

## **“IT’S LIKE, ‘I’VE NEVER MET A LESBIAN BEFORE!’”: PERSONAL NARRATIVES AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF DIVERSE FEMALE IDENTITIES IN A LESBIAN COUNTERPUBLIC<sup>1</sup>**

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### **Abstract**

This paper uses membership categorization analysis to illustrate how five women invoke multiple female gender and sexuality identity categories in personal narratives to construct the device of womanhood. The five racially diverse women include four self-identified lesbians and one heterosexual and range in age from mid-twenties to early forties. Analysis of their two hour audio recorded interaction illustrates that gender and sexuality cannot be understood as a binary difference between men and women. These women use revolutionary categories, defined on their own terms rather than by outsiders, to characterize women they encounter in their personal experience (lesbian and otherwise). The revolutionary categories exemplify a diversity of female gender and sexuality identities and ultimately challenge heteronormative conceptions of female identity while simultaneously constructing a lesbian counterpublic. Thus, the personal experiences of these women, as related through everyday narratives, turn out to be highly political.

**Keywords:** Membership categorization analysis; Gender; Sexuality; Lesbian identity; Narrative; Interaction; Counterpublics; Women’s studies.

### **1. Introduction**

Studies on the relationship between gender and discourse acknowledge that gender is not simply a matter of binary difference (male vs. female) but should be examined as the performance of a diversity of masculine and feminine identities (Bucholtz & Hall 2004; Cameron 2005; Kiesling 2001; Kitzinger 2000; Speer & Stokoe 2011). ‘Femininity’ and ‘masculinity’, although ideologically associated with ‘female’ and ‘male’ bodies, are not necessarily tied to a particular sex but rather can be accomplished through communicative practices by all bodies, no matter their sex identification (Halberstam 1998). Furthermore, since sexuality is intimately tied to gender, “the

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performance of gender has consequences for sexuality as well” (Bucholtz & Hall 2004: 491). Sexuality is understood as “the systems of mutually constituted ideologies, practices, and identities that give sociopolitical meaning to the body as an eroticized and/or reproductive site,” (p. 470).

Past studies on masculinity find that traits popularly associated with hegemonic masculinity include aggression, violence, homophobia, muscularity/athleticism, communicating intellectual superiority, boasting, competitiveness, and other methods of maintaining dominance in a particular situation (Connell & Messerschmidt 2005; Kiesling 2001). Women may be characterized as a counterpublic whose experiences, relegated to the private sphere, subordinate them to men, the dominant public (Butler Breese 2011). Traits popularly associated with femininity include conforming “to prevailing images of beauty and attractiveness” (Impett, Schooler, & Tolman 2006: 131) by wearing dresses and high heels, having long hair, wearing make-up, and generally conveying heterosexuality (Adams, Schmitke, & Franklin 2005). Attitudes associated with femininity are to act accommodatingly, suppress the direct expression of opinions (Impett, Schooler, & Tolman 2006), ask questions and provide positive reactions to maintain social interaction (Maltz & Borker 1982), and to be emotionally expressive (Henley & Kramarae 1991). Women’s discourses of personal experience, however, may serve “to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests, and needs” (Fraser 1992: 67). Feminist scholars characterize these personal discourses as political, linking women’s experiences in the private spheres to their public awareness of their social conditions (Lazar 2008).

Gender and sexuality, thus, are the product of “socially imposed norms” (Bucholtz & Hall 2004: 491) and of local practices. In other words, the performance of gender and sexuality is both governed by normative social structures and serves to reproduce, negotiate, or challenge these structures on a local level, thus echoing tensions between structure and practice (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet 1992; Giddens 1984; Greco 2012). The purpose of this paper is to investigate how multiple female identities (in terms of both gender and sexuality) are made relevant in local interactions and how local interactions link to larger ideologies about these multiple negotiated identities. More specifically, this paper uses one speech event (Hymes 1962) among friends to examine how four self-identified lesbian women invoke popular notions of masculinity and femininity through narrative to construct female identities that challenge normative notions of what it means to be a woman. As these women struggle with the normative notion of “being a woman,” tensions arise between their positions on womanhood and how they choose to narrate their positions. Using membership categorization analysis (MCA) (Sacks 1974; Stokoe 2012), I illustrate how these tensions are managed through the use of multiple, differing, female identity categories (e.g., lesbian, gold star, teeny bopper, ignorant woman, butch dyke) which ultimately construct the device of “womanhood”.

First, this paper describes the speech situation surrounding the analyzed interactions (Hymes 1962). Then, I explain how MCA is used to analyze the construction of female identities during narratives. The analysis illustrates how participants position multiple, differing female membership categories under the device of “womanhood” through the narratives they tell. The paper closes by drawing conclusions about the link between these interactions and normative notions of femininity and masculinity, ultimately contributing to studies about gender and sexuality identities in interaction.

## 2. An informal women's brunch

The setting for these interactions is a small, liberal, New England town known for a relatively concentrated lesbian population. The women in this interaction often reference a social network of lesbians and mention terms for gender and sexuality female identities that may not be prominent in more hetero-dominant settings. Furthermore, the women in this interaction are close friends, and two of them (pseudo-named Tiana and Jen) are in a committed relationship, which is conducive to more informal, intimate interactions typical of a face-to-face, civic counterpublic constructed through co-presence and feelings of camaraderie (Butler Breese 2011). Participants include four lesbian women and one heterosexual woman, me. Tiana and Aesha are African American, Jen and Karen are white, and I, Natasha, am Indian-American. The participants' ages range from mid-twenties to early forties. One of the participants, Karen, was a friend of mine, and she introduced me to Tiana, Aesha, and Jen. The four women have been friends for at least a year, and I had only met them at a social event two months prior to the recorded interactions.

The participants eat brunch together once every few months, and I had previously attended a brunch with them. During our interactions, I, as a new friend in the group and the only heterosexual, noticed the prominence of discussion about being a *lesbian* woman. As a scholar, I have a general interest in how minority or marginalized identities are made relevant in everyday interactions, so I asked these women for permission to record their interactions for an exploratory project on gender identity. After receiving approval from the university's institutional review board, I hosted a brunch in my own home, which provided a relatively familiar, comfortable setting for informal interaction, which I audio-recorded.

As a friend of the participants, I was positioned as somewhat of an insider to the group. We were all women around the same age and education level. We had also spent time together on several previous occasions. An identity I did not share with these participants was the lesbian sexual identity. As a heterosexual woman (and also a relatively new friend in the group) I was not acquainted with many of the other women they talked about or with some of the identities they mentioned, but as a sexual minority in this group, I was expected to adapt to discussion of lesbian experiences. My unique positioning as a friend yet outsider to the group worked to my advantage as a researcher because I was easily able to ask questions when necessary without losing the friendly, intimate, and natural quality of the conversation.

The brunch lasted for two hours, all of which was audio recorded. After listening to and transcribing the interaction, I identified a total of twelve narratives of personal experience (Ochs 2004). Personal narratives are a genre of talk characterized by a plot structure that relays tellable past life experiences, a form of cognition that emphasizes remembering and evaluating events, and a social activity in which many participants often co-tell and co-author the stories. This analysis presents seven personal narratives (other narratives were omitted at the participants' request or because gender and sexuality identities did not appear relevant in those narratives) and illustrates how participants negotiate multiple female identities, including their own, through the narratives they tell. I transcribed the interactions using conversation analytic conventions (Jefferson 2004). All names in the transcriptions are pseudonyms.

### 3. Linking narrative and identity

Narratives are a genre of talk in which speakers endeavor in the “construction of self and life worlds” (Brockmeier & Carbaugh 2001: 7). Scholars have studied how participants use multiple communicative resources in their narratives to construct different, situationally relevant identities (e.g. Brockmeier & Carbaugh 2001; Hill 1995; Koven 1998; Labov & Waltetzky 1967). Thus, “telling a story of personal experience usually involves evaluatively replaying or enacting past speech events, often as colorfully constructed accounts of who said what to whom, how, and to what effect and what kinds of locally recognizable personas talk/act like that” (Koven 1998: 417). This analysis teases out how participants use multiple communicative resources in their narratives to invoke various gender and sexuality identities that illustrate the participants’ positions about womanhood.

Narratives also function to provide coherence of particular personal identities (Elliot, Gunaratnam, Holloway, & Phoenix 2009; Linde 1993). Wilkinson and Kitzinger (2003) argue that when women position themselves in terms of differing identity categories, “the world of such categories, and the inferences associated with them is produced, reproduced, and sometimes...resisted.” (p. 160). Furthermore, “gender identities may be constituted less by the contrast with *other* gender and more by contrast with other versions of the *same* gender” (Cameron 2005: 487, emphasis in original). The analysis in this article illustrates how, through narrative, these women negotiate a coherent system of gender and sexuality identity within their lesbian counterpublic while simultaneously positioning their non-normative sexuality in relation to the “hegemonic heterosexuality” (Bucholtz & Hall 2004: 471) of other women.

To analyze the different female identities invoked by participants during narratives, I use Membership Categorization Analysis, or MCA. MCA is a field originating in Sacks’s (1974) work that discusses how identities are established, managed, and cohere in interaction. MCA focuses on how members of a group make sense of their own identities, the identities of others, and ultimately organize their social words using identity categories (Stokoe 2012). Past works have illustrated the usefulness of MCA to study a variety of contexts, including interactions among callers and hosts in radio-programs (Dori-Hacohen 2012, 2013; Ferencik 2007), the establishment of membership categories in political discourse (Leudar, Marsland, & Nekvapil 2004), bilinguals’ use of linguistic resources to align with particular membership categories (Higgins 2007; Zimmerman 2007), and the overt use of racial categories in everyday talk (Whitehead & Lerner 2009). This analysis contributes to work that uses MCA to understand how people negotiate social organization through the establishment of identity categories in everyday interactions.

Several studies have employed MCA to examine how gender and sexuality identities are made relevant in interaction. These studies have illustrated how categories of ‘woman’ and ‘feminist’ are established in interaction (Eglin 2002) and how neighbors name particular types of women and particular gendered activities associated with women as warrants for complaints in neighborhood dispute interactions (Stokoe 2003). Kitzinger’s (2005a) analysis of phone interactions between hospital staff and family/friends of patients illustrates how heterosexism is accomplished through participants’ assumptions that the normative categories that comprise ‘a family’ include

a husband and wife (as opposed to other types of family make-ups, e.g. a wife and a wife). Land and Kitzinger (2005) analyze interactions among lesbian women to illustrate how these women make their lesbian identities known (or hide them) depending on particular contexts, ultimately illustrating that homosexuality is not as routinized as heterosexuality in everyday interactions.<sup>2</sup> This paper uses interactions among lesbian women as well and contributes to past works on gender and sexuality identity, and on lesbian identity in particular, by illustrating how lesbian women negotiate the category "woman" using their own system of identity categories.

For the interactions analyzed in this paper, the omnirelevant membership category device, i.e. "apparatus through which categories are understood to 'belong' to a collective category" (Stokoe 2012: 281) for these participants is "womanhood." Some categories these women use to construct the device of womanhood are explicitly named: "femme", "butch", "dyke", "lesbian", "peppy girl", and "teeny bopper". Other categories are invoked through referencing the performance of category bound activities (Stokoe 2012), or activities associated with a particular female membership category. Furthermore, some identities referenced are "dominant categories", or the socially recognized categories that indicate how the dominant majority views these women (e.g. lesbian), and others are "revolutionary categories", which the women themselves have fashioned to resist dominant forms of categorization (e.g., gold star, butch dyke) (Sacks 1979). The identities are positioned in relation to one another as different types of female identities that exist within a larger social hierarchy of gender and sexuality identities, thus contributing to the formation of a lesbian counter-public.

Three of the stories presented below recount events that took place at the largest shopping mall in this region, located in a larger, less affluent city where there is a smaller lesbian population. As we will see below, the participants orient to this mall as a hetero-dominant space and narrate shopping experiences in which they encounter a variety of heterosexual women who the participants evaluate in specific, sometimes conflicting, ways, ultimately indicating their own positions about womanhood. Furthermore, the participants also narrate their observations of "lesbians in training" shopping with their mother who have an ambiguous, possibly lesbian identity. Three stories presented recount events in which the hetero-dominant spaces are either not relevant or are not oriented to by the participants. The stories include encounters with a truck loving, muscular lesbian friend and two encounters with a sexually aggressive lesbian date. The last story presented is about past heterosexual encounters of one of the lesbian participants, Tiana, and illustrates how past sexual experiences contribute to presently voiced positions about womanhood.

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<sup>2</sup> For further research on the subject, see studies that use conversation analysis to illustrate how heterosexuality is accomplished as routinized in everyday interaction (Kitzinger 2005b) and how supporters of same-sex marriage negotiate the term 'marriage' as it applies to gay and lesbian relationships (Land and Kitzinger 2007). Other work on gender, sexuality, and identity include: Koller, V. (2008). *Lesbian discourses: Images of a community*. Routledge., Cameron, D., & Kulick, D. (eds.). (2006). *The language and sexuality reader*. Taylor & Francis., Motschenbacher, H. (2010). *Language, gender and sexual identity: Poststructuralist perspectives* (Vol. 29). John Benjamins Publishing Company.

### 3.1. *Shopping at Delia's with the Little Peppy Girl*

In the narrative presented below Tiana describes Jen's and her shopping experience at Delia's, a young teen girl clothing store at the mall. Throughout the story, Tiana mentions multiple identity categories that evaluate Delia's, Tiana's girlfriend Jen, the salesperson, and Tiana herself as embodying particular types of female identities. In addition, the identity categories invoked are also structured in a way that increases the stories tellability for the participants, ultimately positioning Tiana as a "good" storyteller.

- |     |    |         |   |
|-----|----|---------|---|
| (1) | 1  | Tiana   | We went to <u>Delia's</u> yesterday [and got her jeans                                      |
|     | 2  | Group   | [(laughter)]  |
|     | 3  | Jen     | [We had had, like I tried on  |
|     | 4  | Tiana   | Do you understand (.) that like we're in like my [childhood teeny bopper store              |
|     | 5  | Natasha | [Delia's is like a tween,   |
|     | 6  |         | like right yeah? that's what Delia's  |
|     | 7  | Tiana   | and not just that like she's like the dykeiest thing you've [ever seen, right?]             |
|     | 8  | Karen   | [(laughter)]  |
|     | 9  | Tiana   | So we go in there and there's li(hh)ke (.) this little peppy girl and her red hair.         |
|     | 10 |         | What was her <u>name</u> ?  |
|     | 11 | Jen     | I have a really small waist   |
|     | 12 | Aesha   | Yep (.) [It's hard to find jeans  |
|     | 13 | Jen     | [So like (.) they   |
|     | 14 | Tiana   | Babe, what was her name? (0.3) Remember the red-headed girl I was like,                     |
|     | 15 |         | what's your name (.) It was like, oh <u>Luciana</u> !                                       |
|     | 16 | All     | ((laughter))  |
|     | 17 | Tiana   | She was so cute, Luciana. She was like, you guys are my favorite customers!                 |
|     | 18 |         | It was like, I've never met a lesbian before.   |
|     | 19 | Karen   | ((laughter))  |
|     | 20 | Tiana   | I was just <u>cracking</u> up. I was like (.) I can't believe we're in this store right now |
|     | 21 | Natasha | Well they look <u>good</u> !  |

When Tiana announces, "We went to Delia's yesterday and got her jeans" (1: 1), the response is laughter (1: 2), which confirms the tellability of this story. According to Tiana, the group's laughter indicates that they are aware of the incongruity of Jen, a 41 year old woman, buying jeans at Delia's, a "childhood teeny bopper store" (1: 4). Here, Tiana identifies a female identity associated with Delia's, "teeny bopper", and aligns herself with this female identity by claiming it as "my childhood" store. By saying that Delia's is "*my* childhood teeny bopper store", Tiana marks herself as normative because she shopped at Delia's at an appropriate age. Simultaneously, however, Tiana distances herself from the Delia's identity since she is no longer "teeny bopper" and therefore would not currently shop at Delia's. I, Natasha, echo Tiana's assessment of Delia's in my characterization of Delia's as a "tween" (1: 5) store, a store for 10-13 year old girls ("in between" childhood and teenager).

Tiana adds another reason why the story is tellable when she classifies Jen, "she", as the "dykeiest thing you've ever seen", contrasting this identity with the "childhood teeny bopper store" (1: 7). Tiana uses the word "dyke" to mark herself as a member of the lesbian group. "Dyke" is a derogatory word used to characterize masculine looking lesbians by non-lesbians. However, when used by Tiana, it is a term

that indexes (Ochs 1992) lesbian camaraderie and performs a membering function (Philipsen 1992). This phenomenon, where women re-appropriate meanings of derogatory slurs, has occurred with other words as well (e.g. "bitch"; Sutton 1995). By referencing Jen's dyke-y identity, Tiana is now interpreting "teeny bopper" not as a marker of age, but as a certain type of female appearance, one that is in direct contrast with Jen's "dyke-y" female identity. Delia's is a store that targets young girls on the cusp of womanhood who seek to emphasize developing breasts and hips. Jen's appearance as a "the dykeiest thing you've ever seen" is in complete opposition to this female identity. Jen has short hair and wears clothes that minimize the appearance of breasts and curves. In addition, by classifying Jen as "the dykeiest", Tiana uses the superlative suffix "est" to position herself as less dyke-y than Jen.

Tiana introduces another figure into the story, "the little peppy girl" (1: 9), using a three part list (Jefferson 1991) to construct a character that fits heteronormative expectations of femininity. Each list item emphasizes a different aspect of this normative femininity: "Little" functions to mark petite size. "Peppy" indicates an excited, emotional persona. "Girl" is marker of gender, and in combination with other items on the list, it contributes to the normative femininity of this figure. "Red hair" also elaborates on the "little peppy girl" identity, as it is a striking, memorable hair color. Altogether, this identity ascription characterizes the saleswoman as a peppy little girl who fits heteronormative expectations of femininity.

Midway through her evaluation of the "little peppy girl", Tiana makes Jen's and her couplehood a relevant identity category by drawing Jen into the narrative with a question (1: 9-10). This question, "What was her name?" serves to help Tiana think of the salesperson's name *and*, as Mandelbaum (1987) points out, as a request for verification, inviting Jen, as Tiana's partner, "to participate in the telling by providing or corroborating its details" (p. 158). When Jen does not reply to Tiana, Tiana addresses her specifically with the term of endearment, "babe" (1: 14) and then re-asks the question. Here, Tiana explicitly labels Jen's and her romantic relationship, indicating that Jen's participation is important not only to corroborate Tiana's story as a co-participant in the narrated event but also as Tiana's significant other. Tiana may be the primary teller of Tiana's and Jen's shared experiences, but it is still a shared story. When Jen does not provide an answer, Tiana answers her own question, saying with great excitement and emphasis, "Luciana!" (1: 15), further suggesting that Tiana turning to Jen to ask for Luciana's name was a ploy to involve her in the narrative.

In returning to evaluate Luciana, Tiana adds the evaluation "cute" (1: 17) and then provides an account to explain why. Tiana uses reported speech (Tannen 1986) which 1) directly reconstructs Luciana's words ("she was like") and 2) constructs her own interpretation of what Luciana meant ("it was like"). Tiana's reported speech, "She was like, 'you guys are my favorite customers!'" (1: 17) marks Luciana as particularly attentive to Tiana and Jen, and therefore, following her quote of Luciana, Tiana provides an account. "It was like, 'I've never met a lesbian before!'" (1: 17-18). Tiana positions Jen and herself as lesbians and in opposition to Luciana, the little peppy girl who is fascinated with Tiana and Jen because they are lesbians and she has "never met a lesbian before!" Being fascinated with lesbians is a category bound action attributed to Luciana that characterizes her as a non-lesbian. Furthermore, Tiana voices Luciana as using the term "lesbian" because lesbian is a dominant category (Sacks 1979), used by heterosexuals to refer to lesbian women. As seen earlier in this story, Tiana, a member of the lesbian community, prefers to use "dyke" to refer to other in group members (in

that case, her girlfriend Jen). Thus, without explicitly marking Luciana's heterosexual identity, Tiana is able to construct her as a normative heterosexual teenage girl who is fascinated with Tiana and Jen *because* of their lesbian identity. This fascination, however, is positively assessed as "cute" rather than "rude", most likely because despite her fascination, Luciana was still able to perform her duties as a salesperson and find Jen satisfying jeans.

Tiana closes the story by emphasizing what she took to be the main reason for its tellability, "I was just cracking up. I was like (.) I can't believe we're in this store right now" (1: 20). Here, Tiana uses the word "we", to make relevant Jen's and her couplehood and re-emphasizes the contrast between their identities and the identity of the store by saying she was "cracking up" about the fact that they were in a teeny bopper store with a little peppy girl helping dyke-y Jen try on jeans.

Jen, as a person who was taking part in the events, provides an alternative explanation to those provided by Tiana. Later in the recorded excerpt, Jen reverts back to the Delia's event claiming, "Well actually the waitress the uh the woman at delia's told us that we were her favorite customers of the day" because, as she explains later, "we were funny". Jen uses the pronoun "we" to position herself and Tiana as a singular unit, and emphasizes their couplehood as relevant to their experience in Delia's. Jen then expands on her claim by reiterating the *category bound actions* that made Tiana's and her couplehood relevant in Delia's and also explains why Tiana and Jen were a funny couple: "She [Tiana] *kept saying like babe this and babe that and like being disgusted with me* because jeans didn't fit." "Babe" reappears as an index of couplehood in Jen's reported speech about Tiana, strengthening the claim that Tiana uses "babe" often to mark Jen's and her couplehood to others. Furthermore, although Jen and Tiana are openly performing an alternate sexuality by being in an obvious relationship with one another, Jen still characterizes their relationship as normative and as normally received by Luciana, unlike Tiana, who claims that Luciana's fascination was because of the display of an alternate sexuality.

### 3.2. *Shopping at Victoria's Secret: The ignorant woman vs. the good lady*

The next shopping story is told almost immediately after the Delia's story and is set in Victoria's Secret, a lingerie and underwear store for adult women. This story is similar to the previous one in that it is a story about Jen's shopping experience but is told almost entirely by Tiana. Tiana speaks for Jen when explaining why the couple went shopping at Victoria's Secret. This pattern is similar to the first story in that Tiana is the "teller" of shared experiences of the couple and Jen is a collaborator. The following narrative is another example of when Tiana and Jen encounter a heterosexual salesperson. The participants construct several identity categories: The Victoria's Secret identity, the ignorant saleswoman, Jen's butch dyke identity, and Tiana's relatively normative female identity. Aesha contributes with a counter evaluation of the "ignorant woman" as a "good lady".

- |     |    |         |   |
|-----|----|---------|---|
| (2) | 36 | Tiana   | I didn't tell you I took her to Victoria's Secret?                                |
|     | 37 | Aesha   | No, was-is was there anything good in there?                                      |
|     | 38 | Tiana   | Well cuz she wanted like a real <u>bra</u> : yeah, and I have the:se um bras from |
|     | 39 |         | Victoria's Secret that like are razorback and they clip in the middle             |
|     | 40 | Natasha | Mhmm  |

41 Tiana and they don't have lining or whatever so I thought-and I really wanted her to  
42 get something with an underwire so first you try on underwire things.  
43 Aeesha Yeah  
44 Tiana The woman kept bringing in like this lacy shit (.) and I'm like "come [on!"  
45 You shouldn't make assump↑tions.]  
46 Jen  
47 [And I'm like really kind of] embarrassed to be in there because they, I've  
48 NEVER been in Victoria's Secret [before I mean]  
49 All [(laughter)]  
50 Tiana But It was ↑so ridiculous. [I was like come on you should see, she's like the  
51 butchiest dyke-iest girl ever]  
52 Aeesha [The lady was like trying, but you  
53 know what? She was being good.] It was good that lady was being good  
54 Tiana No she wasn't. No:  
55 Aeesha She was being, [she was not assuming(.) assuming anythi- ((laughter))]  
56 Tiana [She was being a little ignorant. She wasn't making] I mean  
come o:n

Tiana uses "bra" (2: 38) as a marker to discuss different types of female identities in this story. Tiana indexes Victoria's Secret authority on women's underwear when she says she took Jen to the store "cuz she wanted like a real bra" (2: 38). Part of Jen's "dyke" identity (described outside of this excerpt) is that she only owns sports bras, which according to Tiana, are not "real bras", so Tiana and Jen went to a place that sells "real" bras: Victoria's Secret. Tiana then gives an extensive explanation of the type of bra she has bought from Victoria's Secret in the past: A simple, basic bra (2: 38-39) and then follows this description with "so I thought" (2: 41) before repairing (Schegloff, Jefferson, & Sacks 1977) to talk about the specific type of bra she wanted Jen to buy. This extensive description of a simple bra indexes common knowledge about the particular female identity associated with Victoria's Secret. Victoria's Secret is advertised with supermodels wearing lacy lingerie, and many items sold at the store are extremely lacy and contain a lot of padding, colors, design, underwire, etc. Tiana implies that despite this perceived female identity, she has bought simple, basic bras at Victoria's Secret "so she thought" she could find some for Jen also.

Tiana's hopes are dashed when she asks for "underwire things" (2: 42) and was met with a stream of "lacy shit" (2: 44). This is where Tiana starts to construct a second female identity, "the ignorant woman". Tiana is frustrated ("come o:n", 2: 44) with "the woman's" category bound actions of "bringing in like this lacy shit" (2: 44) and not making assumptions (2: 44-45, 50) based on Jen's obvious dyke appearance. Before Tiana can explain her frustration, Jen inserts herself as a co-teller. Jen contributes to Tiana's point about the awkwardness of the "woman" bringing in "lacy shit" by explicitly talking about her feelings during the episode. In this story, Jen's contribution, "And I'm like really kind of embarrassed to be in there because they, I've NEVER been in Victoria's Secret before I mean" (2: 46-48) compliments Tiana's set up of the story by making explicit the awkwardness of bringing "the dyke-iest thing you've ever seen" to Victoria's Secret. The category bound action of avoiding going to Victoria's Secret serves to further cement Jen's and Victoria's Secret's female identities as almost exclusive of one another: Victoria's Secret sells lacy clothing, which contrasts with Jen's dyke-y female identity. Similar to the Delia's experience where Jen's evaluation of the story centers around Luciana liking Tiana and Jen personally as a couple, Jen's contribution to the story focuses on Jen as an individual, embarrassed person.

Tiana's goal in both of the narratives is to expand these personal experiences to comment on multiple, opposing female identities she and Jen experience in everyday life. Tiana continues the story, explicitly characterizing "the woman's" actions as "so ridiculous" (2: 50) and gives an account for this characterization by saying the woman "should see" that Jen is "butchiest, dyke-iest, girl ever" (2: 51) and this identity marks Jen as someone who is not interested in wearing lacy underwear. Here, Tiana opposes "the woman" and the Victoria's Secret identity to Jen and constructs Jen's identity using another three part list. Each element of this list emphasizes a different aspect of Jen's female identity. Furthermore, this characterization expands on the previous characterization of Jen as the "dyke-iest thing you've ever seen" by adding "butchiest" and "girl". "Butchiest" marks Jen's short hair and non-curve flattering clothing, "dyke-iest" builds on butchiest by emphasizing how much Jen looks like a lesbian (unlike Tiana and other lesbians who fit popular notions of heterosexual female appearance), and "girl" marks all of these categories as belonging to the device of "womanhood." Despite the fact that Jen does not resemble heteronormative Delia's, Victoria's Secret expectations of female appearance, she is still a "girl". In fact, this last element of the three part list descriptor, "girl," puts Jen and Luciana, the salesperson from the previous story, in the same device of "womanhood," as the parallel of these descriptors "butchiest, dyke-iest, girl" and "little peppy girl" illustrates.

Tiana and Jen have collaboratively constructed an opposition between Victoria's Secret/"the woman" and Jen's butch dyke identity, and this contrast establishes the story's tellability. As the story draws to a close, Aesha interjects by providing a counter-evaluation of the "the lady" (in her words) as "being good" (2: 53) for the same category bound action that warranted Tiana's criticism: "she was not assuming" (2: 55). Aesha commends the saleswoman for not assuming that Jen has different tastes because of her different, dyke-y appearance. Aesha's evaluation is met with staunch opposition by Tiana ("No she wasn't. No," 2: 54) and the eventual labeling of "the woman" as "ignorant" (2: 56) because she is not making obvious necessary assumptions about Jen's identity and subsequently her bra preferences.

These counter evaluations complicate the relationship the participants construct among lesbian and heterosexual women. Tiana emphasizes the power differential between heterosexual and lesbian women, which allows heterosexual women to be ignorant about lesbian forms of female identity. In this case, "the ignorant woman" caused an awkward and unsuccessful shopping experience for Tiana and Jen, something that is not dealt with by most heteronormative women. Tiana emphasizes that for women who are a part of the lesbian counterpublic, mundane events such as shopping with friends are not mundane at all but rather marked, and sometimes frustrating, experiences. Aesha, on the other hand, emphasizes camaraderie among all women, arguing that in not making assumptions, this heterosexual woman was treating Jen as a "normal" woman despite her butch dyke-y appearance.

### ***3.3. Lesbians in training***

This last, brief narrative differs from the previous two stories because it is about the identification of possible lesbians by the participants in a hetero-dominant space (again the mall). Tiana narrates her observation of possible lesbians, who she labels as

"lesbians in training", and Aesha helps co-construct an evaluation of these potential lesbians:

- |     |                                 |       |   |
|-----|---------------------------------|-------|---|
| (3) | 165<br>166<br>167<br>168<br>169 | Tiana | But <u>wait!</u> But we were in there, and those other chicks ((inaudible)) the chick who was next to you. I was like, they're like lesbians in training. They look like these big like soccer or lacrosse players. They were like, they were (.) like probably <u>teenagers</u> and they're in there with um: one of them was in there with her mother ((inaudible)) and like she had these super like (.) muscular legs<br><i>Lines 170-172 about cooking bacon omitted</i> |
|     | 173                             | Aesha | Were they cute? Were they cute?   |
|     | 174                             | Tiana | N↓o:  |

Tiana starts this narrative with the discourse marker, "But wait!" (Schiffrin 1987) to transition from a discussion about cooking brunch to a story about lesbians in training. She then quotes herself as describing "those other chicks" as "lesbians in training", using the dominant category (Sacks 1979) "lesbians" (instead of previously used "dyke"). While it was assumed that Luciana was heterosexual because of her red hair and peppy attitude, these girls are characterized as lesbians because of they embody aspects of female masculinity often associated with butch lesbians (Halberstam 1998). Included in these characteristics are that the girls are "big like soccer or lacrosse players" (3: 166-167) and one of them had "super like muscular legs" (3: 169). Even though soccer and lacrosse are sports that are also played by heterosexual women, these "lesbians in training" are oriented to as potential butch lesbians, similar to other women who play traditionally male-dominated sports and therefore have a muscular build (Caudwell 1999). These women are then evaluated for their attractiveness when Aesha asks "were they cute?" (3: 173), indicating that women who are muscular, like these lesbians in training, and women who are petite, like Luciana, both have the potential to be evaluated as "cute", thus contributing to defining what potentially constitutes a "cute" woman.

### 3.4. Maria: "She's fuckin' in love with this truck."

This and the following narratives illustrate experiences that occur in lesbian spaces, where all characters in the stories are types of lesbian women. These narratives serve to further expand gender and sexuality identities these participants consider relevant to these lesbian women. Maria, a friend of Tiana's, is also characterized as being muscular and is overtly labeled as a "good butch dyke" (unlike the lesbians in training where a 'butch' identity was merely implied). Maria is a pseudonym created by the participants themselves during Tiana's story about her relationship with this particular woman. The narrative is long, taking almost twenty minutes, and consists mostly of Tiana reading text messages sent and received between Maria and herself the previous day. Below are multiple excerpts characterizing Maria according to both her gendered appearance and her expression of sexual desire:

- |     |                   |       |   |
|-----|-------------------|-------|---|
| (4) | 247<br>248<br>249 | Tiana | I mean like she's fucking in love with this truck. She <u>loves</u> this truck. You know, she's like a good (.) she's like a good butch dyke. She's like "look at my truck man, look at my Tacoma" And I'm like, what do you even need to do (.) with a pick-up truck |
|-----|-------------------|-------|---|

250	Aeesha	Like what, you could probably pick her up and throw her ((laughter))
275	Tiana	No she <u>used</u> to have man arms and I'm like
276	Aeesha	Man arms are what, like <u>hu:ge</u> or something?
277	Tiana	She used to have huge arms (.) by the way.
321	Tiana	FYI I was gonna ask you to help me because I like hanging <u>out</u> with
322		you (.) and you seem really into your truck so I thought you'd relish
323		the opportunity to help out a femme dyke.
377	Tiana	O:h <u>yeah</u> , she goes oh (.) all my exes say I'm really good in bed, and
378		bla(h)h bla(h)h bla(h)h ((laughter))

The first way Tiana attributes a butch identity to Maria is through the category bound action of Maria being “fucking in love with this truck” (4: 247). Tiana repeats that Maria loves her truck, and then names the identity category associated with this action: “good butch dyke” (4: 248). This is yet another three part list (Jefferson 1991) Tiana uses to describe a character. These adjectives are similar to the description of Jen, “butchiest, dyke-iest, girl”. However, Jen’s identity as a “girl” is still emphasized. Jen may have short hair and not show off a curvy figure, but she still shops at Delia’s and Victoria’s Secret. Maria’s description, on the other hand, falls short of using “girl”. Her identifier stops at “dyke” with the previous two descriptors of “good” and “butch.” Maria is not only a “butch” but is also “good” for having masculine behaviors like “loving” and boasting about (“look at my Tacoma”) her truck. Tiana takes this characterization one step further by using reported speech (Tannen 1986) and lowers her voice to imitate Maria’s boasting about her truck: “look at my truck man” (4: 248). Tiana establishes the “truck” as a part of Maria’s identity when she asks the question, “what do you even need to do with a pick-up truck?” (4: 249). The truck is not a practical item that Maria needs, but rather an item Maria has because of her “good butch” female identity. This characterization of Maria as compared to Jen indicates the multiple “degrees of butchness” (Halberstam 1998: 123) that characterize some butch women, like Jen, as “soft” because they appear butch but do not act in ways popularly associated with masculinity and other butch women, like Maria, as the hard, stone butch who owns a truck that she does not need and boasts about it to her friends.

Aeesha points out what they see as an incongruity between Maria’s appearance and her attitude because Maria is apparently small enough for Tiana to “pick her up and throw her” (4: 250). Despite Maria’s small stature, however, she is still further evaluated as butch because she used to have “man arms” (4: 275) which are defined as “huge arms” (4: 276-277). The third excerpt shown is a text message Tiana sent to Maria that Tiana is reading to the rest of the group. In her text message, Tiana explicitly names another category “femme dyke” (4: 323). The use of femme dyke performs several functions. First, Tiana marks her normative female appearance (“femme”). Second, by using the term femme dyke, Tiana points out that there are many types of dykes and that “femme” dykes should be helped by “good butch dykes” who are “into trucks”. Tiana is creating a team (Stokoe 2012) of dyke identity categories, and on this team, butch dykes should “relish” helping their “femme dyke” team members in butch activities (and femme dykes help butch dykes in femme activities, like Tiana helped Jen go shopping in the previous stories). The team categories are all under the device of “dyke”, furthering the classification of the team as a revolutionary category (Sacks

1979), coined by the group to independently categorize and distinguish among themselves rather than submitting to the outsider imposed, homogeneous, "lesbian" identity category.

Later in the story, Maria's identity is elaborated on further with the category bound action of bragging about being "really good in bed" (4: 377), which Tiana marks as undesirable through laughter. Bragging about sexual ability to potential sexual partners is another category bound activity popularly associated with masculinity and therefore contributes to Maria's "good butch" identity. Overall, Maria is constructed as a "good butch dyke" through both her appearance (man arms), through her behaviors (loving her truck and bragging about sexual ability), and because she is positioned as opposite to Tiana's "femme dyke" identity.

### 3.5. Susan: The Gold Star Creepster Lady

The following narrative features Susan, a sexually aggressive woman, and illustrates yet another form of female masculinity (in addition to Jen, the lesbians in training, and Maria). Jen, the main teller, starts the telling by referencing an experience that she and Tiana recently had, seeing Susan Delay. When the group is not aware of the "Susan Delay story", Jen tells it, and since it is an experience that occurred previously to Tiana and Jen's relationship, Jen is the main teller.

- (5) 1 Jen We saw Susan Delay last night. Did I tell you the Susan Delay story?  
 2 Aesha No I=  
 3 Jen =The date I went o:n where she like a-(.3) a- accosted me and stuck her tongue  
 4 down my throat  
 5 Aesha NO ((laughter))  
 6 Karen ((laughter))  
 7 Aesha No(hhh), never heard of that, uh-oh.  
 8 Karen ((laughter))  
 9 Aesha So this creepster lady ((inaudible))=  
 10 Jen =Well I went on like an okcupid date  
 11 Aesha O:h  
 12 Jen and um (.) she was just crazy like (.) and we were having a good ti:me and >all  
 13 of sudden she's like<, Can I ask you a question? And I was like (.) Su↑re. How  
 14 do you feel about pub-public displays of affection? And I was like (.)°I'm fine  
 15 with that°. She was like (.) Well, can I kiss you right now? And we're standing  
 at the tunnel bar (.) [right?  
 16 Aesha [Yeah  
 17 Jen So I'm like leaning up against the bar and she just like (.3) grabs me  
 18 All ((laughter))  
 19 Jen and like shoves her tongue (.) down my throat  
 20 Natasha Oh [wow  
 21 Aesha [Wow::  
 22 Jen [like HARD, like like she was attacking me,  
 23 Aesha Wow  
 24 Natasha O:h,[yeah I don't like that either]  
 25 Jen [and I was like, FLAILing against] the bar, and it was like [crazy  
 26 Aesha [Wo:w, you  
 27 were like no more (hh) bye (hh)  
 28 Jen Yeah, I was like, ↑Woo, I might've (.) been interested in you but not anymore.

Jen starts this story with a question that draws the rest of the group in as audience members who want to hear the ‘Susan Delay story’. Jen then immediately references a category bound action tied to Susan Delay, “she accosted me and stuck her tongue down my throat” (5: 3-4). Jen uses the term “accosted” and vividly describes Susan’s actions to characterize Susan’s display of sexual desire as violent, aggressive, and inappropriate. Susan’s aggression is a form of female masculinity that is described by Jen as extremely out of the ordinary for a first date encounter. Karen and Aesha’s reactions (5: 5-8) illustrate their shared interpretation that Susan’s display of sexual desire was out of ordinary and that Jen’s story is tellable. Aesha labels an identity that accompanies this strange sexual desire, “creepster lady” (5: 9), confirming the group’s negative evaluation of Susan’s actions. Aesha re-uses the word “lady” (she already used it to evaluate the Victoria’s Secret “good lady”), and since she used the term to refer to two very different women, it suggests that “lady” may just be Aesha’s way of referencing women (as opposed to Tiana’s use of “girl”).

Jen adds to the creepster lady identity category with an evaluation of her own: “she was just crazy” (5: 13). Jen, in labeling Susan’s behavior as a “crazy” emotional display, ties Susan’s behaviors to popular notions of femininity that characterize women as being emotionally (over)expressive. Jen, therefore, is using popular notions of masculinity (sexual aggression) and popular notions of femininity (acting crazy) to construct Susan’s particular female identity. Jen then proceeds to explain Susan’s “crazy” behavior on their date. The beginning of the date is described as normal (5: 12-13), and Jen uses reported speech to portray Susan as considerate because she asks Jen’s permission before altering their relationship to include public displays of affection (5: 13-15). Then, Susan’s craziness resurfaces (5: 17). Jen continues using aggressive words such as “grabs” (5: 17), “shoves her tongue down” (5: 19), and “HARD, like she was attacking me” (5: 22). Jen positions herself in contrast to Susan as the subordinate and as a victim of Susan’s aggressive actions (“and I was like, FLAILing against the bar”, 5: 25). The relationship Jen constructs between Susan and herself illustrates an opposition between a “soft butch” like Jen, who has short hair and needs help shopping for clothing, but is not sexually aggressive, and a hard butch like Susan who has hyper-aggressive sexual behaviors typically associated with hegemonic masculinity (Halberstam 1998).

Jen wraps up the story by evaluating the whole scene, “and it was like crazy” (5: 25). Aesha contributes to this evaluation by ventriloquizing (Tannen 1986) what Jen would have said in that situation, “you were like, ‘no more (hh) bye (hh)’” (5: 26-27), and Jen confirms this by declaring a definite dis-interest in “crazy” Susan (5: 28). Following this narrative is another that describes the recent encounter Tiana and Jen had with crazy Susan and is full of identity categories that the participants use to explain crazy Susan’s behavior. Excerpts are shown below:

(6)	53	Tiana	She’s very (.) she’s petite
	54	Jen	She’s tiny (.) yeah
	55	Aesha	Oh my god
	56	Jen	And she’s very like engaging and charismatic and interesting and CR↑AZY

	63	Jen	She: like I think she’s like bipolar (.) like, but she’s very (0.3)
	64	Tiana	Or just bisexual
	65	All	((laughter))

73	Jen	I actually think she's a gold star actually
74	Natasha	What's a gold star?
75	Aeesha	I don't kno(h)w
76	Jen	It's when you've never slept with a man before
77	Aeesha	Oh, <u>oh</u> okay
78	Tiana	And I fucking hate them because they're like ↑"I'm a gold star" mah mah mah and I'm like, you do not have a black Baptist grandmother dammit.
79		Fuck you.

First, Susan is described physically as "petite" by Tiana, echoed by Jen who describes her as "tiny" (6: 53-54). Second, Jen introduces a bipolar identity category, which she associates with the category bound actions of being "very like engaging and charismatic and interesting and CR↑AZY" (6: 56) at the same time. Jen's choice to assess this behavior as "bipolar" frames Susan's behavior as a psychological disorder. Tiana adds to this evaluation, by joking "or just bisexual" (6: 64). Here, Tiana adds a new category of sexual desire to the device of womanhood and positions it as extremely undesirable by associating bisexual desires with someone who is "crazy", "creepster", and "bipolar".

Upon Tiana's classification of Susan as "bisexual", Jen adds that Susan is actually a "gold star" (6: 73). This identity category is another "revolutionary category" (Sacks 1979), as is evident from one member's lack of knowledge about it. Aeesha did not know the definition of the term, and eventually Jen explained it to me as "when you've never slept with a man before" (6: 76), which is opposite to Tiana's "bisexual" classification. The gold star identity is negatively evaluated later by Tiana, who states, "And I fucking hate them because they're like "I'↑m a gold star" mah mah mah and I'm like, you do not have a black Baptist grandmother dammit. Fuck you," (6: 78-79). According to Tiana, a "gold star" identity has in group prestige, which is why she voices gold stars as being so proud of their sexual identity: They have not succumbed to societal pressure to have heterosexual sex. However, Tiana also points out that the ability to be a gold star comes with the privilege of growing up in a particularly liberal, accepting family and community. Tiana's own experience speaks to the difficulty lesbians have "coming out" in black religious communities, and ultimately comments on the fact that although it is hard for everyone to "come out", it is even harder for certain groups of people to do so.

Tiana's anger towards proud gold stars ("fuck you", 6: 79) can be further explained by her own past experiences, where she felt it necessary to try having sex with a man. Through narratives about past experiences dating men, Tiana reveals an alternate sexuality she experimented with in the past: Heterosexuality.

(7)	1	Tiana	So the story is- so this is when I was dating John (.3) That th-the <u>boy</u> (.) as I call him. <i>lines 2-23 omitted because tells tangential story about an old roommate</i>
	24	Natasha	Is he the only boy- is that why he's <u>the</u> boy
	25	Tiana	Well I dated a <u>gay</u> boy before that.
	26	Aeesha	Oh y(h)ah.
	27	Tiana	That was one other one
	28	Aeesha	The Italian one?
	29	Tiana	Yeah (.) [He refused to have sex with m(h)e ((laughter))
	30	Natasha	[How did that even work?
	31	Tiana	I wanted to <u>try</u> it!

- 32     Natasha     Oh oh [gotcha  
 33     Tiana         [I was twenty: (.) two-almost twenty two and I had never had sex with a  
 34                   man and he like didn't (.) he wouldn't do it. And I was like (.) >I wanna know  
                   what it's like<

Tiana talks about “dating John”, “the boy” (7: 1-2), and this is a category bound action linking Tiana to a heterosexual identity. However, Tiana marks this action as non-normative for her and as no longer applicable by emphasizing that John is “the (one, only) boy” she dated. After hearing this story, I ask Tiana if John is the only boy she has ever dated (7: 24). Tiana then reveals that she also dated a boy who she now classifies as gay (7: 25). Tiana’s reasoning for dating the gay boy is that she was in her early 20’s, had never had sex with a man before, and wanted to try it (7: 33-34). These stories help illustrate Tiana’s aversion to “gold star” lesbians, as she has obviously been pressured (by herself or others) in the past to try having heterosexual relationships and heterosexual desires. Furthermore, Tiana’s sexual history also helps clarify the group’s attitude towards bisexuality. Tiana and other non-gold star lesbians have had sex with both men and women but do not identify as being interested in both sexes at the same time. Experimenting with heterosexuality in the past is an acceptable identity, but bisexuality, an interest in men and women at the same time, is evaluated negatively.

#### 4. Conclusions

This paper has illustrated the role that multiple female identity categories play in everyday interaction and how they challenge the notion of gender difference, in which women are characterized as internally homogenous and are defined in relation to men. This analysis, in which participants construct multiple forms of female identification, is similar to studies of men in which the same phenomenon occurs (Connell & Messerschmidt 2005; Kiesling 2001; Wetherell & Edley 1999). Furthermore, by examining and incorporating the participants’ viewpoints about forms of female identification, this paper provides a more complete understanding of how women construct a definition of womanhood in everyday interaction.

The women in this study use revolutionary categories to expand notions of female-ness by allowing for the creation of multiple female identities encompassed both within the dominant category of “lesbian” and outside of it. The participants also evaluate the multiple forms of female identification they produce on their own terms, thus challenging heteronormative ideologies about female identities. Revolutionary categories such as “femme dyke”, “butch dyke”, “good butch dyke”, and “gold star”, replace the dominant category of “lesbian” that is enforced on the group. Furthermore, these women mark womanhood using the term “girl” (“butchiest dyke-iest girl” and “little peppy girl”), “lady” (“good lady”, “creepster lady”), “woman” (“ignorant woman” and “woman at delia’s”), and “chicks” (“those chicks”), as revolutionary categories to expand terms of reference that indicate membership in the “womanhood” device. As stated by Sacks (1979), the purpose of revolutionary categories is to create independence for marginalized groups. Whereas “lesbian”, for example, is a category at least partly imposed by non-lesbians, revolutionary categories used by lesbians are ones where lesbians “will recognize whether somebody is a member of one or another category, and what that membership takes, and *they* can do the sanctioning” (p. 11,

emphasis original). Thus, revolutionary categories place power of identification within the marginalized groups.

The women also use revolutionary categories to illustrate that traits popularly and hegemonically associated with men can be found in *the device of womanhood*, thus problematizing the notion of normative female appearance and sexual desire. The multiple types of butch lesbians described by these women directly illustrate that such traits are not always or exclusively tied to the male body. The lesbians in training, for example, are "big with muscular legs" and are still referred to as "chicks". Jen, although she is a "butch dyke" and has short hair and wears clothes that do not emphasize curves, is still a "girl" and during her bad date story, positions herself as submissive (a trait popularly associated with femininity) rather than aggressive (a trait popularly associated with hegemonic masculinity). Maria is a "good butch dyke" ("into her truck", "man arms", sexual confidence) and is not classified as a "girl" but still referred to using the personal pronoun "she" and the traditionally female pseudonym "Maria" that the participants chose themselves. Susan is the most aggressive with her overt displays of sexual desire. These behaviors, however, are evaluated with terms used to characterize women ("petite", "tiny", "creepster lady", the repeated use of "crazy" which is mostly attributed to females). This particular way of referencing and organizing the multiple invoked female identity categories directly challenges notions of internal homogeneity among women in terms of physical appearance, sexual desire, and general behaviors, ultimately demonstrating the complexity of the positioning of this lesbian counterpublic among larger structures of gender and sexuality.

This analysis also contributes to the notion that the personal is political. In sharing stories about their everyday, personal experiences, these women speak politically about different female identities they encounter in everyday lives. As illustrated by the multiple narratives presented, mundane experiences for these women are always viewed through a political lens of sexuality. Shopping, both at Delia's and Victoria's Secret, is complicated because of Tiana's and Jen's lesbian and couplehood identities. They encounter an "ignorant woman" who is uncomfortable with their sexuality and a peppy teen girl who is interested in it. Dating and expressions of sexual desire are also altered in the lesbian experience. On Jen's bad date, Susan's sexuality is constantly negotiated as the participants characterize Susan as being normal, sexually aggressive, bisexual, and a gold star within one minute of talk. The participants are negotiating among multiple socially recognized categories of sexuality in the lesbian counterpublic, therefore orienting to Jen's personal story as a political discussion about forms of lesbian sexuality. The sharing of these stories serves to bond these women both as friends and as a lesbian counterpublic whose experiences and perspectives are marked in the larger, hetero-dominant world. For these women, all experiences, no matter how mundane, are part of a lesbian experience, making the personal always political. The actions taken through these narratives contribute to the formation of a counterpublic of diverse female identities and, on a more personal level, contribute to the formation of their own lesbian counterpublic.

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