 28$) identified as androgynous and expressed masculine gender expression and 18.8% ($n = 36$) identified as none and expressed masculine gender expression. The none and androgynous groups were combined, to create a non-butch identified group to contrast with the butch-identified women. In the study masculine butch-identified lesbians were coded 1 and masculine lesbians not butch-identified was coded as 2. An additional 35 participants were removed from the sample because they identified as bisexual. Bisexual individuals may not go through the same sexual orientation identity development as lesbians so they are not appropriate in this sample.

Finally, one question was used as a check. Participants responded to the question “do you think your appearance is: Very feminine; A little feminine; Neither masculine or feminine; A little masculine, or Very masculine.” Of the participants, two who identified as ‘none’ on the previous question identified as “a little feminine” and another as “very feminine”; these three participants were also dropped from the study. This resulted in a sample size of 191, which included masculine butch- identified lesbians ($n = 127$, 66.5%) as well as masculine lesbians who were not butch-identified ($n = 64$, 33.5 %).

Procedure

The study was advertised by sending an announcement, with a description of the study and a web-link, to websites and web-lists catering to the lesbian community. When participants clicked on the web-link, they were first taken to the informed consent page, and after giving their consent, they were able to begin the survey, which was composed of approximately 300 questions. There was no incentive offered for participating in the survey.

Statistical Analyses

I described the sample in terms of demographic variables: sex (female or intersexed but raised female), gender (female or transgender but not male identified), race, age, highest level of education attained, personal income, occupation, sexual orientation (lesbian; homosexual, gay, or dyke; woman loving woman; other), and butch-femme identification (butch, femme, androgynous, or no identity). I reported all the results both in terms of the overall population, and also examined how each variable was distributed within lesbian gender identification.

In order to explore the study hypotheses, I conducted a path analysis. The exogenous variable was butch/none lesbian gender identity. The endogenous variables were level of outness, social support, and two measures of lesbian internalized homophobia: personal feelings about being a lesbian and attitudes toward other lesbians. The dependent variable was self-esteem. The exogenous variable was hypothesized to have a direct positive relationship on level of outness and perceived social support. Level of outness and social support were hypothesized to have direct negative effects on lesbian internalized homophobia, which would have direct negative effects on self-esteem. Further, all endogenous variables were hypothesized to mediate the effects of butch lesbian gender identity on self-esteem.

Chapter 4

Results

Prior to estimation of the model, exploratory analyses were conducted testing the assumptions underlying the application of multiple regression. Results indicated that for each equation defining the model, the residual analyses indicated no severe departure from the assumptions of independence, normality, heteroschedasticity, and linearity. Variance inflation factors were checked for multicollinearity (VIF range of 1.031 – 1.228), suggesting that multicollinearity was not present in this study. Correlations, means and standard deviations of the variables of interest are found in Table 1.

Direct, Indirect, and Total Effects

The set of five independent variables hypothesized to impact self-esteem explained 17.5% of the variance in self-esteem $F(5,185) = 7.867, p < .001$, with two of the five variables having significant direct influence on self-esteem (see Figure 2). These two significant direct positive effects are, in order of magnitude, perceived social support ($\beta = .32$) and level of outness ($\beta = .16$). Thus, after controlling for the other variables in the model, perceived social support and level of outness had the greatest influence on self-esteem. The results did not support the hypothesis that either measure of lesbian internalized homophobia or butch gender identity directly contributed to self-esteem.

The set of three independent variables (butch gender identity, perceived social support, and level of outness) hypothesized to impact lesbian internalized homophobia, specifically, Personal Feelings about Being a Lesbian, did not explain a significant a significant portion of the variance ($F(3,187) = 1.597, p = 0.190$). The results did not

Table 1

Correlations, Means, and Standard Deviations for Measures Included in the Research

	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Butch Lesbian Gender Identity	1					
2. Outness	-.020	1				
3. Perceived Social Support	.043	.312**	1			
4. LIHSss3	.158*	-.007	.007	1		
5. LIHSss5	.103	.055	-.008	.414**	1	
6. Self-Esteem	-.067	.260**	.368**	.087	.019	1

*p < .05. **p < .001.

M 1.34 5.21 48.45 13.08 15.30 33.0

SD 0.473 0.963 8.730 6.725 7.200 5.500

support the hypotheses that level of outness, perceived social support, or butch gender identity directly impacted Personal Feelings about Being a Lesbian.

The set of three independent variables (butch gender identity, perceived social support, and level of outness) hypothesized to impact lesbian internalized homophobia, specifically, Attitudes Toward other Lesbians, did not explain a significant portion of the variance ($F(3,187) = 0.942, p = 0.577$). The results did not support the hypotheses that level of outness, perceived social support, or butch gender identity directly contributed to Attitudes Toward other Lesbians.

Gender identity and perceived social support, the two independent variables hypothesized to impact level of outness, explained 9.8% of the variance in level of outness $F(2,188) = 10.266, p < .001$, with one of the two variables, perceived social support, having a significant direct positive influence on level of outness ($\beta = .31$). Thus, the results supported the hypothesis that perceived social support positively influences level of outness, but did not support the hypothesis that gender identity significantly influences level of outness. Finally, gender identity did not explain a significant portion of the variance ($F(1,189) = 0.350, p = 0.562$) in perceived social support. Results of the path analysis for direct effects are found in Table 2.

Perceived social support had significant indirect influences on self-esteem (ind. effect = .032). These indirect effects were manifested through one mediating variable, level of outness. Perceived social support also had a significant total effect on self-esteem (total effect = .372).

Table 2

Results of Path Analysis and Direct Effects

Variable β (b)	Self-Esteem	LIHSss3	LIHSss5	Outness	Social Support
Butch Lesbian Gender Identity	-0.09 (-0.07)	0.16 (2.24)	0.11 (1.61)	-0.03 (-0.07)	0.04 (0.79)
Social Support	0.32** (0.20)	0.00 (0.00)	-0.03 (-0.03)	0.31** (0.03)	
Outness	0.16* (0.91)	-0.00 (-0.03)	0.07 (0.51)		
LIHSss3	0.11 (0.09)				
LIHSss5	-0.02 (-0.08)				
R ²	0.175	0.025	0.015	0.098	0.002

*p < .05. **p < .001.

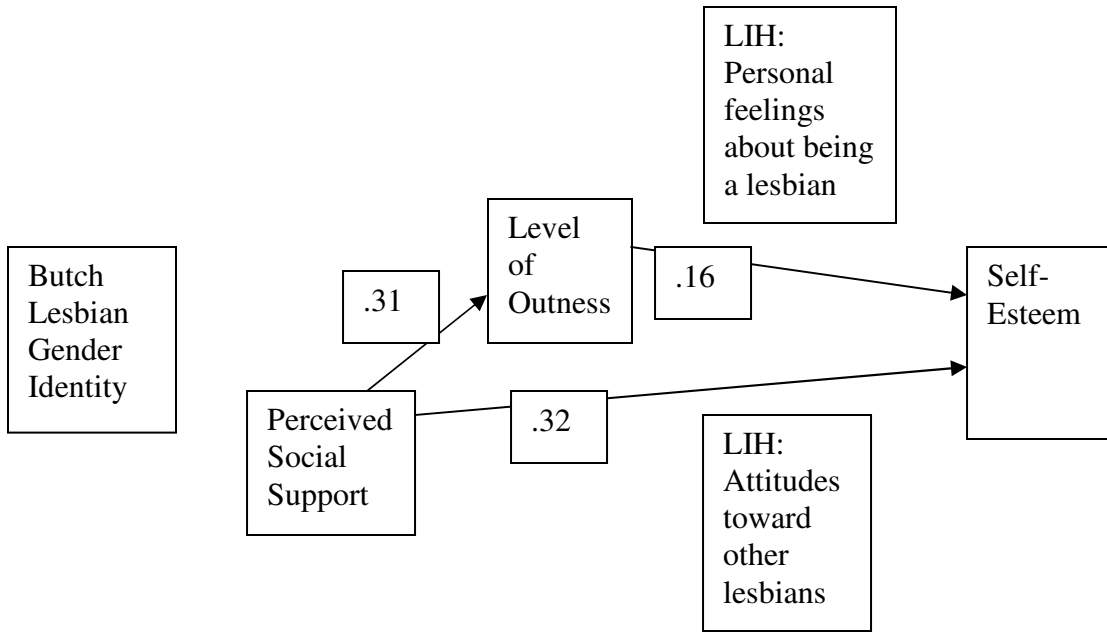


Figure 2. Path Model of Direct Influences

Chapter 5

Discussion

There were three significant paths found in the current model. One of the paths, perceived social support positively influencing level of outness, was hypothesized and lends support to previous research that found similar relationships between social support and outness (Jordan & Deluty, 2000; Potoczniak et al., 2007; Yakushko, 2005). There were two additional significant paths supported by the model that, while not hypothesized, do support current literature. Higher levels of outness led directly and positively to higher self-esteem, which supports previous research (Beals & Peplau, 2005; Koh & Ross, 2006; Luhtanen, 2003). In this study, it was hypothesized that Lesbian Internalized Homophobia would mediate the relationship between level of outness and self-esteem but this hypothesis was not supported.

The third significant path in the model was a direct, positive relationship between perceived social support and self-esteem. This relationship is supported in the literature (Beals & Peplau, 2005; Morandi & Funderburk, 2007). This relationship was predicted in the model with Lesbian Internalized Homophobia as a mediator between perceived social support and self-esteem, but the results did not support Lesbian Internalized Homophobia as a mediator. However, level of outness mediated an indirect path between perceived social support and self-esteem, indicating that perceived social support had both direct and indirect influences on self-esteem. That is, social support may increase lesbian women's capacity to come out to others, which in turn may increase their self-esteem. Thus, this study adds to the literature supporting several direct, positive relationships: greater perceived social support leads to higher levels of outness, and both greater

perceived social support and higher levels of outness lead to higher self-esteem. More specifically, these relationships are supported for women with a masculine gender expression and/or butch lesbian gender identity, indicating that outness and social support are important regardless of whether one identifies as butch or not. There is much literature that describes relationships between lesbian internalized homophobia and level of outness, perceived social support, and self-esteem. Szymanski et al. (2001) found that a higher level of outness was negatively associated with lesbian internalized homophobia, but in this study outness was unrelated to lesbian internalized homophobia. . Further, they also found that perceived social support was negatively related to lesbian internalized homophobia, which was also supported by Rotondi (2007). Again, these relationships were not significant in the current model, so the related hypotheses were not supported. The literature also describes a negative relationship between lesbian internalized homophobia and self-esteem; this relationship was hypothesized in the current study. However, the results did not support this significant negative relationship. Therefore, this study did not support any significant relationships between lesbian internalized homophobia and perceived social support, level of outness, and self-esteem.

One potential rationale for the lack of significant relationships with lesbian internalized homophobia is the relatively low level of lesbian internalized homophobia reported by this sample ($M = 14, r = 7-56$). With a sample with more diverse scores on lesbian internalized homophobia, any relationships between internalized homonegativity and these variables might have been detected. Additionally, this study only utilized two of the subscales of the lesbian internalized homophobia scale, which may have reduced

whether participants were actually reporting lesbian internalized homonegativity, despite the relatively strong internal consistency of these subscales (.83, .86).

Another factor that may have impacted this study is that different scales were utilized in the previous studies, and women were not analyzed separately from men. For instance, the study by Igartua et al. (2003) included gay men and lesbians in the sample. They used the Nungesser Homosexual Attitudes Inventory to measure internalized homophobia (not specific to lesbians). Szymanski et al. (2001) note that the internalized homophobia scales developed prior to the LIH were based primarily on gay men, so their applicability to lesbians is unknown. Further, instead of using self-esteem as the dependent variable, they measured anxiety and depression. Perhaps low anxiety and depression are not equivalent to high self-esteem, but are different constructs. Lewis et al. (2003) also studied men and women and used the Internalized Homophobia Scale in their research. Perhaps the utilization of only two subscales to measure this and the lack of range in scores impacted the ability to detect potential relationships between lesbian internalized homonegativity and these factors.

Butch gender identity was hypothesized to have a negative relationship with both perceived social support and level of outness such that masculine butch-identified lesbians would report higher levels of perceived social support and greater outness than those masculine individuals who do not identify as butch. Neither of these hypotheses was supported by the results. Thus, although individuals who go through butch identity development report coming out as butch and having strong perceived social support as one positive aspect of this development, they may not be qualitatively distinct from other women who come out as lesbian and have good social support in the process of

developing a lesbian identity. Butch gender identity was also hypothesized to have a significant impact, direct or indirect, with self-esteem, but this hypothesis was not supported by the results.

The theory that butch gender identity, perhaps because of its dual identity development, might significantly increase outness and social support and decrease lesbian internalized homophobia, was not supported in this study. It may be that going through two distinct identity formations has no significant effect on the variables in the study. However, it may be that women were at different places in their development of a butch identity, and therefore, not all women in this group experienced butch identity as a positive factor related to their self-esteem. An alternate explanation is that the study contained 18.8% women who identified as transgender and the majority of these individuals (80%, $n = 29$) also identified as butch. It is unknown what the potential impact of these coexisting identities might have on self-esteem. Further, if the individual is developing a transgender identity, which they may experience as central, then their butch gender may be less salient to their positive feelings about themselves. Further analyses comparing butch-identified women who also identify as transgender with those who do not is warranted.

Within this study there were some limitations that should be noted. Although the sample was diverse in some ways (age, lesbian gender identity, and sexual orientation) there was limited racial representation other than Caucasian participants. Additionally the sample was highly educated. Because the data were gathered via Internet survey, respondents had to have access to a computer.

An additional limitation of this study is that there was no distinction between individuals who identify as transgender and those who do not. While all the participants identified as female, it is possible that those who claim a transgender identity may be qualitatively different from those who don't claim that identity. In this study 18.8% ($n = 36$) identified as transgender, and 80% ($n = 29$) identified as butch. However, their butch-transgender experience may be different than a butch-female identity. Follow up analyses without transgender participants will be explored.

Another limitation in this study is that there is not an accepted definition for butch, making it unclear whether the participants who identified as butch conceptualize their identity in the same way. Individuals embrace a self-label that is meaningful to them, but it may mean slightly different things to different people, leaving the qualitative difference between butch-identified and non-butch-identified ambiguous.

Future research in this area may examine other variables as they relate to butch gender identity. Transgender identity was not distinguished from butch gender identity, so research that examines how butch transgender identity differs from a butch female identity is suggested. Further, given that femme-identified lesbians may be less active in general lesbian communities and more active in butch-femme communities, examining femme identity as it relates to lesbian internalized homophobia might shed more light on what role these identities might play when encountering homophobia or internalized homonegativity.

Finally, it might be useful to explore bisexual identity in relationship to butch-femme gender identity. Research has not explored what impact identifying as bisexual has on butch-femme identity. Self-esteem is a complex factor. Other studies have

conceptualized self-esteem using other variables than the current study. These factors include depression, anxiety, minority stress, ego identity, life satisfaction, and relationship satisfaction. Incorporating these variables into a path model might provide greater understanding of the relationships among these factors. For instance, perhaps lesbian internalized homophobia is more predictive of anxiety and depression than self-esteem. Broadening how psychological health is defined could provide additional understanding on how all of these variables inter-relate.

This research may have clinical and political implications. Therapists may find themselves working with individuals who have already realized their lesbian gender identity, or who have not yet embraced a lesbian gender identity but for whom one is relevant. This study did not find that butch gender identity serves as a protective factor against low self-esteem, so self-esteem may need to be addressed as it relates to each lesbian woman's experience of themselves and their gender expression and identity. Further, therapists may have clients who do not embrace a lesbian gender identity but who present a masculine gender expression. From this study both appear to have low internalized homonegativity and fairly good self-esteem and outness. Whether the client is completely unaware of lesbian gender identity or has not yet been able to comfortably apply it to themselves, therapists may be able to guide them and support them. Therapists may also work with couples for whom butch (and femme) identities and/or masculine gender expression play a role in their relationships. Finally, therapists may work with family members struggling with understanding lesbian gender identity or gender expression of their loved one.

Beyond counseling, therapists may be able to be socially and politically aware and active on behalf of their butch (and femme) identified and masculine lesbian clients. Lesbian and bisexual communities, as well as the broader general population, are not always tolerant of lesbian gender identity or nontraditional gender expression (i.e. female masculinity), and therapists may find opportunities for activism and education to enhance the lives of butch and masculine (and femme) lesbians and bisexuals. This activism might be geared towards mental health practitioners as well, so the potential targets may be far-reaching and significant. Lesbian women, regardless of lesbian gender identity, gain resilience from feeling supported by significant others, which allows them to be more out as lesbians and appears to increase their self-esteem. Therapy and advocacy that focuses on increasing social support for lesbian women may be the most important means of enhancing self-esteem of lesbian women.

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Appendix A

The Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (Zimet, G. D., Dahlem, N.

W., Zimet, S. G., & Farley, G. K. (1988)

Instructions: We are interested in how you feel about the following statements. Read each statement carefully. Indicate how you feel about each statement.

Circle the “1” if you **Very Strongly Disagree**

Circle the “2” if you **Strongly Disagree**

Circle the “3” if you **Mildly Disagree**

Circle the “4” if you are **Neutral**

Circle the “5” if you **Mildly Agree**

Circle the “6” if you **Strongly Agree**

Circle the “7” if you **Very Strongly Agree**

1. There is a special person who is around when I am in need. (SO)
2. There is a special person with whom I can share my joys and sorrows. (SO)
3. My family really tries to help me. (Fam)
4. I get the emotional help and support I need from my family. (Fam)
5. I have a special person who is a real source of comfort to me. (SO)
6. My friends really try to help me. (Fri)
7. I can count on my friends when things go wrong. (Fri)
8. I can talk about my problems with my family. (Fam)
9. I have friends with whom I can share my joys and sorrows. (Fri)
10. There is a special person in my life who cares about my feelings. (SO)

11. My family is willing to help me make decisions. (Fam)

12. I can talk about my problems with my friends. (Fri)

Sum the scores. The scale ranges from 12 – 84; the higher the score the higher the level of perceived social support.

The items tended to divide into factor groups relating to the source of the social support, namely family (Fam), friends (Fri) or significant other (SO).

Appendix B

Lesbian Internalized Homophobia Scale (LIH), (Szymanski, D. M., & Chung, Y. B.

(2001)

7-point Likert scale (1= Strongly Agree and 7 = Strongly Disagree).

Personal Feelings about Being a Lesbian subscale

1. *I hate myself for being attracted to other women.
2. I am proud to be a lesbian (bisexual).
3. *I feel bad for acting on my lesbian (bisexual) desires.
4. As a lesbian (bisexual), I am loveable and deserving of respect.
5. I feel comfortable being a lesbian (bisexual).
6. *If I could change my sexual orientation and become heterosexual, I would.
7. I don't feel disappointment in myself for being a lesbian (bisexual).
8. *Being a lesbian (bisexual) makes my future look bleak and hopeless.

Attitude toward Other Lesbians subscale

1. I feel comfortable with the diversity of women who make up the lesbian (bisexual) community.
2. *If some lesbians (bisexuals) would change and be more acceptable to the larger society, lesbians (bisexuals) as a group would not have to deal with so much negativity and discrimination.
3. *I wish some lesbians (bisexuals) wouldn't "flaunt" their lesbianism (bisexuality). They only do it for shock value and it doesn't accomplish anything positive.
4. *Lesbians (bisexuals) are too aggressive.
5. *My feelings toward other lesbians (bisexuals) are often negative.

6. *I frequently make negative comments about other lesbians (bisexuals).
7. I have respect and admiration for other lesbians (bisexuals).
8. *I can't stand lesbians (bisexuals) who are too "butch." They make lesbians (bisexuals) as a group look bad.

Questions marked with an "*" are reverse-coded prior to scoring. To score each subscale, sum all of the responses, with a higher value indicating more lesbian internalized homophobia.

Appendix C

Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (Rosenberg, 1979)

Use the following scale to note how strongly you agree or disagree with each statement.

Strongly Agree = 3

Agree = 2

Disagree = 1

Strongly Disagree = 0

1. I feel that I am a person of worth, at least on an equal plane with others.
2. I feel that I have a number of good qualities.
3. All in all, I am inclined to feel that I am a failure.
4. I am able to do things as well as most other people.
5. I feel I do not have much to be proud of.
6. I take a positive attitude toward myself.
7. On the whole, I am satisfied with myself.
8. I wish I could have more respect for myself.
9. I certainly feel useless at times.
10. At times I think I am no good at all.

To calculate scores, reverse code the following items: 3, 5, 8, 9, and 10.

Sum the scores.

The scale ranges from 0-30. Higher scores indicate higher self-esteem.

Appendix D

Level of Outness - Categorical variable

Question: I am out to:

Responses: No one, A select few people, Some friends only, Some friends and family,

Almost all friends and family, and All friends and family.

The higher the score, the higher the level of outness.

Appendix E

Butch Lesbian Gender Identity - measured by three categorical variables

1. How would you describe yourself now (check the answer that best applies): Butch (soft butch, hard butch, stone butch, boi-but, etc.), Femme (high femme, stone femme, etc.), Androgynous (kiki), and None of the above.
2. Even if you don't identify as butch or femme, on a butch-femme scale from 0-10 which category most accurately describes your current gender expression? The term butch refers to feeling comfortable with a gender expression style typically considered more masculine, while the term femme refers to feeling comfortable with a gender expression style typically considered more feminine: most butch, quite butch, butch, butch-androgynous, androgynous-but, androgynous, androgynous-femme, femme-androgynous, femme, quite femme, most femme.
3. Do you think your appearance is: Very feminine; A little feminine; Neither masculine or feminine; A little masculine, or Very masculine.