

The Book of Fusion:

The Lesbian Identity Integration Fictional Narrative

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INTRODUCTION

Fusion: 1. A merging of diverse, distinct, or separate elements into a unified whole. 2: An occurrence that involves the production of a union; merger, unification 3: The state of being combined into one body; coalition.¹

I have always been an avid reader of fiction. As I began forming my own lesbian identity, I became increasingly interested in fiction by and about lesbians' lives and cultures. Now that I am writing stories about how I understand my own navigation of the world as a lesbian, I situate myself and my work in the context of lesbian writing. I am particularly interested in lesbian identity development, and how that process is reflected in literature. I believe that lesbians must tell our² stories – especially as underrepresented, underprivileged voices in a heteronormative, male dominated society – and a natural place for that story to start is at the beginning, with the events that led the character to understand her difference. That story, the story of “coming out,”³ is very common in lesbian literature; since the 1960s and 1970s, it has developed into its own subgenre.

I am interested in coming out stories, but I find that these stories are becoming less relevant to me and to my close friends in the community. I have started to observe us going through new stages of development, which we often referred to as the ‘fusion stage’ – the stage where we fuse the multiple parts of ourselves into a whole, so we are no longer divided and .

¹ Merriam-Webster Dictionary, 2004.

² I use “our” here because I include myself in this general category. Bonnie Zimmerman explains her pronoun use complication as follows: “When I directly express my own opinion, I use “I.” When I am speaking about and from the amorphous and generic lesbian community, or to the representative reader, I use “we.” When difference and particularity are the focus of the argument, I use “they” to refer to specific groups to which I do not belong” (xvi). I have found her clarification useful and reprint it here with hope of using these terms similarly in this work.

³ The origin of the slang phrase “coming out” is from “out of the closet,” which is a variation of “skeletons in the closet.” Someone who “comes out” no longer hides their emotional and/or sexual feelings toward someone of the same gender. This also led to many other slang terms, such as: the adjective “out” (i.e. I am out, she is out), and the verb “to out” (i.e. I *outed* myself to my mom). (From Wikipedia.)

Even though we have all been “out” for years, I have watched us go through phases, from celebrating our queerness⁴, theorizing our queerness, and then, it seems, putting our queer identity back in the corner to let other parts of our identity come through. It seemed that we were integrating our lesbian identity in with the other aspects of our selves, and that our lesbian identity became only part of who we were, instead of the main focus.

Witnessing this process made me wonder where, how, and why identity forms and reforms, what that process looked for lesbians specifically, and a well-adjusted person. I turned to literature to look for answers to these problems, because I’ve found that literature, especially books about lesbian life, is often ahead of books of academic and psychological theories. Literature not only reflects a certain capture of life at a particular time, it also affects those who read it, and shapes reality. It is relatively easy to locate lesbian coming out stories: the character is not out in the beginning and is out at the end, and has some sort of realization, disclosure, or first sexual or romantic experience with someone of the same gender within the story. But more recent stories, from the late 1980s through the early 2000s, focus on a character who is already out and has developed a firm lesbian identity at the beginning of the book, but who deals with everyday life activities and is not so focused on the issues of being in the world as a lesbian.

My intention with this project is to figure out what stage of identity development lesbian literature currently reflects, to attempt to identify it, and to use it as a starting point for my own fiction. It consists of two primary parts: first, the literature review, where I discuss the history of lesbian literature, specifically the lesbian novel, and the psychological phases of identity development for lesbians. The second part consists of juxtaposing specific lesbian novels in the

⁴ There is some ambivalence in both the GLBT community and in academia about the use of the word “queer” because of its negative context. Though I do understand that some people highly object to the term as derogatory, I do believe there has been substantial work by the GLBT community to reclaim it, and I use it as an all-encompassing word to mean gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, questioning and other sexual minority members.

context of the stage model by Morris. I also include, in the appendix, the creative project on which I am currently working, which is a novel also called *The Book of Fusion* with characters based within different stages of identity development. This research project is the context in which to place the fiction work, and though I am only excerpting a chapter here, it is the creation of something new which has evolved from this project, and is important for me to include.

PART ONE: LITERATURE REVIEW

There are two relatively large bodies of literature about two related fields: one, the genre of lesbian fiction; and two, the stages of coming out. When examined side by side, it becomes clear that the genre of the lesbian novel is going through a coming-out process, and that lesbian fiction is now in a late coming out phase, which I call “identity integration.”

Lesbian Literature

What “lesbian fiction” is exactly has been widely disputed in academia and in lesbian communities. Using the term “lesbian” at all is problematic, given that there are many different ways to define what or who a “lesbian” is or does. For the purposes of this project, I am not going to deconstruct the use of the term “lesbian.” I am going to define it as women⁵ who engage in sexual or romantically emotional relationships with other women.

Even with that simple definition of “lesbian,” “lesbian fiction” must still be defined. The definitions of lesbian fiction range from broad to very refined, and are often quite varied. If defined broadly, “lesbian fiction” could be fictional writing by or about lesbians. But that leaves many unanswered questions, such as: Is it lesbian fiction if the character is a lesbian or if the author is not, or vice versa? Is it lesbian fiction if a writer had relationships with other women but lived in a time period when the lesbian identity was not named as such? (The term “lesbian” in historical contexts has been debated.) Is it lesbian fiction if the author lived for years with another woman but never publicly ‘came out’? Is it lesbian fiction if the author is male, but the characters are lesbian? Is it lesbian fiction if the characters are female and have relationships

⁵ Though I am not going to examine specific literature dealing with transgendered women for the purposes of narrowing my scope, as that is outside the scope of this project, I do use the term “women” here, and throughout, as someone who defines herself as a woman, not necessarily as someone who was born a woman.

with other women, but never identify themselves as lesbian? All of these are possible definitions of what constitutes “lesbian fiction,” but for the purposes of this project, I am going to use lesbian fiction to mean a fictional work by a lesbian⁶ whose protagonist is a lesbian.

A wide variety of books of criticism and journal articles have been published about the genre of lesbian fiction. The history of lesbian fiction has been well documented in two books: *Chloe Plus Olivia: An Anthology of Lesbian Literature from the Seventeenth Century to the Present* (1994) by Lillian Faderman and *The Safe Sea of Women: Lesbian Fiction 1969-1989* (1990) by Bonnie Zimmerman. These books present the most comprehensive study of lesbian fiction.

Prior to *Chloe Plus Olivia*, Faderman published two important books about lesbian history.⁷ She was already established as a lesbian historian when she set out to examine literature from the past four centuries. Faderman radically redefines some of the major works by women to interpret them in ways that paints the writers or the work as “lesbian.” She offers a “variety of ‘lesbian’ writers of the past and present . . . in a historical and theoretical framework,”⁸ and acknowledges that many of the women she writes about would not have considered themselves lesbian – such an identity did not exist or develop until the 1920s and ’30s.⁹ Nevertheless, Faderman’s exploration of the last four centuries of women’s writing has been widely cited and used for re-visioning history and examining the progression of lesbian literature.

⁶ I use “lesbian” here as I defined it above; so the woman does not have to self-identify as a lesbian in order to be considered such for the purposes of this project.

⁷ Faderman, Lillian, *Odd Girls and Twilight Lovers* (New York, NY: Penguin, 1991) and *Surpassing the Love of Men: Romantic Friendship and Love between Women from the Renaissance to the Present*. (New York: William Morrow & Co., 1981).

⁸ Faderman, Lillian, *Chloe Plus Olivia: An Anthology of Lesbian Literature from the Seventeenth Century to the Present* (New York: Viking, 1994), viii.

⁹ Brown, Laura S. “Lesbian Identities: Concepts and Issues,” in *Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Identities Over the Lifespan*, ed. Anthony R. D’Augelli, Charlotte J. Patterson. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 3-23.

Though Faderman's work was not published until 1994, Bonnie Zimmerman completed her twenty-year history of lesbian literature in 1990. Zimmerman includes explanations of "the roots of contemporary lesbian literature"¹⁰ ranging from Sappho to the rise of gay and lesbian culture after World War I. Her opening chapter follows lesbian literary history through the rise of lesbian feminism in the late 1960s and the famous police raid at the Stonewall Inn in New York City in 1969, where "gay liberation was born."¹¹ The remainder of her study focuses upon lesbian literature in the twenty-year span from 1969 to 1989 as it depicts relationships, community, and the self.

The twenty-year period Zimmerman examines was a significant time for lesbian literature. Small, independent presses began publishing vast amounts of queer literature, and the genre began to flourish. From 1973 to 1981 an average of just five lesbian novels were published each year, but between 1984 and 1987, the genre rose to boast twenty-three per year, and figures indicated that the genre was still on the rise.¹²

Since Faderman and Zimmerman's publications of these two literary historical collections, no author has published a definitive guide to the lesbian literature of the 1990s; perhaps it is still too recent. However, dozens of essays have been published which examine individual authors or genres, many of which include writings from the 1990s and early 2000s. Lesbian literature has been on national bestseller lists, put out by major publishers, and won awards, (often not exclusively for its lesbian content) such as Sarah Water's novel *Tipping the Velvet* (1999). The lesbian novel genre is flourishing, on the rise, and it seems there is still more to say.

¹⁰ Zimmerman, 3.

¹¹ Zimmerman, 10.

¹² Zimmerman, 207.

To understand the context of current lesbian literature and where it is going, it is important to understand its rich history. Before I outline the progression of the genre and its significant publications and eras, it is important to understand the history and development of lesbian identity.

Lesbian Identity and the Coming Out Process

“Coming out” is the common term for the process by which homosexual males and females develop their¹³ homosexual identity. The two are intrinsically connected although the process itself and the identity can be examined separately.

Laura Brown’s article *Lesbian Identities: Concepts and Issues* is one of the few articles to focus on how the concept of a lesbian identity¹⁴ formed and how it operates in dominant Western psychology. Brown maintains that sexual relationships between women before the turn of the 20th century “tended to be perceived as perverse relationships between women who were essentially heterosexual ... There was no framework for understanding the concept that a person might be fundamentally homosexual.”¹⁵ Though there was an identification of homosexual *behavior* in a heterosexual person, it wasn’t until the turn of the twentieth century that a person could be seen as having a fundamentally homosexual *identity*. Though relationships between women have been “normative in many cultures over time without a lesbian identity attaching to the behavior,”¹⁶ with the psychoanalysts and sexologists of the early twentieth century, such

¹³ In this paper, I use ‘their’ as a singular, non-gendered pronoun. I realize ‘their’ is traditionally defined as a plural pronoun; however, as the English language has no gender-neutral pronoun, a writer must create their own solution.

¹⁴ There are many books published about the experience of gay men’s identity processes, which are often seen as universally applicable.

¹⁵ Brown, 3.

¹⁶ Brown, 3.

relationships were attributed an inevitable sexual component (which they did not necessarily historically contain), and were seen as sexually deviant and morally wrong.

Though Brown attributes the existence of a homosexual identity to sexologists of the 1920s and '30s and offers no explanation of the events leading up to the development of the identity, Zimmerman, in her discussion of "The Roots of Lesbian Literature," claims the homosexual identity developed in the "late nineteenth century."¹⁷ From the late nineteenth century to the 1920s, much was changing – industrialism and western expansion in the United States, as well as new discourses in psychoanalytic theory, including Jung and Freud. Medical experts, or sexologists, began examining homosexuality and declared it a "congenital condition, if not defect, characterized primarily by cross-gender identification"¹⁸ – lesbians were seen as male souls trapped in women's bodies, belonging to a "third sex." By contrast, Freud (and his followers), in psychoanalytic thought, saw lesbians as women whose normal sexual development had become stuck in an adolescent phase. Both the congenital and psychoanalytic theories "morbidity" the connection between women that had previously been tolerated, or even encouraged.¹⁹

Though gay and lesbian people were still thought to be inherently heterosexual with some sort of disorder, the turn of the twentieth century brought the first time the *identity* of homosexuality was labeled – but not without stigmatization by the psychological diagnosis which accompanied its definition. It was immediately added to the American Psychiatric Association's Diagnostic and Statistical Manual under "Sexual Deviation."²⁰

¹⁷ Brown, 4.

¹⁸ Zimmerman, 4.

¹⁹ Faderman, Lillian. "The Morbidity of Love Between Women by 19th Century Sexologists," *Journal of Homosexuality* 4(1), Fall 1978: pp73-90.

Just what “lesbian identity” means is often discussed within psychological and sociological literature,²¹ and, as with the term “lesbian” and the genre of “lesbian literature,” defining “lesbian identity” is difficult. Brown defines lesbian identity as “primarily a self-ascribed definition held by a woman over time and across situations as having primary sexual, affectional, and relational ties to other women.”²² But Brown immediately complicates her own definition, including that this identity “may not be congruent with *behavior* at any point in the life cycle” (emphasis added), and the identity may also be “ascribed to the woman by others”²³ even if the woman does not self-define as lesbian. It is obviously a complicated identity to claim and to define; there are many factors to consider. For the purposes of this project, and with acknowledgement of its complications, Brown’s definition works well – and so I use “lesbian identity” to mean the notion of self that women hold when they define themselves as lesbian.

Definitions and complications of “lesbian identity” could be a study all by itself. However, I am primarily interested in how the notion of a “lesbian identity” currently develops in individuals. Since we are in a society where we homophobia teaches us that heterosexuality is the only appropriate sexual orientation, making heterosexuality a learned norm, “one must *develop* a lesbian identity,”²⁴ and over time, theorists have noticed patterns in this process. According to current literature, two main conceptions of lesbian and gay identity development evolved between the 1970s and 1980s, a direct result of the gay liberation movement.²⁵ Developmental psychologist Erik Erikson’s model for identity development heavily influenced

²⁰ Homosexuality was not removed from the official list of psychological disorders until 1973 (D’Augelli, Anthony R. “The Cutting Edges of Lesbian and Gay Psychology.” in *Lesbian and Gay Psychology: New Perspectives*. Eds. Adrian Coyle and Celia Kitzinger. (Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishers 2002). pp1-20. xiii).

²¹ E.g., Brown 1995, Esterberg, Kristin G. *Lesbian and Bisexual Identities: Constructing Communities, Constructing Selves*. (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1997).

²² Brown, 4.

²³ Brown, 4.

²⁴ Morris, 4.

²⁵ Esterberg, 12.

the first; the second was based on sociological labeling theories and symbolic interactionism.²⁶ Queer theory in the 1990s has criticized “static notions of identity and identity-based politics,” pulling on literary theory and cultural studies;²⁷ rather than seeing identities as fixed, queer theory complicates identity as fragmentary, partial, shifting, and, at times, performative.

Identity politics can be deconstructed and problematized in many ways, but the purpose of relating lesbian identity theories here is to examine the inception of lesbian identity, and what has happened to the lesbian novel after years of activist work for lesbian visibility and legal rights.

Since the birth of the initial concept of a lesbian identity in the 1920s and ‘30s, the most significant work on how this lesbian identity develops has been since the gay and lesbian liberation movement of the 1970s. The coming out process has been examined in various books and articles, and contain many models of the stages of coming out. Most of the models for identity development I have found do not focus specifically on lesbians’ experiences, though the authors who do focus on the lesbian coming-out process²⁸ frequently cite and examine other stage models.

In the article “Lesbian Coming Out as a Multidimensional Process” (1997), Morris explores many of the popular stage theories that have been developed in the past twenty-five years, including Cass, 1979; Coleman, 1981; Hanley-Hachenbruck, 1989; and Sophie, 1985-86, all of which I explain in detail below. She also proposes a new model of her own creation based on the benefits and shortcomings she sees in the other models. In what follows, I examine first

²⁶ Esterberg, 15.

²⁷ Esterberg, 16.

²⁸ E.g. Markowe, Laura A. *Redefining the Self: Coming Out as Lesbian*. (Cambridge UK: Polity Press, 1996). and Morris, Jessica F. “Lesbian Coming Out as a Multidimensional Process.” *Journal of Homosexuality* Vol 33(2) 1997. pp1-22.

the popular stage models that Morris mentions, then Morris's own stage model of identity development is described at the end.

Aside from Morris's article, Laura A. Markowe's extensive exploration, *Redefining the Self: Coming Out As Lesbian* (1996), is one of the few other studies of identity development for lesbians specifically. It explores two main aspects of coming out, "broadly divided" into coming out to the self, and coming out to others.²⁹ These stages include "when a woman has begun to think of herself as (possibly) lesbian, ... making contact with other lesbians for the first time ..., [and] considering telling family or friends about herself."³⁰ While her work provides great insight into these two stages, most models of identity development are more complicated, and includes many more stages.

Both Markowe and Morris acknowledge that the process of identity development is rarely simple and straightforward, that the steps do not always follow in order and not all individuals go through each step. Stage theory models are problematic because they seem to imply that the fourth stage, integration, is the "goal" and that there is nothing beyond that stage, and that if an individual jumps through the different stages that she may not be "finished" developing. These are valuable critiques of the stage theories; nevertheless, Morris's new model of lesbian identity development is broad and flexible enough to apply to many experiences.

What follows are details of the models mentioned above. None of these models were presented in a table form, so the use and arrangement of the tables are my own creation. I have quoted the information from each of the models as accurately as possible, just arranged it in a table in order to lay out the stages of the models as clearly as possible.

²⁹ Markowe, 4.

³⁰ Markowe, 4.

Vivienne Cass, through her work as a psychotherapist, developed a six-stage model in 1979. Though she did not indicate whether or not the model was developed through work with gay men or lesbians, she does indicate that it is applicable to both.³¹ I disagree; lesbians and gay men go through very different processes when developing homosexual identities because of the differences in gender socializations. Cass's stages (Table 1.2) are as follows: first, Identity Confusion, in which the individual feels "turmoil" between lesbian sexuality and what has been considered "normal" sexuality. Stage two is Identity Comparison, where individuals begin to consider that they may be different, i.e. homosexual, and may feel isolated. The third stage is Identity Tolerance, where the individual begins to accept that they likely are homosexual. Identity Acceptance, stage four, resolves the incongruity seen in the earlier stages and the individual accepts "I am a homosexual." Stage five is characterized by feelings of anger at the oppression of gays and lesbians, and in which the individual embraces activism in order to fight to progress the political, social, and economic rights of the queer community. Cass calls this stage Identity Pride. The last stage in her model is Identity Synthesis, where the individual rejects the activism and anger of stage five and becomes integrated in their personal and public sexual identity. Thus the individual sees homosexuality as only one aspect to their full identity.³²

Morris includes descriptions of some of the shortcomings of Cass's theory. It assumes a "neat and orderly progression" through the stages, which is problematic of linear stage models in general. It also assumes that activists have not reached the "highest" level of identity development, and are not yet fully developed; or those that have not considered themselves activists are even less developed. It also assumes that those who continue to see lesbianism as their singular defining characteristic "never fully develop their lesbian identity because they fail

³¹ Morris, 5.

³² Cass, qtd in Morris, 5-6.

to see lesbianism as only one aspect of the self.”³³ Cass’s model assumes that there is a singular fully developed lesbian identity, which looks a specific way, yet I believe a fully developed lesbian identity looks differently for each unique individual.

1	Identity Confusion	Inner turmoil between lesbian or gay sexuality and what has been considered as “normal” sexuality.
2	Identity Comparison	Individuals have feelings of difference and sometimes isolation. They grapple with the idea that “I may be homosexual” during this stage.
3	Identity Tolerance	Desire to overcome the isolation of the incongruity of identity. The important idea dealt with at this stage is “I probably am a homosexual.”
4	Identity Acceptance	Incongruity between previous identity as a heterosexual and current identity as a lesbian or gay is resolved. “I am a homosexual.”
5	Identity Pride	Characterized by feelings of anger at the oppression of lesbians and gays, and embracing of activism. Guided by the phrases “gay is good” and “gay and proud.” Activism is motivated by a philosophy characterized by the assertion, “how dare you presume I’m heterosexual.”
6	Identity Synthesis	Individuals reject the activism and anger of stage five. Personal and public sexual identities become fully integrated. The final resolution is to see “homosexuality” as only one aspect of total identity.

Table 1.1, Identity Development model by Cass, 1979, qtd in Morris, pp 5-6.

Eli Coleman’s model (Table 1.2), from 1981, acknowledges that “people may move through stages out of order, or be in several at once,” and likewise that “moving into the final stage does not mean the coming out process has ended.”³⁴ Coleman expects that individuals move fluidly through the stages depending on the situation they are in. Coleman describes the stages as follows: the first stage, Pre-Coming Out, is when the individual begins to have same-gender sexual feelings. Coming Out, stage two, is a self-acknowledgement of gay or lesbian feelings, as well as a disclosure to others. The third stage, Exploration, is primarily a sexual

³³ Morris, 6.

³⁴ Morris, 6.

exploration; and as the individual develops a desire for intimacy, sexual exploration is abandoned for stage four, First Relationship, where the individual begins a committed sexual relationship. The last stage of Coleman’s model is Integration, which is depicted as the development of “more success in sexual relationships as well as being better at terminating relationships.”³⁵

1	Pre-Coming Out	Conflict develops as individuals begin to have the feelings of difference about same gender sexual feelings.
2	Coming Out	Self-acknowledgement of lesbian and gay feelings, and telling others of those feelings.
3	Exploration	Primarily sexual exploration.
4	First Relationship	Desire for intimacy motivates the abandonment of sexual exploration and the beginning of a committed sexual relationship.
5	Integration	More success in sexual relationships as well as being better at terminating relationships.

Table 1.2 Identity Development model by Coleman, 1981, as depicted by Morris, pp 6-7.

Coleman’s model of development parallels Morris’s model in many ways, but it focuses primarily on the individual’s relationship to a sexual partner rather than on the individual’s relationship with society in general. While I do believe that sexual relationships are still the major identifier of queer relationships, I favor models which incorporate other factors of identity, including emotional relationships and friendships, political organizing and activism, and navigation of and relationship to queer and straight communities. While Coleman distills the stages into relatively simple and broad developments of sexual relationships that I believe are applicable to nearly everyone, I believe it is incomplete in its incorporation of other factors.

³⁵ Morris, 7.

1	First Awareness	Awareness of homosexual feelings or awareness of the relevance of homosexuality for oneself, or both. a. First contact with any lesbian or gay people b. No disclosure to others that the individual is questioning their sexuality c. Alienation – both from self (denying homosexual feelings) and from others (passing for heterosexual and denying homosexual feelings)
2	Testing and Exploration	Testing and exploration, with no homosexual identity. a. Alienation from and no disclosure of identity to heterosexuals b. Seeking out gay and lesbian community c. Not yet engaging in first homosexual romantic relationship
3	Identity Acceptance	Identity acceptance, in which the individual adopts a homosexual identity. a. Socialize primarily with other gays and lesbians b. Individual sees lesbianism as a positive identity c. Continued nondisclosure of own homosexual identity to heterosexuals
4	Identity Integration	a. Anger at oppression of gays and lesbians. b. Disclosure to numerous people. c. Identity develops stability as homosexual.

Table 1.3 Identity Development model by Sophie, 1985-86, qtd in Morris, pp 8-10.

Joan Sophie’s study (1985-86) reviewed various models, including Cass and Coleman (above), and incorporated their various points into a “generalized stage model.” The four stages (Table 1.3) are summarized as “(a) awareness of homosexual feelings or of the relevance of homosexuality for oneself, or both; (b) testing and exploration, with no homosexual identity; (c) identity acceptance, in which the individual adopts a homosexual identity; and (d) identity integration” (Sophie, qtd in Morris 8), and each stage contains a few detailed phases. Sophie then compared the four generalized stages to women’s actual experiences of the coming out process.³⁶

³⁶ The exploration of the models of coming out in my own work is not focused on whether these models match with individuals’ experiences, but how the models work and how they feed into Morris’s own multidimensional model, which are the general stages I use to explore the evolution of lesbian literature. Markowe (1996) and Sophie’s models are the only models I have found which have compared stages to women’s actual experiences of coming out, however, so for the sake of completion I have included a short paraphrase of Sophie’s findings.

She found that her participants' experiences matched the earlier stages closer than the later stages, especially when it came to disclosing identity to non-homosexuals.

While I am fond of Sophie's generalized stage model, as I believe the stages are broad enough to include most lesbians' experiences of identity development, I believe her detailed phases within the stages are sometimes too specific and not necessarily exclusive to the stages in which they fall. For example, it is not until stage four that Sophie puts "anger at the oppression of gays and lesbians," yet I believe this develops much sooner in most people, and often occurs long before any acknowledgement of one's own homosexual identity. Likewise, Sophie does not place the first romantic homosexual relationship until stage three, which I believe is too late; from my own experience, I know how significantly my identity changed and developed after I began engaging in romantic relationships with other women, and I believe it needs to be included in more stages. Also, there are many stories of women in sexual and/or romantic relationships with other women long before they consider themselves to be homosexual, so placing romantic relationships so late in the stages does not seem accurate.

Hanley-Hackenbruck developed a more recent model (1989, Table 1.4) that intends to incorporate the stigmatization of lesbianism and gayness into the identity through the coming out process. These stages acknowledge that the individual must overcome negative ideas and stereotypes in order to develop a homosexual identity that the individual accepts and feels comfortable with; also, Hanley-Hackenbruck recognizes that other differences – such as race, ethnicity, gender, and the values of the historical period or place where someone lives – can affect the coming out process.³⁷ All of the examples in Hanley-Hackenbruck's model are from a gay male perspective, and no mention is made of whether Hanley-Hackenbruck worked with lesbians, gay men, or both in her study. It is difficult to translate this model to lesbians, since

³⁷ Morris, 7.

masculinity functions differently than femininity and her examples are based on the conflict between homosexuality and masculinity. In my explanation below, I considered substituting being a “good person” for a “real man,” so as to make these stages more applicable to lesbians, but that substitution changes the meaning of the stages. Since Hanley-Hackenbruck does not consider gender in developing a homosexual identity, I believe the model is not as useful to lesbians as other models.

1	Prohibition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Denial – “I can’t be gay because I’m a real man” b. Shock or Identity Crisis – “I can’t be a real man because I’m gay” c. Negative/Ambivalent Labeling – “perhaps all gay men aren’t effeminate”
2	Ambivalence/Practicing	or Compulsion/Exploration – “Yes I <i>am</i> a good person and I <i>am</i> a homosexual”
3	Consolidation/Resolution	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Consolidation – positive role models b. Resolution

Table 1.4, Identity Development model by Hanley-Hackenbruck, 1989, qtd in Morris, pp 6-7.

The first stage, Prohibition, has three phases within it. Denial, the first phase, is characterized by the statement “I can’t be gay because I’m a real man.” The second phase is Shock or Identity Crisis, which is characterized by the idea “I can’t be a real man because I’m gay.” These phases evolve into Negative or Ambivalent Labeling, phase three, where the individual begins accommodate more positive views of lesbians and gay men. Through grieving for the loss of the self as heterosexual, the individual develops a new sense of self as homosexual.³⁸ The second stage is labeled either Ambivalence/ Practicing or Compulsion/ Exploration, which Morris simply explains as being characterized by the statement “Yes I *am* a

³⁸ Hanley-Hackenbruck, qtd in Morris, 7.

good person and I *am* a homosexual”³⁹ – the stage in which the new sense of self is explored and settled. The final stage is Consolidation/Resolution. Morris states that this consolidation comes from having positive gay and lesbian role models and completing the grieving for the former heterosexual self.⁴⁰ Resolution comes when the tension “between the desire to disclose homosexual identity and the fear of rejection and being stigmatized” is resolved.⁴¹ Hanley-Hackenbruck acknowledges the danger of living in a homophobic society through this model, which her stages reflect.

These identity development models are not, by far, the only models that have been theorized and written about. In Wilfrid R. Koponen’s book *Embracing a Gay Identity: Gay Novels as Guides* (1993), Koponen examines Cass and Coleman’s stages, as I have above, but also Richard Troiden’s model of “gay identity acquisition”⁴² and Elizabeth Kübler-Ross’s stages of dying (1969), which is the model upon which he bases his analysis of gay identity in novels. I have seen the coming out process likened to Kübler-Ross’s stages before, and while I do admit that learning that one is homosexual may come as a shock, much as learning that death is approaching, and that the individual does mourn any attachment to the previous heterosexual identity and become re-born as a homosexual during the development process, comparing coming out to dying implies a lot of negativity and morbidity with which I do not agree.

The stages of dying that Kübler-Ross outlines are Denial, Anger, Bargaining, Depression, and Acceptance. The stages themselves are another aspect of the model to which I object; I disagree that coming out has such negative emotions attached to it. This process can be and often is incredibly joyous, relieving, and exciting to many individuals.

³⁹ Morris, 7.

⁴⁰ Morris, 7-8.

⁴¹ Morris, 8.

⁴² Koponen, 17.

Throughout Morris’s article on lesbian identity development, she discusses her own proposed stage model (Table 1.5) composed of four general stages, “somewhat overlapping but nevertheless distinctive.”⁴³ The first stage is the acknowledgement of the identity to the self, “sexual identity formation which encompasses development of lesbian sexuality and awareness of being a lesbian”; the second is “disclosure of sexual orientation to others”; the third stage is relationship-based, as the individual experiences lesbian “sexual expression and behavior”; and the final stage is what I call “identity integration.” Morris describes this stage as “lesbian consciousness, which refers to how lesbians see themselves in relation to the social environment,”⁴⁴ meaning both queer and heterosexual spheres of friends, lovers, relationships, consumerism, activism, and navigation.

1	Awareness	Acknowledgement of the identity to the self. Sexual identity formation which encompasses development of lesbian sexuality and awareness of being a lesbian.
2	Disclosure	Disclosure of sexual orientation to others
3	Expression and Behavior	The individual experiences lesbian sexual expression and behavior.
4	Integration	Lesbian consciousness; how lesbians see themselves in relation to the social environment, including lesbian and gay communities.

Table 1.5 Identity Development model by Morris, 1997.

In the following table, I have taken the five models of homosexual identity development discussed above and displayed them next to each other (Table 2.1) in a table which I created. When juxtaposed, it is obvious that they have patterns, connections, and overlap. Many of the stages correspond directly or nearly, and are described similarly. For instance, the early stages focus on gaining an acknowledgement of one’s own homosexuality, and the late stages focus on

⁴³ Morris, 3.

⁴⁴ Morris, 3.

some sort of integration or resolution. The middle stages vary from model to model, yet some themes occur; romantic relationships are usually addressed, as is the relationship of the individual to both the queer community and the straight community.

Cass 1979	Identity Confusion	Identity Comparison	Identity Tolerance	Identity Acceptance	Identity Pride	Identity Synthesis
Coleman 1981	Pre-Coming Out	Coming Out	Exploration	First Relationship	Integration	
Sophie 1985-86	First Awareness	Testing and Exploration	Identity Acceptance		Identity Integration	
Hanley-Hackenbruck 1989	Prohibition		Ambivalence/ Practicing		Consolidation/ Resolution	
Morris 1997	Awareness	Disclosure	Expression & Behavior		Integration	

Table 2.1, Identity development models compared (my own creation).

Many of the models include stages which directly relate to the individual’s emotional response to development, such as “ambivalence.” Kübler-Ross’s stages of dying specifically outline the feelings that the individual encounters as they come to terms with new life-altering information – death, in Kübler-Ross’s model, or sexual orientation, in identity development models. I believe emotional responses, though possible to theorize, map, and discover patterns, are not necessarily universal experiences. The daughter of two gay men, for instance, would not necessarily have the same emotional responses to the process of coming out as would someone from a small, isolated town where the only imagery they have seen of homosexuality has been negative. The emotional coming out process would be extremely different for these individuals,

and does not necessarily take into account other factors of ethnicity, socioeconomic status, geographical location, religion, age, etc.

Because Morris takes into account many of the shortcomings of the other models, and because Morris's model is based upon how one's relationships with others, with oneself, and with the world changes rather upon the emotional progression of the individual, I believe Morris's model is the most applicable to the widest range of lesbians' experiences. Her stages are simplified such that they incorporate a broad range of experiences, yet they cover three of the basic relations that I have demonstrated are in nearly every stage model – relationships with the inner self, with friends and relatives, and with romantic partners. I believe all three of these relationships change significantly when one goes through the coming out process. Morris's model ends with an integration phase; though she primarily defines the fourth stage as the individual in relationship to her environment, I wish to amend her stage to include the time when the individual comes to incorporate her identity as a lesbian, however she defines that, and her other aspects of herself into a stable sense of self, by which I mean a relatively comfortable understanding of who she is and how she operates in the world. Because I most identify and most agree with Morris's model, I have chosen to use it as a framework for examining the identity development progress of the lesbian novel in this project.

PART TWO

JUXTAPOSED: THE IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT PROCESS OF THE LESBIAN NOVEL

What follows is a rough outline of the significant publications and eras of lesbian literature as related to the stages of coming out, as outlined by Morris (1997) and described above, with other models included when effective. Each section has three parts: a description of the historical context that lesbians in each timeframe faced; a review of the identity development stage, as outlined by Morris; and a discussion of the novels themselves, with each novel's connection to the stage.

There are many more novels than I could reasonably fit into this project; many of these authors have been studied alone for theses such as this one. I do not intend this to be a comprehensive guide to all lesbian novels, but rather an overview of many of the most influential and successful (I discuss how I determined those factors below), signaling the trends and movements of the lesbian novel genre. Though I could not possibly cover everything, I do my best to mention significant writers and novels outside of my examples where relevant.

My primary purpose for reviewing these stages of lesbian literature is to situate my own personal writing in historical context and in conversation with this long history of writers and books, as I desire this project to be fuel for my own fictional "lesbian novel."

The novels I examine were published in Canada, England, and the United States, but the project focuses on novels from the United States primarily because I am American, and the books that my community generally has the best access to are by US authors. However, the lesbian novel genre in English has not developed in any one place without significant influence from other places and authors, including works such as Jeanette Winterson, Katherine Philips,

Jane Rule, and Sarah Waters. Though translations of novels in other languages have been significant, I do not include them simply for the sake of narrowing the number of novels to review and study.

I chose these novels because of their frequency of occurrence and significance according to articles about lesbian literature. I consulted the following gay and lesbian book award lists: the American Library Association Stonewall Awards (1973-2003),⁴⁵ the LAMBDA lesbian fiction awards (1989-2003),⁴⁶ and the list of “100 Best Gay and Lesbian Novels” (1999) selected by the Publishing Triangle, an association of gays and lesbians in publishing.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ American Library Association Stonewall Awards 1971-2003

⁴⁶ “Lesbian Fiction” Lambda Literary Foundation Awards, 1989-2004.

⁴⁷ “100 Best Gay and Lesbian Novels.” *The Advocate* June 22, 1999

Stage One: Awareness

The first stage in Morris's model of lesbian identity development is awareness. In general, a woman⁴⁸ must come to some knowledge of herself as lesbian before she can tell other people of her identity or have intimate sexual relationships with other women. This is not always the case; there is evidence of women who do not consider themselves lesbian but are still engaged in a sexual relationship with another woman (e.g. the novels *Pages for You* (2001), *Tipping the Velvet* (1999)). It is also the case that a person (or character) can be in such deep denial that they do not recognize their own desire or behavior as lesbian until after they have already engaged in a sexual relationship; indeed it is the relationship itself which makes the person question her sexuality (e.g. *Girl Walking Backwards* (1998)). However, generally a woman must acknowledge to herself that she has a desire to be with other women before she can seek out resources for lesbians, such as media representation in books, films, etc., or lesbian community, such as friends, events, and lovers.

This process of awareness for a woman became easier by the late twentieth century as queer culture and identity became mainstream and information about queer lives is easily accessible. Even very isolated areas of the country (and world) have access to the Internet and the World Wide Web, where thousands of resources are available with only a simple keyword search. However, prior to the significant social movements of the twentieth century, the industrial revolution, the significant rise of literacy, and the recent global ability to spread information, queers in general and lesbians in particular were incredibly isolated from each other, both geographically and through pervasive societal homophobia which kept individuals

⁴⁸ Since I am specifically referring to lesbian development, I assume by definition that the subject self-identifies as a woman.

closeted, which contributed to the lack of a cohesive group and identity. The development of a cultural lesbian identity in the early twentieth century led to a significant rise in lesbian literature.

Bertha Harris, in her essay “What We Mean to Say” (1977), explores the idea that there must first be a cultural identity in order for a body of work to be perceived as a literature. “A group or a nation must know that it exists as a group and that it shares sets of characteristics that make it distinct from other groups,” she writes. So, in order for lesbians, for example, to have a literature, lesbians must see themselves as a group and with a history. The Lesbian History Group writes of the importance of access to history in their introduction to *Why Lesbian History?*, “Every social group needs access to its own history ... Lesbians have been deprived of virtually all knowledge of our past. This is deliberate since it keeps us invisible, isolated and powerless.”⁴⁹ This deliberate detachment from and rewriting of lesbian history serves the interest of heterosexuality as an institution in order to cut women off from the knowledge of lesbianism; indeed the denial of the existence of lesbian relationships is still often used as a tactic to keep lesbians disempowered and alone.⁵⁰

Though we do have a substantial amount of written records of women’s loving and passionate relationships with other women prior to the late nineteenth century, it is complicated to label this writing as “lesbian literature” for a variety of reasons. These women writers did not and could not self-identify as lesbian because they lived in a period when there was a very different concept of sexual identity up until the late nineteenth century. Prior to the development of sexual identity, people were seen as fundamentally heterosexual, even though they might have engaged in homosexual behavior. The notion that a person was fundamentally homosexual, that

⁴⁹ Lesbian History Group, The. *Not a Passing Phase: Reclaiming Lesbians in History*. (London: Women’s Press Ltd, 1984). (2)

⁵⁰ Much work has been done on reclaiming lesbian history. See *Not a Passing Phase: Reclaiming Lesbians in History*, Lillian Faderman’s literary historicism, and Sarah Waters’s novels from the late 1990s as discussed later in this paper.

a person had a homosexual identity, is a relatively recent development in psychological history. It wasn't until the theories of Richard von Kraft-Ebbing in the late nineteenth century that this notion of a gay identity began to develop.

That we have a current notion of identity makes it difficult to look into the past without that lens attached to our interpretations. We cannot accurately assess how lesbian identity and behavior worked in another time because it operated differently then than it does now. As Morris writes, "sexuality in general is embedded in a socio-historical context ... [and] since lesbianism is one aspect of sexuality, it too must be examined within a specific time and place. How individual lesbians construct their own sexuality has also changed over time. Therefore the sexual identity formation of lesbians is different during various historical periods."⁵¹ This is complicated when identifying women's "romantic friendships," as Lillian Faderman describes them, which were a common, crucial part of the lives of middle-class women in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

Sheila Jeffreys's article "Does it Matter if They Did it?" (1984) examines the complications of identifying women in history as lesbian if there was no "proof" of their lesbian relationship, which dominant historical research would consider to be a sexual relationship or genital contact.

I believe we, writers and scholars of lesbian history, psychology, and literature, *can* describe these women as lesbian, but that we need to complicate the definition of lesbian in this situation by situating it in their specific historical context as much as we possibly can. We need to include these women in lesbian history because they have much to teach us about the development of lesbian identity and lesbian literature. Now that I have attempted to situate these women's works in their own historical context, let me introduce you to their work. In this

⁵¹ Morris, 4.

section, I focus on the women writer's lives as well as their work because of the insight they lend to the development of lesbian identity.

I begin with the work of Aphra Behn (1640-1689), a British poet, playwright, and novelist, not because there is no lesbian literature prior to Behn, but because there were two powerful developments during that time period. First, romantic friendships between women were increasingly recorded from the seventeenth century and were often written about in letters, diaries, or poetry. Second, prior to the seventeenth century there was no specific "novel" genre in literature, and the novel is specifically what this project is focused on.

There are significant works prior to Behn, however, many of which deserve mention because of their significance and because it is important to note the existence of intimate romantic and passionate relationships between women throughout history. We have seen records of love and erotic longing between women in "Greek myths of virgin goddesses and their female followers, from international tales of female transvestites and amazons, from the Old Testament story of Ruth and Naomi, and especially from the lyric poetry written by Sappho (ca. 612-558 B.C.)."⁵² There were also significant writings produced by the medieval troubadour Biers de Romans and the nineteenth century Chinese poet Wu Tsao.

Aphra Behn, alleged by Virginia Woolf in *A Room of One's Own* to be the first woman in England to earn a living as a writer, is a bit of a mystery. Where she was born and who her parents were is unknown, but it is known that she was married for a short time and widowed at age 25. She became a successful London playwright and then a novelist. She wrote poetry, feeling that this form allowed her to express her "masculine part," as she expressed in one poem. Behn lived for a time in Surinam, an experience that inspired her first novel, *Oroonoko, or The*

⁵² Zimmerman, 3.

Royal Slave (1688). *Oroonoko* is significant in the development of the novel genre, as it is among one of the first in the genre.

While Behn's novel dealt with the inhuman treatment of slaves and the industry of the slave trade, her poetry often focused on her admiration and love of other women. Perhaps the most famous is "To the Fair Clarinda, Who Made Love to Me, Imagin'd More than Woman" where Behn explores her love and comments on how it is acceptable for the two to be in love because they are both women. "In pity to our Sex sure thou wert sent, / That we might Love, and yet be Innocent: / For sure no Crime with thee we can commit; / Or if we shou'd – thy Form excuses it." Clorinda's "form" – her body, that she is a woman – excuses any "crime" of sexual misconduct they could commit together because it was understood that women could not possibly *be* sexual together, as sex was defined by the use of a penis.⁵³ This suggests that these "romantic friends" may have laughed at the conventions which allowed their intimate relationships that we would have called "lesbian."

In Behn's poem "A Song. By Mrs. A.B." the speaker identifies herself as female through the title, but asks for the same intimacies that Iris – to whom the poet is speaking – allows her male lovers. Behn used poetry to express her masculine side, as she often drew upon the traditionally romantic poetry of the time period to structure her own work.

Just before Behn, Katherine Fowler Philips was another famous poet of the romantic friendship genre from England. Though she did not write in prose, possibly because it was not a popular genre at the time, she wrote a significant amount of poetry and developed an organization of women that she called "The Society of Friendship," within which the members

⁵³ See Faderman's *Surpassing the Love of Men*, for more in-depth examination of romantic friendships between women during the seventeenth century.

each assumed classical pseudonyms. Philips was known as Orinda. In her poetry, she referred to herself and her friends using their pseudonyms.

Philips' had three significant relationships over her lifetime, with Mary Awbrey (whom Philips called Rosania), Anne Owen (called Lucasia), and Elizabeth Boyle (called Celimena). She was involved with Lucasia for ten years and wrote over half her poems to this lover. Celimena was her most brief relationship – Philips fell in love with her in 1664, the year of her own death from smallpox when she was 33.

Like Behn, Philips was given in a marriage, arranged by her father, to a man nearly forty years her senior, which was not uncommon in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Her husband encouraged her literary interests and spent a great deal of his time far from London, in Wales, which enabled Philips to maintain her close friendships with the women in her life. All of her most important emotional relationships appear to be with other women, as she almost never wrote about her husband but wrote volumes about the women she loved.

Philips wrote many poems to both Rosania and Lucasia, and both eventually married men, after which their relationship with Philips disintegrated. Philips writes, in "To Rosania, now Mrs. Montague, Being with Her," of her obvious sadness in losing their friendship: "Thy absence I could easier find,/ Provided thou wert well and kind,/ Than such a Presence as in this,/ Made up in snatches of my bliss." But shortly after, Philips meets Lucasia, as she shows in "On Rosania's Apostasy and Lucasia's Friendship," where Philips vows even more love to Lucasia and announces her as a replacement for Rosania. When Lucasia and Philips are separated for a time, she wrote, "Orinda to Lucasia Parting, October 1661, London," expressing sadness at their goodbye: "Adieu, dear Object of my Love's excess, / And with thee all my hopes of happiness." It is obvious that Philips relationships with these women were more significant than that with her

husband, as her husband was gone for years at a time and never once, that we know of, received a poem of lament and longing.

Philips and Behn are two of the most well-known examples of women's romantic friendships from the seventeenth century, but they are not the only records. Sor Juana Ines De La Cruz (1648-95) wrote poetry in Colonial Mexico; she was a nun in the Order of St Jerome and allowed to keep a library of more than four thousand volumes, one of the largest private libraries in Mexico at the time. She learned to read early and had fantasies of entering the university in male disguise; she was never comfortable with the traditional female role.⁵⁴ Her love poetry focused mainly on women.

The "Ladies of Llangollen," who were Lady Eleanor Butler (1737-1829) and the Honourable Sarah Ponsonby (1755-1831), were not only dreaming of living devoted to each other, they were actually living it. They lived together for more than fifty years, until Eleanor's death when she was ninety-two. Eleanor kept a diary of their life together from 1785 to 1821, where she frequently referred to Sarah as "my Heart's darling," "my sweet love," "my Beloved." Yet the diary lacks a record of explicit sexual relations, which has led some scholars to question whether the relationship was sexual.

However, Jeffreys points out that heteronormativity is at work in our viewing of history – we assume everyone to be heterosexual unless explicitly otherwise proven. We do not require the same amount of proof for heterosexuals – no one would ever question someone's *heterosexuality* because there was no evidence of sexual relations with the opposite gender, or with, for instance, a long-term life partner that someone lived with for over fifty years. Jeffreys believes this is yet another form of homophobia. Regardless of the lack of evidence, I do not believe it is relevant how sexual these women were or weren't with each other; what is important is that there is

⁵⁴ See Faderman, *Chloe Plus Olivia*

significant evidence of their romantic involvement in their written work, and they were obviously primarily focused on each other.

Anna Seward (1749-1809) also wrote romantic friendship poetry; she was excused from marriage because she was required to take care of her father until his death, when she was in her forties and too old to marry. She, like Behn and Philips, escaped the conventional marriage relationship, which enabled her more time for not only other women in her life but also her writing. She wrote many sonnets and poems to a few significant women in her life, such as “Miss Honora Sneyd,” to whom she wrote many letters and poems from youth through to the end of her life. Faderman claims that though Seward’s poems “are not striking in their originality of language or imagery, they do express deep feeling motivated by an all-consuming passion that is often very moving.”⁵⁵ Her work provides literary evidence for eighteenth-century romantic friendship between women, and is historically important.

Emily Dickinson (1830-86), perhaps the most famous poet in American literary history, has been frequently heterosexualized in the twentieth century, but no researcher has yet been able to construct any concrete evidence of her significant emotional or physical involvement with a man (with one possible exception in middle age). She had significant romantic friendships with other women in her early years, however, which were well documented. Sue Gilbert, a friend of Dickinson to whom she wrote many letters, eventually became involved with and eventually married Dickinson’s brother Austin, which caused great grief to Dickinson and was possibly even one of the causes of her breakdown. Many of the letters during that time that passed between Gilbert and Dickinson were destroyed upon Dickinson’s death. After Sue and Austin were married, Dickinson began writing poetry again and reconciled with Sue at about the

⁵⁵ Faderman, *Chloe Plus Olivia*, 39.

same time. Dickinson began showing her work to Sue for criticism; at least 128 letters and 276 poems were sent to Sue.

Critics have often denied that Dickinson's poetry was dealing with lesbian relations; even her poem "Her breast is fit for pearls" one critic said was written about a "male sparrow,"⁵⁶ which shows how scholars frequently heterosexualize lesbians' work. However, though the subjects of Dickinson's poetry have often been disputed, it is impossible to deny that Dickinson had significant romantic relationships with other women. Yet again, however, the relationships she was able to have with other women were complicated by the historical time period in which she was living; it is possible that this was convention, and the relationship was not sexual. Nevertheless, she attempted to connect with other women in a passionate, romantic way.

Also worth mentioning around this same time period are writers such as Christina Rossetti (1830-1894), whose poem *Goblin Market* (1862) portrayed two girls going to market attempting to resist the Goblin fruit, which is depicted in sensual feminine imagery; "Michael Field," pseudonym for writers Katharine Bradley (1846-1914) and Edith Cooper (1862-1913), who collaborated on nearly three dozen volumes of historical dramas and verse together; Katherine Mansfield (1888-1923) wrote short stories that examined sensuality between women and the unhappiness of women's domestic role; and Angelina Weld Grimké (1880–1958), a poet during the Harlem Renaissance, contributed significant work to the African American lesbian community. As the turn of the nineteenth century approached, there were many more women writers who wrote about lesbian subjects in a variety of novels, many of which I will mention below. This list above contains pertinent poets of the nineteenth century, worth mentioning because of the relatively new novel genre and the literary and historical significance of their

⁵⁶ Faderman *Chloe*, 45.

work. Their work is significant if only for the fact that it survived centuries of homophobia and oppression

It is difficult to precisely parallel the identities and writing of these women from the past with any exact identity development process;⁵⁷ however, I believe they parallel the first stage of the coming out process as illustrated by Morris, because the writings and theorizing of these women on their identities and their romantic relationships was part of what provided the notion of a lesbian identity to develop at all.

Toward the end of this roughly three hundred year time period, the study of psychoanalysis and psychiatry increased. Sexologists, primarily men with middle-class backgrounds, began studying homosexual behavior in women.

German activist Karl Heinrich Ulrichs was the first modern theorist of homosexuality. His work in the 1860s influenced other theories of homosexuality, such as those by von Krafft-Ebing and Freud. Ulrichs began using the term "Uranian," to describe a homosexual person, which refers to Plato's *Symposium*, which describes the "heavenly" form of love between men (associated with Aphrodite as the daughter of Uranus) practiced by those who "turn to the male, and delight in him who is the more valiant and intelligent nature." This type of love was distinguished from the "common" form of love associated with heterosexual love of women.

He also developed a classification system for the varieties of (male) sexual orientation, "Dionings" (heterosexuals), "Urnings" (homosexuals), and "Uranodionings" (bisexuals), based on their preferences for sexual partners. (A fourth category, hermaphrodites, he acknowledged but dismissed as occurring too infrequently to be significant.⁵⁸

⁵⁷ see Faderman *Surpassing the Love of Men: Romantic Friendship and Love Between Women from the Renaissance to the Present* for more theory on the identity of women in romantic friendships.

⁵⁸ see Kennedy, Hubert. *Ulrichs: The Life and Works of Karl Heinrich Ulrichs, Pioneer of the Modern Gay Movement* (Boston: Alyson Publications, 1988) for a further study of Ulrichs and his work.

From Ulrichs' work, sexologists such as Karl Westphal and Richard von Krafft-Ebing continued to develop theories of "sexual inversion," which explained that a lesbian was a man trapped in a woman's body. Westphal, a German psychiatrist writing in 1869, was the first to describe love between women in medical terms. Early sexologists' perspectives were centered on inappropriate gender behavior – inverted gender behavior so that a female looks and behaves like a male. However, inappropriate sexual object choice – choosing a woman as the object of desire – was clearly connected to inverted behavior, by Westphal and others.⁵⁹ French, English, and German sexologists formed various theories about the origin of such behaviors, believing it was biologically based.

The development of theories of homosexual behavior – which led to the establishment of a homosexual identity – made the romantic friendship literature of the past something "perverted" and "abnormal."

As psychiatry continued to develop as a scientific practice in the west, Sigmund Freud's explanation of lesbianism as determined in childhood was the dominant view of from the 1920s through the 1960s. Freud's psychoanalytical work focused primarily on the sexual development of men and women, and with that came his theories on sexuality, including homosexuality, which he saw as a perversion. Rather than believing that sexuality was biologically based, as his nineteenth century counterparts did, Freud believed sexuality was something the brain learned in the development process. The identity of heterosexual developed right alongside homosexual, as homosexual had to have a norm in order to be "othered." As homosexuality was seen as an abnormal development of the psyche, it then meant that homosexuality could be 'cured' through psychoanalysis and psychotherapy.

⁵⁹ Faderman, *Odd Girl Out*, 41.

During the same time period, from the late nineteenth century through the turn of the twentieth, many female novelists contributed significantly to the evolving genre of lesbian literature. However, the concept of lesbian identity was quite different than both the previous romantic friendships and the concepts of “invert” or “third sex” in the early twentieth century. Many of the female novelists who are quite well known during this time period have significant lesbian subtexts within their work, but one has to know where to look. For instance, Sarah Orne Jewett (1849-1909) wrote short stories, poems, and novels, as well as many letters to her “wife” Annie Fields, with whom Jewett held a Boston marriage. Gertrude Stein was quite well known, both for her prose and poetry, such as *Tender Buttons* (1914) and *Lifting Belly* (published posthumously, 1953), and for her *Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* (...), as much an autobiography of her partner as it was a biography of herself, their life together, and their community. Virginia Woolf (1882-1941), too, included lesbian subtexts in many of her novels, including *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925) and *Orlando* (1928).

Though the homosexual undercurrents in both their works and their lives are rarely acknowledged, many of these authors remain well studied today. Though the works by these authors are significant, few of them dealt directly with the development of lesbian attraction or acknowledgement, choosing instead to subtly weave hints and clues into the stories rather than confront the development of a lesbian *identity*, not just the acknowledgement of lesbian *behavior*.

Stage Two: Disclosure to Others

Continual development of psychological theories by Freud, Jung, and others lead to the understanding of a homosexual *identity*, not just behavior. This was understood as the “third sex,” neither man nor woman, caused by “mistakes” in the deeply ingrained development of a young child. Another theory of inversion was quite popular among psychologists, and reflected in lesbian literature such as *The Well of Loneliness*, as I explore below, which explained that homosexuality was a psychological status which believed lesbians were basically men in women’s bodies.

The United States was a hostile environment for gays and lesbians in the early twentieth century, and there were many American expatriates living in Paris. Specifically, writers such as Djuna Barnes, Natalie Barney, Gertrude Stein, and Renee Vivien all lived and wrote in Paris during the 1920s and 30s, often writing about issues of female sexuality and sensuality, and women’s feelings for other women. Barney formed a Salon, a writer’s and artists circle which was nearly all lesbian, and included Gertrude Stein and, on occasion, Radclyffe Hall.

In the midst of her career, Radclyffe Hall wrote what is known as the “first lesbian novel,” *The Well of Loneliness* (1928), which was banned in the US and Britain for its explicit sexuality. Although there were novels that dealt with romantic and sexual feelings between women prior to Hall’s publication, this was the first to focus on lesbianism as an identity as the main issue and conflict with which the character was struggling.

The Well of Loneliness has all the characteristics of an old-fashioned novel – “strong plot, a noble and martyred hero, sharply-defined secondary characters, plentiful romance, and a tearjerker ending.”⁶⁰ The protagonist, Stephen Gordon, is a fictionalized version of the invert. Stephen’s childhood and adolescence are marked by difference – her “boyish” pursuits, and her

⁶⁰ Zimmerman, 7.

attraction to women. She flees to Paris and the relative acceptance of the lesbian circles there (modeled after Natalie Barney and her salon). Eventually, Stephen gives up the woman she loves in order to allow her to marry a man, choosing instead solitude and loneliness.

Though the lesbian protagonist is isolated and condemned to a life of misery because of her sexuality at the end of the book, *The Well of Loneliness* was written with a specific agenda: to argue that homosexuals deserve a place within nature and society.⁶¹ Unlike the novels published by authors in the early twentieth century,⁶² Hall focused on her character's struggle to acknowledge and accept her lesbian identity and, one step further, her struggle for social acceptance. By depicting Stephen as an outcast, rejected by society, Hall intended readers to sympathize and to encourage putting an end to homophobia. However, since Hall's novel "virtually defined lesbianism" for forty years,⁶³ until the rise of the gay and lesbian movement in the late 1960s, her protagonist's miserable life was the dominant understanding of how homosexuals lived, and the accepted explanation for her misery was not society's homophobia but rather Gordon's own sexual confusion. Though Hall was commenting on the realities associated with isolation, the common reading was not sympathy and social activism, but rather further condemnation, and the perpetuation that homosexuality was bad and would lead to a miserable life.

This homophobic attitude toward lesbianism and homosexuality in general would only get worse before it got better. After World War II in the United States, being openly homosexual became increasingly dangerous. Homosexuals were identified as subversives by Joseph McCarthy's House Committee on Un-American Activities, and "retaliation against known

⁶¹ Zimmerman, 7.

⁶² E.g. Woolf, Jewett, Cather.

⁶³ Zimmerman, 7.

homosexuals was certain, swift, and brutal.”⁶⁴ Homosexual culture was forced even further underground and to the margins of society. Though gay and lesbian activist groups, such as the Mattachine Society and The Daughters of Bilitis, were being formed in the 1950s, they were highly secretive, and there were very real consequences for one’s homosexual identity being revealed. Gays and lesbians “lost their jobs and homes, suffered incarceration in mental institutions and prisons, and endured violent attacks in the streets and bars.”⁶⁵

During the 1950s and ‘60s, Bonnie Zimmerman believes the “written word was crucial to sustaining and promoting lesbian identity”⁶⁶ because lesbian life was so hidden. More lesbian novels were published in this time than in any other time in history, largely due to the rise of the pulp paperbacks. For the first time, publishing houses were producing thousands of mass marketed paperback books, made small enough to fit into a pocket and costing relatively cheap (ten to forty cents). Their low prices and their high visibility – as they were available at bus stops, drug stores, and train stations throughout the country – made them ideal for all classes of people to pick up and read. Since these pulp paperbacks were considered throw-away ‘trash’ literature, they were rarely if ever censored by the publishing houses, which meant there were many, many books dealing with sexuality in all sorts of “deviant” forms – from sadomasochism to homosexuality.⁶⁷

Pulp was rarely (and is even still) thought to be “real” literature, labeled “sleaze” and “pulp” rather than books or novels. But these books were key to survival in this difficult time period, as they were widely available and affordable to many people. These pulp paperbacks

⁶⁴ Zimmerman, 8.

⁶⁵ Zimmerman, 8.

⁶⁶ Zimmerman, 9.

⁶⁷ Personal notes from the *Saints & Sinners* literary conference (New Orleans, LA; May 2004).

were crucial to the lesbian culture of the 1950s and 1960s because they offered proof of lesbian existence.

Tereska Torres' pulp novel *Women's Barracks* (1951) began the lesbian pulp novel craze. In the 1950s and 1960s, over 2,000 lesbian pulp novels were published, though only about 200 of them written by women, and many of those lesbian authors published more than one book – so there were relatively few women authors. Yvonne Keller, in her essay “Pulp Politics: Strategies of Vision in Pro-Lesbian Pulp Novels, 1955-1965,” claims the pro-lesbian pulp genre contains closer to one hundred titles by fifteen different major authors.⁶⁸

Though there were many pulp fiction books published about heterosexual relationships (usually involving a sexual “deviant”), as well as male homosexuality, many of the most successful pulp fiction books were lesbian. This is likely because lesbian pulps had not only a lesbian audience, but straight male and gay male audiences as well. Often, the lesbian pulps depicted lesbians as women waiting for the right man to come along, as they were written by and for a straight male reader. Gay male men were more inclined to purchase lesbian pulps than the gay male pulps because they could appear straight if reading about lesbians, but could have very real consequences if seen purchasing gay male erotica.⁶⁹

However, most of these novels were pulp paperbacks that showed lesbians as tragic, maimed characters and often linked lesbianism to alcohol, violence, and meaningless sex – some were written by men for men and were little more than soft pornography. These plots left lesbians as either doomed to unhappy love affairs or redeemed by heterosexual marriage. And because they were often written by men for men, there was often no literary value in the plot or

⁶⁸ The fifteen authors Keller names are: Ann Bannon, Sloane Britain, Paula Christian, Joan Ellis, March Hastings, Marjorie Lee, Della Martin, Rea Michaels, Claire Morgan (pseudonym of Patricia Highsmith), Vin Packer, Randy Salem, Artemis Smith, Valerie Taylor, Tereska Torres, and Shirley Verel.

⁶⁹ Zimet, Jaye. *Strange Sisters: The Art of Lesbian Pulp Fiction, 1949-1969*. (New York: Viking Studio, 1999), 5.

characters – rather they were only a way to get from one lesbian sex scene to the next. Aside from the pornographic aspect of lesbian pulps written by men, male authors often sought to expose the ‘perversity’ of homosexuality, describing lesbians as nymphomaniacs and sexual predators. Many lesbian authors, however, wrote realistically about the lives of lesbians, and even implied that the pathology of lesbianism depicted in the stories, such as madness, suicide, adultery, etc., was not the result of homosexuality itself but rather of the social intolerance homosexuals face.

Some of these novels, written by women, actually portrayed strong lesbian characters, even with feminist attitudes. Ann Bannon’s series of five pulp novels, known as the *Beebo Brinker Chronicles*, are among some of the most well known of all the pulps published in the pulp era. The series includes many strong lesbian characters and continues to deal with the issues that began with Hall’s *The Well of Loneliness*, that of societal rejection because of the newly developed identity “lesbian.” The original cover of Bannon’s second novel reads “*I Am A Woman ... in love with another woman ... must society reject me?*” The message is clear.

Valerie Taylor’s series of novels, including *The Girls in 3-B* (1959), *Journey to Fulfillment* (1964), *Return to Lesbos* (1963), and *World Without Men* (1963), all with protagonist Erika Frohmann, explore many feminist ideas, such as being stuck in the suburbs and bored to tears with domestic duties.

Many of these books were incredibly well received – Bannon’s *Odd Girl Out* (1957), the first book in the *Beebo Brinker Chronicles*, was the number three selling paperback book in the United States in 1957. There was an obvious market for lesbian novels during this time period, though it was difficult to determine which books were really about lesbians and which were

written by men for men. Ann Bannon, in her introduction to *Strange Sisters: the Art of Lesbian Pulp Fiction 1949-1969*, wrote,

Women learned to recognize what a nascent literature of their own by reading the covers iconically. If there was a solitary woman on the cover, provocatively dressed, and the title conveyed her rejection by society of her self-loathing ... if there were two women on the cover, and they were touching each other ... if a lone male, whether looking embarrassed, hostile, or sexually deprived, appeared with two women, you had probably struck gold.⁷⁰

There were codes that many female readers learned to see in order to weed out the lesbian pulp novels written by men. Studying the cover art depicted in *Queer Pulp: Perverted Passions from the Golden Age of the Paperback*, it is easy to get an idea of the art Bannon describes. The lesbian pulps written for men are obvious in their titles as well as their cover art; titles such as *Thrill Chicks* and *Dial P for Pleasure* imply sinful desire and kinky sex. Other titles, such as *The Other Kind of Desire* or *Strange Sisters*, were clearly depicting more than just sex – they describe subtle, covert relationships.

A frequent theme in the lesbian pulps showed characters who were searching for acceptance within society.⁷¹ “[Some] lesbian pulp writers ... showed in their fiction that social prejudice against lesbians was morally wrong. They also suggested that lesbians were driven to insanity or death because of the society around them that condemned them as abnormal, not because they were inherently psychologically disturbed. For the period, this was an unusual and refreshing message.”⁷² Though the convention of the pulps was to show disturbing characters,

⁷⁰ Bannon, 12.

⁷¹ E.g. *The Price of Salt, Odd Girl Out*.

⁷² Inness, Sherrie A. “Novel: Lesbian” *An Encyclopedia of Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer Culture*. http://www.glbtq.com/literature/novel_lesbian.html Accessed June, 2004.

lesbian authors often reinvented that convention in order to explain the *why* behind the miserable lives.

However, the characters were not always miserable. Patricia Highsmith,⁷³ under the pseudonym Clare Morgan, published *The Price of Salt* (1952), which is known as the first lesbian novel with a happy ending. Highsmith portrays lesbians as women who can easily blend into a heterosexual crowd, with traits such as long hair and motherhood, a rare perspective for the time as they were usually depicted as mannish and sexual predators. The story follows Therese Belivet, a young artist living in New York City, as she falls in love with Carol Aird, who is separated from her husband and living with her daughter. Throughout the novel, the two women gradually become closer and eventually begin a sexual relationship.

However, Carol's former husband threatens to use her lesbianism to gain full custody of their daughter. Though the text does imply that lesbians cannot be "real" mothers, Carol and Therese clearly recognize that Carol is the better parent, but that the social reality will not allow her to be involved with another woman and raise a child. Faced with the choice to choose between her new lover or her daughter, Carol chooses Therese—a very radical decision for the literature of the period.

Jane Rule's novel *Desert of the Heart* (1964) is credited as being the first Canadian lesbian novel with a happy ending. Though Rule was born in the US, she relocated to Canada, where *Desert of the Heart* was published. Set in Reno, Nevada, the story focuses on the relationship between Evelyn, a professor of English literature, and Ann, a change girl at a Reno casino, who is also a successful cartoonist. Evelyn is just getting a divorce from her husband of

⁷³ Highsmith went on to write *The Talented Mr. Ripley* and a number of other mystery novels. Many of the pulp authors would become very well known, including Marion Zimmer Bradley.

many years because of their sexual and emotional incompatibility; in this fashion, Rule points out that heterosexual relationships are not always superior to homosexual ones.

Surprisingly enough, at the end of the novel, as at the end of *The Price of Salt*, Evelyn and Ann are still together and planning to establish a life with each other. Rule refuses to accept the commonly held assumption that homosexual relationships are merely temporary experiments. Both of these novels are “sensitive and dignified . . . in the tradition of the 1950s romance” which “demonstrated how lesbian fiction, freed from the stereotypes and narrative conventions of the past, might determine its own voice.”⁷⁴

The necessary components of popular 1950s lesbian pulp fiction, such as lesbians as sexual predators, “becoming” straight, marrying men, or committing suicide, never appear in *Desert of the Heart* and *The Price of Salt*. Still, the characters were slowly coming out, pleading with society to accept them and let them live freely, and disclosing their sexuality to others, hoping to find support and fearing to find opposition. This specifically corresponds to the second phase of coming out.

Morris defines the second stage of identity development as “disclosure of sexual orientation to others.”⁷⁵ After developing some sort of acknowledgement of a new inner self, we expose this new self to the world. We go in search of further information about this identity, and the only way to do so is to “out” ourselves, to disclose our own identity to others. Markowe discusses this stage as well in her study *Redefining the Self: Coming Out as a Lesbian*. She focuses on only two stages of coming out, however, instead of Morris’s four stages: *coming out to self* and *coming out to others*. Markowe’s study, as opposed to Morris’s theoretical work, interviewed a variety of women about their personal experiences with coming out. The second

⁷⁴ Zimmerman, 10.

⁷⁵ Morris, 7.

stage of coming out to others were examined in different areas: coming out to other lesbians and coming out to family and heterosexual friends.⁷⁶

The novels during this time period – from the 1920s with the early development of the lesbian identity until after World War II, but before the birth of the gay rights movement with the Stonewall riot – focused on initial contact with other lesbians (such as Therese in *The Price of Salt*) and dealing with family rejection after coming out (such as Stephen Gordon in *The Well of Loneliness*).

The late sixties saw the blossom of many social movements. The rise of the women's liberation movement and the beginning of the lesbian and gay rights movement brought significant opportunities for important social activism. Yet lesbians were marginalized in both groups, as they were non-straight in the feminist movement, and non-male within the gay rights movement. Many lesbians felt the need to create their own space, in order to focus on issues that were important to them. This led to a combination of activist movements and a significant rise in lesbian culture and visibility.

⁷⁶ Markowe, 199.

Stage Three: Expression and Behavior

After the Stonewall riots of 1969 in New York City,⁷⁷ credited as the official beginning of the gay rights movement, lesbian literature flourished. The women who came of age in the 1960s in the United States established “the most dynamic and pervasive sense of lesbian cultural identity ever recorded,” according to Zimmerman, who “insisted upon our right to say who we are, what we think and feel, how we love and live.”⁷⁸ And with the increased cultural identity came increased cultural representations, including, of course, a rise in the lesbian novel genre.

For instance, from 1973 to 1981 an average of only five lesbian novels were published each year, and though that was less than the thousands of pulp paperbacks published in the 1950s and 1960s, these novels were written by lesbians specifically for a lesbian audience and often published on lesbian presses. Between 1984 and 1987, the numbers of lesbian novels published rose to twenty-three per year, and figures indicated that the genre is still on the rise.⁷⁹

Representation of difference within the lesbian community, however, remained marginalized. The mainstream gay and lesbian movement was (and still, largely, is) dominated by white and middle-class people, and the lesbian novel genre generally reflected this perspective. Many lesbians’ life experiences fell outside of the dominant representations. However, as both queer and feminist activism rose, many marginalized voices fought to be heard, and influenced the direction of activism and oppression studies by demanding acknowledgement of the complexities of multiple intersecting, and sometimes conflicting, identities.

During the 1960s, which birthed this third stage of the lesbian novel’s development, a new understanding of lesbian identity developed which “altered the temper of America

⁷⁷ See Martin Duberman’s history of the riots in the book *Stonewall* (New York: Plume, 1993).

⁷⁸ Zimmerman, 11.

⁷⁹ Zimmerman, 207.

drastically ... in the context of widespread interest in liberalization and liberation.”⁸⁰ The prior view was that lesbian identity was essentialist: women were gay because they were born gay or became so early on in life. Along with that came the understanding that problems lesbians faced stemmed from society’s homophobic attitudes. The new argument about lesbian identity came from women who identified as “lesbian-feminist,” and who usually believed they *chose* to be lesbians for primarily political purposes. Their “analysis of male domination and patriarchal behavior led them to reject their old bonds with men,”⁸¹ including sexual bonds. The notion of the gay identity as inborn or developed in early childhood was challenged as women adopted the label and identity of “lesbian” in order to consciously protest the “evils of patriarchy.”⁸² This complicated lesbian identity and moved the definition of lesbian away from a primarily sexual identity to a political, social, and economic identity as well.

The new identity presented lesbianism as a happy alternative to heterosexual power relations, which in turn began carving a strong, rich culture that would come to produce many important cultural artifacts. Throughout North America, the United Kingdom, and in Western Europe, numerous “lesbian-feminist bookstores, journals, publishing houses, and a large audience of lesbian readers who carved works that promulgated feminism and presented positive literary images of love between women.”⁸³ Lesbian presses such as Naiad Press, Diana Press, Women’s Press Collective, and Daughters sought work for publication that reflected the philosophy of the movement. The fiction of this period emphasized that difficulties placed upon lesbians, such as disapproval, losing employment, or motherhood, were the result of societal

⁸⁰ Faderman, *Odd Girls*, 189.

⁸¹ Faderman, *Chloe*, 547.

⁸² Faderman, *Chloe*, 547.

⁸³ Faderman, *Chloe*, 548.

homophobia, rather than the prior notion that obstacles to happiness were based on the woman's own medical sickness or moral sin, for "choosing" to be with other women.

During this thriving period, the coming out story emerged as a dominant genre within lesbian literature. It told the universal and yet completely unique experience of developing a lesbian identity, of which every lesbian has gone through in some form. Stories of lesbian's journeys to their lesbian identity were essential to tell and understand, and lead the character, the author, and the reader to a new understanding of identity that ideally would help us navigate the world with a greater sense of our own identity. Since we do live in a heteronormative society, in which we are socialized to be heterosexual, lesbians and other queers must, even still, *develop* a sexuality which is alternative to the dominant socialization – we have to come to the identity within ourselves in some way, come out to others, and experience relationships. The coming out novel attempts to answer the "question of how-I-got-this-way,"⁸⁴ and in the 1960s and 70s, when the gay liberation movement, the feminist liberation movement, and lesbian-feminism thrived, women were able to come out with a new level of safety and community available to them.

This community, however, was somewhat limited. Racism, classism, and transphobia meant that only a sliver of women were accepted with open arms into lesbian communities. Working class women, women of color, and women who identified as butch/femme or experimented with BDSM were often marginalized from mainstream white, middle-class lesbian-feminism. Most of the characters in and authors of literature published during this time was by and for this mainstream lesbian readership. However, this was a period when lesbianism disrupted the dominant culture and demanded acceptance, and the visibility of lesbian culture, including the lesbian novel, meant that more women had access to lesbian representations than ever before.

⁸⁴ Zimmerman, 50.

The third stage of lesbian identity development is relationship-based, as the individual experiences lesbian “sexual expression and behavior.”⁸⁵ This is the stage where the individual has been “out” for long enough to date and to begin to form meaningful relationships, both sexual relationships and friendships. This stage also informs expression of one’s sexuality in the (non-queer) world and how much activism and community-building in which one is involved.

Paulina Palmer, in her critical work *Contemporary Lesbian Writing: Dreams, Desire, Difference* (1993), believes that the dominant critical theory around the coming out novels in the 1970s and 80s “generally center on the protagonist’s subjectivity and underestimate ... its significant social dimension.”⁸⁶ Novels in this period describe that the psychological development is “by no means solitary,” and the character’s understanding of her lesbian orientation, which is the focus of the story by definition, “relates very clearly to her interaction with the world at large.”⁸⁷ This relationship is depicted in two ways: her acts of resistance to the dominant culture, and the supportive relationship she establishes with the lesbian community, be it a group of women or a single partner.

The literature of the late 1960s through the late 1980s told the coming out story like none of the previous eras. The stories of lesbians’ childhoods, developments, and relationships were produced in new numbers to a new audience, as well as a newly visible community. Literature in this time is wide and varied, representing many aspects of lesbians’ lives but still focused on the coming out story, the how-I-got-to-be-this-way.

Isabel Miller’s novel *A Place for Us* (1968), later reprinted under the title *Patience and Sarah*, explored a lesbian relationship set in puritanical New England in the early nineteenth century. Patience and Sarah had to make up their own rules as they went along, as they had no

⁸⁵ Morris, 8.

⁸⁶ Palmer, 41.

⁸⁷ Palmer, 41.

models from which to pull. They dream of a life together, of running away and operating their own farm, but their patriarchal families get in the way, often even physically. Sarah leaves, passing as a man, but comes back to find her feelings for Patience just as strong. Though they have no community support or lesbian identity from which to gain strength, their pull toward each other is enough for them, and they find strength in each other and in their passionate relationship.

A Place for Us is one of the first significant lesbian novels set in a historical time period. Miller attempts to imagine a lesbian relationship in the absence of a lesbian subculture, which, though it was growing stronger in the late sixties, was yet to be realized in the United States. It was originally published just before the Stonewall riots, and anticipates, in a way, the significant development of lesbian culture which was to occur in the next few years.

Rubyfruit Jungle (1972) by Rita Mae Brown, on the other hand, is full of the discovery of lesbians and lesbian community. It is one of the most famous lesbian novels in general, and caused a sensation because of its strong lesbian heroine, Molly Bolt. Even when she is a child, Molly knows that she never wants to get married and assumes that she is a lesbian. Despite her illegitimate birth and her impoverished background, Molly, thanks to her superior intelligence and strength of character, wins a full scholarship to the University of Florida. In college, she begins to experience lesbian life and has an affair with another woman student. When she is expelled from school because her lesbian relationship with her roommate is revealed to the administration and after her rejection by her family, Molly heads to New York City where she studies to be a film director.

This novel is a coming out story that traces Molly's maturation as an individual and specifically as a lesbian. Brown's novel is upbeat and positive. Though Molly has various loves

and lovers throughout the novel, she does not walk happily into the sunset with one of them; however, she succeeds in film school and makes peace with her mother, overcoming tremendous personal obstacles and shining through with a strong lesbian identity in the end.

Zimmerman cites *Who Was that Masked Woman?* (1981) by Noretta Koertge as another “classic lesbian coming out novel.”⁸⁸ In it, Tretona ponders why she is attracted to women and what she should do about it. She wonders who her essential self is, beneath the mask. She ultimately concludes that she’d always been “queer,” that lesbianism is her “true skin.”⁸⁹ Tretona decides, though she has been masking herself as straight, she has always been lesbian underneath it all.

Ann Allen Shockley’s novel *Loving Her* (1974) is one of the only lesbian novels focusing on black lesbian lives prior to the 1980s. In *Loving Her*, an account of an interracial love affair, as well as in her other novels, Shockley explores with sensitivity the difficulties facing African-American lesbians. Like *Patience and Sarah* and *Desert of the Heart*, *Loving Her* shows lesbians as able to overcome any obstacle through their love for each other. The novel claims love can’t be confined to color or object, but rather that “[l]ove is what you see, like and admire in a person, how you feel and respond to that person.”⁹⁰ Though Shockley’s characters overcome external racism as well as societal homophobia, *Loving Her* still implies that lesbians of color face different issues in the world, of which white lesbians are often not aware. *Loving Her* signified a departure from the limited viewpoint of the middle-class white lesbian novel, and though the racism and classism inside of the lesbian movement was far from over, other voices were disrupting and demanding to be included.

⁸⁸ Zimmerman, 210.

⁸⁹ Koertge, Noretta. *Who Was that Masked Woman?* (1981) 107, 108.

⁹⁰ Shockley, Ann Allen. *Loving Her*. 84.

There were many other classic lesbian coming out novels during this time, including *Riverfinger Woman* by Elana Nachmann and *Yesterday's Lessons* by Sharon Isabell.⁹¹ The coming out story continued to be the quintessential lesbian novel, tracing the development of the protagonist's journey to her lesbian identity. However, other significant genres of the lesbian novel began to develop in the late 1970s and early 1980s, which expanded the lesbian novel and explored the variety of lesbian lives and culture.

Though the romance genre dates back to novels such as *Patience and Sarah* and *The Price of Salt*, published in the 1950s and 60s, Katherine V. Forrest's novel *Curious Wine* (1983) signified a resurgence of the genre for the 1980s. *Curious Wine* details a developing relationship between two women, and became highly successful because of its numerous detailed scenes of making love. Its eroticism attempts to find or create a language for lesbian sexuality, one that, though it had been exploited quite frequently in the past, had not been explored and celebrated quite like this.

The lesbian romance was not the only lesbian novel sub-genres to develop in this period. In Audre Lorde's "biomythography," as she calls it, *Zami: A New Spelling of my Name* (1982), she tells her own story, dispelling myths and telling truths all along the way. She explores the interconnections of what it meant for her to be black and lesbian in the United States. Lorde has made significant theoretical, fictional, and poetic contributions to the feminist movement through her writing, and her work is still widely studied by young feminists today. Her explorations of the intersections of identities challenged the dominant discourse in the 1960s and 70s, which hierarchized and separated identities such as race, gender, sexuality. Lorde was relentless for speaking up loud and clear, disrupting the norm. The autobiographical novel continued to develop and significantly changed the lesbian novel during the 1990s.

⁹¹ Zimmerman, 210.

M.F. Beal's novel *Angel Dance* (1977) was the first lesbian detective mystery. Its angry, complex, visionary indictment of heterosexual and patriarchal capitalism is steaming with 1970s protest culture. The Chicana detective and first-person narrator Kat Guerrero is a subversive. The character embodies the way class, race, gender, and sexuality interface to uphold the hegemonic order of law. The corrupt power of the state is represented as being so extensive that concepts of "justice" can no longer be invoked.

The traditional crime novel is a site for the expression of anxieties about society in which the enemy is named and destroyed. In the lesbian and feminist crime novel, the terms often become inverted so that the state government's homophobic biases are identified as the corrupt enemy, and the lesbian sleuth, normally the feared and hated Other, is the victor. The lesbian detective novel or mystery became a popular genre in the 1980s and 90s, which I will discuss in the section on *Stage Four: Integration*.

In many lesbian communities during the 1970s, dominated by "lesbian-feminists and middle-class lesbians," lesbians generally mistrusted masculine/feminine roles, sexual "violence" (whether real or in play), and pornography, which they saw as a "manifestation of the misguided male sex drive."⁹² As the 1980s progressed, the lesbian-feminist identity was challenged by various groups of women who "wanted to find ways for lesbians to claim their sexual selves" just as gay men and heterosexuals had been doing.⁹³ Faderman calls the 1980s full of "sex wars" for lesbians. Aside from further splitting within the lesbian community on these issues, women everywhere also dealt with political and economic backlash against the feminist gains in the 1960s and 70s, and the lack of response to the AIDS crisis sparked more organized queer activism.

⁹² Faderman, *Odd Girls*, 248.

⁹³ Faderman, *Odd Girls*, 248.

Despite these setbacks, lesbians came out, fell in love, organized activism, and lived their lives. Each generation has been able to navigate with more freedoms and more safety. The post-lesbian-feminist writers took on pro-sex attitudes and began twisting the coming out novel, writing it to suit their own needs. In this way, the final stage of the identity development process – Integration – began.

Stage Four: Integration

The final stage is what I have named Integration, what Morris describes as “lesbian consciousness, which refers to how lesbians see themselves in relation to the larger social environment, including lesbian and gay communities.”⁹⁴ This includes integration into (non-queer) society, and integration of gay identity with other forms of individual identity, braiding the strands of identity into one cohesive, strong whole.

I am interested in this stage of development for multiple reasons. This seems to be the stage that most of my friends and community are exploring, as we have been “out” for five or more years and are now in our mid- or late-twenties, and we have spent time exploring other aspects of our identity. Stage four is also the stage most current lesbian literature seems to be exploring, and I am interested in how that identity formation works, what that looks like, and what that means for activism and social change within the lesbian community.

Many coming out models include some sort of “final” stage. But, as I have been careful to note, this does not mean that people somehow “complete” their identity development, for identity development happens throughout one’s life. This “final” stage is not necessarily the stage which one comes to last, after one has completed all the other stages; it is possible to go through the stages in a variety of combinations and orders, and it is possible to not go through certain stages at all. The stage models of coming out are not necessarily linear, though for my purposes I am examining the stages juxtaposed with the forward linear movement of time. I do realize that a necessary stage of development is to recognize the history and development of an identity, which often makes the understanding of this history non-linear and fluid, but I am using both a linear forward movement of time and a linear stage model here because I believe it clearly outlines the different major obstacles that lesbians must face while developing a lesbian identity,

⁹⁴ Morris, 8.

and because many of the stages rely upon previous stages in order to function. For instance, it is generally, though not always, necessary for a woman to admit her lesbian identity to herself and to other people before she may meet other lesbians with which to develop relationships. Because the stage model clearly outlines the progression of identity development, it is successful to examine the progression of lesbian literature.

Many stage models include a “final” phase of identity integration. As I mentioned previously, Cass (1979) calls her final stage of development Identity Synthesis, which is described as integrating one’s personal and public sexual identity and, finally, to see “homosexuality” as only one aspect of total identity. Though Coleman’s model (1981) has the fifth and final stage labeled Integration, the description focuses on thoughtful, conscious relationships rather than on multiple aspects of identity. Hanley-Hackenbruck (1989) describes the Resolution stage as a resolution of the tension between the desire to come out to others and the fear of rejection – in other words, when one is firm enough in one’s identity to be able to be out comfortably without being affected and damaged by a negative reaction. Sophie’s (1985-86) final stage of Identity Integration included three phases: anger at societal homophobia, disclosure of identity to numerous people, and stability as a homosexual.

Many of the lesbian authors in the recent decades have explored this stage of identity development in various ways. Some have portrayed identity in ways that coincided with the above psychologists’ models, and others have complicated the idea of lesbian identity entirely (such as Jolly, as outlined below).

Postmodernism and the critique of identity politics has done significant work to deconstruct the concept of identity. Postmodern thought emphasizes a form of subjectivity that is multiple rather than singular, fluid rather than static. It argues against the privileging of

naturalized or essentialized positions and points of view. Postmodernism seeks to decenter assumptions about what is "natural" or essential.

Postmodern criticism has affected identity politics, which is activism, politics, theorizing, and other similar activities based on the shared experiences of members of a specific social group (often relying on shared experiences of oppression). Identity politics have been criticized as naïve, fragmenting, essentialist, and reductionist. Some critics question whether sexual identity itself is a stable element of an individual's personality and have questioned whether it makes sense to base a political movement on so nebulous a concept. Social critic bell hooks, for example, argues that identity is too narrow a basis for politics.⁹⁵

Postmodernism has attempted to see the person within the identity, the cohesive whole and the unique, individual parts which make up the whole. This is precisely what the fourth stage of lesbian identity development describes, such as Cass's description of Identity Synthesis as integrating one's personal and public sexual identity and, finally, to see homosexuality as only one aspect of total identity.

But have we have moved into this phase of integration in our literature? Are we no longer primarily defining ourselves – and our literature – according to our coming out stories, our early relationships, our sudden revelation of our queer identity? Elaine Hutton, editor of the anthology *Beyond Sex and Romance? The Politics of Contemporary Lesbian Fiction*, asks, "Have we

⁹⁵ This brief discussion of postmodernism and identity politics is quite incomplete, and only a brief explanation in order to better understand the fourth stage of identity development. For more in-depth exploration, examine the works of authors such as Butler, Judith. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. (London: Routledge, 1990), hooks, bell. *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center*. (Boston: South End, 1984), and Craig Rimmerman, *From Identity to Politics: The Lesbian and Gay Movements in the United States*. (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2001).

moved *beyond* the early coming-out stories of the 1970s and 1980s, or the pulp fiction of the 1950s and 1960s?”⁹⁶ This is precisely the question I seek to explore in this section.

Since the lesbian-feminist movements in the 1960s and 70s, the traditional coming out story, telling how-I-got-this-way, is no longer the focus of the lesbian novels that have been published since the late 1980s. “Lesbian writers no longer focus on the drama of coming out as a lesbian. How I came out – how I discovered my real self – no longer engages [the current lesbian reader’s] attention. *We are* out, and it’s time to get on with our lives.”⁹⁷

Themes within the lesbian novel genre began expanding to incorporate various subgenres of mainstream fiction, including the detective or mystery, the autobiographical novel, and the historical novel. Works by Hutton and Palmer both identify various subgenres of lesbian literature, either written by lesbian authors or including lesbian themes or protagonists, such as the comic, the thriller, utopian and dystopian fiction, and science fiction.

Between the late 1980s and the 2000s, lesbian authors were published more frequently by mainstream presses, which could signify various cultural shifts. First, it signifies that the audience for a lesbian novel has grown, implying both that more lesbians themselves are seeking out cultural representations of lesbians and that perhaps lesbian novels are realized to be not only relevant to the lesbian community, but relevant to anyone and everyone regardless of gender identity, sex, or sexuality. Also, this could signify that mainstream publishing houses are no longer hesitant to publish lesbian literature, the most likely reason being that it has been proven

The integration stage of identity development begins in the late 1980s, under the Reagan and Thatcher regimes in the US and Britain respectively. The escalation of the AIDS epidemic, which “tended to make homophobia in particular, and conservative values in general, more

⁹⁶ Hutton, Elaine. *Beyond Sex and Romance? The Politics of Contemporary Lesbian Fiction* (London: The Women’s Press Ltd, 1998). 3, emphasis original.

⁹⁷ Zimmerman, 210.

respectable,”⁹⁸ created an extremely hostile environment for marginalized groups. The antifeminist backlash from the gains of the 1960s and 70s women’s liberation movement permeated the media.

The hostile governmental environment contributed directly to the rise of the lesbian detective mystery. Protagonists in lesbian detective mysteries are often fighting homophobia and unjust systems of power (including the government) rather than representing systems of power, as mainstream detective and mystery novels usually do, with protagonists such as CIA agents, police officers, and homicide detectives. The lesbian detective mystery dates back to M.F. Beal’s *Angel Dance* in 1977, as I discussed in Stage Three, but began gaining popularity in the mid-1980s. Anna Wilson, in her exploration “Death and the Mainstream: Lesbian Detective Fiction and the Killing of the Coming-Out Story,” calls *Angel Dance* an “isolated precursor which engendered no imitators.”⁹⁹ Though there were a few more lesbian detective novels published in the early 80s, the genre took off in 1984 with the publication of novels such as *The Sophie Horowitz Story* by Sarah Schulman and *Murder in the Collective* by Barbara Wilson.

Anna Wilson claims that the rise in the lesbian detective genre not only indicates the cultural and political shifts of the time, but also was “instrumental in the decline of the coming out story.”¹⁰⁰ The environment of the 1980s was increasingly hostile towards lesbians, and the focus of the women’s movement had “gradually shifted away from an emphasis on exploring and enhancing the “liberated” self toward a preoccupation with a self as embattled and endangered.”¹⁰¹ Lesbians and feminists organized primarily around issues such as rape,

⁹⁸ Wilson, Anna. “Death and the Mainstream: Lesbian Detective Fiction and the Killing of the Coming-Out Story.” *Feminist Studies* Vol 22(2) 1996. 251-278.

⁹⁹ Wilson, 267.

¹⁰⁰ Wilson, 251.

¹⁰¹ Wilson, 251.

pornography, sexual abuse, and routine male violence at that time. The idea of lesbianism as having “redemptive properties” was generally fading.

While the rise of heterosexual feminist detective novels were seen as invading traditionally male space, the lesbian audience already had a genre – the coming out novel. Wilson argues that this is not an addition to lesbian literature as much as it is a “shift from one form to another.” She also believes it is a change not just in the “vehicle of expression but in what is expressed”¹⁰² – meaning it is not just a new literary structure with which to examine lesbian identity, but it is a new version of lesbian identity that is being expressed as well.

Munt claims that “in mystery novels the formation of an identity happens through the solution of a crime ... The new identities offered to the reader of the lesbian mystery novel are dependent upon the possible political alternatives presented by any given cultural period or context.”¹⁰³ And because of that, the 1980s lesbian detective novel introduced a new lesbian identity.

Murder in the Collective is an especially good example of the crossings of these genres because it is both a mystery detective novel and a coming out novel. The plot revolves around murders at two printing presses, Best Printing, which included straight and gay women, and the lesbian separatist B. Violet Typesetting. Pam Nilsen from Best joins Hadley from B. Violet and they investigate the crime together. Pam, who previously identified as heterosexual, falls in love with Hadley and the two have an affair. While their relationship unfolds, Wilson is also invoking the genre of the lesbian romance, which was increasingly popular in the 1960s and 70s.

In the first half of Wilson’s novel, the crime investigation and romance intertwine. But in the second half, the “tension which exists between the genres of the thriller and the romance

¹⁰² Wilson, 254.

¹⁰³ Munt, Munt, Sally R. “Mystery Fiction: Lesbian,” *GLBTQ.com: An Encyclopedia of Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer Culture*. http://www.glbtq.com/literature/myst_fic_lesbian.html (Accessed June, 2004).

becomes apparent”¹⁰⁴ as the collaboration for the solving of the crime ends up resulting in the breakup of their relationship, as Hadley encounters her former lover while they are interrogating suspects and ultimately reconciles with her. This returns Pam to the position of the ‘loner,’ which is “traditionally assigned to the figure of the investigator,”¹⁰⁵ but obviously places her outside of the romance genre, as she does not get the girl in the end.

Many other significant lesbian detective novels were published in the late 1980s and throughout the 1990s, including *Murder at the Nightwood Bar* (1987) by Katherine Forrest and *She Came Too Late* (1986) by Mary Wings, as well as a wide variety of authors who have popularized the genre.¹⁰⁶

As the 1990s progressed, the third feminist wave became clearly in place and queer¹⁰⁷ activists organized for successful social, economic, and political gains. There were also many differences between the queer generation in the 1980s and 90s and their predecessors. Where post-Stonewall gays rejected gender roles, 1990s gay youth has rediscovered and embraced butch/femme gender roles¹⁰⁸ in some major metropolitan areas. While feminism provided the foundation for many 1970s lesbians to discover and acknowledge their own identities, some lesbians in the 1990s call themselves "post feminist" and reject what they see as the unnecessary

¹⁰⁴ Palmer, 71.

¹⁰⁵ Palmer, 71.

¹⁰⁶ Zimmerman cites lesbian detective writers such as Vicki McConnell, Camarin Grae, Sarah Dreher, Lauren Wright Douglas, Marion Foster, Antoinette Azolakov, Diana McRae, and Claire McNab in addition to those that I have already mentioned (210-211).

¹⁰⁷ Here, I begin to use the phrase “queer” to describe the general gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgendered, and questioning community from the 1990s to today. As I discuss, the lesbian “sex wars” in the 1980s brought many new voices into mainstream activism, and many previously marginalized groups fought their way into the community. I believe the word “queer” supports a variety of viewpoints, genders, and expressions, in a way that “lesbian” or “gay” does not. I am aware that it has a history of negative context. However, I have also been involved in reclaiming words in general, and reclaiming the word “queer” in particular, and I believe its reclamation to be at least partially successful.

¹⁰⁸ There are many caveats to claiming butch/femme roles are currently embraced and accepted. Geography is one major factor, as queer communities in different areas across the US, Canada, and England vary greatly depending on the location. Analysis of butch/femme identities, however, is outside the realm of this project, and I do not delve into the details here.

polarity that feminism espouses. Parts of the gay liberation movement has expanded to include issues surrounding bisexuals and transgendered people.

Many celebrity lesbians publicly announced their identities in the 1990s. Martina Navratilova came out in 1991 after becoming an enormously successful tennis player; singer and songwriter k.d. lang came out in a 1992 interview in the gay news magazine *The Advocate*, and subsequently appeared on the 1993 cover of *Vanity Fair* lounging in male drag in a barber's chair with Cindy Crawford hovering teasingly over her¹⁰⁹; Madonna had a romance with Sandra Bernhard in the mid-1990s; Ellen DeGeneres had her own TV show until 1997, after her character (also named Ellen) came out in an episode that was one of the highest rated television shows ever, attracting 36.2 million viewers and winning an Emmy Award for writing; Rosie O'Donnell confirmed long-time rumors of her lesbianism in 2002, particularly to engage in debates about gay and lesbian parenting rights. The number of gay and lesbian films rose significantly. Access to information about gay and lesbian issues and activism increased significantly with the widespread use of the Internet – suddenly even people in incredibly isolated areas could find thousands of resources by a simple keyword search. By the end of the 1990s and the early 2000s, gay and lesbian characters were more and more frequent on TV, such as *Will and Grace* and the latest television show, *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy*. Clearly, gay and lesbian identity was becoming more visible in the media.

Margaretta Jolly explores the progression of identity development in her article “Coming Out of the Coming Out Story: Writing Queer Lives,” in which she deconstructs two specific coming out narratives from the 1990s and mentions multiple other memoirs. She acknowledges that the “integration of social and psychic parts made possible by public acknowledgement of

¹⁰⁹ Crawford, one of the quintessential representations of femininity in the 1990s, appeared with lang, in male drag, which represented lesbian butch/femme roles. This was controversial, as women depicted in men's clothing is often interpreted as dangerous to the gender role's status quo.

one's sexuality can in fact permit a more fluid and mobile sense of self, no longer divided between covert relationships and public conformity."¹¹⁰ Her article specifically traces the autobiography *Apples and Oranges: My Journey Through Sexual Identity* (1999) by Jan Clausen, who, after coming out as a lesbian and having relationships with women for over a decade, goes through a second coming out when she falls in love with a man.

Jolly also examines Anchee Min's story *Red Azalea* (1996), a story about coming of age in communist China and falling in love with another woman. In this story, there is "no coming out at all", but rather just events of the past retold – sexuality is "never identified separately from relationship, as a state of being rather than behavior."¹¹¹ This is a new approach to sexuality as depicted in lesbian novels. There is virtually no identity development, no story of "before and after, of fall or enlightenment, conversion or revelation" which is so characteristic of most coming out stories of the 1970s and 80s. Min's sexuality is never further discussed; there is no mention of her current sexual status.¹¹² Instead, the narrative focuses on desire and the body which is a different way to depict the development of lesbian identity than the coming out narratives which were previously so prevalent in the genre.

The biographical narratives of the 1990s made a significant move away from the traditional structure of the coming out story in the 1970s and 80s. Though Jeanette Winterson's writing began with her novel based on her own coming out and coming of age story in *Oranges are Not the Only Fruit* (1985), she continued to write and publish many significant books through the 1990s and 2000s. *Oranges* was very successful, and even became a BBC television production in 1990. Winterson's witty but poignant work focuses on a contemporary coming of

¹¹⁰ Jolly, Margaretta. "Coming Out of the Coming Out Story: Writing Queer Lives." *Sexualities* 4, no 4 (2001), 474-496.

¹¹¹ Jolly, 485.

¹¹² Jolly, 485.

age tale of a young lesbian, Jeanette, in an evangelical household in the industrial midlands of England. “Jeanette’s coming out story, her understanding of difference, and her experience of maternal power – all themes characteristic of lesbian novels – are placed within the context created by her particular class and religious culture, not divorced from it.”¹¹³ Winterson integrates various aspects of her identity into one novel.

As young Jeanette discovers and begins to explore her love for other women, she is also confronted with resistance from her family and church. Yet she cannot understand what the problem is: “It all seemed to hinge around the fact that I loved the wrong sort of people. Right sort of people in every respect except this one; romantic love for another woman was a sin.”¹¹⁴ She comes to believe that the problem was not due to the “exquisite longings” for other women, but rather from “others’ inability to recognize and acknowledge the loveliness of sexual love shared between women.”¹¹⁵ Much like some of the lesbian pulp novels which were actually written by lesbian authors, Jeanette’s unshakable conviction that her lesbianism is right creates such strength in the novel that Winterson “totally redefines normal and renders heterosexuality as unintelligible for Jeanette.”¹¹⁶

Winterson explores various themes of “postmodern historiographic metafiction (such as intertextuality, parody, pastiche, self-reflexivity, fragmentation, the rewriting of history, and frame breaks)”¹¹⁷ in order to challenge and subvert patriarchal and heterosexist discourses. She has various novels which explore issues relating to sexual politics and gender construction, including her character Villanelle’s access to traditionally male spheres in the novel *The Passion*

¹¹³ Zimmerman, 230.

¹¹⁴ Winterson, Jeanette, *Oranges are Not the Only Fruit*. 127.

¹¹⁵ Doan, Laura. “Jeanette Winterson’s Sexing the Postmodern.” (from *The Lesbian Postmodern*. Ed. Laura Doan. New York City: Columbia University Press, 1994).

¹¹⁶ Doan, 137-138.

¹¹⁷ Doan, 138.

(1987) and rewriting fairy tale myths to disrupt normative gender relations in *Sexing the Cherry* (1989).

Though not quite as directly postmodern, Leslie Feinberg's *Stone Butch Blues* (1994) weaves a fictionalized autobiography through the story of Jess Goldberg at the intersection of gender, sexual orientation, and class.

Growing up in upstate New York in the 1950s, Jess struggles with gender identity. She leaves a difficult home life and stumbles upon the underground butch/femme lesbian bar world, and finds a place as a stone butch. The need to earn a living leads Jess to blue-collar factory jobs, where passing as a man provides increased job security. As police crackdowns on gay bars result in many nights in jail, as well as various forms of physical abuse, Jess decides to begin taking male hormones and have a breast reduction in order to pass as a man. His transition becomes emotionally complicated; although he enjoys the rituals of masculinity such as the barber shop, he is extremely threatened by homophobia while passing in the straight world. But Jess and his like-minded friends who have embraced the butch/femme dichotomy find they have no place in either the nascent women's or gay pride movements.

But as the narrative progresses, Feinberg does leave us with some hope at the end. The last chapter opens with Jess at a gay pride rally, pulled in by the speakers who described horrible homophobic violence, and suddenly Jess is moved to speak:

[S]uddenly I felt so sick to death of my own silence that I needed to speak too. It wasn't that there was something in particular I was burning to say. I didn't even know what it would be. I just needed to open my throat for once and hear my own voice. And I was afraid if I let this moment pass, I would never be brave enough to try again. ... My own

amplified voice startled me ... Everyone got very quiet as I spoke, and I knew they were listening; I knew they had heard me.¹¹⁸

When Jess does speak, he questions her place within the gay and lesbian movement and community. He expresses the pain and suffering he has been caused by being forced outside of the community, and asks, “‘Isn’t there a way we could help fight each other’s battles so that we’re not always alone?’ ... I heard the same thunderous applause that those gathered gave each person who found the courage to speak. To me, the applause was an answer: yes, it was possible to still hope.”¹¹⁹ Feinberg leaves us with the feeling that yes, we can work together, and yes, we will.

The final autobiographical novel I want to explore is Michelle Tea’s *Valencia* (2000). It is classified as fiction rather than autobiography even though the main character is named Michelle and the events are based on the author’s life. The protagonist is out at the beginning of the book and out at the end of the book, and simply living her life in between. She doesn’t go through some deep identity awakening, doesn’t discover new and amazing things about being a lesbian, but just goes about her life – which mostly consists of having sex with girls, drinking, and doing drugs.

The 1990s and 2000s brought new and innovative ways for lesbians to create and craft fictional representations of our lives, and along with new ways to create and re-create our histories. Though there have been various lesbian historical novels published (such as *Patience and Sarah*, as outlined in the second stage), the subgenre has remained relatively small so far. Perhaps it will be increasingly popular in the future. Good historical fiction – that is, historical fiction that has been well-researched – is not only fulfilling literature, it is teaching the reader

¹¹⁸ Feinberg, Leslie. *Stone Butch Blues* (Ithaca, NY: Firebrand Books, 1994) 296.

¹¹⁹ Feinberg, 296.

about life in another time. For lesbians, this is especially important, as we must learn about our past and inheritance in order to empower ourselves and continue important activist work.

Tipping the Velvet (1999) made a huge impression on the literary scene when it was published in 1999, winning numerous awards and even turned into a BBC miniseries in 2000. Sarah Waters was inspired to write *Tipping the Velvet* while working on her PhD dissertation on lesbian historical fiction, which underlined the inadequacies and potential of the contemporary lesbian historical genre.¹²⁰ While planning the novel, she became increasingly intrigued by the Victorian music hall and by male impersonator performers in particular. Her research led her to investigate music-hall life, the Whitsable oyster trade, Victorian fashion and daily life as well as Suffragism and early Socialism, all of which she incorporated into *Velvet*. She also read a fair amount of nineteenth-century pornography and dictionaries of slang and vulgar words, which led to her discovery that 'tipping the velvet' is Victorian slang for cunnilingus.

Waters has since published two more historical fictions, both based in the late 1800s, both involving women falling in love with other women and coming to understand their lesbian identities in some way. This historical reclamation has opened up an era in new ways, as it is suddenly refreshingly available to readers (and viewers of the film) of the 1990s. With her historical account of lesbians in Victorian England, Waters is literally rewriting history to include lesbians' stories and voices.

¹²⁰ Waters, Sarah. www.sarahwaters.com (accessed June 2004).

CONCLUSION: BEYOND THE FOUR STAGES

In this project, I have shown that the historical development of the lesbian novel is grounded in the theories of the psychological process of lesbian identity development, i.e. coming out. Lesbian fictional characters are, of course, representations and reflections of real life, from which authors pull their ideas; but lesbian characters and novels also inform lesbian life and lesbian identity.

Many writers have already asked questions about where the lesbian novel is heading, and what that may mean for lesbian identity. Anna Wilson believes the coming out story has been virtually replaced by the lesbian detective novel; Bonnie Zimmerman does not necessarily agree, seeing that stage as a “pulling back from some of its most radical analyses and in the sense that it is pausing to reflect upon its situation and heal its wounds.”¹²¹ Faderman examines the post-lesbian-feminist writer in terms of her sexual outlaw status and alliance of differences.¹²² But what if Elaine Hutton is correct, in that we *have* moved beyond sex and romance? What then? What will our literature of the future look like?

As a writer who (I would like to think) is just beginning my career, I see myself and my own writing as growing out of this fourth phase of integration. I have seen many differences in the ways that the queer community has dealt with our identity development. My partner refuses to self-identify as a lesbian because she does not necessarily believe there should be an identity attached to her behavior; she loves people, believes she could theoretically fall in love with any gender, but is currently with me. I have close friends who did not feel the need to officially come out to their parents, but rather simply shared their life – if they happened to be dating someone of the same gender, then that was what they revealed.

¹²¹ Zimmerman, 222.

¹²² Faderman, *Chloe*, 692.

Coming out and the process of lesbian identity development has changed and evolved, and, because of the well-established queer communities in most major metropolitan areas, GBLTQ people are now more widely acceptable and widely acknowledged than ever before. Queer people are no longer confined to one bar that is safe enough not to get beat up in, to one coffee shop where we will not be hassled, to one street where we can actually hold our lover's hand or kiss our lover's cheek without being heckled. In larger cities and places with substantial queer communities, we can go about our lives, holding hands with whomever we choose, with relatively few violent personal threats.¹²³

Upon my inspection of lesbian identity development over the past few centuries, I believe that, for the women of the time, each stage of identity development has become increasingly easier to grasp and accept. Each of the four stages I outlined decreased in years from the one before it, which I believe is directly related to the success of the political and social activist movements of the twentieth century. Stage one covered hundreds of years, and yet the second stage covered roughly forty years. The third stage, even smaller, covered approximately twenty years, and my final stage (though I believe we are still in that stage at the moment and cannot say when it will end) only covered approximately fifteen years. We are picking up speed on this journey to discovering ourselves, and every step of the way we are learning various other useful tools, such as academic theory, psychological theory, progressive therapy, politics and law, and allies from various marginalized groups.

¹²³ There are quite a few organizations whose very existence is a personal threat (e.g. the Religious Right), but by this I mean a face-to-face physical threat. And sadly, many gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgendered, and intersexed people are hourly physically threatened or harmed. I do not intend to downplay those very serious situations, but rather to notice (and celebrate) the change in larger communities and cities.

There is still much more to know about the process of developing a lesbian identity. Stage models can be quite limiting, as I have discussed, in their linear progression and goal-oriented design. As sexual identity continues to be questioned, and as identity politics are deconstructed and reconstructed, what kind of lesbian identity will we end up with? Will we end up with any lesbian identity at all? Some say that would be ideal; we could relate to people without the stigma attached to marginalized identities. What if there was no reason to *develop* a homosexual identity because there was no learned heterosexuality associated with sexual development that we had to unlearn?

I firmly believe all people could benefit from more integration in their lives, not only queers. We are none of us one single thing; we are all made up of thousands of tiny parts, each complicated. Merging our diverse, distinct, and separate elements in to a unified whole, creating some sort of identity fusion, braiding ourselves together, will make us thicker, stronger, able to withstand more of the disappointments and hard work that affect our daily lives.

APPENDIX I: *THE BOOK OF FUSION*

Introduction

As I have mentioned numerous times throughout the text of this project, my original intention was to study lesbian literature in order to produce some of my own literature, with the goal of using the research as a jumping-off point to begin a novel I could continue to work on after this project was complete. As my theoretical research formed, and as I structured my project around the four stages of lesbian identity development as outlined by Morris, I began applying the same structure to a novel outline.

My novel in progress, also titled *The Book of Fusion*, follows four lesbian couples, close friends, through various stages of the identity development process. The novel is launched into action when one couple, Boston and Clare, get engaged and begin to plan their “wedding” with their friends. Each couple has a different reaction to the engagement, and each character struggles to make sense of her own lesbian identity through her partner and her friends.

The novel is made up of fourteen chapters, roughly 20 pages each, alternating four different characters’ perspectives. Each chapter focuses on a different couple, each representing a different aspect of the lesbian identity development process. The point of view is third person limited to the character. The style of voice is both poetic and grounded. The language is intimate and sensual, with some visible poetic style. It is set in Portland, Oregon, in the fall of 2003.

Character & Plot Summaries

Caroline & Lauren: Awareness

As the novel opens, Lauren and Caroline have been dating casually for about four months. Caroline is confident and has been out for many years, but Lauren is still very hesitant to claim she is a lesbian. She dated a woman – Starr – during her freshman year in college, but Starr never took their relationship seriously because it was lesbian. Lauren was heartbroken after Starr transferred to another college, and repressed her lesbian desires in order to get over the pain of the breakup.

Lauren works at Powell's bookstore, where she developed a close friendship with Claire, who introduces her to Caroline. Lauren is very scared of Caroline's open, confident lesbian identity, and is incredibly drawn to her. Claire takes Lauren under her wing and helps Lauren get over some of her fears of coming out. Lauren is overwhelmed by Claire and Caroline's close group of lesbian friends, and avoids social events when she can, but is very curious about lesbian lives and culture.

Caroline wishes her relationship with Lauren was more serious and clearly defined, but is very willing to go slowly and carefully. She works at an art gallery, loves art and fashion. She has known Claire for many years.

Throughout the novel, Lauren is coming to terms with her own identity as lesbian. She often ponders whether or not it's necessary for her to identify as anything at all. She observes social situations in a fly-on-the-wall way, studying "lesbian culture," and wondering if she belongs inside of it. The other characters, especially Claire and Caroline, coax her along and give her insight into their own identity development processes.

Emily & Tessa: Disclosure

Emily and Tessa met while playing on the college rugby team. They have been together for five months, and moved into a one-bedroom apartment together one month before the opening of the novel. Emily grew up isolated, home-schooled on an island in rural Alaska; she lacks social graces but has excellent outdoor skills and is very physically talented. She works for Alaska Airlines specifically so she can fly home and visit her parents twice a month.

Tessa is extremely dedicated to school and rarely socializes. She came from a working-class family of five kids where she had to compete for attention, and has always wanted to get a good job in order to be financially secure. She is majoring in Chemistry and completing pre-med requirements in order to go to Medical School to study sports medicine. She doesn't work currently, but is funded completely by sports and academic scholarships.

Neither Tessa nor Emily are out to their immediate families as the novel opens. Emily has asked her parents if she could bring Tessa home to visit, and her parents have an explosive reaction to her lesbian relationship. Emily is also not out at work, but is outed by a coworker who sees Emily and Tessa kissing. Emily is heartbroken, feeling she has lost her parents' love and approval, but ecstatic and thrilled to be in love with Tessa. Tessa decides by the end of the novel to come out to her parents, who are very traditional, conservative Japanese, as a symbol of support to Emily.

Both Emily and Tessa are struggling with Disclosure, Stage Two. They are still frightened to tell other people of their lesbian identity, as they have encountered resistance and negativity in the past and fear it in the future. Though Emily has a group of lesbian friends, she is not comfortably out in other parts of her life, and often feels like she leads a double life where she must be two different people. However, as the book progresses, she discloses her identity to

more and more people around her, and she discovers that the consequences are often incredibly rewarding, instead of frightening.

Boston & Clare: Relationships

When the novel begins, Boston proposes to Clare and Clare accepts. This sets much of the action of the novel in motion: planning the engagement party, discussing marriage, codependency, lesbian families, and examining relationships. Boston identifies as transgendered male and has his gender changed on his driver's license just before the novel opens, which allows Boston and Clare to marry legally rather than in a Civil Union or a Domestic Partnership.

Boston is still in college full time, and works at an insurance company as a computer consultant. Clare works at Powell's bookstore with Caroline, has finished an English degree in college, and identifies as femme. She and Boston frequently discuss the unfairness of their partnership compared to the rest of their community. They aren't sure whether they should use their ability to get "truly" married when their lesbian friends are legally unable to exercise the same rights.

They face trans discrimination throughout the book. Some members of the lesbian community ostracize Boston and Clare because they appear to some to be straight. Their relationship is threatened when Boston decides he isn't sure he can go through with the engagement, because it appears to be affirming heterosexist values.

Sena & Jane: Integration

Sena and Jane have been together for five years, and are often seen by the other characters as the quintessential lesbian couple. They are a little older than the others, both 31; they have both been out and active in the lesbian community for more than ten years. They moderate a lesbian discussion group through a local community center, where Sena works. Jane works for a county domestic violence advocacy coalition. Sena was raised in Canada; her father is French-Canadian and her mother is Iranian. She speaks French, and has traveled a lot. She feels hesitant that Boston and Clare are getting married; she is close friends with Boston and knows they are a good match, yet she feels strange about the legal issues of gay marriage, and still harbors a little anger at Boston for his transition from female to male, as she feels like her own identity as a butch lesbian was rejected by him in the process.

Jane gets very excited about the wedding. She has only recently been interested in Sena's group of friends at all, and now wants to be involved in all the gossip. She is very self-conscious, though appears relatively balanced, and often worries about what others think of her. Sena is surprised that Jane supports Boston and Clare's engagement so fully. As the novel develops, Sena does some soul-searching to discover that she feels unsettled with Jane and would actually like to get married herself, and felt jealous that Boston and Clare really could. Jane, however, hesitates to have a Civil Union ceremony rather than a "real" wedding, and Sena and Jane must work out their relationship.

Sena and Jane are representing Stage Four, Integration. They are both attempting to integrate their various aspects of self, to settle down into a routine life together, but are discovering difficulties along the way.

Excerpt

Chapter Four, *The Book of Fusion*

Loren Cray moved like winter into spring. She was buds of crocuses nervously peeking out from beneath a fresh dusting of snow. She was thick knitted scarves and mittens and coats with big buttons and snowpants and moonboots, she was raincoats and umbrellas and sudden spring showers. She was sunshine melting the ice. She was a glass of cabernet and a porcelain dish of coffee ice cream. Loren was fresh mown grass and daffodils bowing with the weight of the world. She was pregnant magnolia buds, tense with maternity, ready to pop open with a sigh. She was lavender, silver-gray, midnight blue: all the shades of spring equinox. She was an egg balancing on its end.

But Loren Cray was not hot nights with the windows open. She did not balance on a unicycle, winding down running paths along side a lake. She was not fine Italian and French restaurants with cloth napkins and menus not in English. She was not soft late-spring butterfly kisses, awakening chrysalises. Loren was not aware of her ringing phone and she was deep in a dreamy scene. And she was not used to being woken, unrested and disheveled, by the persistent ringing on her bedside table. Her eyes resisted the bright light pushing through the blinds and she let her hands instead fumble for the phone.

It must be Caroline, she hoped it was Caroline. “Hello?”

“Morning Loren, did I wake you?” Caroline Taber had a hint of flirtation to her voice, which made something flutter in Loren’s stomach. Oh, the sound of her voice! Caroline was always up early. Loren blamed her black coffee habit.

“Yeah. That’s okay. I’m supposed to be up already.” Loren covered her eyes with her arm and tried to stretch her body awake.

“You haven’t forgotten about tonight? *Le Français restaurant*, seven pm.” Caroline’s flat black pumps clicked against the hardwood floor of her artist’s loft – Loren could hear them in the background. She could see Caroline’s pressed trousers, soft moss-green ones today, Loren guessed, dressing Caroline in her mind, and the delicate matching jacket pulled over some plain short-sleeved shirt of nice fabric. She heard the water running, then stop; she imagined Caroline’s fingertips wet. What was Caroline doing, just this minute?

.....

Loren had witnessed Caroline’s morning rituals only the morning before: the rustling around the kitchen packing a lunch into her small cloth bag; the grinding of her gourmet coffee beans, the dribbling hot water through the grounds; the morning news humming on the TV in the background; the string of work-related phone calls Caroline never seemed finished making. Loren, bare and raw to the heart from the previous evening, had twisted the covers around her from the thick mattress on the floor and watched Caroline flutter. Her plain, dirty blonde hair that touched her jacked was not quite dry from the shower, and Caroline unconsciously tucked the stray pieces behind her ears. She still was not used to its length, so had not yet discovered hair accessories after years of cropped hair.

Caroline stirred honey into earl gray tea, dropped the metal tea ball into the sink, and broke her rushed routine to step lightly over to Loren. She balanced on her heels and placed the blue glass mug into Loren’s hands.

“Thank you, this is perfect,” Loren said. The liquid steamed. She gently blew over the surface and watched the steam waterfall down the side of the cup and rise back up, reaching. It had not been a warm morning, and Caroline’s big windows and high ceilings made the loft

drafty, but Loren was not shivering from the cool air. Her skin pulsed and her muscles shook with sensitivity and sensation. When was the last time she felt so alive?

.....

“Of course. I haven’t forgotten,” Loren said. The hands of the clock on her white bed stand read eight am exactly. She pressed herself upright and touched her feet to the carpet. Her toenails were bare. She decided they needed polish. Red maybe. Would red be too bold? “I’ll meet you there.”

“I’d be glad to pick you up. Six thirty?” Caroline said.

Loren’s breath caught. “Don’t worry about it. I, uh, I don’t know when I’ll be able to leave the bookstore, I might just go right there.”

“Alright.” Caroline paused. “I’m ... looking forward to seeing you again. Bye, Loren, have a good day at work.”

“Thanks, you too.” Loren massaged the bridge of her nose and slammed her other hand onto the alarm clock automatically when it began buzzing again, turning off the snooze and replacing the phone in the cradle. She reached for her glasses, which were on the top of the stack of books balanced carefully behind the phone – recent fiction mostly, with a few political memoirs and books of poetry. The pile of magazines beside her bed was beginning to overflow too. Recent copies of *The Economist*, *Mother Jones*, *the New Yorker*, and *Curve* were tucked everywhere, with occasional copies of *Interview* and *On Our Backs*, depending on who had been on the cover. Loren Cray would never admit to the *Martha Stewart Living* issues, but they were there, buried. If her journalism teachers saw her now, reading things like *Martha Stewart*, they would surely say her education was being wasted. Or perhaps they’d ask her to make that lasagna recipe again, and overlook its source.

Loren hustled through her morning preparations and caught the eight-forty train downtown and got off two blocks from Powell's. The red brick buildings of Portland had finally persuaded the trees to change color, camouflaging everything in shades of fall. The leaves dropped as if the trees were letting them go one by one, off to college or into the army or into the gutter or wherever leaves went, like parents – or like lovers, letting each other go on with their own lives like adults. Committed to the growth of the other. As though the leaves knew the trees needed time alone, bare. A few hung on, clung to branches and memories of summer and that old green color that didn't belong any longer, leaving scars where the branches couldn't heal. Loren kicked through small piles of leaves the wind had swept up and listened to the crunch. She knew it would start raining soon, but it was clear and crisp, any drops of moisture in the air were surely frozen.

Scarves and gloves were becoming abundant on the downtown streets, especially in the shopping district, but winter coats were not yet rescued from the backs of closets; fall was bringing out the pea coats and thick knit sweaters, the boots, the thick socks. Loren shivered through her jeans and tennis shoes and stuck her hands deeper into her sweatshirt pockets. She hated fall every time September rolled around. The leaves and the temperature started dropping, and school started up again. She clung to summer, refused to pack up her shorts and tank tops, and wore sandals until her toes were numb. The fall colors were lovely, of course; perhaps it was the knowledge that the holidays were just around the corner that turned her sour, all that overtime and holiday gifts and family cheer. Perhaps it was the ominous beginning of the long dark winter. Perhaps it was back to school. Maybe it was even Seasonal Affective Disorder. Loren had never been able to place it, but every fall, it was falling, choking, drowning, in the changing of the seasons. Everything that had opened up began to collapse.

But Caroline, she was a warm fall wind: not icy enough to stop you in your tracks, but strong enough to shake everything around you. Caroline was a tree letting go of her leaves one by one, sacrificing the creations of the summer. Caroline was bright and brilliant in the fall colors: sienna, mahogany, cedar, crimson, pumpkin, gold. What would a winter girl like Loren do with such a fall girl?

Loren swung Powell's main glass doors open, clocked in, and took her usual chair at the information desk on the third floor near the history books. It was going to be a long shift.

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