Apparent lesbian performances, heteroflexibility and sexual identity: Fluid sexuality among young women in public places.

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Apparent Lesbian Performances,
Heteroflexibility and Sexual Identity: Fluid Sexuality among Young Women in Public Places

By
Allisa Scott

A Thesis
Submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research through Sociology
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
the Degree of Master of Arts at the
University of Windsor

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Abstract

Semi-structured interviews were used to document the experiences of fifteen young women between the ages of 18-31 who have engaged in “apparent lesbian performances”. Apparent Lesbian behaviours occur when women engage in intimate behaviour with other women in public places. This study finds that women who engage in this behaviour may identify as lesbian, bisexual, or heterosexual. Their lesbian performativity is defined as “apparent” because it is characteristically not interpreted by the actors or their audience as the actions of “real” lesbians. Rather it is behaviour that has been encouraged and normalized by pop culture icons like Madonna and Britney Spears who have popularized the female kiss on TV in 1993. The notion of heteroflexibility and fluid sexuality is examined in relation to the many ways that the young women in this study used apparent lesbian performances to construct, test, maintain and understand their own sexual identity as both fluid and fixed. The performances take place within highly specific public contexts where apparent lesbian behaviours are accepted and sometimes even encouraged.
Dedication

I dedicate this thesis to all those who supported my research and helped me through the tough times, including my family and friends. You know who you are. I will thank you all personally for my gratitude when I see you. Your support and positive encouragement was incredibly important to helping me complete this challenging task. After two long years, I am proud of all the hard work I was able to put in to completing this thesis. Thank you so much. I will never forget you.
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I would also like to thank the 15 women who participated in this research and were willing to conduct personal interviews with me to help me develop the first research to be done on this topic in a local, Canadian context. I am grateful for your contributions.
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Introduction

Sexuality is now prevalent in the media, and it has recently become more visible in public spaces such as bars. It is no longer unusual to see two young women involved in intimate activities such as rubbing, touching and kissing in public places. This behaviour has become increasingly visible for young women as it has been encouraged by pop culture icons like Madonna and Britney Spears who have popularized the female kiss on TV. According to Anderson-Minshall (2004. p 27), the Britney Spears-Madonna kiss was “a choreographed moment of pure showmanship” between two heterosexual women that the media have perfected over the last several years. Today, more young women are engaging in these apparent lesbian performances, however, they are not celebrities, so why do they do it? Even more puzzling are the identity labels they use. Women who engage in this behaviour do not usually identify as “lesbian” or even “bisexual”, but often as “heterosexual”. Some of them also identify with a fluid sexual identity. The women who engage in apparent lesbian performances are being called “heteroflexible” by researchers of this phenomenon since they are predominantly heterosexual, but they still engage in same sex behaviour (Essig, 2000).

There is a large gap in the current Canadian literature on the subject of young women’s sexuality. Diamond (2005) researched the commercial media images of female same-sex sexuality, and a few magazine articles have commented on lesbian imagery from the United States. But academic research has never attempted to investigate apparent lesbian performances and how this relates to women’s everyday lives. This thesis investigates apparent lesbian performances and asks questions such as: Why are lesbian “performances” socially acceptable in some public places today?
Why do some women “perform” apparent lesbian acts in public places? Is this behaviour related to their identity, a form of sexual expression or simply a detached “performance” for them? How do the women involved define their sexuality? Do these women identify as “heteroflexible” or “bi-curious”, or with a “fluid” sexual identity? How do women feel about their participation in this kind of behaviour? Are these women doing it for themselves or for a male audience? This study explores how young women construct, maintain and understand their own sexual identity by examining how apparent lesbian behaviour is publicly performed and how women’s sexuality can be constructed as either fluid or fixed within a public heterosexual context.

Literature Review

According to Matamala (2000, p.15), women’s bodies are in a “sexual contract of modernity” because women’s bodies reflect production, power struggles and controversy, especially in regards to sexuality. During the 1960s sexual revolution, North American women started to resist those who tried to control them and their sexuality by publicly focusing on issues of sexuality (Gomez, 2000). As discourse about women’s sexuality grew more public in context, sexuality and feminism became strongly linked, and women became empowered by the feminist ethics of independence and choice (Hope, 1996). With this new independence and freedom of choice, women took on more public social roles then ever before.

Effects of Heterosexism

According to Joyrich (2001, p. 441), sexuality is presented to society through sets of binary divisions such as heterosexuality/homosexuality, “same/different,
inside/outside, public/private, secrecy/disclosure, health/fitness, life/death” which keep hetero-normative sexualities at the center of acceptability as part of the ongoing construction of public space. According to Warloumont (1993, p.27), knowledge is “developed, transmitted and maintained” in a reality that is accepted by others for its general use. And when these realities are depicted visually, they become part of what we learn and understand to be socially acceptable. Warloumont argues that this reality is also changed by perception, and over time, it can produce multiple meanings for individuals and those in their lives.

Berlant and Warner (1998, p. 553) argue that intimacy is constructed to meet the needs of heterosexuals by publicly mediating sexuality and situating it in the private sphere, and by implementing it through heteronormative social practices in the consumer industry. By emphasizing women’s sexuality in society for consumer use, it is “hyper” produced while becoming increasingly public within a heterosexual context.

**Sexual Labels**

According to Hacking (1986), people often fit into categories that are prescribed for them while simultaneously changing the very meaning of those categories. Hacking describes these new categories as coming into existence once specific distinctions are made, and they are created through a dynamic process because previous existing realities become altered in some manner when individuals take on a role. In other words, “a kind of person came into being at the same time as the kind… itself was being invented” (Hacking, 1986, p. 228). These new meanings impact the way social relations exist because they are created by both men and women who change the way social meanings are understood in society. As noted by Petras (1987, p.20), society
Lesbian performances has become sexualized and it is “one of the few remaining ways of manifesting individuality coupled with concern for others, thus sexuality becomes an affirmation of individuality in relationships with others”. If this is true, then what kind of statements are women trying to make about their individuality and sexuality when they perform apparent lesbian performances in public places? What are their motivations for engaging in lesbian performances?

Constructing Sexually Fluid Labels

Diamond (2002, p.7) conducted a study where she investigated young women’s adolescent “intimate friendships” which are stereotypically referred to by other researchers as “repressed romantic relationships”. Diamond argues that that the young women’s identities in her study are much more complicated then they appear. The women in her study identified as lesbian, bisexual and “unlabeled” and were between the ages of 18-25. She found that the women described their passionate friendships similar to how a romantic relationship would be described: with feelings of a strong emotional attachment and feelings of excitement, fascination and possessiveness of their “love object” (p. 8-9). Diamond found that many women did not seem to characterize their relationships as sexual in nature, nor did they describe their behaviour as “lesbian” behaviour. Diamond (p.10) argues that “the distinction between affectionate and sexual motives for physical intimacy is obviously ambiguous, and thus, one might reasonably challenge these women’s claims that such affectionate behaviours had no sexual overtones”. The women in her study argue that their affectionate behaviours are not motivated by sexual attraction, but are demonstrations of the intimacy they feel for the woman they are interested in.

Diamond (p.14) concluded that these intimate friendships could be classified as either
Lesbian performances

“unacknowledged and unconsummated same-sex romances or ‘just friends’”.

Diamond (p.13) also found that sexual minority women showed evidence of fluidity between their emotional and sexual feelings, which were characterized as strong affectional bonds and the foundation for same-sex sexual desire. Diamond (pg. 14) found that young women experienced an “interconnectedness between passion, attraction, sexual activity and sexual orientation [which] are relatively fluid and situation-dependent”. The women in her study had “trouble distinguishing between close, same-sex friendships and same-sex love affairs, given the primacy of emotional intimacy” in their relationships. Therefore, these relationships blurred the line between friendship and romantic relationship, and changed the way relationships are assumed to be fixed and clearly defined as either sexual or affectionate. Diamond’s research did not define women’s “true” sexual orientation since the women’s motivations were found to be ambiguous and their identities complicated and changing; however, it did contribute to a notion of female sexual fluidity.

Sexual Subjectivity and Sexual Labels

Anderson and Cyranowski (1994, p. 1079) argue that young women’s sexual schemas explain part of their sexual subjectivity. They argue that women with positive schemas tend to be more liberal in regards to sexuality because they are “generally free of such social inhibitions as self-consciousness or embarrassment” (p. 1094). If young women are more sexually free and less inhibited, then they are contributing to the way their sexuality is defined, practiced and understood. If women’s sexuality has been socially redefined as more sexually free, then that gives women more freedom to comfortably express their sexuality in public places.
Performativity

Goffman (1959, p. 22) refers to a performance as "the activity of an individual which occurs during a period marked by his continuous presence before a particular set of observers and which has some influence on the observers". Butler (1993, p.121) however, defines a different kind of performance. According to her, "performatives" are intelligible only within a matrix that is simultaneously social and semiotic. She argues that individuals perform "subjected statuses of the subject" and receive recognition while attaining a "certain order of social existence, in being transferred from an outer region of indifferent, questionable, or impossible being to the discursive or social domain of the subject" (p.121). Butler (2004, p.18), also says that "through the practice of gender performativity, we not only see how the norms that govern reality are cited but grasp one of the mechanisms which reality [ha]s reproduced and altered in the course of that reproduction". If I apply this theory to lesbian performativity, then lesbian performances are being reproduced among young women in a commercialized Canadian context, but in those performances, altered meanings arise as part of their complicated nature. For this research, the term performances and performativity will be used to refer to the apparent lesbian behaviour that women engage in with other women. Even though Butler’s description of performativity is useful and worth investigating, there is no way to be certain that the women in this study are aware of the kind of gendered performativity that is described by Butler.

When it comes to social behaviour, women are defined and understood by their gender. According to Irigaray (1974, p.180), a woman’s body is “split in two. The ‘natural’ body that allows women pleasure is different from her ‘irreconcilable’
Lesbian performances and ‘socially valued, exchangeable body’”. She emphasizes the notion of a woman’s multiple selves and how her body has a social significance outside of her “natural body” because of the social associations with femininity and womanhood. Hope (1996, p.24) then elaborates on this when she says that Irigaray “most values...the non-unitary nature of woman – the impossibility of reducing her to one being – and the great potential this multiplicity provides”. This notion of multiple selves both in the body and in the social, as well as existing on other levels, is another way to view the complexity of performativity. Hope argues that a multiplicity of selfhood is an empowering experience for women.

Heteroflexibility

Theorists like Cox (2004) have called the women who engage in lesbian performances “bi-curious”. The term “heteroflexibility” has recently been used by Essig (2002, p2) to describe a woman who is open to same-sex experiences, but is predominantly attracted to men and only wants to have serious relationships with men. This popular trend of heteroflexibility has become so familiar, that it is now starting to be documented because of its public visibility (Essig, 2002).

Warn (2003a, p. 1) has been examining this popular trend of heteroflexibility, and has noted that in American pop culture, “most women are secretly attracted to women, but (almost) always in addition to – and subjugated to – their attraction to men”. Warn uses the television series “Ally McBeal” as an example when she describes heteroflexible behaviour as becoming more normalized in the media. Warn’s theory about women’s sexuality being “subjugated” to their attractions to men is something that needs to be further investigated. Diamond's (2005, p. 104) research similarly investigated how female to female sexuality is represented in the media,
Lesbian performances noting that more accepting "portrayals of female same-sex sexuality… have (been) increasingly proliferated in American entertainment media. Over the past 5-10 years, there has been an upsurge of openly lesbian [and bisexual] characters and relationships on American films and television shows". Diamond recognizes this new trend of heteroflexible women and describes them as "depictions of presumably heterosexual women hinting at or experimenting with same-sex sexuality" (p.104). She mentions numerous televisions shows and the influence of the Madonna and Britney Spears kiss on MTV as being significant to this form of female same-sex behaviour.

According to Fields (2004, p. 1) though, heteroflexible women are engaging in "public permissiveness" that "gives fantasy a literal reality right in the living room". She sees heteroflexibility as a form of exhibitionism, and an imitation of celebrities who have engaged in lesbian kisses on television. She specifically discusses how heteroflexibility seems to be happening among teenage girls and believes it is related to rebellion. Cox (2004, p.1) sees heteroflexible behaviour as a form of acting out like Fields, but she defines it differently. She argues that heteroflexibility is a form of "acting out" by women who identify as "bi-curious" and who feel they need to experiment with their sexuality. Cox (2004) argues that women who engage in this behaviour are not "lesbian", but "bi-curious". When Cox interviewed women, she found a complicated situation. Bisexuality might seem like a viable option in today's heterosexist society because bisexuals seem to have the prestige that comes along with being with a man, such as "social acceptability and greater financial stability through marriage and children" (p.2). On the other hand, Cox found that bisexual women must often "negotiate female sexual encounters with
Lesbian performances

Lesbian performances, and success in doing so is worn like a “badge of honor” (p. 2). This is the only literature that refers to bisexual women sexually negotiating with lesbians, but it does not clearly explain what happens when “bi-curious” women approach lesbians, or what identifying as “bi-curious” means to the women involved. What Cox’s theory of bisexuality contributes though, is that popular media are now encouraging young women to explore their sexuality in ways that has not been publicly seen as acceptable before.

So are women aware of their heteroflexible behaviour and how do they imagine other’s perceptions of it? According to Goffman (1963), the information that is given to others is embodied, and it may be something that only occurs in specific situations and contexts. Therefore, certain things must be present in order for the behaviour to occur in the first place. Lesbian performances then might only be practiced during a “social occasion” which is “bounded in regard to place, and time” such as in a bar (p.18). It is possible that women may engage in lesbian performances for the sheer pleasure of experiencing it, because lesbian performances could be seen as being “recreational” (Goffman, 1963). Goffman also argues that “expressive messages…must often preserve the fiction that they are uncalculated, spontaneous, and involuntary, as in some cases they are” (p.14). Therefore, women who engage in lesbian performances may do so in a way that seems spontaneous and exciting for the audience they are performing for. As Goffman (1963) notes, “to be engaged in an occasioned activity means to sustain some kind of cognitive and affective engrossment in it, some mobilization of one’s psychobiological resources; in short, it means to be involved in it.” (p.36). When lesbian performances occur, they “convey information about the actor’s social attributes and about his conception of himself, of
Lesbian performances 10
the others present, and of the setting.” (Goffman, 1963, p.24). Women may be
actively engaging in these lesbian performances and be aware of them, though they
may not be fully aware of how others perceive them. Regardless, women may be
aware that they are performing for an audience and they are getting something out of
it. Lesbian performances are becoming more visible, but there are complicated
reasons for this occurrence.

_Heteroflexibility and the Male Gaze_

Heteroflexibility in women is further complicated though, because women
may be engaging in lesbian performances for heterosexual men. Media largely
shapes public space and social acceptability, which in turn constructs women in a
particular context to be looked at and objectified. According to Lukas (2002, p.1), the
male gaze operates as a form of “visual harassment” which he says occurs when “men
have the power of the gaze—they can watch women in private and in public”. Like
Lukas, Mulvey (1975) examines how women are located visually for men through the
male gaze within a patriarchal culture. She also defines the male gaze as a
voyeuristic way that men look at women. She argues that women are “bound by
symbolic order in which man can live out his fantasies and obsession” (p. 7). These
all contribute to the way we “see” and have pleasure in looking at others. Mulvey
(p.9) argues that the very act of looking objectifies women, and the audience is
essentially a set of “voyeurs and peeping Toms, whose only sexual satisfaction can
come from watching, in an active controlling sense, an objectified other”. Women are
then deemed to be erotic exhibitionists for men and consent to playing a part in their
own objectification when they are put on display for male voyeurs. This results in a
change in objectification and refers to a passive form of contribution to the re-

making of the meaning of performance.

Diamond (2005, p.105) also discusses the male gaze and asserts that women
are depicted in a particular way to “attract and titillate young male viewers”, to
present same-sex sexuality as a form of “experimentation as a means of confirming
one’s essential heterosexuality”, and to “obscure the sociopolitical context of
‘compulsory heterosexuality’”. The theme of assumed heterosexuality is common for
many theorists who examine this topic which plays a key feature in lesbian
performativity. Diamond’s comments about male viewers also express the consumer
aspect when she says, “the most desirable and acceptable form of female sexuality is
that which pleases and plays to the heterosexual male gaze, titillating male viewers in
the conventional heterosexual market-place” (p.105).

Warn (2003a, p. 1) also argues that the media are responsible for glorifying
lesbians and lesbian behaviour for a male-centered audience. She contends that
shows like “Ally McBeal” are specifically designed to attract a male audience, and
these heteroflexible women perform for men to excite and arouse them. According to
Warn, “lesbianism is just another weapon in the war between the sexes, a tool for
heterosexual women to use to manipulate or supplement the affections of men” (p. 3).
This plays into male fantasies about sexualized women, and it caters to desires that
contribute to patriarchy and power struggles between men and women. Berger’s
(1972, p. 46) classic theory about the way we “see” things argues that a man’s
presence is affected by the power he possesses, and the object is always exterior to
him and is based on a power he exercises over it. Berger theorizes that relations
between men and women are based on men looking at women, and women looking at
Lesbian performances themselves while being looked at by men. Berger also argues that when men are
surveying women, women are giving up their femininity to them. This power
struggle between the sexes then becomes a monotonous cycle of gender appropriation
through power.

The Roots of the Male Gaze, and Media Influences
According to Warloumont (1993, p.29), women are seen as “providers of services to
men…and are seen as objects of the male gaze….traditionally and consistently it is
the female body shown as an object of the male gaze and associated with objects or
products for sale”. This is historically rooted, since early art was created by men.
This notion of the female body or female image is consistent in the literature even
though it is used differently today with this new popularity of apparent lesbianism.
Tendre (2003, p.3) argues that to “reinvent a waning public persona”, lesbianism is
being used as “a hip marketing tool to generate buzz for any kind of product”. She
maintains that this is problematic because those who are against homosexuality can
write it off in three ways by categorizing it as a fad, phase, or something that is only
done for fun. This downplays homosexuality as being a legitimate sexual practice
and identity.

Lesbianism on television also seems to occur at a particular time, which
makes it seem like it is a marketing tool. Warn (2003c, p. 1) finds that “lesbian
visibility” on television seems to increase during “Sweeps” (the time when television
shows are rated in late October and ends just after the American Thanksgiving in
November). She argues that by allowing lesbianism on television during sweeps, it is
exploiting lesbians because they are used to get good ratings and then taken off the air
after the ratings have come in (Warn, 2003c, p. 1). Therefore, lesbianism is being
Lesbian performances

used on television temporarily, as a ploy to get high ratings for television shows. Warn argues that this is not a move towards equality since lesbians are not portrayed on television shows for regular television programming. They are seen as disposable and unimportant characters on television. Warn also notes that lesbians on television often have a heterosexual tone to them, because when presented with the opportunity to be with a man, they are. Therefore, mainstream television is portraying a form of “lesbian performance”.

Lo (2004, p.1) questions whether celebrity women are exploiting the lesbian image for profit, however, she chalks their lesbian behaviour up to the Sexual Revolution and to Madonna and Angelina Jolie in the 1990s who have “declared their love for and right to have sex” as women who are sexual beings. She argues that these women are not claiming a sexual identity, but they are claiming to be sexual without labeling themselves. In the past, only men were able to be publicly sexual, so she considers this to be a positive move towards reconceptualizing the modern women’s sexuality. Christina Aguilera, for example, has publicly admitted that she likes casual sex and experimenting with her sexuality because sex is “a beautiful thing” (Lo, 2004, p.2). Lo (2004, p.1) argues that Aguilera does “play up her sex appeal to sell records”, however, she also argues that Aguilera is controlling her own image instead of letting it be controlled by the media who want to box in her sexual identity. Aguilera is also quoted for her comments about being sexual with other women as “I love experimenting with my sexuality….if that means (with) girls then so be it. It would be wrong to hide this side of my personality” (Lo, 2004, p.1). According to Lo then, what is often perceived as female promiscuity can be a form of sexual empowerment.
The Britney Spears – Madonna kiss at the MTV Music Video Awards in 2003 is one of the most memorable and interesting lesbian kisses in the media, because Madonna’s character essentially played a dominant male role while Brittany played a passive female role. Warn (2003b, p. 1) discusses their kiss and the events that led up to it:

During the performance Madonna’s dominance was clearly established through the body language and interaction between her and Britney and her and Christina. She frequently put her hands on Britney’s and Christina’s bodies, both possessively and intimately – stroking Britney’s face, putting her hand on Britney’s hip, putting her face against Christina’s thigh as she pulled the garter off Christina’s leg.

This performance of “male dominance” by Madonna’s character onto Britney’s passive female character shows how male dominance and sexuality are exchanged. This image is so powerful because of who was performing this kiss – two celebrities, and Madonna is a well-known role model for women’s empowerment. But performing like a man to give males sexual pleasure gives women in society a clear message that men should be pleased by women. This particular lesbian performance is not considered threatening by most men because it was performed by two well-known, attractive, heterosexual women. Even though these women are engaging in “homosexual” behaviour, it is still seen as existing within the safe limits of heterosexuality, because they are not claiming to be real lesbians to exclude men. By doing this, Britney Spears and Madonna made something as unattainable as “lesbianism,” attainable for men, giving them even more power then they previously had over female sexuality. Essentially, these women were exploiting lesbianism by performing for a heterosexual audience while “getting in on the fun of homosexual pleasures” at the same time (Essig, 2000, p. 2).
Anderson-Minshull (2004, p. 27) dubs the Britney Spears-Madonna kiss the "ultimate lesbian kiss" because it is one of the first to be purposely crafted for a heterosexual audience and broadcast on public television. Anderson-Minshull (p. 30) believes these public acts of lesbianism are meant to "titillate while avoiding trickier questions about sexuality". She argues that the women who engage in these lesbian kisses are perceived as being "sexually adventurous", but they are used to excite men, not to further the image of the "real lesbian" on television because "real" lesbians are still a great source of discomfort to the public.

Diamond (2005, p. 107) agrees with Warn and Anderson-Minshall about the social consequences of lesbian performances, arguing that it discounts women's positive sexual power and pleasure. Diamond argues that heterosexuality becomes compulsory through the depiction of these images of seemingly "lesbian" women when it is a "cultural imperative for women rather than a natural 'state of being'" (Diamond, 2005, p. 108). When lesbianism is demonstrated as being a form of entertainment or a performance, it takes away from the identity politics and positive social image that self-identified lesbians have worked so hard to achieve. These false images of lesbianism then become reproduced in the media and have a circular affect. Since media images like Britney and Madonna's kiss on television reinforces social behaviour, it makes apparent lesbian performances that were already occurring, more visible. This public image then reinforces apparent lesbian performances making them more visible, which then may encourage women to engage in apparent lesbian behaviour in bars.

*Gendered Performances and the Male Gaze*

Goffman (1959, p. 35), argues that gendered performances are "'socialized',
Lesbian performances are molded, and modified to fit into the understanding and expectations of the society in which they are presented,” resulting in “an impression that is idealized”.

“Idealized” lesbian performances are what men find appealing and they have become normalized over time and socialized to become publicly appropriate because of male power and expectations. In Western culture, when someone looks at you, it usually means that they like you (Argyle, 1975, p.162). Since it is typically men who seek women, looking is seen as an appropriate social behaviour in our society. Mulvey (1975, p. 11) agrees, and argues that the pleasure of looking is split into “active/male and passive/female”, resulting in a gendered notion of control and power of males over females through the male gaze.

Hope (1996) examines a different concept of the gaze. She asserts that women can redirect the male gaze by forcing them to see something they are intentionally displaying. She argues that “the pleasure of watching is there for the narrator only if she is certain of being the subject [rather then the object] of the gaze” (Hope, 1996, p.10). Hope believes that women can then purposefully change their relationship to the male gaze, choosing to show certain aspects of themselves when being gazed upon. This theory of the gaze gives women a sense of agency over their images and their “selves”.

The above review on “the male gaze” ignores an important question – do women “gaze” as well, and if yes what does this mean? According to Shields (1990), women are so used to being objectified that they look at other women to compare their own beauty. Therefore, they identify with the image that is seen through the male gaze. But Gaines (1987, p.365) says that women cannot assume a voyeururistic position because a woman is too close to that image “which is ultimately her own”,
and because she is a passive recipient of that gaze herself. However, this may change if a heterosexual, bisexual or lesbian woman is looking at another woman. Do they have a gaze as well? And what does their gaze consist of?

The Male Gaze & Pornography

Research suggests that the male gaze exerts power over women, and this can be seen in pornography. Lesbian sexual fantasies are commonly portrayed in modern pornography. According to Loftus (2002, p. 52), most men are aware that lesbian scenes are not “real” but they like them for a number of reasons. Some men “were just happy to see nude women experiencing pleasure together”, some men liked how sensual women were together and other men liked to imagine being one of the women engaging in the sexual acts themselves. Men also reported in Loftus’s research that they believed women were more sexual, orgasmic and experimental then men, so men have accepted that women are sexual beings as well. Loftus argues that men like lesbian pornography because it expresses a sense of equality to them. Most feminists would be surprised to hear this since they often argue that men like power play and dominance, but the men in this study felt that equality was an important factor in identifying with pornography. Loftus also found that heterosexual men like to be voyeurs while they view women as passive objects which satisfy their sexual fantasies. However, Loftus also says that men do acknowledge women’s sexual pleasure in the act as well, so perhaps the literature on lesbian pornography is incomplete. Perhaps some men also respect women’s sexuality and their sexual openness with other women even if it is for their consumption.

For some heterosexual men, lesbian performativity may be a live enactment of the sexual fantasies they see in pornography, and the “real thing” is better than a
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pornographic movie or magazine so it is especially arousing for them. This consumer aspect of the male gaze is significant when it comes to lesbian performativity, and it needs to be further investigated.

_Female Sexual Agency_

Even though it seems that women are engaging in lesbian performativity for men, there is controversy over how much (if any) agency women give to their performances. Kaufman-Osborn (1997) theorizes that agency is constructed in a web of power, which should be carefully considered when examining identity. Kaufmann-Osborn (p.654) states that performances are embodied and recited in the "illusion of the self-subsistent 'I'," which comes to be "normalized as the effect we mistakenly designate as the extradiscursive cause called 'sex'".

Goffman (1967, p. 31) defines agency through the "self" as "an image pieced together from the expressive implications of the full flow of events in an undertaking....[which is] a kind of player in a ritual game who copes....with the judgmental contingencies of the situation". His construction of performativity involves a notion of the self that has agency and actively contributes to the complex process of performativity. Perhaps women are consciously engaging in lesbian performances without being fully aware of the social implications that it has on other people and their own sexual identity.

Hope (1996, p.12) sees agency differently. She describes a delicate balance where "our subjectivity is neither forced upon us nor inherent within is. It is the result of a vast network of forces in which the subject plays an active role". Hope’s understanding of subjectivity is unique because it emphasizes that women are both the product and the creator of their own subjectivity. If this is true, then agency may

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not be a clear cut aspect of a woman’s sexuality or her self. It may a complicated balance of multiplicity. Hope also describes women as being postmodern, socially constructed, and fragmented. She describes the self as a process of redefinition which she believes begins with the body. She argues that experiences contribute to what happens to the body, but “even their [women’s] experiences of these events are socially mediated; never can a woman encounter her body as pure, natural essence” (Hope, 1996, p. 16). This notion of a true, pure body, and or a pure “self” is contrary to Butler’s (1994) theory that all experiences are socially influenced and socially constructed.

Bannerji (1995) on the other hand argues that experience is the process where the “world enter[s] into a creative union called ‘social subjectivity’” (p. 86). Bannerji describes subjectivity and agency:

subjectivity...does not reify itself into a fixed psychological category called identity which rigidifies an individual’s relationship with her social environment and history. Subjectivity and experience, understood in this way, argue for a coherence of feeling and being without forcing either a homogeneity on or a fragmentation of subjectivity, as advocated by postmodernism (p. 88).

Bannerji theorizes that agency is embodied, and is created through complex social, historical and political processes, and brought about by a sense of collective shared experiences. So in theory, if a woman does not identify herself with one particular sexual orientation label, then performing lesbianism could be more an expression or feeling than trying to please an audience. She could be doing it because it feels good and is doing it to experience it with other women and just because she can do it.

Benhabib (1999, p.347) contends that identity is located within individuals as well as externally within webs of social and political narratives that are constructed in
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everyday life. Benhabib distinguishes a dialogical and narrative understanding of
the self. She locates agency within personal narratives that are described as
belonging to both individuals and “collective identities,” that are defined as fragments
of stories that humans tell about themselves to others. She argues that “narrativity
stresses otherness and the fluidity of the boundaries between the self and others”
which have “authoritarian and repressive movements” that one responds to when
searching for “certainty, for rigid definitions, for boundaries and markers” (p. 351).
Therefore, agency is created in this process of defining one’s identity in relation to
others. She describes narratives as a:

web of interlocution which is also a conversation with others(s). Others
are not just the subject matters of my story; they are also tellers of their
own stories, which compete with my own, unsettle my self-understanding,
and spoil my attempts to mastermind my own narrative (p. 38).

So according to Benhabib, agency is located within social narratives that are
“familial and gender(ed) narratives” that relate to one’s “macro narrative” of
collective identity (p. 344). She theorizes that humans are “conversation partners”
within external narratives in which we do not choose to be involved in, but “our
agency consists in our capacity to weave out of those narratives and fragments of
narratives a life story that makes sense for us, as unique individual selves (p. 344).
The “self” then, is a negotiation of personal agency that strives to understand itself.
She argues that the self is not a fixed or stable category but a fluid self that is created
through the “performatives of gender and language, social roles, and individual
postures” (p. 347). More specifically, she describes personal agency as the “fragile
achievement of needy and dependent creatures whose capacity to develop a coherent
life story out of the multiple, competing, and often irreconcilable voices and
perspectives of childhood must be cherished and protected” (p. 350). Benhabib also
Lesbian performances contends that individuals’ exertions of agency are in the construction of their own identity that is embodied in the social world. If Benhabib is right, then women may not be just performing lesbianism, but they may be contributing agency to their performances in both a personal and social way.

Methodology
This research study is exploratory because research on lesbian performativity in a local and public context has not been conducted before. As outlined in the literature reviewed above, the research draws on a combination of theories to explain the trend of apparent lesbian behaviour. Particularly salient are Judith Butler’s gender theory of performativity and Erving Goffman’s theories about the “self”, social interaction and performances, which are largely used in this research. A feminist perspective puts women’s experience at the centre of this research and examines the notion of fluid sexuality, agency, and the influence of the male gaze in association with lesbian performativity. A social constructionist perspective investigates how social roles have changed and developed with the differences and similarities between what is known as “apparent” lesbian performativity and “actual” (perceived by the women as real) performativity. Understanding how women’s performances are constructed by the women themselves and how this affects their social behaviour is a crucial component of this research.

Sample
Fifteen women between the ages of 18-31 were interviewed. They were asked open-ended interview questions that were related to their participation in apparent lesbian performances (See Appendix C, p.69). I asked questions about their frequency and
meaning, their sexual identity and sexual orientation as well as their motivations for their participation in this behaviour. The women were predominantly from a white middle class background, and most of them were University of Windsor students, or young women who frequented bars where these university women were. The women identified as heterosexual, bisexual, lesbian or used an alternative sexual identity like “pansexual”. Many women who participated in this research study said they identified with a certain label, but they did not agree with predetermined social meaning assigned to them, so they redefined their sexual label or added to existing ones. None of the women used the term “heteroflexible” themselves.

**Recruitment Strategy and Procedures**

There were two successful types of recruitment used to get participants for my study. First snowballing and an opportunistic approach were used. There were a few women who had already volunteered to participate in this study when I told them about it in person, and they informed their friends which resulted in more volunteers. Secondly, women were recruited on campus at the University of Windsor, and in online Windsor communities by using an invitation poster that was printed on bright coloured paper. (See Appendix A, p.66). The remainder of the women heard about my research from these posters; the online recruitment did not produce any volunteers for my study. Once interested candidates contacted me, I screened them by asking them if they had ever touched and kissed a woman in a bar or public place. This determined if they were good candidates for this study. If their answer was satisfactory (which they all were), then I scheduled an interview time to meet with them at my office at the University of Windsor.
Before we began the interview, I asked each woman to read and sign the consent form (See Appendix B, p.67) and the information letter that gave me consent to record the interviews to transcribe later to use for my analysis. Before I recorded them I asked them if they had any more questions about the interview and if they did, I answered them.

Interviews took place on campus to ensure professionalism and they lasted from 45 minutes to 1.5 hours depending on how talkative the participant was. I used an interactive interview approach and I probed them appropriately with each question I asked (See Appendix C, p.69).

At the end of the interview, I asked interviewees if they had anything else to add and let them end the interview when they were ready. Some women added more information at this time, but the majority of them just ended the discussion. Each participant was then debriefed (See Appendix D, p. 73). I gave each interviewee a card with community counseling service numbers on it and explained where they could go if they needed to talk about any issues this interview may have brought up (See Appendix E, p.74). I also informed them that if they had any questions about the research then they could contact me or my advisor with further questions. No one contacted me afterwards to reveal any discomfort.

A follow up message was sent to each woman thanking them for their participation and I reminded them that I would be in touch again once my research results were completed. I informed participants that they could also receive a short version of the final results upon request.
Data Analysis

The interviews themselves were semi-structured, and proactive with planned prompts for the questions in appendix E. As noted in McCracken (1988), face-safety is important in the interviews, so I made sure that I opened up each interview with less threatening questions that were simple and more information based on the participant’s background. I then asked my planned questions, using my predetermined probes, and also probed further about anything that came up during the interview that needed elaborating. The questions were carefully constructed with sensitivity in mind. I reworded questions if the participant was not clear about the question or if she needed help further elaborating on the answer.

Once the interviews were completed, a descriptive analysis was done and an interpretative analysis followed. The purpose of the descriptive analysis was to identify common themes in the interviews. The interpretative analysis was used to identify themes and sub-themes to categorize into the performativity spectrum.

First, the interviews were transcribed, and then they were analyzed by using a thematic approach. I used inductive methodology and grounded theory for my analysis, which resulted in a spectrum with themes and sub-themes related to apparent lesbian performativity. By organizing my data this way, it allowed me to have more flexibility with the data and it also allowed for the data and theory to interact (Neuman, 2004).

Findings

The Context

In order to completely understand apparent lesbian behaviour, the context in which it
Lesbian performances occur must be explained. Windsor, Ontario is located on the Canadian and United States border, across from Detroit, Michigan. Downtown Windsor is known as a “party” town and is frequented by an unusually high number of young people due to its lower drinking age of 19 years old. Therefore, there is a highly developed downtown bar scene that thrives on this youth culture. Windsor has a number of different types of bars including sports bars, art bars and gay bars. The majority of bars in downtown Windsor are dance bars, with one particular art bar being the most popular. “Club Retro” is a large, popular bar that is frequented by youth from Canada and the United States. This bar is known for being more “open minded” and accepting, and is a popular party location. Apparent lesbian performances are frequent and visible at “Club Retro”, and a number of the participants in this study frequent this bar. These bars cater to this particular party crowd that has formed a social niche, where the cultural phenomenon of apparent lesbian performances is accepted and encouraged among this young cohort.

Experiences of Lesbian Performativity

The fifteen women in this study had similar experiences with lesbian performativity. The performances always happened at a bar. The following quote is from Participant 5, (who identifies as queer, and frequents artsy dance bars):

I guess it was at Club Retro three weeks ago, and I went with this group of girls I always go with, and since I dated one of the girls before, we got drunk and we were on the dance floor and I wasn’t dancing. They just dance with me and something always ends up happening just because we have a history. Most of the time it’s like we’ll mess around on the floor so the other girls are always watching us to see what we are doing. It used to happen every weekend …We used to go to the gay bar a lot too but then we started going to Club Retro almost exclusively so it would happen like every weekend.
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Participant 11, (who identifies as ambiguous and frequents artsy dance bars)

describes her experience of meeting another woman at a bar:

I was at club retro and had just gotten out of a serious relationship and I went to the bar in hopes to just have fun, you know, like whatever. And I was telling this to a girl who I did not know who was sitting at the table just across from me who was complementing me a lot throughout the night. She asked me why I was at the bar, and I told her I was trying to pick up. And she asked me what I was looking for and I said ‘I don’t know, just whatever, a hot make out session that would be fun’. And she said ‘Well, I’ll make out with you’ and I was like, and I was like, very taken off guard by it, but eventually I was just kind of like ‘Sure why not’? So we went downstairs and we just kissed for like a few seconds and then we went upstairs and that was it.

This participant changed locations to kiss the other woman. The art bar she is frequenting gets very crowded upstairs, so they went downstairs to a somewhat public and less crowded area which was more comfortable for her because it was the first time she has ever been with another woman.

Participant 9, (who identifies as bisexual and frequents dance bars and artsy bars)

approached another woman at a bar:

This girl that I saw in the club, [well], I thought she was interesting. She went out on the balcony of the club to have a smoke and even though I’m not a smoker, I went out on the balcony to strike up a conversation with her and just we really hit it off. And I just kissed her [laughing]. I just grabbed her, pulled her to me and just kissed her. And she’s like ‘wow,’ and we talked, exchanged emails and she left not too long after that.

For women who identify as bisexual, lesbian or queer, their experiences at the bar are similar. For example, participant 6, (who identifies as bisexual and frequents dance bars), talks about a specific bar that she goes to that accommodates bisexual women:

We ah frequented swingers clubs where about 95 percent of the women are bi and when I go out with [my two friends], it’s common to make out or fondle one another in bars. [Swingers Clubs are] similar to a bar atmosphere but it’s much more open and relaxed. Much less inhibition, [because] everyone’s basically there for the same reason, and I think I initially started going because a lot of the women are bisexual and it [is] a safe way to meet other women who were interested [in women].
I go with a group of friends and you know, depending on how the night goes, you end up going out with somebody or hanging out and end up going home with somebody.

Other women talk about their experiences at the gay bar:

I dated a girl for like five years so we, used to go out to the gay bar all the time, and we would never do it [be affectionate in public] at any other bar. It had to be the gay bar because we were really kind of weird about [it]...like even now, I would never do that at other bars...you know, it was always at the gay bar for some reason. When she would get drunk, she would always want to make out and I wouldn’t be comfortable with that unless I was drunk too. So that was for five years we would occasionally do that. And then sometimes at the gay bar with like other girls, just girls that I like [laughs], not girls I am seeing or anything. (participant 5 who identifies as queer and frequents artsy dance bars).

Participant 10, (who identifies as openly gay and frequents straight dance bars and gay bars) describes her experiences at the gay bar described above in the United States:

We go to a couple of bars in the [Unites] States and we just hang out over there. It’s usually the gay bars, so we usually go there. I always meet people there. There’s a person that I met there [recently] and we got along very well. We just started talking. I was introduced to her by my friends. She introduced me to her and we just kind of hung out and talked the whole night and then um, before the end of the end of the night, we kissed.

Lesbian performativity also seems to happen most frequently when the women are dancing at the bar. For example, participant 11, (who identifies as ambiguous and frequents artsy dance bars) says, “There’s always the same situation. I was just at a bar and we kissed and that’s pretty much it”. Participant 12, (who identifies as heterosexual and possibly bisexual who frequents dance bars) says, “We were just like dancing together, like stomachs [together] and face to face. Holding each other, whatever. Fast dancing, but sexually I guess. Since dancing encourages close physical contact it seems to be an easy way for women to be intimate”. 

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Participant 8, (who identifies as pansexual and openly sexual who frequents dance clubs) describes this:

Um, it was basically just dancing together, that kind of thing. Like flirting basically. There was lots of kissing, touching, that kind of thing. Sometimes it was like two other, [or] three other girls at the same time, like it was just a bunch of us having fun. [laughing] You know, that kind of thing. It was always on the dance floor because there was always wild dancing it was never just sitting on the sidelines or anything. It was always part of the dancing I guess, it was just a thing we did.

Participant 13, (who identifies as bisexual and frequents dance bars) also describes the dance floor as being the predominant place where lesbian performativity takes place:

Well, we were dancing on the dance floor first. And then later on we went to the bar, stayed at the bar and that, and had a couple drinks. Then one thing led to another... Well we went back up onto the dance floor after we got a couple of drinks and everything, and we went back up on the dance floor, and then...we actually did it again but that was while we were dancing.

Other women were touched by other women in a public place. For example, participant 2, (who identifies as primarily heterosexual and frequents mostly gay bars) says, “Some of them were at the bars back home and we were with another guy friend too, and she just like grabbed me and kissed me, just being ridiculous more or less.”

Participant 12, (who identifies as heterosexual and possibly bisexual who frequents dance bars) says, “We were walking and she stopped me, she grabbed me, turned me and was like ‘here you go’! And she kissed me.”

Participant 11, (who identifies as ambiguous and frequents artsy dance bars) has talked about lesbian performativity with another woman in a bar, but she did not actually engage in it that time:

There’s a friend of mine who is older with kids and she is really cool. I’ve always like, kind of liked her, and she once made the comment that she
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had never had any lesbian experimentation before she got married. And I was like ‘well for the love of God if you do want some then call me!’ [enthusiastically laughing]. Like, [we were] in a bar and she’d be talking about like, everything that I’ve never tried [with women myself], and I’m like, ‘You’re stopping right there, like lets go.

All of these women’s experiences with other women were quite similar even though they happened at different bars with different people. Since the women are all young and frequent similar types of bars (art bars or gay bars) where this behaviour seems to be more acceptable, their experiences are similar and it occurs between women of different sexual orientations.

The Lesbian Performativity Spectrum

Once all of the data was analyzed, a spectrum of lesbian performativity was constructed. A spectrum of themes was identified and broken up into four numbered areas which are called: 1. Having Fun, 2. Male Audience, 3. Male & Female Audience and 4. Female Audience. (For a detailed diagram of the performativity spectrum, see Appendix F, p. 76). In between each theme, there is an arrow that shows the direction of the participant’s fluidity. All 15 women fit into this spectrum in a unique way depending on their sexual identity. The women are placed with each corresponding theme along the spectrum according to their identity. The women who are in between themes identify with fluid identities, or show that they have fluid behaviour. They identify with both of the themes, therefore they cannot be categorized in only one theme.

The first part of the spectrum is unique. Most women talk about getting involved with other women for fun, so they all fit into the first theme called “Having Fun”. However, those who have more fluid sexual identities or later identify with a different sexual label, fall more closely into one of the other three themes. A lot of
the women fit in between two themes, and do not go from theme one all the way over to theme four, but fit specifically between the two they are associated with. As this performativity spectrum shows, sexual fluidity is a gradual process, so the spectrum is designed to capture this complex notion of a partially fluid, yet somewhat defined sexual label for each of the women in this study. This spectrum is not meant to show a progressive or linear movement of sexual identity, but a fluidity of each theme that is linked according to how each woman fits into the spectrum.

**Defining the Performativity Spectrum**

The women in the first part of the spectrum seem to be relatively consistent with their heterosexual sexual identity labels even when they define them as fluid. The women in this part of the spectrum are also consistent with their reasons for performing apparent lesbianism which you will see in the first theme. This part of the spectrum also shows the importance of the types of bars in which women perform lesbianism. Both the bar context and the first theme “Having Fun” must be present in order for women to start engaging in apparent lesbian performativity. The women in the last three parts of the spectrum have varying reasons for performing apparent lesbianism. For many of the women who identify as bisexual or lesbian in this study, they have very specific and critical reasons for why and when they will engage in intimate public behaviour with other women. For them, they are not “performing” lesbianism, but expressing their attraction for other women, but the audience homogenizes all women who appear to be lesbian into one category. The women in the last three parts of the performativity spectrum seem to overlap with the spectrums before them. This will be described in more detail below.
Part 1 of the Spectrum: “Having Fun”

The first identifiable theme from the spectrum is called “bar behaviour”. Women who fit into this part of the spectrum engage in apparent lesbian behaviour because they typify it as fun and a form of entertainment. For example, participant 3 (who identifies as heterosexual without rigid label definitions and frequents dance bars) says “It just seems like joking around more then like being serious. We all kissed everybody, and we got felt up kind of thing, but we never actually like, made out with a girl or anything so it’s in passing, joking around kind of thing”. Participant 8, (who identifies as pansexual and openly sexual, and frequents dance bars that are “open”) said “there was nothing serious behind it, like we both just do that all the time. We were just having a good time dancing.” When talking about being with women, participant 2, (who identifies as primarily heterosexual and frequents mostly gay bars) says that “it’s just more casual entertainment. I don’t think I’d actually go through with [anything more intimate with a woman]”. Participant 5, (who identifies as queer and frequents artsy dance bars) discusses the lack of seriousness attached to the behaviour when she says “even if I made out with a girl like that in a club and I asked her to come home with me she probably wouldn’t. You know because I think it ends like as soon as you leave the bar”. Some women say that they did not have any pre-planned thoughts attached to their behaviour. For example, participant 7, (who identifies as heterosexual and frequents dance bars) says “I think it was just the moment and then being a friend. I don’t know if I can explain it better then that.”

These data confirm Goffman’s observation that performances occur during a “social occasion” where the behaviour is done for recreational purposes. The women in this part of the performativity spectrum engage in lesbian performativity for fun.
Some women in this part of the spectrum also feel that it is important to know the woman they engage in lesbian performativity with. Participant 7, above brought up the importance of performing lesbianism with a friend. Some women in this part of the spectrum consider lesbian performativity as a gesture of friendship and closeness. Some women do not define it is sexual at all, but feel it is a way of expressing how they feel about their friend. For example, participant 2, (who identifies as primarily heterosexual and frequents mostly gay bars) says, “I don’t think it’s an attraction thing. I think it’s more like just a friendship, love friendship kind of thing.” She then further elaborates by saying “oh well, it’s mainly good friends that I do this with so it’s just like a friendship thing, just special and you know, you care about them and it’s just fun and fancy free.” Participant 12, (who identifies as heterosexual, and possibly bisexual who frequents dance bars) says, “even women I know that aren’t lesbians and they are just friends, well they’ll hold hands and they will hug each other and give a peck on the cheek”. For some of the women, the salience of friendship is more clearly defined. They engage in this behaviour believing that it will only be based in friendship. For example, participant 7, (who identifies as heterosexual and frequents dance bars) says, “I’m aware that they’re friends of mine and I know how they feel and I know how I feel. It’s never been a question of it going any further or becoming like an intimate situation.” For participant 1, (who identifies as “selectively heterosexual” and frequents artsy dance bars), says that it’s about comfort, “I feel more comfortable with girls and I think they are better looking, but I don’t know if I could actually date one.” She emphasizes that the root of her behaviour is that she is just showing affection to a close female friend instead of feeling sexually attracted to
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her. So the women in this part of the performativity spectrum feel they are not engaging in “real” lesbianism, but performing lesbianism, and they do not feel attracted to the women with whom they engage in it. Participant 7, (who identifies as heterosexual and frequents dance bars) actually acknowledged that that her lesbian performativity was not “real lesbianism” when she says, “I just won’t consider what I’ve done lesbian behaviour because it’s not. If I were a lesbian then yeah, it would be like a step in the direction towards something bigger in a more intense relationship, but because it’s not and it ends there, then it’s just active, like friendly intimacy, not sexual intimacy, I think.”

These responses confirm Diamond’s (2002) research on intimate friendships where the women did not feel their lesbian behaviour was sexual at all, but a demonstration of their affection for another female. As noted by participant 7, (who identifies as heterosexual and frequents dance bars) above, she also did not identify as “lesbian” but clearly stated that the display with the other woman was a performance of lesbianism.

Bar Context

The context of where these lesbian performances are taking place seems to be a contributing factor for the women in this part of the performativity spectrum. Lesbian performativity seems to happen in a particular context. For example, participant 15, (who identifies as bisexual and is still discovering her sexual identity and frequents straight and gay dance bars) says, “there are certain bars, especially in downtown Windsor where women will like, will make out with each other.” And participant 8, (who identifies as pansexual and openly sexual, and frequents dance bars that are “open”) agrees that certain bars encourage this behaviour when she says, “well the
kind of bars I went to, it was only two or three. It was like nobody cared what you were doing, it was really open.” This validates Goffman’s (1963) theory that performativity is bounded to a specific place, in this instance an art bar, dance bar or gay bar where lesbian performances are accepted and encouraged. One reason why women are engaging in lesbian performativity is that public venues now exist where women can demonstrate their curiosity, and revel in being watched. Participant 1, (who identifies as “selectively heterosexual” and frequents artsy dance bars) emphasizes the importance to her of knowing that she is being watched. She states, “I think it has less to do with liking other women; it’s more to do with just feeling good and being beautiful I guess… and knowing people are watching.” Similarly, participant 6, (who identifies as bisexual and frequents dance bars and swinger bars) said, “I am a bit of an exhibitionist so yeah, I do enjoy the attention that it draws.” Participant 8, (who identifies as pansexual and openly sexual, and frequents dance bars that are “open”) also expressed this feeling, “I am sure it was to get attention in some way shape or form, but it wasn’t necessarily a specific person. It was just [that] I liked to be looked at…so I would sometimes do it just to get somebody to look.” This voyeuristic aspect is described by Mulvey (1975) and is a large part of the gaze which was described in the literature reviewed above. The gaze in this context is wanted by the performer so lesbian performativity is about getting attention and feeling admired while participating in their objectification willingly. Field’s (2004) theory that women are exhibitionistic was true for women in this part of the performativity spectrum. Finally, Goffman’s (1963) argument that women want to seem spontaneous for their audience and keep them interested was also a contributing factor to women in this part for the performativity spectrum.
The Influence of Substances

Since the bar context is an important contributing factor for engaging in apparent lesbian performances for the women in this part of the spectrum, it is also important to identify the influence of substances since the party context in the bars these women frequent encourages the consumption of alcohol and sometimes even drugs. Many women blame or relate their apparent lesbian performances with the use of alcohol or drugs. Participant 10, (who is openly gay and frequents dance bars and gay bars in Canada and the USA) explains this well when she says, “we play you know, just silly games with all our friends at school...drinking games where you had to like kiss people, just on the lips... we are always goofing around and playing around [and]...we are always like picking up girls”. Participant 5, (who identifies as queer and frequents artsy dance bars) feels that alcohol is directly involved in her lesbian performativity when she said, “this is what happens when I drink because if I was sober I wouldn’t have done it”. Participant 12, (who identifies as heterosexual, and possibly bisexual who frequents dance bars) says that this behaviour “always seems to happen at bars when alcohol’s involved, usually with a few people”. Participant 13, (who identifies as bisexual and frequents dance bars) says, “I was stoned and one thing led to another and it happened”, and participant 14, (who identifies as gay or lesbian and frequents straight bars and gay bars) says, “I guess being intoxicated makes a difference”. All of these women explain their behaviour as a passive reaction or consequence to being intoxicated. Alcohol or drugs loosened them up enough to perform lesbianism that they may not have otherwise done. The alcohol also gave them the ability to engage in behaviour in which they otherwise would not have engaged in. Even though women used alcohol and drugs as an excuse for engaging in
apparent lesbian performances, they still expressed enjoyment in their experiences and continued to engage in them, sometimes on several different occasions.

**Fluid Sexual Identity**

All women first engage in apparent lesbian performances for fun and entertainment. The women in this part of the spectrum identify as primarily heterosexual, but they too seem to have some notion of a fluid sexuality. For example, participant 1 (who identifies as “selectively heterosexual” and frequents artsy dance bars) says, “I think for the most part I’m hetero, but very selectively hetero. I have no idea, its tough to say”. Participant 2 (who identifies as primarily heterosexual and frequents mostly gay bars) says she is, “primarily heterosexual. I don’t know. I indulge in fantasies every once in a while but my day to day attraction is to guys so”. Participant 3 says that she is, “Heterosexual, I wouldn’t say only just orientation but I would say that I’m not so rigid to like not enjoy my females relationships with my friends”. The idea that women would identify as heterosexual, but feel the need to express fluidity about their sexual identity is a very interesting finding. These women seem to be willing to let go of the traditional heterosexual label and redefine it to suit their sexuality while still maintaining a primarily heterosexual identity at the same time.

**Social Acceptability**

Women also engage in apparent lesbian behaviour because they believe it is more socially acceptable. Participant 8, (who identifies as pansexual and openly sexual, and frequents dance bars that are “open”) talks about the esthetic reasons for lesbianism being so popular:

I mean with girls [they’re] more attractive. It’s [about being] pretty, you know? Like lesbians are attractive in movies. They always have like hot, tight bodied women that are doing these scenes kind of thing. I think that, if only for the aesthetic quality, it ends up being more acceptable because
I mean... as far as my experience goes. I don’t know as many women who are into homosexuals, as guys that are into lesbians, you know what I mean? So I think it’s just a majority thing.

Participant 11, (who identifies as ambiguous and frequents artsy dance bars) talks about how common it is to see this behaviour, “Like it was definitely attractive, I mean these beautiful women are kissing each other. And in a way I guess you could say...well you see it all over the place anyway.” Lesbian performativity is very popular or trendy according to participant 7, (who identifies as heterosexual and frequents dance bars), “Lesbian woman character(s) are...experimental because that’s [what] tends to be the thing that’s considered hotter, is someone who’s straight but has experimented”.

Participant 10, (who is openly gay and frequents dance bars and gay bars in Canada and the USA) explains how common it is and expresses her belief that one’s sexual orientation is irrelevant to participate in this behaviour: “They think that is more appropriate because it’s more acceptable now. Like...girls are making out with girls and they don’t want to be gay, they will just do it.” Participant 1, (who identifies as “selectively heterosexual” and frequents artsy dance bars) also talks about how socially acceptable this behaviour is, “I think the world thinks...it’s more acceptable for women because women are by nature affectionate anyways and they get away...with...[it].” Participant 4, (who identifies as heterosexual and frequents dance bars) also believes it happens because it is socially acceptable, “I think women know that...there’s really are no consequences that would take place. I think it’s just more open and I think that they can”. Petras (1978) argues that social roles can become expected from people, and these women seem to be describing a social expectation that is quite common now in certain bars. However, these lesbian performances are
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constructed within a heterosexual context (Berlant & Warner, 1986) and it also
seems to be very gender specific since only women are engaging in it. Hope’s (1996)
theory that women are intentionally displaying their sexuality and power is consistent
in my research. Many of the women described how common they thought apparent
lesbian performances are, so they act with more intention then if it was not socially
acceptable. Perhaps Irigaray (1974) was right when she said that women’s bodies are
valued differently in the social world when this research is taken into consideration. If
women’s bodies and their performances are on display and socially acceptable as
described above, then women’s bodies have an important social value that is
perceived differently depending on what behaviour they are engaging in. Hacking’s
(1986) theory that performances can be part of a person’s public, socially constructed
self. These findings are also consistent with Anderson and Cryanowski (1994) who
said that people are more open to their sexuality and displaying it because it is more
socially acceptable.

Publicity

Another reason why women may engage in this behaviour is to get publicity, and this
was clear when I asked the women in this study about the Madonna and Britney
Spears kiss on MTV. Many women believed that it was just an act or performance, “I
think that, that is using sexuality to get publicity and, well I mean if you really think
about it...it would’ve gotten not as much publicity, but it would’ve gotten publicity if
she almost kissed a guy...but I think that it sells, lesbianism sells right now”
(participant 7, who identifies as heterosexual and frequents dance bars). Participant
11, (who identifies as ambiguous and frequents artsy dance bars) says, “I just think
that it was a publicity stunt and to some degree...I mean two girls who - as far as I’m
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centered portray completely straight women who would do everything and anything for men and it seems like this was just another, like image of that. Of them trying to get attention from men.” Participant 10, (who is openly gay and frequents dance bars and gay bars in Canada and the USA) believes it was such a big deal because they were seemingly heterosexual women engaging in the kiss:

I think it was more a shock because they thought ‘oh my god’, you know, Brittany Spears who was supposed to be this role model for little kids and, you know, she’s straight. She was with Justin Timberlake from N’Sync and here she is kissing Madonna whose married. I think it was more like you know, why is she doing this for? Is it just for attention? Um I don’t think it was the kiss it was more or less who was the person kissing.

So like Diamond (2005), Tendre (2003), and Lo (2004), the women felt that lesbianism can and has been used to gain attention, like they do, but their kind of attention is for popularity and publicity. The women did not describe wanting popularity from engaging in this behaviour themselves, but they did distinguish the lesbian performativity they engaged in as different then celebrity lesbian performativity. For example, Participant 2, (who identifies as primarily heterosexual and frequents mostly gay bars) says that she and her friends thought the kiss between Madonna and Britney Spears was “cool,” so there is definitely a popularity factor involved for celebrities. It seems obvious that celebrities are exploiting lesbianism for popularity and to sell more of their products (albums, clothing and other merchandise). Most of the women in this study described lesbian performativity as nothing more than a publicity stunt.

Celebrities and the Effects of the Social Image of Women’s Sexuality

Some women have a definite opinion about how that kiss may have affected younger girls or society in general like Participant 5, (who identifies as queer and frequents artsy dance bars) who states that, “Madonna is...not really relevant anymore to
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girls...nineteen year old girls. If everyone wants to do everything Brittany Spears does, here she is making out with...girls. Of course they're going to want to do it. You know she kind of opened the door for that. She's kind of like that party girl”.

Participant 8, (who identifies as pansexual and openly sexual, and frequents dance bars that are “open”) says, “maybe some people were influenced by it, like maybe some people were like ‘oh, well if they can do it, I can do it too because I’ve always been curious’” but she personally was not. She also says, “Madonna wasn’t a surprise you know, but then Brittany [kissed her] and everybody’s like ‘oh she is supposed to be a virgin’. And she was wearing white for Christ’s sakes wasn’t she?” The women in this study did not seem to be affected by the kiss because they had seen lesbian kisses many times before. Women also had something to say about how this kiss affected the image of women’s sexuality overall. For example, Participant 7 (who identifies as heterosexual and frequents dance bars) says that when celebrities performed lesbianism, it gave society a certain image about sexuality. She said, “I think that, that is Brittany Spear’s quote image...like a...promising to try anything, like an implication that ‘I’m a slut and I’ll hook up with you’, I mean it just kind of adds to that”. However, most women did not seem surprised that Madonna was engaging in this lesbian performativity. They describe it in more acceptable and positive ways because they expected her to be sexual. For example, Participant 8, (who identifies as pansexual and openly sexual, and frequents dance bars that are “open”) says, “Madonna has always been shocking people”, and participant 10, says “Madonna was just being her wild crazy self and just trying to you know, shock people like always”.

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Therefore, women in the first part of the performativity spectrum engage in lesbian performativity because it is fun and entertaining, and it is a demonstration of their friendship for another woman, or because they were under the influence of alcohol or drugs. They expressed enjoyment in engaging in apparent lesbian performances and some engaged in it on several different occasions. This behaviour takes place in certain contexts such as dance bars, art bars and gay bars. Women in this part of the spectrum also engage in apparent lesbian performativity because they like to be exhibitionists and feel admired by others. Some of the women describe their sexual identity as being primarily heterosexual, yet fluid as well. This unique finding needs to be further investigated. The women in this part of the spectrum also believe that lesbian performances are socially acceptable, and they distinguished the difference between lesbian performativity that was done by celebrities to get publicity and their own performances. The women in this research also seem to be aware that lesbian performativity affects the way other people view women’s sexuality in society, and they show concern about it. Loftus’s (2002) theory of the importance of consumerism and sexuality is consistent with this research.

All of the women in the other parts of the performativity spectrum often start with the same motivations for engaging in apparent lesbian performances as these women, except for women who identify as bisexual or lesbian who are actually attracted to other women. However, the context and all the other motivations explored here are (or were) relevant to all the women in the spectrum.

**Part 2 of the Spectrum: The Male Audience**

As reported in the interviews, lesbian performativity occurred in part because the women were encouraged by males to perform, or because the women wanted
attention from males. Males assumedly encourage this behaviour because it is attractive to them. Participant 10, (who is openly gay and frequents dance bars and gay bars in Canada and the USA) says it best, “it’s sexually appealing I guess. Most guys like seeing two girls together.” Since women believe men like lesbian performances, they use such performances to gain male attention. My interviewees believed that being with another woman sexually is one of the most common and appealing heterosexual male fantasies. Participant 5, (who identifies as queer and frequents artsy dance bars) said, “he wants to watch, like he’s actually said he would like to watch me kiss another girl or do something [sexually] with another girl”. Men often encourage this behaviour either by subtly suggesting it or asking women to do it. Interviewees reported that kissing another woman is often asked by men they know. For example, participant 4, (who identifies as heterosexual and frequents dance bars) says, “there was two of us and... he kind of said something to the effect of ‘you guys are dancing pretty close... why don’t you just start kissing or something like that?’” Participant 13, (who identifies as bisexual and frequents dance bars) says, “everybody knows it’s one of the major guys’ fantasies to see two girls going at it or kissing or anything.” Participant 7, (who identifies as heterosexual and frequents dance bars) agrees that when men see this, they automatically assume that “they’ll later have a role” and be able to take part in this lesbian performativity. This is part of the male fantasy that Warn (2003) suggested, and this assumption also relates to the male gaze as a visual pleasure as noted by Mulvey (1975). This also passes as visual harassment as noted by Lukas (2002), into a form of sexual harassment that was mentioned by some women in this research, but they never called it sexual harassment.
Male Attention

Some women admit to engaging in this behaviour to impress males and get their attention, like Participant 11, (who identifies as ambiguous and frequents artsy dance bars) who says the following, “I think that in most cases...a lot of women really do it for men. And I think that, like, I have certainty taken advantage of the situation...to impress guys. I have no problem admitting that.” Participant 14, (who identifies as gay or lesbian and frequents straight bars and gay bars) wants to impress guys as well, “I just thought that, like, I was being sexy or I was ah impressing guys or trying to get them to like me. If I didn’t like them I’d still want them to like me you know?” Some women even try to get men’s attention when they are not actually engaging in the behaviour, like Participant 11, (who identifies as ambiguous and frequents artsy dance bars) who says, “I liked one of them, and it was definitely kind of like ‘hey, guess what I just did. Would you have liked to have seen that?’” She then elaborates on this some more, “It’s more like after it happened, getting the man’s attention, like I didn’t do it for that reason but after that, like sure, yeah. There have definitely been times where I’ve like made note of it to impress guys.” Participant 15, (who identifies as bisexual and is still discovering her sexual identity and frequents straight and gay dance bars) says that she has been approached by other women to impress guys or get their attention, “I know women have touched or kissed me to get a man’s attention”. Even though she was not initiating the behaviour, she is okay with engaging in apparent lesbian performance because she is aware of why she is being invited to perform. Participant 15 says that the woman who approached her would be upset if it was not for a male audience. This behaviour is very similar to the behaviour engaged in by celebrities like Madonna and Britney Spears who are known
Lesbian performances for trying to get male attention as mentioned by both Anderson-Minshall (2004), and Warn (2003).

*Performing Heterosexual Lesbianism*

Even though the women in this part of the performativity spectrum engage in lesbianism for the reasons mentioned above, they also seem to be aware of the particular type of lesbianism that men want to see them engaging in:

I think that guys think that lesbian girls are hot, but in a straight man’s lesbian girl. I mean they like the girls who are portrayed as stereotypically straight and are hooking up with each other for man’s enjoyment and I think if you showed them a tape of that, it would have a completely different reaction than two women who did not like men at all, who are not interested in men, who are not, you know, looking over their shoulders at the camera winking at the guy, or whatever. You know, two completely gay women would have a different reaction. But I mean I’ve had guys explain it to me because I’ve questioned it and they its just you know, ‘one naked women hot, [laughing] two naked women, twice as hot’. (participant 7 who identifies as heterosexual and frequents dance bars).

Participant 5, (who identifies as queer and frequents artsy dance bars) also talks about the particular type of lesbian that is appealing to men: “If you look a certain way, if you’re feminine and cute and a guy wants you then it’s okay. But if … you look butch or something, or you’re fat or you know you’re not dressed in like revealing clothes, then you are going to get yelled at.” This particular type of socially acceptable lesbian performativity is consistent with Essig (2000), Cox (2004), Fields (2004), and Warn (2003)’s research about heteroflexible women. However the women never use the term “heteroflexible” themselves because it is not yet a common label. The statements made by participant 5 and 7 are also consistent with Warn’s (2003) research that emphasizes how lesbianism is consumed by a male audience. Women’s apparent lesbian performances are perceived as sexual fantasies by men who consume their image.
Therefore, women who perform lesbianism for a male audience are often encouraged by males to do it, they may want attention from the men, but they are aware of the difference between real lesbianism and performativity. Unlike women in the first part of the spectrum, these women engage in apparent lesbian performances with some motivation to gain male attention and they cooperate with male encouragement to perform lesbianism for them. The women in this part of the spectrum do not seem to mind that men are attracted to lesbians and they are the closest to being called "heteroflexible" then any other women in the performativity spectrum since they perform for men.

**Part 3 of the Spectrum: Male and Female Audience (The Transitionary Phase)**

This phase of the performativity spectrum is much more complicated then the previous two, and demonstrates how women in this part of the spectrum are either transitioning into a new sexual label or have a fluid sexual identity.

*Female Fantasy*

Some women describe having sexual fantasies about women. Participant 2, (who identifies as primarily heterosexual and frequents mostly gay bars) for example says, "I indulge in fantasies [about women] every once in a while but my day to day attraction is to guys.” Participant 11, (who identifies as ambiguous and frequents artsy dance bars) describes how pornography made her realize she was attracted to women:

And the porn was of two women having sexual relationships and I remember that when I saw it, my body overwhelmed me like you know, went into that little...where everything starts pulsating and I was like ‘whoa that’s hot!’ You know? And even though I didn’t acknowledge it at the time that it was hot, it certainly did turn me on. So I always knew that...[what] I did find sexually attractive was two women being sexually involved.
Participant 11’s experiences are unique since the rest of the women in my study did not discover their sexual attraction to women through pornography. It is often assumed that men are the only ones who discover their sexual attractions through pornography, but this is not true (Loftus, 2002). Hope’s (1996) theory that women can be both the producer and the creator of the gaze is very significant here. Gaines’ (1987) theory that women are not voyeuristic and cannot have a gaze because they are a passive recipient of the gaze was not confirmed in my research. This is demonstrated by Participant 1 (who identifies as selectively heterosexual and frequents artsy dance bars) who says, “I think while having a boyfriend I will still think girls are hot, but I won’t really take that extra step” (to be sexual with them). This participant acknowledges that she gazes at women and enjoys it even if she may not engage in any further intimate behaviour with other women. Other women in my study reported that they fantasize about other women, however, it did not always coincide with a lesbian or bisexual identity. These findings suggest that heterosexual women, as well as women with other sexual orientations may use female sexual fantasy as a way to experiment with their sexuality.

Public Sexual Experimentation

My findings suggest that women who engage in lesbianism as experimentation are first triggered by their sexual curiosity. They reported that they were (or currently are) unsure of their sexual identity, or they feel safe to experiment with it, and they used lesbian performances to publicly test out their sexuality. Participant 1, (who identifies as “selectively heterosexual” and frequents artsy dance bars) says, “I think I did when I was like 17 because I didn’t know what else to call it. It was the first time I even thought about trying things with a girl and I wanted to be something different I
guess.” Participant 6, (who identifies as bisexual and frequents dance bars and swinger bars) believes that women may not be aware of their sexual identity and this experimentation helps them realize if they are heterosexual or not:

I think a lot of what goes on at the bars and the touchy feely kiss a girl kind of thing that seems to be really prevalent in the bar scene today… maybe it’s like experimentation on the women’s part maybe there are some repressed feelings there that they’ve wanted to experience… before and it’s a little more socially acceptable than it used to be and it does draw attention.

Participant 6, (who identifies as bisexual and frequents dance bars and swinger bars) talks about a “friends with benefits” type of relationship, “They are like close girlfriends that you know come over and hang out, and sometimes stuff happens, and sometimes stuff doesn’t happen.” This relationship seems to be more unique and was only discussed by this one woman who identifies as bisexual.

Participant 14, (who identifies as gay or lesbian and frequents straight bars and gay bars) describes her experiences:

I definitely thought I was straight. There was no way in hell I was a lesbian and it didn’t even cross my mind until I met someone. So… I was kissing lots of girls in bars for guys, I would like go up on stage and like do the hot body contest (laughing), but I would get into a dancing contest with my friends and make out with them on stage and like in front of a whole group of guys… But I think somehow deep down, it was me trying to realize my sexuality or trying to experiment with it in a safe environment. You know, where I wasn’t going to be like rejected for it.

Participant 7, (who identifies as heterosexual and frequents dance bars) also talks about a “safe space” being important for her to sexually experiment: “you’re straight and…it’s almost like a safe zone with women like getting physically into it” (while in public). The notion that a straight bar would be a “safe” place to experiment with your sexuality, but a gay bar would not be as safe is a very odd and interesting component of this part of the spectrum. This emphasizes the importance
of the audience’s influence on what sexual activities are socially acceptable, and who can engages in them. Traditionally, gays bars would be the place to sexually experiment, but when you leave the bar environment, it is not safe due to discrimination that still occurs towards gays and lesbians. However, it was perceived as socially acceptable for the women to engage in apparent lesbian performances in these specific straight bars. These women needed an audience to confirm their sexuality, so they performed for an audience to decide if they were heterosexual or not. Their lesbian performances seemed spontaneous which was consistent with Goffman’s (1959) notion of spontaneity, that they subtly knew what they were doing.

It seems that all of the women in this part of the performance spectrum have gone through some kind of experimental phase which they may still be trying to define for themselves. Some women still struggle to find their sexual identity as participant 5, (who identifies as queer and frequents artsy dance bars) describes, “I’m trying to find out who I am. I don’t know I still think about it everyday like where am I, where do I fit in on the scale? You know and I just want to have a label that describes me perfectly like everybody else does, you know, but it’s been really hard. I can’t find out where I fit.” The women quoted above (participant 1, 5 and 6) seem to have fluid sexual identities and sometimes refer to themselves with one label then another later on. When these women engage in lesbian performativity they are trying to figure out what their sexual identity is. It is interesting that these women felt that these particular bar environments were a “safe” place to experiment sexually. Cox (2004) would refer to this behaviour as “acting out”, but the women who were engaging in lesbian performativity saw it differently as described above.
Some women feel sure about their fluid sexual identity and they are okay with it even if they struggle with it. For example, Participant 5, (who identifies as queer and frequents artsy dance bars) says, “I can’t really say I’m bisexual because I can’t say I’m only attracted to men and women. It goes from here to here” (on a spectrum).

Participant 8, (who identifies as pansexual and openly sexual, and frequents dance bars that are “open”) says it was experimenting with both sexes that helped her discover her sexual identity and she is content that she is compatible with either gender:

It was a time when I [was] experimenting, I wouldn’t call it a wild phase cause I was doing the same thing with guys. You know what I mean? It wasn’t like ‘oh I’m going to experiment with girls only’ kind of thing. Like I was essentially exploring my sexuality as a whole. I was seeing what I liked and what I didn’t like. Like if the opportunity comes up to do the same thing I did a couple of years ago, I’d probably do it again. You know? It’s not just something that I did at one time in my life; it’s just that it was more prevalent.

Some women try identifying with different sexual labels to see how they feel about it. Participant 8, (who identifies as pansexual and openly sexual, and frequents dance bars that are “open”) has tried different sexual labels but seems content to have a fluid sexual identity:

I didn’t really like the labels so I was trying to find out what I would call myself...because I felt...bisexual was a little too...I guess it’s a little stifling because it’s kind of like people basically expect you to be in some sort of three-way relationship when you say that you are bisexual... for a long time I kind of struggled with the idea of even liking girls cause I was like “oh, what’s wrong?” [laughs]. But after a while I was just kind of like why am I even thinking that I decided to just go along with all sorts of fun things like pansexual or I like everything kind of thing.

This was consistent with Lo’s (2004) findings that some women did not use sexual labels. Participant 8, (who identifies as pansexual and openly sexual, and frequents
dance bars that are “open”) feels that labels are too restricting, and she also thinks that there are no particular labels that can completely describe her fluid sexual identity or the fluid nature of sexual identity in general. She talks about a heterosexual—homosexual continuum that she believes describes sexual fluidity:

You know like I don’t believe in black and white as far as sexuality goes. Like people can be 90% one way and 10% the other way or 50/50 or Somewhere anywhere in between you know? I don’t think anybody is ever purely 100%...I mean I changed mine [sexual identity] like several times.

Several other women discuss their fluid sexuality. Participant 2, (who identifies as primarily heterosexual and frequents mostly gay bars) says, “I don’t want to call it a phase [that] everyone goes through but, I don’t know. I think everyone falls on like the continuum”. Participant 15, (who identifies as bisexual and is still discovering her sexual identity and frequents straight and gay dance bars) discusses the rigidity of labels and how society should define sexuality more fluidly:

I think that we need to be less label oriented in general and... labels like gay and lesbian [always] end up marginalizing people, and like sexuality is a continuum, and they totally deny themselves that they feel emotionally or [that they are] attracted to someone of the same sex. That’s my opinion. They are lying to themselves.

For participant 14, (who identifies as gay or lesbian and frequents straight bars and gay bars), it took being with a woman for her to realize her sexual identity. She defines her sexual identity by using the most suitable identity she could find that matches her moral and personal beliefs:

So, then I met a girl who happened to be gay and fell in love with her, and for the first two weeks I was in my bisexuality phase... I think I was kind of afraid of going like right from straight to gay because I thought...those labels are so strict. So I’m not ready to say I’m completely anything...and still, like I still identify as a lesbian but don’t think I’m 100 percent gay. Probably like about 70 [percent lesbian and] 30 [percent heterosexual].
Participant 15, (who identifies as bisexual and is still discovering her sexual identity and frequents straight and gay dance bars) also describes her discovery of other women’s fluid sexualities when she came out as a lesbian, “Like it’s really interesting because the first person I ever came out to, like there were three girls and someone else [said] ‘well, I’m kind of a lesbian’, and she said…” I’m really attracted to women’. Two other of them at the same time said ‘yeah me too’”.

Male Encouragement and Agency

Sometimes male encouragement to perform lesbian behaviour is given to women, but they do not always comply with it, or agree with it. For example, Participant 5, (who identifies as queer and frequents artsy dance bars) says, “sometimes someone’ll be like ‘oh you should kiss [the other woman while] in the picture’ and I will, but it doesn’t mean that every time that request is made I’m going to or that I feel like it’s being pushed”.

Other women do not like male encouragement. Participant 13, (who identifies as bisexual and frequents dance bars) says that men encourage her to engage in lesbian performativity by whistling as a positive reinforcement for her behaviour but she does not always appreciate it. Participant 5, (who identifies as queer and frequents artsy dance bars) says that “there’s always some random boy who comes around and says things like…you know, whooping and stuff like that.” She also goes on to say:

I notice there’s always guys who are dancing by themselves and they come up as if they are a part of it or something as if they are going to be invited or something and we always look at them like ‘what are you doing?’ You know? If he’s not good enough to like meet other women on the dance floor, he’s just coming up to us you know? Usually …I stop or I walk away because I just, I hate…when they come up like that. You know?
This participant interrupted the male gaze and redirected it. She does not allow him to invade their intimate space or participate in their apparent lesbian performance; so she resists male consumption of her lesbian performance as well. This is consistent with Hope's (1996) theory about women who re-appropriate the male gaze, except the women here were not actually performing for the men, but for themselves or someone else. They specifically describe not cooperating with what the men were asking them to do. Participant 5, (who identifies as queer and frequents artsy dance bars) describes how males inappropriately assume that they have a right to be involved in women's lesbian performances as part of the male gaze. According to these comments, women's sexuality is not necessarily subjugated by their attraction to men as Warn (2003) suggested, but they engage in lesbian performances purposefully, trying to avoid performing lesbianism to pleasure men or perform for them. The women who tend to be more cautious of their lesbian performances in this study have identified as bisexual or lesbian. This separates the women from the first and second part of the spectrum from the women in the third part of the spectrum. They are more aware of their motivations for engaging in apparent lesbian performances.

**Pornography and Lesbianism**

All of the women in this research were asked if they felt pornography had an influence on their partner. Some women did not feel it had a big influence on them while some women did. Participant 8, (who identifies as pansexual and openly sexual, and frequents dance bars that are “open”) says, “I would never think pornography influences [the men] that much, like what people really like”. Participant 1, (who identifies as “selectively heterosexual” and frequents artsy dance bars) says,
“I don’t know his experience with porn; he doesn’t keep any magazines. I know he’s downloaded a few pictures or whatever, but they weren’t even that big of a deal. They were just girls with boobs. I don’t even think of him being attracted to other girls or obviously he doesn’t tell me about it”. Even though these women are aware of the effects of pornography, they did not seem to think the images of lesbianism were particularly harmful; they just accepted that men enjoyed it.

The women who did feel that pornography was harmful had very critical views about the misconceptions of what real lesbianism is. For example, Participant 14, (who identifies as gay or lesbian and frequents straight bars and gay bars) says that, “You know it gives the very wrong message that lesbianism is just about the physicality and it’s just about turning guys on and then when I have a relationship with a girl, guys come up to us and ask us to have a threesome with them”.

Participant 5, (who identifies as queer and frequents artsy dance bars) shares another story about a male she knows and his unrealistic expectations about lesbianism:

There was one guy at school a couple of weeks ago…like he’s admitted to watching porn all the time, [and] I honestly think his entire…sexual repertoire is built up for. Like he uh asked me to find another girl for him…who I was going to be in the threesome with to be with [him]…because you know, cause he’s obsessed with porn. He thinks it’s going to be like this porn fantasy, and one time I was with multiple people [and] it was not like that at all. It was really awkward and hard to maneuver, and so it was not as sexy as I thought it would be.

These findings were inconsistent with Loftus (2002), who found that men knew the difference between “real” lesbianism and performative lesbians. The men described by the women in this study seem to have given into their fantasies and believe that women who perform lesbianism would go along with their sexual fantasies, or that they could somehow be involved. But the women in this research were clear that if they were real lesbians they wanted nothing to do with men. And
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even some women who were bisexual or identified otherwise were not interested in
men getting involved with their lesbian performances or sexual relationships with
other women.

Hope's (1996) theory that woman's personal subjectivity and social self is
very complicated was consistent with the findings in my study. The women in this
part of the performativity spectrum all believe that sexuality is ever changing, and is
fluid. The women in this part of the spectrum were unlike those in the first two,
because they acknowledge that lesbian performativity is not just for fun or attention.
For them, it is about fantasy and their attraction for other women even if they identify
as heterosexual. They perform lesbianism as a way to experiment with, investigate
and explore their own sexuality. These findings are consistent with Diamond's (2002)
findings of sexual fluidity, and with Bannerji's (1995) theory that women enjoy
performing and it feels good to do so. The women engaging in this part of the
spectrum do not appear to be engaging in heteroflexible behaviour, because they do
not express a preference for performing for men. The women in this part of the
spectrum express genuine sexual interest in other women and perform for both
audiences. They are also aware of the way women are portrayed in pornography and
the bisexual and lesbian women had very critical viewpoints about the
misconceptions of lesbianism that is portrayed in pornography. They were also very
clear that their sexuality was not for males, but for themselves.

Section Four: The Female Audience

Women who participated in lesbian performativity for a female audience often
had fluid sexual identities, or they identified as bisexual, queer or lesbian. Women in
this part of the spectrum were very aware of the wide range of sexual identities that exist. Participant 13, (who identifies as bisexual and frequents dance bars) describes the different sexual identities, “see there’s lesbians, but then there’s also bi’s. Like there’s…girls that sleep with guys that sleep with girls and there’s girls who just sleep with girls and no guys. And then there’s sometimes bicurious [women]”. The distinctions between the women are sexual as well as social. This is consistent with Bannerji’s (1995) notion of fluctuating subjectivity. Participant 13, describes being aware of different fluid identities and the ability to change one’s identity over time. It is also congruent with Benhabib’s (1999) theory that one’s identity is in a constant state of negotiation in social relations.

Other women are aware of the social image that is projected by false lesbian performativity. For example, Participant 15, (who identifies as bisexual and is still discovering her sexual identity and frequents straight and gay dance bars) is bothered by women who are not genuine in their lesbian performances:

I find it really disturbing when young women go out to bars and make out with each other just to get guy’s attention. And there are certain bars, especially in downtown Windsor… I think it’s really upsetting when women and girls…are constantly striving for male attention and approval and they have to wear short skirts to do it and make out with other women to do it.

There seems to be a difference in the way women are treated depending on how they identify. Participant 5, (who identifies as queer and frequents artsy dance bars) explains how she got treated differently than the women performing lesbianism because she actually dates women, “So it’s like it was really bizarre to see that at…some bar downtown and how people are like celebrating it, getting all excited and thinking it’s so great and I thought well for it’s completely different if I’m with my girlfriend who obviously looks like a lesbian you know? It is a totally different
experience”. This finding is consistent with Diamond (2005) who argued that real
lesbianism is discounted and threatened, or seen as unimportant when compared to
those who engage in lesbian performativity for a male audience.

*Lesbian Social Identity*

Unlike most women in the other categories, women who identified as bisexual
or lesbian were more careful when displaying their real lesbian relationship.
Participant 15, (who identifies as bisexual and is still discovering her sexual identity
and frequents straight and gay dance bars) did not like the attention she got when she
performed lesbianism at the bar. Males would say, “'ooh baby keep it up’, like you
know, like trying to egg you on or something, and it just really bothers me. That’s
why I generally try to avoid it”. Participant 10, (who is openly gay and frequents
dance bars and gay bars in Canada and the USA) is careful in public places out of
respect for others, “in the mall we would kind of keep it conservative, like we
wouldn’t be holding hands throughout the whole mall or like making out on a bench
or anything because it’s offensive to some people, and I am not the type of person to
just flaunt anything in front of people’s face”. In bars, this behaviour is described as
being more acceptable, even if it is self-identified lesbians who are engaging in
intimate public behaviour as participant 10, describes, “the bar that my friends and I
hang out at, it’s a regular gay bar, so it’s probably the most comfortable place. Even
at straight bars, we dance and we, you know, hug and kiss or whatever it’s not a big
deal. Most people are pretty accepting of it.” Participant 10, (who is openly gay and
frequents dance bars and gay bars in Canada and the USA) also says that even though
males know she is a lesbian, they still encourage lesbian performativity which she is
used to: “Most of the guys that I hang around, they encourage it.” Even though she
Lesbian performances gets attention from men, she also admits to playing up her lesbianism when at the bar to attract a female audience. Despite the male attention, she still feels that she can be with women at the bar: “I like showing affection to her at the bar and I like dancing with her and you know, like if people notice it then that’s great.” Participant 13, (who identifies as bisexual and frequents dance bars) doesn’t like it when men stare at her when she is performing lesbianism in public place so she says: ‘hey, keep your eyes to yourself, this isn’t a show!’ Since these women are not “performing” lesbianism, but are engaging in what is natural to them, they do not fit into the performativity spectrum the same way as other women do.

**Attraction and Emotion**

Women who are in this spectrum are sexually attracted to other women. Participant 10 (who is openly gay and frequents dance bars and gay bars in Canada and the USA) describes this, “I just have specific taste(s) and I think the group of my friends that I hang out with all have very similar tastes and we all like the same type of girls.” Participant 10, (who is openly gay and frequents dance bars and gay bars in Canada and the USA) also says that she will only engage in lesbian performativity if she is attracted to a woman, “it’s definitely because I was attracted to her”.

Women in this part of the spectrum are attracted to other women, but they also have a lot of emotional attachment to them as well. When talking about her relationships with women, participant 14, (who identifies as gay or lesbian and frequents straight bars and gay bars) says, “that there’s more respect. Um, a lot of it is emotional too. So, I could never really have the same connection with a man”.

Participant 10, (who is openly gay and frequents dance bars and gay bars in Canada
Lesbian performances describes how she feels about women and why she thinks more women are experimenting with their sexuality:

I think it's more emotional, and physical, and everything. You want to have someone who can be with you, you know every which way. Not just through sex, but through, you know, what they say or how they act or you know, other things. That's why women... know how to teach, you know, be good to each other or I don't know teach each other certain things and that's why a lot more girls are converting to bi or gay whatever.

Participant 10, (who is openly gay and frequents dance bars and gay bars in Canada and the USA) also likes to be with women sexually because of the equality she feels in the relationship, "With guys it's just 'do it for me baby' Girls are like 'let's do this together' you know, 'it's kind of fun'". Diamond (2002, 2005) and Anderson-Minshall (2004) both emphasize the importance of real lesbian relationships and these women's experiences correspond with their need to legitimize lesbian relationships. These women describe their attractions to other women, and do not understand their expression of affection for women as mere performance. Their lesbian behaviour may be perceived as performance, but to these women, it is a demonstration of their "real feelings".

Critical Meaning

Some women in this study expressed concern about the way other people perceived lesbian performativity. They also had very critical opinions about other women who engage in lesbian performativity as well. For example, Participant 5, (who identifies as queer and frequents artsy dance bars) says:

we'll go out to a restaurant and there will be two girls making out and everyone calls them a lesbian and I'm like 'that's not lesbian, they're doing this to give you a hard on' you know? It drives me absolutely crazy, or like people like assume that I'm a lesbian because I dated a girl or something, you know, but I always get into these rants in bars with strangers um [laughing], you know, like labeling and things like that. Um. Guys do that a lot.
Participant 5, (who identifies as queer and frequents artsy dance bars) also feels that lesbian performativity could be a positive political statement, but others may not see it that way. She talks about Britney and Madonna as an example:

I thought that Madonna was making a really important statement by coming out and dressing like a groom and having these two brides you know. And everyone just didn’t even pay attention to what she was trying to say, they were just like ‘oh look, there are two hot chick making out’.

Seeing lesbian performativity as a critical statement was a very distinct aspect of women in this part of the spectrum. Participant 11, (who identifies as ambiguous and frequents artsy dance bars) recognizes the power issues that are involved when being involved in lesbian performativity, “So I think men see [lesbian performativity] as okay because it puts them in some sort of position over power to control women, and that women will do anything, even a sexual act that they...themselves do not enjoy, but will pretend to enjoy just to get a guy off”.

Participant 14, (who identifies as gay or lesbian and frequents straight bars and gay bars), feels that people do not see lesbian sexuality as legitimate because of the misrepresentation by women who engage in lesbian performativity. She argues that real lesbian sexuality is seen as something that is superficial, “It’s seen as less then like a straight relationship because it’s just entertainment. It’s just you know, for show and very superficial. And it’s not that at all.” She goes on to talk about the harmful effects of lesbian performativity: “I think that gives a really bad message and it delays the gay movement so much because the majority of people that see that are straight people because this is at straight bars [and]...there’s more of them and that’s what the average person starts thinking lesbianism is”. There are also other negative consequences of lesbian performativity. Participant 14, (who identifies as gay or
Lesbian performances

Lesbian and frequents straight bars and gay bars) talks about how lesbian performativity has made her question using the lesbian label to identify herself:

I have an issue with using the term lesbian because I think this thing, and they think another thing. So, I guess both of us...like I think it’s hard for both sides. But other people definitely have issues when I say I’m a lesbian. They automatically think like, because I’m not...the stereotypical butch lesbian that I can’t, like it’s hard to fit into both sides. I can’t be straight because I like girls but I can’t be totally gay because I don’t look gay.

Participant 14, (who identifies as gay or lesbian and frequents straight bars and gay bars) also talks about the false image that apparent lesbian performances portray, “I mean...most of my friends can look at it in the same time because they understand that it’s not real that it’s a show, but like especially for younger audiences, or people who are trying to figure out their own sexuality, or figure out any type of sexuality in general, I think they got a wrong perception of it...of lesbianism or bisexuality or whatever.” These are the negative consequences of lesbian performativity that only those in the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered community deal with since there does not seem to be any real negative social consequences for heterosexual women who engage in this behaviour. This awareness of politics in relation to lesbian performances was important to Anderson-Minshall (2004), Diamond (2002) and Warn (2003) who all believe that lesbianism is being depoliticized. Lesbian performativity that is engaged in by heterosexual women is threatening to real lesbians since they are trying to change the stereotypical image of lesbians that heterosexual women are reinforcing by engaging in apparent lesbian performances. Self-identified lesbians want their sexuality to be taken seriously. To them, it is not about fun and entertainment or necessarily about getting attention. It is about being intimate in public with their same sex partner, and feeling that they have the right to do so without negative social consequences.
Unlike the others who saw lesbian performativity as a political issue, Participant 11, (who identifies as ambiguous and frequents artsy dance bars) felt that lesbian performativity could actually be used as a form of female empowerment: “We could say that it is woman powering cause women...you know, [could] be making out with men, but they are making out with women and therefore excluding the man.” The other positive aspects of lesbian performativity were discussed earlier which included: women being rewarded with attention and other things they wanted, a sense of admiration and freedom to experiment sexually, the ability to have fun and entertain themselves in a public place and demonstrate affection in their friendship or with their same sex partner among many others. Petras’s (1978) theory also argues that it could be empowering for women to explore their sexual identity and experiment sexually because it affirms one’s individuality.

The women who are in this part of the performativity spectrum are characterized with fluid sexual identities, or identities that are predominantly bisexual or lesbian in nature. They have strong critical viewpoints about the image of true lesbianism versus performative lesbianism, and they feel threatened by the stereotypical images of apparent lesbian performances. They feel that apparent lesbian performances portray a false image of lesbianism to society, and especially to men by allowing them to assume that they have the right to access lesbian relationships. There have been both positive and negative outcomes described above by those who engage in apparent lesbian performances. The women who identify as bisexual or lesbian, are not “performing” lesbianism, they are expressing their true attractions and feelings for other women. However, they are often categorized along with the heterosexual and sexually fluid women who engage in apparent lesbian
Lesbian performances

Lesbian performances for men, but they do not want to be associated with them. They are conscious of avoiding same sex contact for men who may be watching them or encouraging them to be intimate. The very act of restricting men from having access to their public lesbian behaviour is a form of political protest against apparent lesbian performativity used by the women in this part of the spectrum.

Conclusion

Based on the interviews provided by the 15 women, it appears that apparent lesbian performances are both an activity that women engage in, and a performance for different audiences. Both Goffman (1959) and Butler (1990, 1993, 2004) contribute valuable theory about social behaviour and performance to this recent social behaviour. Goffman argues that performances flow from an internal self where women explore their sexual identity in the social world. Butler on the other hand, argues that women’s subjectivities exist through gendered performances, therefore women cannot have any kind of agency or notion of the self since it is all socially scripted. In my research, some women were performing to discover their “true” sexual identity, whereas other women were just performing what they felt was a socially acceptable, fun sexual image, however, the woman’s performances in this study did not fit neatly into either category. Neither Goffman nor Butler’s theories could capture the true complexity of these women’s experiences. Some of the women fit into both theories of performativity, but their behaviours varied depending on their sexual identity and their perceptions of apparent lesbian performativity itself. Many women’s experiences fit into several different parts of the performativity spectrum,
Lesbian performances showing a fluid notion of sexual identity and behaviour. This needs to be further investigated to understand how and why this variability exists.

These lesbian performances are both common and socially acceptable among young women who frequent specific bars in downtown Windsor, such as the dance bars, art bars and gay bars. It seems to be particularly acceptable in these specific bars for two young, attractive women to engage in this activity. This coincides with lesbian performativity having become much more acceptable in mainstream media. Apparent lesbian performances are a complicated issue, which this study has found to be situational, contextual, and geographical. In my sample of young, white, women who mostly attended university or already had university or college degrees, this behaviour was viewed as normal and acceptable, and often as “cool” and provocative.

I have named this behaviour “apparent”, because for women who identify as “heterosexual”, these “performances” are just that – a performance, not necessarily a part of their sexual orientation. Lesbian performances may also seem to be “apparent” to the audience even if they are not, because even if a woman does not define herself as a heterosexual, then the audience may still assume that the woman is. In highly specific public and social contexts, the visual representation and social implications of simulated lesbian behaviour has multiple meanings, which this research has only started to uncover. Lesbian performances must appear heterosexual, yet simultaneously lesbian in these specific bars. This allows the audience to consume a lesbian image that is attractive to people who frequent these bars.

The participants in this study did not use the “heteroflexible” label themselves, but if it becomes more common, more women in the first and second part
of the performativity spectrum may choose to use this new label. Most of the women in this study had flexible sexual labels that were negotiated by redefining or adding to traditional ones that were too rigid. This is an important aspect of women’s sexual identities in all parts of the performativity spectrum, even those who identified as heterosexual.

As noted in this research, the spectrum of apparent lesbian behaviour is related to a number of things depending on which part of the performativity spectrum the woman’s performance lies. However, the most common aspect of all parts of the spectrum seems to be about women’s sexual identities, their fluid sexualities, and the audience. Most women seem to care about who the audience is. Lesbian performances are enacted in front of an audience to get a reaction of some kind. Women who engage in this behaviour have different sexual orientations, but all of the women interviewed perceive sexuality to be fluid, even many of those who identified as heterosexual. This is demonstrated in the way they redefine or add to their sexual identity label, and their awareness of the various different kinds of sexual identities. Fluid sexual identities are another defining characteristic of apparent lesbian performativity, which separates women into each theme on the performativity spectrum depending on where they fit in according to their behaviour.

There also seems to be a larger media influence to this behaviour. Celebrities engage in lesbian performances for attention, and their lesbian publicity stunts certainly get them noticed, and help them sell more merchandise. These images cater to the male gaze, making apparent lesbian performances visible for social consumption. The Madonna and Britney Spears kiss on MTV is the most recent and popular image of lesbian consumerism. The link between the media and young
Lesbian performances

women who engage in this is not clear, however, the media do have some kind of influence, as each woman in this study knew about that kiss. The representations of apparent lesbian performances in the media provide a discourse of female agency for some of the women in this study. Some women find apparent lesbian performances empowering, and they engage in it for themselves or for an audience because it is a form of self-assertion for them. Some of the women also exerted agency by interrupting and redirecting the male gaze, claiming their performances as their own, or for a female audience only. By using apparent lesbian performances as a form of sexual agency, some women were able to overcome traditional notions of appropriate social and sexual behaviour that may otherwise restrict their self expression. This adds to the complex notion of female sexuality, showing yet another layer of personal meaning and gratification that women can experience from engaging in apparent lesbian performances.

More research needs to be done on a larger scale to see if lesbian performances are more widespread, and if they are acceptable beyond that portion of the university and college party crowd that frequents the dance bars, art bars and gay bars in Windsor and other North American contexts. The spectrum of lesbian performativity that was identified in this research also needs to be reproduced using a larger sample to see if the findings can be generalized on a global scale. Since women engage in lesbian performativity in bars, it would be useful to find out if it happens in other public locations as well. It is important to study apparent lesbian behaviour because it is a part of the way young women and men are redefining and experiencing sexuality in Contemporary Canada and the United States.
Appendix A

UNIVERSITY OF WINDSOR
Department of Sociology

Poster Recruitment

Young women wanted for an M.A. study on women who touch or kiss other women while in bars or clubs.

Are you a woman who has touched or kissed another woman in a bar or club?

If you are between the ages of 18-30 and you can answer yes to the above question, then you are invited to participate in a study that involves a confidential interview on the meanings you assign to this activity, and on how it fits with your identity as a woman.

I’m a Master’s student in the Department of Sociology at the University of Windsor. This study has been cleared by the University of Windsor Research Ethics Board.

For details, please contact me at XXXXXXXXXXX, or my extension (to be assigned by the Sociology & Anthropology Department).

(This was printed on bright coloured paper and posted in the locations mentioned above).
Appendix B

UNIVERSITY OF WINDSOR
Department of Sociology

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

Title of Study: Young Women's Affectionate Experiences in Bars or Clubs

You were asked to participate in this research study and the information obtained will be used for a Master's thesis research project conducted by Allisa Scott under the supervision of Dr. Barry Adam for the department of Sociology at the University of Windsor.

If you have any questions or concerns about the research, please feel to contact Allisa Scott at extension (will be supplied by the Department of Sociology & Anthropology), or my dissertation advisor Dr Barry Adam at (519) 253 - 3000 ext: 3497. If you have any other comments or questions about the ethics of this study, you may contact 519-253-3000, ext. 3916.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY
The purpose of this research is to investigate young women’s experiences with other women in public spaces. I am especially interested in learning more about your feelings, thoughts, attitudes, opinions and experiences at the bar.

PROCEDURES
If you volunteer to participate in this study, we would ask you to do the following things:

You have been asked to meet in this office on campus to ensure you’re confidentially and anonymity in regards to your participation of this research. During this interview you will be asked to answer a number of questions related to the topic above, and I may ask for you to elaborate on specific experiences. Some of the questions may be quite explicit, asking you to report on your thoughts and participation in sexual behaviour. Some people may find the questions to be too personal, so you are free to request to pass a question if you do not feel comfortable answering it. Everyone will be tape-recorded using a pseudonym (given by the researcher) in order to help transcribe the interview later on. The interview should take approximately an hour and a half. I will send you an email afterwards to thank you for your participation.

POTENTIAL RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS
There are no anticipated risks associated with participating in this study. However, due to the sensitive and personal nature of the questions I am going to ask you, you may experience both positive and negative feelings. If you experience any negative feelings after this interview, please consult with a professional on the counselling card that I give you. If you have any other questions regarding this study then please contact me via email at XXXXXXXXXX or my dissertation advisor Dr Barry Adam at (519) 253 - 3000 ext: 3497. If you have any comments or questions about the ethics of this study you may contact the chairperson on the Departmental Ethics Committee 519-253-3000, ext. 3916 at the University of Windsor, Department of Sociology.

POTENTIAL BENEFITS TO SUBJECTS AND/OR TO SOCIETY
This research provides you with the opportunity to contribute to knowledge on young women’s affectionate/sexual activities and their meanings.
PAYMENT FOR PARTICIPATION
Participation is entirely voluntary; therefore you will not receive compensation for your participation.

CONFIDENTIALITY
Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with you will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission. For this reason, participants, bars and public places will be referred to by using Pseudonyms. New pseudonyms will be assigned when the interview data are transcribed. Consent forms will be stored in a locked filing cabinet at the University of Windsor until the thesis is defended, then they will be destroyed. Interview sessions will be tape-recorded and the tapes will be transcribed as soon as possible after the interview to delete anything that might identify any person or agency. Information gathered in this study will be used solely for professional and educational purposes; there is no hidden motive for the study. The results of this study may be published in professional journals or books. No individual study participant or agency will be identified in any private or public context, including publications, public presentations, and informal discussions.

PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL
I would like to emphasize that participation in this research project is completely voluntary, and you may refuse to answer any questions if you do not feel comfortable. You may withdraw from participating at any time without any consequences. The investigator may withdraw you from this research if circumstances arise which warrant doing so.

FEEDBACK OF THE RESULTS OF THIS STUDY TO THE SUBJECTS
I will provide a brief summary of my research results upon completion of this study. This report will be posted on the REB website at the University of Windsor at www.uwindsor.ca/reb.

SUBSEQUENT USE OF DATA
The data from this study may be used for future research related to young women’s affectionate/sexual experiences.

RIGHTS OF RESEARCH SUBJECTS
You may withdraw your consent at any time and discontinue participation without penalty. This study has been reviewed and received ethics clearance through the University of Windsor Research Ethics Board. If you have questions regarding your rights as a research subject, contact:

Research Ethics Coordinator
University of Windsor
Windsor, Ontario
N9B 3P4

Telephone: 519-253-3000, ext. 3916
E-mail: lbunn@uwindsor.ca

SIGNATURE OF RESEARCH SUBJECT/LEGAL REPRESENTATIVE
I understand the information provided for the study “Young Women’s Performances in Public Spaces” as described herein. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I agree to participate in this study. I have been given a copy of this form.

__________________________________________________________
Name of Subject

__________________________________________________________
Signature of Subject

_________ Date

SIGNATURE OF INVESTIGATOR

These are the terms under which I will conduct research.

__________________________________________________________
Signature of Investigator

_________ Date
Appendix C

Interview Questions and Prompts

Demographics
1. What is your age?
2. What is your ethno-cultural background?
3. What is the highest level of education you have completed?
4. What is your yearly income approximately?
5. What is your current marital status?
6. What is your religious affiliation?

1. Describe the last time that you touched or kissed another woman in a bar or other public place.
   - What happened? How did it turn out?

2. Who did you touch and kiss?
   - Friend, stranger.
   - Met in the bar or known a long time?

3. When was the last time this happened?
   - Time frame. Has it happened since?
   - In what context? A contest or dancing?

4. Who witnessed you touching and kissing that woman?
   - Your boyfriend? Friends?
   - Did you know them at all?
   - In what context? A contest or dancing?
   - What was their reaction to this?

5. a) How did you choose the woman you touched and kissed?
   - She was a friend
   - You knew her?
   - She was attractive?
   - I’ve seen her before
   - We’ve done this before

   b) What happened? How did it happen?
   - Were you pushed on stage?
   - Did you start it or did she?
6. **What happened after? What was the outcome/reaction to this event?**
(Sexual, friendship?)
- The bar closed and I went home
- Exchanged numbers to hang out another time
- Went home with you?
- Became friends
- Are friends who only do this when drunk
- Led to a pickup

7. **Do you care about this woman?**
- How often do you see them?
- Do you have a good friendship?

8. **Have you touched/kissed a woman at another time? What happened after?**
What was the outcome/reaction to this event?
(Sexual, friendship?)
- The bar closed and I went home
- Exchanged numbers to hang out another time
- Went home with you?
- Became friends
- Are friends who only do this when drunk?
- Led to a pickup

9. **Who witnessed you touching and kissing that woman?**
- Your boyfriend? Friends?
- How many of them were there?
- Did you know them at all?
- In what context? A contest or dancing?
- What was their reaction to this?

10. **Why did you touch/kiss that (those) woman (women)?**
- Because you are attracted to other women?
- Because you know others are watching?
- You know men find it attractive?
- Were you under the influence of any alcohol or drugs?
- Have you engaged in this kind of behaviour sober?
- Had you considered being with another woman and with your partner?
- Have you ever considered being with a woman outside of a relationship with a male?

11. **Were you going out with someone any of the times you touched/kissed a woman?**
- Was he present when this happened?
- What did he say about this?
- If not present, did you tell him about it?
- What happened?
12. Have you ever touched or kissed a woman to get a man’s attention or to pick up?
   • Tell me about that. What happened?
   • How many times approximately have you done that?

12. Has your current boyfriend/girlfriend or previous one ever asked you to touch/kiss women?
   • What did he say? How did he bring it up?
   • How did it make you feel?
   • Did you agree to do it?
   • Did you do it? What happened?

13. Has your current or previous boyfriend/girlfriend ever asked you to engage in a “three way” before?
   • Tell me about that.
   • What happened?
   • How many times has this happened?
   • How did you feel about him asking that?

15. Do you think your boyfriend/girlfriend would want you to touch/kiss other women even if s/he had not asked you to do it? Do you think s/he might be too shy to ask you?
   • Why? How does that make you feel?

16. Do you think s/he wants you to do this because s/he has seen it in pornography?
   • Explain.

17. Do you think this could be perceived as a “lesbian” behaviour?
   • Explain. How does that make you feel?

17. Did you see or hear about the Madonna/Britney Spears kiss on MTV? What do you think about that?
   • Had you heard about women touching/kissing before?
   • How did others react to it?
   • Since then have you noticed more women touching/kissing in public places?
   • Did this make you feel it was more acceptable to do it yourself?

18. Do you think women are more sexually experimental than men and do you think it is okay?
   • Why? What influences do you think women have to be more experimental?
   • Is it more socially acceptable?
20. Have you ever questioned your sexual identity before? If so then how?
  • What caused you to rethink it? (experiences)
  • Do you feel settled about your sexual identity or are you still discovering yourself?
  • When did this happen?
  • Have you confided in others about this?
  • How do you currently feel about your sexual identity?
  • Do you think a person’s sexuality can change over time?

21. How would you describe your sexual orientation?
  • heterosexual, bisexual, lesbian, bi-curious, unidentified or other?
  • open/closed, comfortable with it, unsure about it, not comfortable with it?

21. Is there anything else you would to share with me about your sexual identity, your experiences or anything else?
Appendix D

Debriefing Letter

We have talked about your participation in this study “Young Women’s Affectionate Experiences in Bars or Clubs” and what this means to you. Is there anything you would like to add, or do you have any concerns about anything we have discussed?

If you have questions or concerns in the future, or if there is anything that you would like to add to what we have discussed today, please feel free to contact me, my supervisor, or the University Research Ethics Chair. Our telephone numbers are on your copy of the consent form.

We are providing everyone who participates in this study with the following sheet, which lists Counseling Services for anyone who might wish to discuss any negative feelings arising from the interview with a counseling professional.

Thank-you for your participation, and have a great day!
Appendix E

Counseling Card

You have just participated in a confidential interview that asked you about the meanings you assign to your experiences with other women. I asked you about how this behaviour fits with your identity as a woman. There are no anticipated risks associated with participating in this study. However, due to the sensitive and personal nature of the questions that were asked, you may experience both positive and negative feelings. If you feel any negative feelings then please contact the following local counseling services below.

Student Counseling Centre at the University of Windsor (519) 253-3000 x4616
Psychological Services at the University of Windsor (519) 973-7012

Community Crisis Centre (24 hours) (519) 973-2235
Teen Health Centre (519) 253-8481

Distress Centre (519) 256-5000

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Appendix F

Sexual Identity and Placement on the Performativity Spectrum

P 3
(Heterosexual without the rigid label definition)

1. Having Fun

P 2
(Primarily Heterosexual)
P 7
(Heterosexual)
P 12
(Heterosexual, Possibly Bisexual)

2. Male Audience

P 1
(Selectively Heterosexual)
P 4
(Heterosexual)

P 6
(Bisexual)
P 8
(Pansexual, Openly Sexual)

3. Male & Female Audience

3. Male & Female Audience

P 11
(Ambiguous)
P 9
(Bisexual)

4. Female Audience

P 1
(Selectively Heterosexual)
P 4
(Heterosexual)

P 5
(Queer)
P 10
(Openly Gay)
P 13
(Bisexual)
P 14
(Gay or Lesbian)
P 15
(Bisexual, Still discovering her sexual identity)
References


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Vita Auctoris

Name: Allisa G.M. Scott

Place of birth: Chatham, Ontario

Year of Birth: 1979


Future Prospects: University of Wilfred Laurier, Waterloo, Ontario. 2006-2008 M.S.C.

Publication of this thesis in an academic journal.

A career in Sex Therapy and Sexual Health Education.