Sexual Orientation and Embodiment:

A phenomenological study exploring the embodiment of sexual orientation identity formation in queer women

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Dedications

I dedicate this thesis to my intensely resilient parents. Your collective beneficent passions for helping others and bringing good into this world are never-ending sources of inspiration.
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ABSTRACT

Sexual Orientation and Embodiment: A phenomenological study exploring sexual orientation identity formation and embodiment in queer women

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The relationship between personal narrative and embodied experience is interactional and tightly interlaced (Brandon, 2014). The purpose of this interpretative phenomenological study was to explore the lived experiences of queer women’s sexual orientation identity formation. Purposeful sampling yielded three participants who participated in semi-structured interviews and movement elicitation. Using an inductive approach, the data was analyzed for essential themes. Thematic analysis was conducted by hand using literature-based codes and lean coding. The thematic codes included identification of embodied recall as both an intercorporeal and metaphorical experience. Findings may be useful to support the importance of the dance/movement therapy practitioner’s attention to sexuality as a necessary component of embodied identity.
Chapter 1. Introduction

The objective of this interpretive phenomenological study is to explore the embodied lived experience of identity formation in queer women. An interpretive phenomenological approach guides the qualitative study. Verbal interviewing in combination with movement elicitation is utilized to evoke the participant’s embodied narrative as it pertains to the individual experience of sexual orientation identity development and formation.

Queer theorists studying embodiment have found that heterosexual expression maintains primacy over other forms of sexual identity expression (Butler, 1990; Sedgewick, 1990). Fahs and Swank (2015) identify the role of embodied experience as an essential component in the formation of marginalized social identities. The relationship between the personal narrative and the embodied narrative is interactional and tightly interlaced (Brandon, 2014). By exploring the theoretical implications of working with embodied stigmatization, Roberts (2016) draws a line between the embodiment of stigmatization and possible outcomes for Dance/Movement Therapy. Through this thesis, the embodied experience of individual sexual orientation identity formation will be explored. The individual narrative in combination with embodied expression through movement elicitation will allow insight into the individual experience of sexual orientation identity formation and the physical experience of intertwined recalled memories.

Identity formation has been examined by philosophers and sociologists alike. Philosophical approaches to identity debate the tension between the role of the mind and body in the formation of identity. Dennett (1992) delves deeply into the formation of self and identifies that the physical body plays a key role in developing the personal narrative. Sociologists Bilodeau and Renn (2005) construct an overview of the literature identifying models and theories outlining Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT) identity development.
Linear models for identifying sexual orientation identity formation and integration comprise the majority of current methods for examining sexual orientation identity formation. Within these linear models of identity formation, integration is a recurrent, culminating, and essential part of identity formation (Cass, 1979, 1984; Coleman, 1982; Troiden, 1989; McCarn & Fassinger, 1996). A linear process of identity formation will guide the data collection process for both narrative and movement data.

The primary model for measuring sexual orientation identity include the Cass Model of Sexual Orientation Identity Formation (Cass 1979, 1984). This model has been reviewed to align with the sexual orientation identity development of gay men (Toomey, Anhalt, & Shramko, 2016). McCarn and Fassinger (1996) expanded the research beyond gay men to include women with considerations for gender identity, race, and cultural background. Fassinger (1998) provided empirical evidence to support use across LGBTQ populations. The Cass model examines sexual orientation identity formation in an individual as well as a group context. Later applications of the model emphasize the importance of internal awareness of identity, interpersonal interaction, and the larger/group or social context as elements of identity formation and integration. The Cass Model of Sexual Orientation Identity Formation will guide the interview and data collection process for both narrative and movement data.

Stage models constructed by Cass (1979, 1984), Fassinger (1991), Savin-Williams (1988, 1990), and Troiden (1979, 1988) identify the “coming-out” process as the resolution of internalized conflict. In these models, the beginning stages LGBT of sexual identity development begin with an individual's use of defenses toward homosexual feelings followed by experimentation and “norming” of behavior. As an individual accepts the feelings, the identity becomes solidified.

Theoretical stage models constructed by Cass (1979, 1984), Fassinger (1991), Savin-Williams (1988, 1990), and Troiden (1979, 1988) identify the “coming-out” process as the resolution of internalized conflict. In these models, the beginning stages LGBT of sexual identity development begin with an individual's use of defenses toward homosexual feelings followed by experimentation and “norming” of behavior. As an individual accepts the feelings, the identity becomes solidified.

Within the dance/movement therapy literature, Brandon (2014) concludes that the embodiment of identity and a person’s narrative sharing of identity cannot be wholly separated. Identity and embodiment simultaneously inform and form each other. Robert’s (2016) examines embodiment as an inevitable part of the historical experience. This is especially true when pertaining to oppressed and marginalized populations. It is noted in Robert’s research that there is a lack of research containing movement analysis to support claims that identity and embodied experience are intertwined, particularly within marginalized populations. Further research in this area would seek to identify the importance of awareness surrounding the intersection of identity and embodiment within marginalized populations to prevent reinforcement of stigmatization through stereotypes.
The objective of this interpretive phenomenological study is to explore the embodied lived experiences of identity formation with queer women. Self-identified women between the ages of 26 and 31 will comprise the sample population. Participants identified as lesbian, gay, queer, or as a sexual minority. The non-clinical population was drawn from the Philadelphia community on Drexel University’s campus and through Philadelphia’s local LGBT centers. Throughout this study, the researcher was engaged in an ongoing reflexive process of documentation and disclosure of personal experience as discovered and experienced throughout the process.
**Researcher Reflexivity**

As a researcher, I am attempting to gain a deeper understanding and describe the experience of sexual orientation identity formation within a small sample population of queer women. I believe that people connect to and experience their identity in a multitude of ways. Through a reflexive process, my aim is to seek a deepened understanding of not only my own experiences but those of my friends, acquaintances, family members, and peer group. I seek to deepen the understanding of identity and the experiences that accompany the process through embodiment.

*Embodiment refers to the experience of living in, perceiving, and experiencing the world from the physical and material place of our bodies* (Fahs & Swank, 2015).

My exploration into embodiment stems from my own understanding and curiosity of the physical experience of existence. As a mover and dancer, my body has been part of my understanding of identity for a nearly two decades. My experiences have shaped a multitude of identities and my understanding of physical experience through movement or somatic studies allows me to reflect on those experiences with an embodied perspective. Through my own understanding of the embodied experience, I became curious about how others perceive their identity, in particular the experience of sexual orientation. Do others give attention to the embodied aspects of identity?

I intend to disclose my personal biases and background in an effort to be transparent. As not only a queer person but also a woman and a person of color, I became interested in the complexity of individual identity and the intersectional elements of systemic social identities that
shape a person’s understanding of self in relation to identity. The inclusion of the physical, embodied understanding of these identities felt like a natural and authentic entry point for exploration of identity.

Throughout the research and data collection process, I engaged in a self-reflective practice through journaling, peer debriefing, and extensive discussions with thesis faculty. I engaged in a process of examining the location of self-examining the multiple facets of my own identity through an Intersectional lens. This approach was taken because Creswell (2007) notes that self-reflective practice will support my ability to provide rich, thick, detail. The data collection through a qualitative process supported by a thorough self-reflection will enrich the essence of the individual experience gathered in the data.

This research does not exist in a vacuum. Early in the process of this research, I was aware that no one element of identity stands alone. My own understanding of identity has been complex and somewhat abstract. I have found the individual’s experience and process of understanding identity is uniquely one’s own. My intersecting social identities have created an understanding of identity that is my own. Intersectional perspectives have helped shaped my understanding of the complexities of identity and the many factors that overlap and integrated to form my understanding of self. Identity is complex and as unique as each individual. Identity is political.

Questions arose throughout the research process guiding and informing the trajectory of my reflection. Are my experiences similar to other individuals? The experiences I found relatable throughout this process were rooted in experiences beyond sexual orientation. Experiences of pride or discrimination based in race were more relatable than the presence or absence of a shared sexual orientation. I found that my feminine gender presentation made many of my
experiences related to sexual orientation different than those of my peers. When collecting data from the participants, there were distinct differences and similarities in experience between the participants and myself based on gender expression. Shared commonalities or distinct differences in childhood experiences, socioeconomic experiences, geography all contributed to a level of understanding or distancing beyond sexual orientation.

What are the challenges to accessing identity as an embodied experience? While identity may be embodied, disembodiment and dissociation as a phenomenon may occur as a result of experience related to, or unrelated to identity itself. Do the physical experiences echo a greater phenomenon present across populations that are traditionally oppressed? I am curious about the greater embodied experience of embodied oppression and the implications for a socially and culturally aware understanding of the physical self.
Chapter 2. Literature Review

The interrelation between identity and embodiment appears in the philosophy, sociology, and traumatology fields. Embodiment will be explored through each of these perspectives followed by an examination of intersectionality as a conceptual framework for the exploration of embodied identity within research. Dance/movement therapy will be explored as a clinical approach to identity work with acknowledgment of identity as an embodied experience within body-based practices.

2.1 Identity as an Embodied Phenomenon in Philosophy

The intersubjective experience or our ability to exist in relation to others is a tangible and bodily phenomenon. (Csordas, 2008). Within the realm of philosophy, the mind and the body are identified as the foundational elements for the development of the sense of self and sense of identity. Within traditional Cartesian dualism, the mind and the body are two independent elements. The magnitude of importance and role both the mind and body play in the formation of identity is debated.

As a key conflict in the theorizing about embodiment, essentialist theorists (that is, those who argue that the body has a biological and scientific reality that is not shaped and contested by social forces) and the social constructionists (those who argue that social and historical contexts influence and impact our bodies) have disagreed about how to understand the body and embodiment (DeLamater & Hyde, 1998).

Within Western dualism, the concept of mind and body are separate. While the mind and body may be informed by each other they function individually. Merleau-Ponty (1962) counters the dualist concept of identity by stating that the conscious mind, the human body, and the
external world are perpetually intertwined in a mutual exchange. This exchange among consciousness, the human body, and the external world is identified by Merleau-Ponty as the Intercorporeal experience or embodiment. Intercorporeality highlights the role of social interaction in the shaping of embodied experience. Weiss (1999) stated, “The experience of being embodied is never a private affair, but is always mediated by our continual interactions with other human and nonhuman bodies” (p. 5). The human experience is that of the embodied experience and the embodied experience is an integration and reflection of the interaction with the surrounding environment. Embodied experiences involving sensory and therefore social interactions, “see”, “touch”, and “hear”, make up the Intercorporeal experience. The intercorporeal experience, the sensory experience is one avenue to the manifestation of the embodied experience within the development of identity.

2.2 Sociological Models for Identity Formation

experimentation and “norming” of behavior. As an individual accepts the feelings, the identity becomes solidified.

Savin-Williams (1990, 1995, 1998) identifies a model consisting of awareness of same-sex attraction, first gay sexual experience, first heterosexual sexual experience occurrence, identifying a gay or bisexual label for one's self, disclosure of sexual orientation to non-family persons, experiencing ones first gay romantic relationship, disclosure of sexual orientation to family member, cultivating a positive identity.

The theoretical model proposed by D’Augelli (1994a, 1994b) is considered a “life-span” approach to sexual orientation identity development. Each of these elements may develop at concurrently, separately and different rates. This model allows for fluidity within identity development and periods of more fixed or more mutable identities. Within this model individuals exit the heterosexual identity, develop a personal LGB identity, develop an LGB social identity, become and LGB offspring, develop and LGB intimacy status, and enter an LGB community.

**2.2.1 Cass’s model for sexual orientation identity formation.** Cass (1979) developed a foundational model for the identification of sexual orientation identity formation based on work with Lesbians and Gays in Australia. This model is based on stages and a progression through stages with the understanding that individuals may not progress through every stage and may stop the process at any point within the progression.

A review of Cass’s (1979) models for identifying stages of sexual orientation identity development by Toomey, Anhalt, and Shramko (2016) found that the Sexual Orientation Identity Development Scale is applicable and consistent when used in a broad sample of latino/latina populations identified as a sexual minority (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender). However, in the study, the population consisted of primarily gay men. The Sexual Orientation Identity
Development Scale was found to be valid within the United States across the Spanish and English languages, and through development from adolescence into adulthood.

2.2.1.1 Identity confusion. In the first stage, discord between and individual’s perceived sense of self and recognition of gay or lesbian thoughts and feelings develops. For individuals, this often becomes a time of "curiosity, confusion or anxiety" as the awareness of conflicting feelings develops (Evans, et. al, 2010, p. 308).

2.2.1.2 Identity comparison. Within the Identity Comparison stage, individuals begin accepting the notion that a gay or lesbian identity exists. In this stage, conflicting feelings about perceived sense of self versus non-heterosexual thoughts and feelings shift toward acknowledgment of sexual orientation within a broader social context. Social awareness gives way to identifying social alienation as a result of the designated sexual orientation. In this stage, feelings of being ostracized or relief may appear (Evans, et. al, 2010).

2.2.1.3 Identity tolerance. Within the identity tolerance stage, individuals begin to acknowledge for themselves that they are probably gay or lesbian. The confusion begins to decrease at this point and personal needs related to a gay or lesbian identity—emotional, social, sexual—begin to become more primary. Within this stage, individuals may begin to reach out to communities that align with their sexual orientation, develop friends and personal contacts, and seek positive role models. If the individual has positive encounters during this stage, it is more likely that they will move toward the acceptance stage of sexual orientation identity.

2.2.1.4 Identity acceptance. As the individual moves toward Identity Acceptance, more contact is made with members of the identified community. However, the individual may still experience incongruence within the self and social alienation as they encounter a lack of acceptance from the heterosexual community. This contributes to the sense that the “inner self is
still tenuous” (Cass, 1996, p. 244). At this stage, the individual may be able to fit in and navigate both the heterosexual and Queer worlds. This may be a stage in which individuals successfully live their lives.

2.2.1.5 **Identity pride.** In this stage, individuals move away from attempts to hide their sexual orientation. There may be a rejection of heterosexual lifestyles, values, and social constructs. In this stage, individuals may engage in activism and become involved in working against oppression. Interpersonal interactions with heterosexual individuals may be influential at this stage. Positive interactions support progress into the identity synthesis stage while negative interactions may inhibit progress and support this individual remaining in the identity pride stage of sexual orientation identity formation.

2.2.1.6 **Identity synthesis.** Within the Identity Synthesis stage, individuals expand a dichotomous view of sexual orientation and begin to accept nuance, differentiated view of heterosexual versus gay or lesbian sexual orientation (Cass, 1996). The individual develops both a personal and social understanding of self and as the sexual orientation identity becomes integrated into the holistic sense of self (Cass, 1996).


2.3 **Developmental Markers with LGBTQ Women**
McCarn & Fassinger (1996) mapped the following model for utilization with a lesbian-identified population for use in counseling and research:

1. **Awareness:** This phase begins with the individual realizing that she may have desires or feelings that are “different from the heterosexual norm and therefore from the predicted self” (McCarn & Fassinger, 1996, p. 522).

2. **Exploration:** The authors hypothesized that women in this phase would have “strong relationships with or feelings about other women or another woman in particular…but will not necessarily involve exploration of sexual behaviors” (McCarn & Fassinger, 1996, p. 522).

3. **Deepening/Commitment:** During this phase, women can identify as bisexual, heterosexual, or as lesbians after exploring their sexual identity. For the emerging lesbian this phase causes her “to recognize her desire for other women as within herself and, with deepening self-awareness, will develop sexual clarity and commitment to herself fulfillment as a sexual being” (McCarn & Fassinger, 1996, p. 523).

4. **Internalization/Synthesis:** In this phase “a woman experiences fuller self-acceptance of desire/love for women as a part of her overall identity” (McCarn & Fassinger, 1996, p. 523). McCarn and Fassinger (1996) acknowledged that although women in this stage may remain “closeted” in different areas of their life, they “believe it is unlikely that one could reach the final phase of individual sexual identity development without beginning to address the group membership questions in the parallel branch of the model” (p. 523).

### 2.4 Embodiment Theories

*Embodiment* refers to the experience of living in, perceiving, and experiencing the world from the physical and material place of our bodies (Fahs & Swank, 2015). Multiple theoretical
approaches across disciplines provide conceptual frameworks for understanding embodiment as related to concept of self, personal and social experience, and trauma as experienced acutely and chronically through social oppression. Johnson (2009) identified the fields of non-verbal communication, traumatology, and somatic psychology as an interdisciplinary conceptual framework for embodiment. Within Feminist Theory Embodiment is identified as a phenomenon influenced by the sociocultural environment, embodiment is an interactional relationship with the narrative self (De Beauvoir, 1949).

The body is involved in developing sense of self and identity (Hanna, 1970; Merleau-Ponty, 1962) and the personal embodied experience is a social experience, (Merleau-Ponty, 1962; Price and Schildrick, 1999; Weiss, 1999). In the field of traumatology, the body is a central component of understanding trauma. The body holds, negotiates, and reveals trauma through the embodied experience (Scaer, 2005; van der Kolk, 1994). Oppression is included and understood within the continuum of trauma as chronic trauma (Burstow, 2003). Within somatic psychology, the body and its experiences become an access point for psychotherapeutic intervention and integration of embodied experience into consciousness (Hartley, 2004).

2.5 Embodiment and Trauma

2.5.1 Stigmatization and embodiment within marginalized populations. By exploring the theoretical implications of working with embodied stigmatization, Roberts draws a line between the embodiment of oppression and the possible outcomes for Dance/movement therapy. Roberts theorizes that othering occurs when hidden stigmas have become internalized. This internalization could manifest as disembodiment and disconnection from self. Through Dance/movement therapy, exploring the concealed stigma in a clinical and explorative setting
would ultimately give clients a tool to expand personal embodiment, relational embodiment, and movement repertoire (Roberts, 2016).

2.5.2 Embodied oppressions and chronic trauma. The intersection of trauma and oppression can be understood when oppression falls on the trauma continuum as chronic trauma (Burstow, 2003). In a review of the scholarly work on sexual identity performance and the gendered implications, social identity, and stigmatized bodies as they relate to embodiment, Fahs and Swank (2015) connected feminist theory literature to the mind and body expanding the argument for embodiment as a conceptual framework compatible with the political implications of marginalized identities. In addition, considerations were made for intersectional relationships of race, gender, gender identity, class, and sexuality citing Bordo (1993), Butler (1990), Irigary (1985), and Wittig (1992).

Burstow (2003) draws explicit connections between trauma and oppression examining the transgenerational trauma and community trauma within marginalized groups. Through narrative somatic inquiry, the study explores the somatic and embodied experiences of individuals identifying as oppressed. The study explores how participants embody previous traumas, how oppressions affect the bodily relationship and how the relationship between social oppressions and embodiment. The results show a relationship between the somatic effects of trauma and the embodied relationship to oppression. Burstow argues that the oppressed populations are linked to psychological repercussions that occur as a result of chronic, generational trauma. “The point is oppressed people are routinely worn down by the insidious trauma in living day after day in a sexist, racist, classist, homophobic, and ableist society” (Burstow, 2003, p.1296).
2.5.3 Somatic experience of trauma. In parallel with Merleau-Ponty’s view that consciousness, body, and world cannot be separated, van der Kolk (1994) argued that the trauma of oppression, chronic trauma, and the embodied experience cannot be separated. Within the work of traumatology, van der Kolk examines somatization, or the conversion of mental health symptoms into physical symptoms, as a coping mechanism of trauma (van der Kolk, 1996). Connections between psychological distress and physical expression of the distress may develop. Physical manifestations of trauma may appear somatically as a constriction of movement within the body, elevated startle responses and increased somatization, and a somatic recall of trauma experiences (Scaer, 2000).

2.6 Embodiment and the LGBTQ Community

2.6.1 The body is political. Tolman, Bowman, & Fahs (2014) define embodiment as “the experience of living in, perceiving, and experiencing the world from the very specific location of our bodies” (p. 761). They further dissect the psychological and social approaches to embodiment-- the first, being embodied as the act of experiencing and awareness of feelings and sensations and the second, embodying the social, as the social and historical events that mesh with our bodies. The research focuses primarily on sexual-minority women’s relationships to and within a social world rather than interpersonal relationship. It is noted that this is likely due to bias in research toward male same-sex sexuality.

2.6.2 Embodied experience is a social experience. Research in embodiment theories and has told us that social experiences have a reciprocal relationship with embodied experiences (Price and Shildrick, 1999; Weiss 1999). The integration of consciousness, the human body, and external world creates the framework for the Intercorporeal understanding of embodiment (Merleau-Ponty, 1962). It is through the interaction and integration of the self with the world that
embodiment inherently becomes a social exchange. The external world encompasses social, political and environmental components each in a constant exchange with an individual’s human experience.

Walsh (2015) took the position of a marginalized researcher in order to reveal flaws in how biases and marginalization are perceived in academia. Walsh (2015) challenged the assumption that marginalized experience produces bias, by differentiating bias born of privilege from the importance of marginalized experience as a source of information in understanding certain phenomena. Walsh identified the possibility for expanding the understanding feminism and intersectionality as a tool to expand the possibilities present in academic research.

2.7 Embodiment and Dance/Movement Therapy

Brandon (2014) explored the connection between embodiment and identity by delving into the relationship between the personal narrative and identity development. Brandon draws upon Dennett’s (1991) work to establish a relationship the body as a container for one’s self-concept and the inherently personal and therefore embodied nature of self-concept and identity. Robert’s (2016) made a connection to the importance of the personal narrative by arguing embodiment as an inevitable part of historical experience, particularly among socially stigmatized populations. For individuals who identify with one or more identities historically considered marginalized, the ability to interact with the embodiment of their narrative may be an avenue for deepening the understanding of experience and of personal identity.

Allegranti (2009) explored identity from a movement perspective. The participants, primarily dance/movement therapists, dancers, and choreographers, moved first mapping their experiences and identities with their bodies. They later reflected on their movements and experiences. In the research, Allegranti (2009) noted that the bodies were shaped by the language
and the language both the researcher and participants used shaped the bodies. This work argues for movement as a research tool, framework, and possible treatment option for exploration of identity.

Goodill and Schelly Hill (2016) have discussed movement as a tool for enriching recall, memory, and dialogue in qualitative research. In the effort to understand the embodied experience, the use of the body and movement elicitation is integral to gather the depth of body-based sensory memory.

Theoretical applications for working with individuals who may be embodying social stigmatizations involve destructing the hierarchical power dynamics that appear when one is stigmatized. Through the process of stigmatization, an individual becomes “othered.” In dance movement therapy, the embodiment of this may be present. It becomes the role of the therapist to be aware of the effects of hierarchical “othering” in order to avoid reinforcement of the initial embodied stigmatization. Roberts (2016) identified the gap between theory, research, and practice and encouraged research into the clinical application with the use of movement analysis.

2.8 Intersectionality as a Conceptual Framework

2.8.1 Theory. Crenshaw (1989) introduced intersectionality as a theoretical framework for understanding how systems of oppression interact, overlap and influence each other. The layering of multiple marginalized identities and overlap of oppressed populations can be examined through an intersectional lens.

Choo and Ferree (2010) dissect intersectionality as a conceptual framework within research. Attention is given to person, group, and system while examining the importance of placing the marginalized, particularly multiply-marginalized, person, group, or perspective at the center of the research. This framework gives attention to intersecting groups of power and
privilege on a systemic level historically, within institutional research, and in a greater social context.

The application of intersectionality as a theoretical research framework (Cole, 2009) reviews the role of an intersectional approach in data analysis and asks the researcher to answer three questions in regards to subject selection, power differential, and personal biases—“Who is included in this category? What role does social inequality play? What are the similarities?”—in order to contextualize the analysis from an intersectional lens.

2.8.2 Intersectionality as theory, paradigm, and method. Intersectionality has been reviewed in-depth as a theoretical framework, paradigm, and method by Berger and Guidroz (2009), Choo and Ferree (2010), Few-Demo (2014), Hancock (2007), and May (2015). Crenshaw (1989) is credited with developing the first intersectional theoretical framework. Collins (2015) defined intersectionality as,

the idea that multiple identities intersect to create a whole that is different from the component identities. These identities that can intersect include gender, race, social class, ethnicity, nationality, sexual orientation, religion, age, mental disability, physical disability, mental illness, and physical illness as well as other forms of identity. (p. 2).

Hancock (2007) and McCall (2005) outlined intersectionality as its own methodological research paradigm. As a methodological paradigm, research is process centered and moves away from utilizing categories as absolutes. As a research methodology, intersectionality seeks an intercategorical approach instead.

The theoretical approach to intersectionality is described by Few-Demo (2014) as a continuation of critical race feminist theories and racial/ethnic feminism. These fields are constantly expanding and changing. Within research, Few-Demo (2015) identifies the
intersectional theoretical approach as validation for variable control. For example, demographic markers or personal identifiers may be grounds for identifying inclusionary and exclusionary criteria based on the demographics of a population.

2.8.3 Intersectional perspective in research. Hancock (2007) approaches intersectionality as a paradigmatic approach to inclusivity and enrichment in data collection. This approach allows research to answer new questions and stimulate political change. Six basic assumptions are made when approaching intersectionality as a normative and empirical paradigm (Hancock, 2007):

1. More than one category of difference (e.g., race, gender, class) plays a role in examinations of complex political problems and processes such as persistent poverty, civil war, human rights abuses and democratic transitions.

2. While these various categories of difference should be equally attended to in research, the relationship among the categories is an open empirical question. For example, while race and gender are commonly analyzed together, to assume that race and gender play equal roles in all political contexts, or to assume that they are mutually independent variables that can be added together to comprehensively analyze a research question, violates the normative claim of intersectionality that intersections of these categories are more than the sum of their parts.

3. Categories of difference are conceptualized as dynamic productions of individual and institutional factors. Such categories are simultaneously contested and enforced at the individual and institutional levels of analysis. Intersectionality research demands attentiveness to these facts.

4. Each category of difference has within-group diversity that sheds light on the way we
think of groups as actors in politics and on the potential outcomes of any particular political intervention.

5. An intersectional research project examines categories at multiple levels of analyses — not simply by adding together mutually exclusive analyses of the individual and institutional levels but by means of an integrative analysis of the interaction between the individual and institutional levels of the research question.

6. Intersectionality’s existence as a normative and empirical paradigm requires attention to both empirical and theoretical aspects of the research question. The conventional wisdom among intersectionality scholars considers multiple methods necessary and sufficient. (p.251)

For the purposes of this study, Intersectionality will be utilized as a framework to expand the understanding of the complexities of human embodied experience and lived identity.

2.8.4 Complexity of Identity. Irigary (1985) examines the complexity of identity by challenging the binary and offering multiplicity as a conceptual framework within which identity can be expressed, observed, and explored. An expanded perspective beyond dualism can be helpful in examining layers of identity, and intersecting factors contributing to identity development. Self-awareness is a critical component of cultural competency within the clinical setting (Plummer, 2010).

2.9 Interpretative Phenomenology

A phenomenological approach to research seeks to gather information describing the lived experience of a phenomenon (Creswell, 2007). An interpretative phenomenological approach allows the researcher to gather data and develop themes describing the essence of the
participants’ lived experience while allowing the participant experience to guide the data collection process. When exploring

Phenomenological methodologies have been used to gather information about the individual’s lived experience within LGBTQ populations. It is noted that an individual’s approach to “being out” may be significantly influenced by generation and chronological age. Plummer (2010) identifies variance in the ways LGBTQ individuals acknowledge and assume their identities based on historical and generational experiences in a phenomenological study exploring the individual experience of “being out” across generation. In a thematic analysis of cross-generation coming out narratives in people identifying as part of the lesbian, gay or bisexual (LGB) communities. Dunlap (2014) examines themes that appear surrounding risk versus reward, and intellectualizing and rationalizing versus feeling the coming out process. Generationally themes distinguishing five distinct cohorts ranging in age from 18 to 74 appeared across the population sample. These distinctions indicated differences in generational experience as related to the coming out process and development of identity.
Chapter 3. Methodology

This study examines only a snapshot of a larger picture. The participants in this study are as diverse as they are similar and their narratives reflect the multiplicity of each experience of existence. In addition to providing a sample of individual experience, I hope to bring awareness to the experiences of individuals who I did not see represented in the materials presented in my graduate coursework.

Only by tackling head-on the distorting impact of kyriarchal power can a privileged scientist produce objective material; we must contextualize our knowledge by declaring our bias and working to extinguish it. (Walsh, 2015, p. 63)

3.1 Design of the Study

This study was an interpretive phenomenological study exploring the lived experiences of the embodiment of sexual orientation identity formation within self-identified queer women. Phenomenological studies intend to identify the essence of the lived experience (Creswell, 2007). In this section, the methods for data collection and the process of data analysis are explained further. The process of qualitative research is inherently interpretative and exploratory (Creswell, 2013). This allows the researcher to work within a conceptual framework to understand the nuances of an individual’s feelings, thoughts, and sensations contribute to the unique lived experience.

3.2 Location of Study

The study was completed in the Dance/Movement Therapy Research Lab housed within the Creative Arts Therapies Department at Drexel University’s Center City campus. The
interviews were conducted in a movement studio space used for Dance/movement therapy sessions research. The space was set up much like a dance studio with a large mirror on one end of the room. The mirror was covered by a curtain throughout the interview process. Two chairs were set up on one side of the room and remained in the space throughout the interview.

3.3 Time Period for Study

This time period for this study was April 2017 until April 2018. IRB permission was granted to conduct this study on Interviews were conducted over a two-month period. The interviews ranged from 60-90 minutes.

3.4 Enrollment Information

Four adult participants who identified as queer women were recruited for this study. Participant’s identified their sexual orientation as gay, lesbian, and queer. Two participants were White, and one participant identified as Hispanic. The participants ranged in age from 26 to 31 years of age.

3.5 Subject Type

All participants involved in this study were adult volunteers who self-selected based on the inclusion and exclusion criteria listed on the recruitment flyers. This study recruited individuals who identified as female and as queer, a sexual minority, or a member of the LGBTQ community. Individuals were recruited from a university campus within a major metropolitan area. The subject group is likely a small sample size and representative of a larger group within the same age range and metropolitan area.

3.6 Subject Source

Participants were recruited through flyers posted on Drexel University’s Main Campus, Center City campus, Queen Lane campus, and from a local LGBT community center.
3.7 Recruitment

Recruitment flyers were posted on Drexel University’s Main, Center City, and Queen Lane campus. Recruitment flyers were also posted at a local community LGBT community center. A copy of the recruitment flyer can be found in Appendix A. Five people expressed interest in participating in the study via email. Five individuals were screened via telephone. Initial phone screening interviews were scheduled with the purpose of informing individuals of the purpose, procedure of the study, and confirming eligibility for study participation. Four individuals completed a live verbal interview and three participants were successfully recorded and interviews were used for data collection. A copy of the phone interview script can be found in Appendix B. Following the initial interview, participants were asked if they would like to schedule participation in the study at that time or at a later date. All participants confirmed interest in the study and scheduled their participation during the initial interview.

3.8 Subject Inclusion Criteria

Participants for this study self-selected based on inclusion and exclusion criteria presented on the recruitment flyer. Participants were required to be at least 19 years of age, self-identify as queer women, speak and read the English language fluently, be willing to participate in a movement elicitation activity, and be willing to discuss sexual orientation and identity development.

3.9 Subject Exclusion Criteria

Participants for this study self-excluded if they identified as (a) heterosexual; (b) students, faculty or staff of the Drexel University Creative Arts Therapies Department; (c) reporting current psychiatric disorders, (d) or reporting being pregnant.

3.10 Investigational Methods and Procedures
3.10.1 Movement elicitation

Within this study, movement elicitation is used as a tool to awaken the bodily experience and deepen the information accessed through verbal dialogue. Verbal dialogue and nonverbal, communicative gestures often appear together. DuNann Winter (1992) identifies the connection between the two noting that movement allows speakers to focus and clarify meaning while translating the internal though process into speech. The restriction of movement interrupts the cognitive process turning though into organized, meaningful verbal articulations. Goodill and Schelly Hill (2016) have discussed movement as a tool for enriching recall, memory, and dialogue in qualitative research. In the effort to understand the embodied experience, the use of the body and movement elicitation is integral to gather the depth of body-based sensory memory.

The movement elicitation portion of the interview began with the student researcher leading the participant through a preparatory warm-up. The warm-up allowed the participant to begin connecting to their body through attention to their breath followed by verbal prompts to expand the breath into other areas of the body. The student researcher supported the participant by demonstrating movement expansion into the limbs, spine, neck, and head. The participants were then guided into walking around the room with acknowledgment given to any sensory (temperature, pressure, sound, light) information experienced. The student researcher then prompted for movements or gestures from the participants that symbolize or represent each of the stages of identity.

1. Identity confusion,
2. Identity comparison,
3. Identity tolerance,
4. Identity acceptance,
Each gesture prompt aligns with one stage of identity formation outlined by Cass (1979, 1984, 1990). Participants were asked to crystallize each gesture through practice and repetition before moving on to the next. Throughout the movement process, the participant was asked to notice any sensations or images. To close the movement elicitation portion of the study, participants wrote down words or images to help them recall the gesture at a later point during the interview process.

3.10.2 Verbal interview. Following the Movement Elicitation prompt, I interviewed each participant individually for an average of 45 minutes. Each interview was transcribed and data from the interview was organized into themes. The full form of the interview guide can be found in Appendix D.

3.11 Data Collection

3.11.1 Informed consent. I provided each participant with a copy of the informed consent form, found in Appendix F. I reviewed all parts of the informed consent form with each participant. Each participant was informed that they may discontinue the study at any point for any reason. Participants were informed that mild emotional discomfort or distress may be experienced due to the subject nature.

In each interview, I reviewed the purpose of the study and the procedures that would take place during the interview session. Participants were informed that they would be moving and asked to recall movement. Participants were informed that they would be digitally audio recorded and the audio recording would be stored until the data transcription process was complete. After which, the audio data would be destroyed.
All documents containing participant information reference participants as “Participant 1-5.” Each participant received one copy of the informed consent form.

3.11.2 Verbal interview. The Movement Elicitation prompt was used to introduce each stage of identity development and recalled by each participant before answering the questions corresponding to that particular stage.

3.12 Data Analysis

The following procedure was used for the data analysis process:

1) engage in an epoche with the intention of identifying biases, prejudices, and preconceptions surrounding the topic of study to encourage a forthright interview experience

2) collect data through a semi-structured interview, audio recording, and movement elicitation

3) transcribe the interviews by hand

4) engage in a naïve reading of the transcript to become familiar with content

5) gather memos, identify key quotes, and engage in lean coding

6) organize themes to support the identification of interrelationships of the interpretive discussion

7) write and interpretive discussion

Important themes were drawn from the data through the use of an inductive approach. Following a naïve reading of transcripts, open coding was used to identify initial themes. Literature-based themes were drawn from initial open coding and emergent trends were extracted from the data. These trends were identified, coded and placed under the literature-based themes as sub themes.
Emergent themes were coded as they appeared in order to identify commonalities, similarities, patterns, and outliers.

Data were compared against the literature based themes. Data saturation may not have been reached due to time constraints and participant response rate. Data collection ended when recurrent themes began to develop among participants. A longer study period and increased sample size may yield saturation of data.

### 3.13 Operational Terms and Concepts

**Cisgender:** A term used to describe a person whose gender identity aligns with those typically associated with the sex assigned to them at birth. (Human Rights Campaign, 2017)

**Closeted:** Describes an LGBTQ person who has not disclosed their sexual orientation or gender identity. (Human Rights Campaign, 2017)

**Coming out:** The process in which a person first acknowledges, accepts and appreciates his or her sexual orientation or gender identity and begins to share that with others (Human Rights Campaign, 2017)

**Dance/Movement Therapy (DMT):** the psychotherapeutic use of movement to promote emotional, social, cognitive and physical integration of the individual (American Dance Therapy Association, 2017)

**Embodiment:** the sensory related elements experienced by the body during a specific event or memory.

**Gender expression:** External appearance of one's gender identity, usually expressed through behavior, clothing, haircut or voice, and which may or may not conform to socially defined behaviors and characteristics typically associated with being either masculine or feminine (Human Rights Campaign, 2017)
Gender identity: One’s innermost concept of self as male, female, a blend of both or neither – how individuals perceive themselves and what they call themselves. One's gender identity can be the same or different from their sex assigned at birth (Human Rights Campaign, 2017)

LGB: an acronym for “Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual”

LGBTQ: an acronym for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer/Questioning

Movement Elicitation: a movement tool for enriching recall, memory, and dialogue in qualitative research (Goodill and Schelly Hill, 2016).

Queer: A term people often use to express fluid identities and orientations. Often used interchangeably with "LGBTQ" (Human Rights Campaign, 2017)

Sexual orientation: An inherent or immutable enduring emotional, romantic or sexual attraction to other people (Human Rights Campaign, 2017)

3.14 Possible Risks and Discomfort to the Subjects

This study involved minimal risk to the subjects in the form of possible discomfort arising while sharing personal information or engaging in movement. There were minimal risks to confidentiality and anonymity, in that although privacy and confidentiality security measures were taken they are not considered absolutely fail-safe.

Participants were made aware of the possibility of discomfort from sharing personal information and engaging in movement. The space was made safe for movement by removing any obstructions or potential trip hazards. Participants were encouraged to move within a range that felt comfortable.

With regard to confidentiality, all interviews were recorded on an encrypted device owned by the College of Nursing and Health Professions. After transcription, all recordings were
deleted. Each participant was assigned a participant identification number. Transcriptions de-
identified all participants by using pseudonyms and eliminating personal identifier information.
The files containing the transcriptions were kept in a password-protected computer for the
duration of the study and files were copied onto an encrypted Department of Creative Arts
Therapies drive for storage. Files were deleted from the password protected computer. All hard
copies of consent documents were stored separately in a locked department file cabinet.
Chapter 4. Results

What is the embodied lived experience of identity formation in queer women? The major findings were a discovery that the primary modes of sensory recall happened through two modes: recall of intercorporeal experience, or embodied social interactions, and through Metaphorical Embodiment. Within the intercorporeal experience, individual’s sensory memories appeared as seeing/being seen, touch, and experiencing being an insider or outsider. Metaphorical Embodiment was disseminated into five categories of description: impact, distancing, imploding/constricting, expanding, and feeling embodied/disembodied. The theme of “Comfort vs. Discomfort” was pervasive across both the Intercorporeal experience and embodied metaphor descriptions.

4.1 Description of Participants

Participants were curious about the nature of the study, my intention for pursuing this research topic, and inquired about my personal identifiers. Disclosure of my own queer identity appeared important to the interview process and level of disclosure with which participants engaged. For two participants sharing information about race, queries about how I identified occurred before participants disclosed additional information about their racial background, and experiences relating to race. All participants identified their gender expression as a separated though the related element of their sexual orientation identity development. Media influence was a notable feature in each participant’s interview. The visibility of queer individuals and their relationships portrayed within the media was a common thread among all three individuals.

4.1.1 Participant 1. Participant 1 is a White 31-year-old cisgender woman identifying as “queer” or “lesbian.” She is a tall confident individual. Participant 1 shared that she feels “comfortable dressing in masculine clothes” and arrived at the interview in a patterned button-
down shirt, khaki pants, dress shoes and a long necklace. Participant 1 appeared open, had an expressive demeanor and utilized a broad range of inflection and volume throughout the interview. She appeared to enjoy sharing her story, was jovial, joked frequently, and seemed comfortable expressing herself with deep, full-bodied laughter.

Participant 1 reported formally coming out at age 22 and again at age 25 identifying first becoming aware of a possible difference in her sexual orientation in middle school. Participant 1 noted that her exploration into different expressions of gender developed at a very young age modeling after older male siblings. The gender expression part of her identity was met with some resistance from her immediate family. When asked about her family’s reaction to her sexual orientation, Participant 1 shared that her gender expression caused more tension with her family. “I had to accept that I enjoy wearing men’s clothes more and that was after I realized I was a lesbian I had to go through a different period of acceptance. It’s so crazy how such little things can change how you feel but it’s also crazy that that was the thing that was the hardest for my family to accept.” For Participant 1 gender expression and racial background were interwoven into the narrative of her sexual orientation identity development. Both of these other components of identity appeared at different points during the interview. The LGBTQ community and her ability to engage with others within the community also appeared to be a significant part of her story.

When describing how she felt about her identity at the time of the interview, Participant 1 stated “I feel more confident than I ever did before” as a statement that exhibited ownership of her identity.

4.1.2 Participant 2. Participant 2 is a White 27-year-old cisgender woman. When asked how she identified her sexual orientation, Participant 2 stated that she identified as “gay or
Participant 2 arrived to the interview dressed in a manner that was masculine of center. She wore glasses, had a short, cropped haircut and was dressed in business casual attire. Participant 2 was occasionally soft spoken, reflective, and appeared aware that discussion of her sexual orientation identity was somewhat anxiety provoking for her. She seemed fairly in tune with her physical self and was easily able to recall sensory information related to her memories and disclosures. “When I first realized I was gay it was kind of just an exploration and exciting.”

Participant 2 identified multiple areas of her life in which her sexual orientation caused some distress. Participant 2 disclosed tension between her identity and certain areas of her life. The workplace, for example, is a place in which she identified not disclosing her sexual orientation or openly discuss her identity with coworkers.

Participant 2 reflected frequently on her college experience as a formative time period in her identity development. Though she recalls becoming aware of her desire to be in a queer relationship at a slightly younger age. Like other participants, media influence played a role in cultivating an awareness and understanding of her sexuality. Participant 2 recalled an initial memory of recognizing a relational aspect of her sexual orientation identity. “I first realized that a female relationship was something that I wanted and was attracted to. It just seemed right for me. It was the fit I had never really experienced before with any media that I had been watching.”

When asked to reflect on how Participant 2 related to her identity at the time of the interview, she stated, “I’m proud of being gay but I’m not comfortable telling the whole world I’m gay.

4.1.3 Participant 3. Participant 3 is a Hispanic 26-year-old femme-identifying cisgender woman. Participant 3 is petite woman who speaks reflectively and laughs sparingly. She has long
brown hair and bright eyes and arrived for the interview professionally dressed wearing a lightly colored button down, black slacks, black pumps, and lipstick. She uses the identifiers “gay” or “lesbian” to describe her sexuality. Participant 3 identified her coming out process as ongoing, though she first recalls coming out at age 22. Participant 3 identified first becoming aware of her attraction toward girls in elementary school. When asked to describe this first experience, Participant 3 shared “The girls kind of sparkled like jewels and all the boys faded in the distance.”

Familial and social acceptance were notable factors in Participant 3’s coming out process. She identified feeling “isolated” from peer groups. Like the other individuals, Participant 3’s gender expression was important to her discussion of identity. Participant 3 identified as being “very feminine” and she noted that this element of her identity allowed her to “pass” as heterosexual. Participant 3 noted there was some conflict between her desire appear dress and express herself in a feminine manner and “appearing straight” while simultaneously identifying as a gay woman. She stated, “I’m almost invisible to not only my community but to straight people too.” Participant 3 frequently referred to her “turbulent childhood” as an element that contributed to shaping her identity. Frequent family relocations and limited familial support appeared throughout her narrative. Another notable element of Participant 3’s background appeared in her description of classmates and peers. She was a racial minority throughout most of her childhood and attended schools with White students who were of a much higher socio-economic status contributing her feeling “complete social isolation.”

4.1.4 Participant 4.

Data loss due to an equipment error limited the data collection from a fourth participant. Immediately following the interview, the researcher gathered data from memory and created a
memo recounting overarching themes of Participant 4’s narrative. While this data was not included in the final thematic development a triangulation of the memo data collected was performed by cross-referencing the collected data against the literature and themes present within the data collected from the three other participants.

Participant 4 is an African-American cis-gender woman. She primarily uses the identifiers “gay” or “lesbian” to describe her sexuality though noted emphatically that the labels were somewhat insignificant. Participant 4 presented somewhat masculine of center and acknowledged her gender presentation as an important piece of her understanding of the complexity of her identity. Elements of her discussion were echoed by other participants. The intersection of gender expression, gender identity, and race appeared in the general themes of Participant 4’s interview. Like other participants, there was overlap of multiple identities within her experience. Participant 4 also articulated the possibility of primacy of other identities maintaining primacy of sexual orientation as an individual’s identity narrative.

In the context of intersectional identities, Participant 4 articulated the intricacies of her intersecting identities at multiple points throughout the interview. She shared her awareness of the complex relationship between gender expression and gender identification, citing instances when she was perceived differently by men based on her disclosure and societal perception. Participant 4 appeared aware of her identity in ways that other participants were also able to access. Participant 4 gave attention to space and temperature. She frequently discussed feeling comfortable or uncomfortable, safe or unsafe, and was able to clearly articulate specific feelings and physical sensations, such as tightness, tingliness, heat, and tension.
Table 1: Participant Descriptions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Race</th>
<th>Education</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>31</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Pursuing Master’s</td>
<td>Cisgender woman, “masculine of center”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Degree</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Master’s Degree</td>
<td>Cisgender woman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26</td>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>Bachelor’s Degree</td>
<td>Femme-identifying cisgender woman</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.2 Themes

Within the data, two versions of embodiment appeared in the participant’s narratives. Participants recalled sensory memories of touch, sight, sound. This recall of sensory information will be described as the intercorporeal experience, or the embodiment of social experience and interaction. The second way participants shared sensory data was through metaphor. Participants identified embodied experiences through descriptive language using metaphor, colloquial idiomatic expressions, and other linguistic comparisons to describe both physical and emotional sensation.

The sexual orientation identity development model served as a means to examine the embodied experience over a period of time and at different points of the coming out process.
4.2.1 Metaphorical Embodiment

Participants used the metaphorical language of the body to describe feeling, emotions, sensations. These were primarily in describing sexual orientation itself or the personal experience of relating to identity development. All participants used metaphor in the descriptive retelling of their experience. Participants’ metaphors fell into five categories: Impact, Distancing, Imploding/Constricting, Expanding, and the experience of being Embodied or Disembodied. Each describing an individual’s relationship to their sexual orientation, their understanding of self in relation to the larger societal categorization, or a description of feelings developing out of an experience related to a stage of sexual orientation identity formation.

Figure 1: Metaphorical Embodiment Themes
The following themes appeared consistently across all three participants at multiple points in the sexual orientation developmental stages.

4.2.1.1 Impact. Impact appeared most frequently with one’s initial awareness, revelations, and interpersonal interactions. Within the coming out process, impact appeared as a frequently occurring embodied expression. Participants abstracted their awareness of and reactions to their sexual orientation identity through the descriptions of impact. Impact metaphors appeared primarily when Participants recalled moments of surprise, during realizations and moments of clarification.

Participant 1 expressed the experience of sexual orientation identity formation using impact metaphor to describe her relationship with the greater LGBT community within her metropolitan area. Participant 1 recalled the conflicting experience with her community as she shared, “The community has built me up, but also torn me down.” In Participant 2’s description of her sexual orientation embodiment included taking action. When describing her initial acceptance of the term “gay” as a label, Participant 2 stated, “It was served up, I just had to hit it.” She acknowledged her opportunity to take action in defining her identity for herself.

In the beginning stages of identity formation, Participant 3 used multiple phrases describing her identity as a force that impacted her greatly. In the initial stage of Identity Confusion, the participant recalled her first awareness of her identity by stating, “It hit me like a ton of bricks.” The descriptions imply weight and the possibility for pain. Participant 3 continues to describe her experiences in coming to terms with her sexual orientation identity in the metaphorical embodiment of impact. Throughout the first three sexual orientation identity formation stages, Participant 3 used language that placed her on the receiving end of a description of impact. When describing her initial comparison of identity to her peer in the
Identity Comparison stage, she expressed “It’s like I took a hit” and “It hit me really hard.” Participant 3 is consistent in her abstract expression of sexual orientation as a force upon her body as she recalls her experiences of coming to terms with her identity in the Identity Tolerance stage, “It hit me in the face really hard that day,” and once again “It hit me really hard.”

Participants appeared to either perform the action of “impact” or receive the action. NO participant was recorded as expressing both the performance and receipt of a metaphorical embodiment of “impact.”

4.2.1.2 Distancing/immersion. Participants used distancing metaphors to describe their personal interaction with sexual orientation as an identity and as a community. Participant 1 frequently spoke of her sexual orientation in relation to her experience of being part of the greater LGBTQ community. Within these descriptions, she used metaphors that allowed her to place herself within the community and in physically descriptive way remove herself from the community as needed. Participant 1 expressed a balancing of how close or removed she would allow herself to be to her LGBTQ community.

For Participant 1 the theme of distancing/immersion appeared in her discussion of relation of self to other. This manifested in her community involvement and investment. She described, “I would totally immerse myself in anything that was lesbian related or queer related,” and “I was immersing myself, then I stepped back from it.” Her involvement paralleled her coming out process and appeared in her description of the Identity Pride stage of development. Participant 1 discussed the act of constant give and take of her physical self and abilities. This allowed her to be part of the community and contributed to a personal balance of self and understanding. When describing her initial immersion into the LGBTQ community, Participant 1 described herself by saying, “When I do things, I do things all in. I struggle with just doing
things a little bit so just for me to attend one [event] wasn’t enough. Then I had to work [the event], then I had to work all the queer events, and then I wanted to volunteer for the LGBT community center.” When later asked how she has changed or grown, she responded by identifying a distancing of herself literally and metaphorically, “I think being so heavily immersed in the community was a lot to actively pursue, I took a step back.”

Participant 2 used the metaphorical embodiment of distance to describe her relationship to her sexual orientation identity specifically in the process of coming out to other individuals. “I didn’t have to bring it to the forefront, I had assistance.” For Participant 2 the metaphorical distance from her identity appeared in the personal realm. In this case, she utilized the imagery of “having assistance” to in the act of bringing awareness her sexual orientation identity “to the forefront” of her identity. Participant 2 identified this as an important part of her coming out process by identifying how the assistance of others and the distance of self from identity in the disclosure of her sexual orientation was a positive experience. This participant also identified the most difficult areas of self-disclosure as the ones she had to deliver directly and personally. Simultaneously she identified this happening with the “important people” in her life such as her parents, and lifelong friends. There was no “assistance” in her disclosures to these and the intimacy of self-identification and disclosure for her was a closely personal experience from which she appeared to desire distance.

Participant 3 used distancing to describe her ability to acknowledge her identity and in understanding of her identity as a factor that distanced her form her peers. When discussing the beginning stages of her awareness of her own sexual orientation Participant 3 recalled that she desired distance from addressing her identity but encountered difficulty in achieving that distance. Participant 3 said, “I shoved it back and it resurfaced” in her descriptions of an early
awareness of sexual orientation identity. Participant 3 also discussed isolation as something she experienced throughout the process of identity development. In addition to intrapersonal distancing from her sexual orientation identity, Participant 3 described the interpersonal distancing she felt through social isolation by her peers.

“I remember I went to pick out my seat and the desks were sectioned into groups. Like, group tables. And I sat, I took a table toward the back of the classroom, and as every student filed in they all sat with each other and I sat completely alone, no one sat with me. So that whole semester I sat by myself and that was such a powerful reminder that not only am I not accepted, I'm also different and how that ties together. That was a very difficult time period in my life because it was so evident.”

“Um, there were a lot of things in my life at that time that made me feel very isolated. It wasn't just my sexuality at that point. I was in a very, in high school, I suppose the one year that I realized I was gay was also the year that I went through a lot of transition in regards to my living situation um. I went to three different high schools in one year, sophomore year, and that was also the year that I realized I was gay and there was just so much change and other obstacles that I constantly felt isolated and outcast.”

“I felt completely isolated socially during that high school period of time. I was the new kid, also the weird kid, also the only minority in my class. I went form one school [to another] and the school I ended in was a very affluent white school and there was only me and another Hispanic in our whole senior class and not only was I dealing with the fact that I'm gay but also that I'm the only person of color in my class when everyone else is white.”

It became evident that the theme of Distancing/immersion was prominent in Participant 3’s experience. This intrapersonal and interpersonal distancing from sexual orientation identity is
interesting to consider when described as occurring in tandem with her personal experience of constant geographical relocation throughout the duration of her identity development.

**4.2.1.3 Imploding/constricting.** Imploding and constricting metaphor appeared when participant began to describe embodiment interwoven with self-awareness and emotion. These descriptions accompanied feelings of confusion, not feeling accepted, feeling as though one does not belong nervousness, and apprehension. Participants described feelings of “getting smaller,” feeling constricted, and inverting, and retreating.

Participant 1 described how she felt before coming to understand her identity in a broad way. As part of her relating to her experiences of identity tolerance, Participant 1 reflected on the process of her sexual orientation identity development, “I felt like I had to be in a box.” In describing the beginning stages of her identity development and understanding of her identity she recalled that she “was really in the closet” using more imagery of being confined and constricted to a defined space in describing both her self-view and view in relation to others.

Participant 2 described the experiences while in the identity tolerance stage of identity development by sharing, “I felt like I was caving in on myself.” Participant 2 described her understanding of her identity in a social context when describing her acceptance of the label “gay.” She shared “I felt like I was in a category that was small and to itself.” Consistent with the enclosing imagery and the imploding/constricting theme.

**4.2.1.4 Expanding.** Expanding appeared within the description of the identity synthesis stage for all three participants. Individuals used expressions of growing, expanding and taking up space to describe the essence of their identity experience at the time of the interview. Participant 1 described her transition into understanding her understanding of her sexual orientation identity on a holistic level, “I felt so open-minded.” She identified “letting go of
other people’s opinions” as she moved toward a more integrated understanding of herself and her identity.

Participant 2 described expanding in a somewhat different way. She accessed the vertical plane in a description of herself. At the time of the interview she described embodying her identity as an act of “Standing up, standing tall.” She accessed space through her metaphor and described an ascent into space as the image that best described her ownership of identity. Participant 3 explored space in a similarly expansive but spatially different way. Participant 3 described her present understanding of her identity experience by sharing, “It feels like I’m gathering space and momentum.” Participant 3 shared a circular, three-dimensional arm gesture as she described “gathering space.”

All participants utilized metaphor to describe their culminating experience of identity. The emergent theme of expanding manifested in their descriptions of mental openness, physical assertion of space and three-dimensional incorporating and synthesizing. The metaphors served as spatial holders. Physical space becomes the metaphorical placeholder for the description of identity synthesis, ownership, and incorporation.

4.2.1.5 Embodied/disembodied. Participants appeared aware of the embodied experience and used metaphor to describe the process of being embodied and aware of their emotional/physical connection. When having difficulty grasping or recalling a specific sensation, Participants 2 and 3, described disembodied experiences, “floating along like an out of body experience” “the [experience of being scared] brings me back down to earth a bit” “I felt out of body” “not grounded.” In contrast to the descriptions of feeling disembodied, in the description of cohesive or integrative identity experiences, participants used embodied metaphors to signal grounding and stability.
4.2.2 Intercorporeal experience: the socio-sensory experience. In addition to using metaphor as a descriptive method for expressing embodiment, participants described the sensory elements related to their experience. Individuals recalled sensory interactions with other people related to physical touch interactions, visual observations, and auditory feedback. All sensory experiences were not described by all participants. Visual recall appeared to be the most frequent occurring sensory memory with touch coming in as a secondary sense.

Participants described their sensory experiences whether through sight, touch, sound, or smell in relation to self, to other, and to the environment. “The experience of being embodied is never a private affair, but is always mediated by our continual interactions with other human and nonhuman bodies” (Weiss, 1999, p. 5). The human experience is that of the embodied experience and the embodied experience is an integration and reflection of the interaction with the surrounding environment. In describing the sensory components of their experience, participants shared the embodied experience of social interaction. Embodied experiences involving sensory and therefore social interactions, “see”, “touch”, and “hear”, make up the Intercorporeal experience.
Participant 1- Seeing
I remember feeling like I shouldn’t look.
I’d look and look away.
Always examining other people’s romantic relationships... always kind of looking for that.
Seeing [acts of affection] between people
Seeing a couple hold hands, a man and a woman hold hands trying to figure out why that’s not you and why that looks so easy.
I watched a lot of TV
It was still overwhelming to see women act more like men and see women more assertive and aggressive because it’s not how people act when they’re not in a safe space.
Seeing that was sort of bizarre but also sort of empowering.
It’s funny to look back and think about who I was.

Participant 1-Touching
It’s not like I got the tingles or anything like that
It was so crowded and overwhelming, there was just so much touching
I guess you feel your heart racing a little bit

Participant 1-Hearing/Saying
Hearing my friends have sex all the time.
I was nervous to tell people.
Participant 2 - Seeing
Watching the show... It was a fit I had never really experienced before
It was about impressing others and seeing who was staring at you

Participant 2 - Touching
Sweating, I get overheated with most feelings
Excitement and feeling tingly

Participant 2 - Hearing/Saying
I wasn’t saying [I was gay] out loud
Speaking properly about the gay community
I’m not comfortable telling the world I’m gay

Participant 3 - Seeing
Everyone looked at me, it was apparent that I stood out.
I think they saw it coming more than I did
I don’t look like a typical queer woman
I stood out like a sore thumb
“It’s important for me to tell people I’m gay because it helps normalize it and gives other people a model of what “gay” looks like.”
I’m in the process of learning to integrate who I see myself as and what people think of me. And coming to peace with that.
It will be reflected and people will hopefully see that as well.
“Activism means standing for equal rights and demanding visibility”

Participant 3 - Smell
Turning away like a bad smell

4.2.2.1 Participant 1. Participant 1 appeared seemed most connected to the visual elements of her experience. Many of her sensory descriptions involved the experience of “looking” and “seeing” in addition to the emotions and sensations that accompanied the visual aspect of her experience. Descriptions of curiosity, comparison, and modeling involved language emphasizing the visual aspect of her experience or interaction with others. The first recognition and awareness of difference in sexual orientation or attraction was described as a moment with a strong visual emphasis. Participant 1 described the act of observing another female peer during an extracurricular event. She recalled, “I remember feeling like I shouldn’t look, I’d look and look away.” In describing elements of her experience while likely in the identity comparison stage, Participant 1 described her feelings using visual imagery while recognizing a difference
between herself and her peers, “Seeing acts of affection] between people, seeing a couple hold hands—a man and a woman—hold hands trying to figure out why that’s not you and why that looks so easy.” The comparison of heterosexual relationships to her own feelings and experiences was expressed through a visually embodied experience.

4.2.2.2 Participant 2.

Like Participant 1, Participant 2 shared her experience of a sensorial interaction in facing her identity through visually embodied occurrences. In addition to describing the visual experience, Participant 2 shared sensory experiences identified through tactile and auditory and descriptions. Visual embodiment of identity was recalled through recognition of the self in media representation and comparison. Tactile embodiment was recalled through internal sensations clearly associated with specific feelings. In the case of Participant 2, a television show served as the mode for transmittal of a visual stimuli that allowed recognition of an internal awareness of belonging.

Participant 2 recalled her interaction with a television show portraying a lesbian couple and its impact on her, “Watching the show... It was a fit I had never really experienced before.” She describes the experience of interacting for the first time with other members of the LGBTQ community through a visual recall. Visual comparison appeared prominently while describing experiences related to the Identity Comparison stage of identity formation. “It was about impressing others and seeing who was staring at you.”

Participant 2 also utilized descriptions of tactile sensations when describing her experience, she recalled sweating, and identified, “I get overheated with most feelings.” When describing excitement related to encountering others with whom she identified, Participant 2 stated that she “remembered feeling tingly all over.” The verbal and auditory component of
Participant 2’s embodied experience appeared as an interaction with the self. Participant 2 identified her thoughts on disclosing identity to herself at the beginning of her identity development “I wasn’t saying [I was gay] out loud” and contrasts it with the current experience of disclosure to a larger external audience toward the later part of her identity development. Participant 2 shared that “I’m not comfortable telling the world I’m gay.” But articulated a shift between her ability to disclose with herself from the beginning of her process to the time of the interview.

In addition, Participant 2 identified her personal ambition toward what she called “activism on a small scale” by articulating the importance of “speaking properly about the gay community.” She identified the importance of the auditory sensory interaction with people in her environment and community through the act of informed dialogue. This appeared while Participant 2 shared her personal experiences surround the development of identity pride.

4.2.2.3 Participant 3. Participant 3 was similarly connected to the visual experiences throughout her identity development. However, Participant 3 identified both “seeing” and “being seen” in her descriptions. For this participant, the experience of “being seen” by others was a crucial element of her experience. “I didn’t look like a typical queer woman. I stood out like a sore thumb, everyone looked at me. It was apparent that I stood out.”

This appeared multiple times during the interview and contributed to feelings of environmental safety and ability to relate with her peers. Participant 3 shared that the visibility of her identity by others was not only affirming but politically relevant. “Activism means standing for equal rights and demanding visibility”

Participant 3 combines both the internal relationship and interpersonal relationship through two sensorial embodied intercoporeal experiences. “It’s important for me to tell people
I’m gay because it helps normalize it and gives other people a model of what “gay” looks like.” First, she uses her voice, the act of hearing herself speak. Then, she combines the verbalization of identity with her physical body to produce a visual model of the identity that is important to her. Not only is this model produced, it is intentionally shared with others in an intentional act of disclosure and display of activism through representation.

4.2.3 Comfort/discomfort as physical manifestations of the trauma of oppression.

Physical manifestations of trauma may appear somatically as a constriction of movement within the body, elevated startle responses and increased somatization, and a somatic recall of trauma experiences (Scaer, 2000). When observed through the lens of Participants 1 and 2 had clear examples of each constriction, elevated startle responses, and somatic recall. These sensations were primarily described as “uncomfortable,” “comfort,” and “not feeling comfortable.”:

Participant 1

I feel like it was always sloppy and kind of rough and not sensual um, only sometimes sensual, it would happen every once in a while, that it would be sensual, but after it would be like "yeah we made out" but I was like "cool" that was just it. And I'd be like "well..." I don’t know... It would always be random. It was always random and that’s when I realized, or not really realized but things sort of clicked and that when I started, um, a relationship with a lesbian, was that I always really struggled making a connection with men. So, I would just make out with them and then text them and they'd be dumb or like too aggressive and it was never really something I could jive with really and I never really felt comfortable enough to really like open up in any way that would turn into a relationship.

[I feel] kind of invincible, Like very confident. I'm trying to think of a word other than confident. Like I stand up straighter, I do this thing. I realize I do this thing where I shift my weight. Let me show you. Hey!

Participant 2

I feel uncomfortable in my stomach, it’s kind of turning like a tide. So, I look at my body in the moment and I kind of curl up a bit. I sit on my hands so I don't twitch them around. I think I twitch a bit when I'm uncomfortable because I try to stop and think more about
that I’m saying and that just makes me twitch a little. Breathing feels a little harder when I'm uncomfortable. Not labored, just uncomfortable. It's no longer one of those body things that just happen but I actively have to think about a breath in and a breath out when I feel uncomfortable.

Discussion of comfort and discomfort appeared within both descriptions of the Intercorporeal Experience and Metaphorical Embodiment. The experience of discomfort does not equate to oppression, however individuals experiencing oppression may experience the physical manifestations of embodied oppression as discomfort. The participants described discomfort in varied and contextual ways. The appearance of comfort versus discomfort related to the notion of personal safety observed as acceptance or rejection, physical safety, and environmental safety as the underlying concerns.
Chapter 5. Discussion

5.1 Overview

This study sought to describe the embodied experience of identity formation in queer women. Themes related to the essence of the participants’ experience will be discussed in the context of embodiment and identity formation literature. The themes will be discussed. The themes are as follows:

1. Metaphorical Embodiment
   A. Impact
   B. Distancing/Immersion
   C. Imploding/Constricting
   D. Expanding
   E. Embodied/Disembodied

2. Intercorporeal Experience: The Socio-Sensory Experience

3. Comfort/Discomfort as Manifestations of the Trauma of Oppression

5.2 Description of Major Findings, Themes, or Outcomes

Basic assumptions within this study involved the applicability of the chosen sexual orientation identity model with the designated population. Based on the inclusionary and exclusionary criteria, the assumption was also made that individuals would be able to access sensory information through prompting and recall. While every attempt was made to allow somatic experience to be accessible to the participants, there was not a uniform way to ensure the same quality or amount of somatic and sensory data could be collected. It cannot be assumed that all participants were at the same stage of identity development nor that they had all experienced all stages of the identity development process.
All three participants noted that the movement elicitation portion of the interview allowed them to think about their identity in a new way. One of the participants mentioned feeling more aware of her physical sensations at the time of the interview as a result of the movement elicitation portion of the study. Bringing the awareness of the possibility of a connection to the physical experience may allow for a more holistic approach to therapy. This is an argument for dance/movement therapy as a field for expanding the individual’s understanding of self through a broadened and reflective lens.

5.2.1 Intersectional considerations. Participant 1 identified the relationship between her gender expression and sexual orientation as an important element of her sexual orientation identity. Participant 1 makes it clear that the gender expression is a process separate from her sexual orientation identity formation, however identifies that there is an overlap in development and an interplay between the two which can be difficult to separate entirely.

P1: “I feel like acceptance Is constantly happening. Like even with my identity, I think we grow as people and I had to accept that I enjoy wearing men’s clothes more and that was after I realized I was a lesbian so like, I had to go through a different period of acceptance. Which I feel good about now. And I feel more confident than I ever did before. I feel so good! Such little things can change how you feel. But it's also crazy that that was the thing that was the hardest for my family to accept. Where it's like ‘Oh, I can be gay and love another woman but you can't accept that I want to wear a tie’ so that's annoying. But, I think that's a level of acceptance that society doesn't really speak to. I think people are confused because it's not like I feel like I am a man. It's just that I like to wear men's clothes. I think people don’t really get that whole ‘masculine of center thing’ which I think, sometimes I don’t know if I get 100% of the time”
For Participant 3, gender expression was also an important part of her sexual orientation identity formation. Participant 3 identified her gender expression as “very feminine.” For this participant, the embodied themes of “seeing/being seen” were apparent as the intersection of gender expression and sexual orientation identity payed out within her narrative. Her expression and understanding of others’ perceptions were in occasionally in conflict emphasizing for her the relationship between gender expression and sexual orientation.

**Participant 3**

“I’ll tell you my first experience at going to a gay club. I was in college and I showed up with a pencil skirt and heels. I had my hair down to my ass at the time and I stood out like a sore thumb. Just looking back I’m laughing at myself because they probably all thought I was straight, showing up in a pencil skirt, you just don't do that. That was my first experience.”

When answering questions related to Identity Synthesis, Participant 3 also identified how visibility for individuals whose gender expression may render them invisible was an important part of her identity development. For Participant 3, expression as a fem-presenting woman allows her to be visible model to others her sexual orientation identity.

“It's important for me to tell people I'm gay because it helps normalize it and it gives other young girls a model of what gay looks like and I think that's really important. As a little girl, I never knew a feminine lesbian or that such a thing existed and if I would have had a role model I think it would have made my process so much easier and of course normalizing.”

Accessing the physical component of identity formation through embodied therapies may be a complementary option to other cognitively based therapies. The personal narrative of the
researcher drove the initial inquiries into the world of identity formation and embodiment. The motivation for this exploration would be difficult to separate from the discussion of individual experiences of identity formation. Every person experiences a unique set of feelings, thoughts and ways of being that informs everyday existence. It was uniqueness of personal expression and understanding of identity that motivated the desire to capture individual experience.

5.3 Clinical Applications

This study explores highlights the necessity of social inclusion and awareness of the embodied lived experience of queer identified women. Allegranti (2016) emphasizes the importance of the practitioner’s attention to sexuality as an ethically necessary component of identity in order to decrease the possibility of marginalization, dis-embodiment, and dis-empowerment. Dance movement therapy can be utilized as a tool for exploring identity through the integration of the somatic experience and the lived experience.

In a field where clinicians work directly with the body, there are social justice implications for the practitioner. The embodied lived experiences of an historically marginalized population and the circumstances under which the marginalization of the identity become embodied are important to consider when providing care for diverse populations. Within somatic psychology, it is proposed that individual experience can be changed to encourage integrated embodiment through the collaborative use of psychoeducation and somatic psychotherapeutic interventions (Harley, 2004).

5.3.1 Metaphor in movement. The frequency of metaphor to describe the physical experience of individual experience provides a basis for the argument of movement as a relevant approach for individuals working with identity. This could also serve as an avenue for access to enriching
the personal understanding of identity and the embodied elements of identity formation that are inherently integrated into identity development.

The strong appearance embodiment described through metaphor is an area rich with information. Participants also appeared to easily articulate their experiences with direct physically corresponding elements. Within the data, the occurrence of embodied experience as an element of identity formation serves as an argument for increased awareness of bias occurring within the embodied therapist. The subthemes that appeared in metaphorical embodiment could easily be correlated to the Laban Movement Analysis themes present within dance/movement therapy theory.

5.4 Strengths and Limitations of the Study

This study is not a comprehensive representation of the experience of embodied identity. These results should not be generalized across the population of queer women. However, the very definition of identity allows for each experience of identity formation and experience to be unique to the individual. The variance in experience is representative of the realities of difference within any given population.

Participants had difference experiences of each stage of the identity development process. It cannot be assumed all individuals had experienced each stage in full. However, some basic assumptions can be made regarding the individual process of identity formation. As each individual volunteered based on the inclusion criteria “identifying as gay, queer, or lesbian, each participant had come to a basic level of identifying, accepting, and labeling their identity. The model used in this study is a linear model. Individuals may experience only some of the stages of identity development or move through the identity development stages in a non-linear way.
throughout the lifespan. There may me multiple processes of identity development happening simultaneously.

Likely due to the recruitment locations, the participants who responded fell within a close age range (26-31 years). In addition, all participants were born and raised within the same geographical region and were primarily exposed to urban settings throughout adolescent development. This is both a strength and limitation of the study. Qualitative examination of the experience could be strengthened by a much broader sampling of the population.

The embodied experience of sexual orientation identity development may could be
As sociopolitical attitudes toward the LGBTQ community morph with the ever-changing political climate there may be trends of embodied of oppressed identities over time visible on a grander scale.

Participants identified intersectional elements of identity as important to their disclosure of embodied experience. Sexual orientation comprises but one element of individual identity. In many cases, this facet of identity is highly influenced and shaped by other components of identity including but not limited to age, race, gender identity, gender expression, socioeconomic status, physical ability, and education.

5.5 Areas for Future Research

Qualitative measures among a sample with more homologous demographics may produce more generalizable results. However, the qualitative sample provides a snapshot of the experience of this population. Further studies may investigate the intersectional elements of identity exploring the interrelation and overlap of gender and sexual orientation embodiment. Gender appeared to be a relevant component of the identity formation process and while gender identity development is separate from sexual orientation identity development. This may be an
area of exploration for the research of the intersection between sexual orientation gender expression, and gender identity.

One area of exploration is the exploration of embodied therapies as an effective therapeutic approach to working with LGB populations. Quantitative data gathered through Movement Analysis would possibly provide more generalizable data for the understanding of the experience of embodied identity. In clinical settings, affirming therapies are often used when working within the LGBTQ populations. This study suggests that the embodied component of identity formation is a part of identity formation that may be worth exploring with individuals seeking counseling.

Multiple small-sample studies exploring sexual orientation identity development and embodiment across a larger sampling population would enrich the data. Future studies may explore the embodiment of resilience, the cross-section of embodiment within multiple marginalized identities or an intersectional examination of the embodiment of oppression. Future studies may the impact of the trauma of social oppression on the development of identity.
Chapter 6. Summary and Conclusions

The purpose of this study was to explore and describe the experience and embodied lived experience of sexual orientation identity formation in queer women. Through the use of a phenomenological research design, the researcher collected data from three participants. Data collection was derived from individual verbal interview with the use of movement elicitation as a data collection too. The interviews were transcribed and the data from the verbal interviews was used to extract the essence of the phenomenon of the embodied sexual orientation identity development experience.

The following themes emerged from the participants’ narratives:

3. Metaphorical Embodiment
   F. Impact
   G. Distancing/Immersion
   H. Imploding/Constricting
   I. Expanding
   J. Embodied/Disembodied

4. Intercorporeal Experience: The Socio-Sensory Experience

3. Comfort/Discomfort as Manifestations of the Trauma of Oppression

These themes were structured by three overarching textual themes: Metaphorical Embodiment, Intercorporeal Experience: The Socio-Sensory Experience, and Comfort/Discomfort as Manifestations of the Trauma of Oppression.

The findings of this study shed light on the interrelationship between individual identity and the embodied experience. The researcher hopes that the findings of this study will expand
the dance/movement therapist’s awareness of the role of the body in identity development, particularly in regard to sexual orientation as one part of the holistic view of identity.
References


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doi: 10.1007/s10465-016-9212-6


Volunteers Needed
for a research study:

SEXUAL ORIENTATION AND EMBODIMENT: Exploring sexual orientation identity formation with queer women

How do queer women embody their sexuality?

This research study is recruiting participants. The purpose of this interpretive phenomenological study is to explore the embodied lived experiences of identity formation in queer women.

- The study consists of individual interviews.
- You will participate in a verbal interview and an expressive movement exercise.
- This study will take about 90 minutes of your time, and your identity will be kept confidential.

Eligible participants:

- Are at least 19 years of age.
- Identify as a woman.
- Identify as lesbian, gay, queer, or members of the LGBTQ community.
- Are open to participating in a brief, guided, expressive movement exercise.
- Are comfortable discussing sexual orientation and identity development.
- Read and speak the English language fluently.
- Do not identify as heterosexual.
- Are not a member of Drexel University Creative Arts Therapies Department students, faculty or staff.
- Are not currently diagnosed with a psychiatric disorder.
- Are not currently pregnant.

*If you are interested in participating, please contact: [embodimentstudy@drexel.edu](mailto:embodimentstudy@drexel.edu)*

This research is conducted by a student member of Drexel University.
Appendix B

Electronic Flyer

Seeking volunteers for a research study
Sexual Orientation and Embodiment: Exploring sexual orientation identity formation with queer women” is recruiting participants. The purpose of this interpretive phenomenological study is to explore the embodied lived experiences of identity formation in queer women.

The study consists of individual interviews. You will participate in a verbal interview and an expressive movement exercise. This study will take about 90 minutes of your time, and your identity will be kept confidential.

Eligible participants:

- Are at least 19 years of age.
- Read and speak the English language fluently.
- Identify as a woman.
- Are open to participating in a brief, guided, expressive movement exercise.
- Are comfortable discussing sexual orientation and identity development?
- You do not identify as heterosexual.
- You are not a member of Drexel University Creative Arts Therapies Department students, faculty or staff.
- Are not currently diagnosed with a psychiatric disorder.
- Are not currently pregnant.

If you are interested in participating, please contact: embodimentstudy@drexel.edu

This research is conducted by a student member of Drexel University as part of a master’s thesis.
Appendix C

Telephone Screening Script
Date:
Time:
Participant’s name:
Phone number:

The following script will be used as the initial screening conversation for prospective study participants:

Thank you for your interest in this study. The purpose of this study is to explore the embodied lived experiences of identity formation in queer women.

I’m going to read a list of criteria that need to be true in order for you to participate.

- You are at least 19 years of age.
- You read and speak the English language fluently.
- You identify as a woman.
- You are open to participating in a brief, guided, expressive movement exercise.
- You are comfortable discussing sexual orientation and identity development.

Can you confirm that all of these items are true for you? Yes/No

If No, the researcher will state the following: You are not eligible to participate in this study. Thank you again for your interest.

If Yes, the screening continues: Now, I’m going to read a list of criteria that cannot be true in order for you to participate. In other words, these would disqualify you from participating in the study.

- You identify as heterosexual.
- You are a member of Drexel University Creative Arts Therapies Department students, faculty or staff.
- You are currently diagnosed with a psychiatric disorder.
- You are pregnant.

Can you confirm that none of these items are true for you? Yes/No

If No, the researcher will state the following: You are not eligible to participate in this study. Thank you again for your interest.
If “Yes, the following will be stated: You are eligible to participate in this study. The next step is to schedule an individual meeting with you on Drexel University’s Center City Campus. Would you like to schedule this meeting now, or would you prefer for me to contract you via email? The student researcher will proceed as indicated by the participant.
Appendix D

Interview Guide

Adapted from Degges-White (2000)

The purpose of this research is to gather information about how individuals like you embody their identity. For the purposes of this study embodiment will be described as the sensory related elements experienced by the body during a specific event or memory.

Demographic Information

How old are you?
What is the highest educational degree you have achieved?
How would you describe your racial/ethnic background?
Do you identify with a religious or spiritual practice?
How do you identify your sexuality?

Stage 1: Identity confusion.

1. Think about when you first became aware of a connection between your sexual orientation and yourself.

2. What happened to cause that awareness and how did you feel?

Stage 2: Identity comparison.

3. Once you began to believe that you might not be heterosexual, how did you perceive yourself in relation to peers? Family? Co-workers? Society at large?

4. As you came to accept that you might not be heterosexual, did you feel a sense of social alienation (perhaps not outright rejection) but a general sense that heterosexual privileges may no longer be assumed? Tell me about these feelings.

Stage 3: Identity tolerance.

5. Tell me about when you first thought, "I probably am gay/queer/homosexual/not straight."

6. Describe your first attempts to meet/interact with other people of the identified group and the feelings that accompanied these experiences.

Stage 4: Identity acceptance.

7. Do you use a label to identify your sexual orientation?
8. Tell me about when you first accepted the self-label of "________" and the feelings that accompanied this.

9. What feelings did your first experiences with other queer individuals create for you?

Stage 5: Identity pride.

10. If you've ever seen your sexual orientation as your main identity, what circumstances led to this view?

11. Have your experiences led you to engage in anything you would describe as activism?

Stage 6: Identity synthesis.

12. Describe how you currently view yourself as a non-heterosexual person in the predominantly straight world.

Probes:

Can you describe the sensation that you felt when…?

That’s interesting, can we return to…

I want to learn more about…

How did you feel when that happened?

Can you remember, recall or describe how that felt?
Appendix E

Movement Elicitation

The movement elicitation portion of the interview will begin with the student researcher leading the participant through a preparatory warmup. The warmup will begin with the participant giving attention to their breath. The student researcher will encourage the movement of the breath to grow into other areas of the body. The student researcher will support the participant by demonstrating movement expansion into the limbs, spine, neck and head. Following the warm up the participant will be asked to begin walking around the space noticing any sensory (temperature, pressure, sound, light) information experienced.

The student researcher will prompt for movements or gestures from the participants that symbolize or represent each of the following:

“Identity Confusion”

“Identity Comparison”

“Identity Tolerance”

“Identity Acceptance”

“Identity Pride”

“Identity Synthesis”

[Each gesture prompt aligns with one stage of identity formation outlined by Cass (1979, 1984, 1990)].

The participant will have time to crystallize each gesture through practice and repetition before moving on to the next. Throughout the movement process, the participant will be asked to notice any sensations or images that appear. After the final gesture the student researcher will provide the participant with paper and pen to briefly write down any information necessary for recalling the gesture at a later point during the interview.

The gestures or movements for each item will be recalled briefly during the interview. The participant will be asked to replicate the gesture one time prior to the student researcher initiating questions aligning with the identity formation stage.
Appendix F

Drexel University
Consent to Take Part in a Research Study

1. **Title of research study:** Sexual Orientation and Embodiment: Exploring sexual orientation identity formation with queer women

2. **Researcher:** Abby Dougherty, PhD, NCC, LPC

3. **Why you are being invited to take part in a research study**
   We invite you to take part in a research study because you have identified yourself as someone who meets the eligibility to participate in this study.

4. **What you should know about a research study**
   - Someone will explain this research study to you.
   - Whether or not you take part is up to you.
   - You can choose not to take part.
   - You can agree to take part now and change your mind later.
   - If you decide to not be a part of this research no one will hold it against you.
   - Feel free to ask all the questions you want before you decide.

5. **Who can you talk to about this research study?**
   If you have questions, concerns, or complaints, or think the research has hurt you, please contact Abby Dougherty at 267-359-5506.

   This research has been reviewed and approved by an Institutional Review Board (IRB). An IRB reviews research projects so that steps are taken to protect the rights and welfare of humans subjects taking part in the research. You may talk to them at (215) 762-3944 or email HRPP@drexel.edu for any of the following:
   - Your questions, concerns, or complaints are not being answered by the research team.
   - You cannot reach the research team.
   - You want to talk to someone besides the research team.
   - You have questions about your rights as a research subject.
   - You want to get information or provide input about this research.

6. **Why is this research being done?**
   The purpose of this interpretive phenomenological study is to explore the embodied lived experiences of identity formation in queer women. In this research, the student researcher will explore social inclusion and awareness of embodied lived experiences in queer identified women. Allegranti (2016) emphasizes the importance of the practitioner’s attention to sexuality as an ethically necessary component of identity in order to decrease the possibility of marginalization, dis-embodiment, and dis-empowerment.
7. How long will the research last?
We expect that you will be in this research study for approximately 90-120 minutes including the consent and interview process.

8. How many people will be studied?
We expect about one person here will be in this research study out of up to ten people in the entire study.

9. What happens if I say yes, I want to be in this research?

- Following the consenting process, the student researcher will use a semi-structured interview process to gather demographic information and progress through open-ended interview questions. The entire research process will take 60-90 minutes.
- Interviews will begin with the gathering of background information followed by a guided movement elicitation activity. (15-20 minutes)
- Participants will be given verbal direction to recall sensory and body based experiences at different points during their identity development followed by a short period of movement. The participants will have the opportunity to recall and solidify their movement experience through movement elicitation prompts.
- Following the movement activity, the student researcher and participant will progress through the open-ended verbal interview questions. (45-60 minutes)
- The movement elicitation activity and interview will take place in Three Parkway Building at 1601 Cherry Street within the Dance/Movement Therapy Research Lab.

10. What are my responsibilities if I take part in this research?
If you take part in this research, it is very important that you:

- Follow the investigator’s or researcher’s instructions.
- Tell the investigator or researcher right away if you have a complication or injury.

11. What happens if I do not want to be in this research?
You may decide not to take part in the research and it will not be held against you.

12. What happens if I say yes, but I change my mind later?
If you agree to take part in the research now, you can stop at any time it will not be held against you.

13. Is there any way being in this study could be bad for me?
This study involves minimal risks to participants in the form of possible discomfort arising while sharing personal information or engaging in movement. There are minimal risks to confidentiality and anonymity, in that although privacy and confidentiality security measures will be taken, they are not considered absolutely fail safe.
14. Do I have to pay for anything while I am on this study?
There is no cost to you for participating in this study.

15. Will being in this study help me in any way?
There are no benefits to you from your taking part in this research. We cannot promise any benefits to others from your taking part in this research.

16. What happens to the information we collect?
Efforts will be made to limit access to your personal information, including research study records, to people who have a need to review this information. We cannot promise complete secrecy. Organizations that may inspect and copy your information include the IRB and other representatives of this organization.

The student researcher and the faculty advisor (PI) will be responsible for the security of the date, as described. The data will be kept for three years after the study ends, according to University policy, at which time the electronic file will be deleted and the consent form shredded.

We may publish the results of this research. However, we will keep your name and other identifying information confidential.

18. What else do I need to know?
This research study is being done by Drexel University.