ENGAGEMENT AND STRUGGLE FOR *BELOVED COMMUNITY*: OLD LESBIANS BUILDING COMMUNITY THROUGH PARTICIPATORY ACTION RESEARCH

by

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ABSTRACT

The remarkable increase in the last 15 years of published literature on LGBT people has typically used mixed samples of gay men and lesbians, even though differences in historical, political, and social contexts lead each reference group to have unique lived experiences and needs. Kehoe (1988) stated that old lesbians are "triply invisible" due to the intersections of *at least* three marginalized statuses – old, female, and lesbian. With rich legacies of activism, old lesbian communities can draw on their radical roots to continue improving the lives of old lesbians in the future.

Participatory action research (PAR) includes research participants as co-researchers and relies on the wisdom and knowledge of the members of a marginalized community to follow the best course of action for social change in their community. This study documented the process by which old lesbians in the Living Our Visions PAR group in Salt Lake City, Utah, created community and engaged in social change. The research goals were: (a) to serve as a catalyst for old lesbians to meet, organize, and identify goals for their community that would enhance wellbeing and to embark on action to achieve stated goals; (b) to document the activities of the group by actively engaging in the *plan-act-observe-reflect* cycle of PAR; and (c) to serve as a model for community building and action for other old lesbian communities.

Data analysis resulted in six categories of old lesbian community building: (a) Consciousness-raising; (b) Celebrating our roots; (c) Creating a vision; (d) Taking action; (e) Belonging; and (f) Envisioning the future. Within each of the six processes, co-researchers of the Living Our Visions project grappled with conceptions of creating a *beloved community* based on the work of Martin Luther King, Jr. and bell hooks. Similarly, the project took a relational approach to building community and engaged in feminist ethics of care. By documenting both engagement and struggles with creating *beloved community* and feminist ethics of care, this study expanded the dialogue on working through conflicts, challenges, joys, and successes in PAR projects and in old lesbian communities.

This dissertation is dedicated
to the friendship and memory of Polly Stewart;
to my generous and loving partner, Sam Santos;
my constant cheerleader and sister, Katy Abrams;
and to my mother, Jackie Abrams, for modeling
a deep respect and love for education and learning.

[There's] a big cultural crisis right now, and one of the things that can solve that crisis is the practice of community because no one is healed in isolation, and as we begin to work with others, we have to engage all of these things we are talking about: compassion, forgiveness, a willingness to listen, to hear difference, a willingness to be inclusive and all of those ingredients come together to make it possible for us to experience the joy of community.

~ bell hooks (2012, p. 86)

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank the co-researchers of the Living Our Visions project for your commitment and dedication to our research, activism, and community-building efforts over the last 4 years. My life has forever been transformed as a result of our time together and the generosity of your spirit and time. I am deeply moved by the ways we connected and created community together. I hope that you feel our work in the Living Our Visions project is well represented in this study and that our co-creations of knowledge, dreams, and your rich legacies of grassroots organizing and activism have taken root here.

I am also appreciative of my advisor, Sue Morrow, and my committee members, Donna Hawxhurst, Kathryn Norsworthy, Laura Smith, and Karen Tao for their continuous support of this participatory action research study. I am also grateful for their mentorship and investment in my development as a researcher in the field of counseling psychology.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION AND REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

It was a hot summer Sunday in Brigham City, Utah, with a backdrop of the northern Wasatch Mountains. This view was not unlike one you might find at an expensive retreat center, with an explosion of wildflowers, blue sky, and green mountains nestled against the relaxing sounds of a Koi pond. Brigham City is a small town about an hour north of Salt Lake City, with a large political base of White, working class, socially conservative Mormon-identified individuals. While many community members were attending church this Sunday afternoon, the women in this backyard were gathered for a very different purpose. Excitement gathered in the air as women reconnected with one another and with their group – the Living Our Visions (LOV) project.

The LOV project began in October 2010 when my advisor, Dr. Sue Morrow, and I co-facilitated an all-day workshop on later life issues and concerns of aging lesbians at our local Utah Pride Center. Appendix A contains the recruitment flyer for the original workshop, and Appendix B contains the ongoing recruitment flyer for the Living Our Visions project. During the original workshop, Sue and I shared ideas and information that had come out of our national qualitative interview study with old lesbians around later life concerns and engaged workshop participants in discussions about what needs

and concerns are important to aging/old lesbians in the Salt Lake Valley of Utah. Appendix C contains the outline/ agenda from the original workshop. The group discussed what was going well versus what was missing in order to make this community the "most rockin' old lesbian community in the country" (Sue Morrow, personal communication, October 30, 2010). We watched the inspiring film, "Grandma Builds an Earthship," of an old lesbian in Colorado who made her vision of life a reality (Gunnufson & Gunnufson, 2008). After the film we asked participants to dream big about their visions for our aging lesbian community and what it might take to overcome barriers and get moving on manifesting the visions for a connected and successful old lesbian community. We ended the day with gauging interest in and creating an action plan for an on-going participatory action research project that engages in social change to improve the lives of aging lesbians in the Salt Lake Valley of Utah.

Approximately 20 women between the ages of 45 and 71 joined the participatory action research project after the workshop in October 2010, and we began meeting once a month at the home of two partnered members. The PAR project was officially named *Living Our Visions*, or LOV, after a book written by Hawxhurst and Morrow (1984), two members of the group who have been doing feminist organizing and activism for over 40 years. The book is about co-creating large-scale feminist multicultural visions and then making them a reality in one's own community – a perfect fit for the work we were about to embark on together. The LOV project follows the spirit of this book in engaging old lesbians to share their visions, create community, and work collaboratively towards social change. The group spent several months learning more about participatory action

research, getting to know one another, and discussing issues that impacted the lives of old lesbians.

Several processes came out of the 1st year of the project that included establishing credibility in the group and in the community; co-creating a group process that is based on power-sharing and collaboration; identifying and negotiating stakeholders in the project; building relationships and inclusivity with women with multiple marginalized statuses/identities beyond lesbian; defining and dialoguing about feminism and social justice in the old lesbian community; and mapping out initial research design, data collection, and analysis. Chapter 2 contains the methods, results and discussion sections of the first year of the Living Our Visions project, which became my predissertation research project. Once the group became established, LOV focused on three primary interests of its members: activism and social change, relationship and community building, and research/ documentation of the work of the group. Women in the group varied in their primary interests; and, by taking this three-pronged approach, LOV has been able to meet the needs of all of its members.

This Sunday meeting in June 2012 would be the first after the launch of LOV's first social action project, a community organizing weekend workshop with old lesbian activist, Alix Dobkin, and the creation of the Utah chapter of Old Lesbians Organizing for Change (OLOC). Appendix D contains the flyer LOV created for the Alix Dobkin workshop. One of the topics on the agenda for today's meeting was to discuss whether LOV will continue as a separate group or be subsumed into the vision and future work of OLOC.

Many members of the broader community would be attending church activities this Sunday afternoon, and little did they know the kind of radical and social justice-oriented conversation happening right in their own backyard. A circle of women gathered round, connecting with one another and talking about visions of social change that might impact their own lives and those of lesbians of younger generations in the years to come. Midway through the meeting, it was clear that LOV members had no intentions of stopping our work together, as women brainstormed and shared their creativity and ideas around housing issues and reaching out to isolated old lesbians who might never be a part of this group. How could they reach and impact the lives of women who may not be out and who may never be a part of LOV? How could they document their work so that other communities could see a model of community organizing and activism that empowers and centers the lives of old lesbians? Towards the end of this fiery meeting I felt energized and heartened to hear women sharing how meaningful and important their relationships with other women in the group had become. Murmurings of connection, of solidarity, of revolution occurred today in a backyard full of old lesbians. And this was just the beginning!

Definition of Terms

There is much "herstory" yet to come about the LOV members and their work together over the last 2 years. Before that unfolds, it is important to situate the LOV project within the literature to show the very important needs and concerns of the old lesbian community as well as why using a participatory action research approach is appropriate and an important form of knowledge production, documentation, and social

action within this particular community. I will begin with definitions of certain terms that carry powerful political meaning. From a feminist multicultural and social justice perspective, language is powerful and meaningful (Elshtain, 1982). Nuanced differences between words or phrases are embedded within a larger power structure and cannot be simply deemed semantics. Variations in word choice can make an impact on how individuals view themselves, others, and the world. By defining and using the following terms throughout this proposal, I am engaging in radical social action and standing in solidarity with particular communities, politics, and standpoints.

Activism

In the literature review that follows this section I will discuss the topics of research and activism that relate to aging, LGBT aging, and lesbian aging. Activism can be defined in various ways, but for the purposes of this study, activism will be defined as follows:

> Participation in a wide array of political actions designed to support a social movement or a particular political cause, which may include, but is not limited to, participation in political parties. Activism, or "doing politics," can be defined as any struggle to gain control over definitions of self and community, to augment personal and communal empowerment, to create alternative institutions and organizational processes, and to increase the power and resources of one's variously defined community. (Zimmerman, 2000, p. 1)

Feminism/ Feminist

There are multiple iterations of feminism; thus, it is important to outline what I mean and what the Living Our Visions project means when we use the terms feminism/ feminist. Chandra Mohanty's (2006) feminist vision includes a stance of antiracism, anticapitalism, decolonization, and solidarity. Although the quote is lengthy, I think it

important to print her vision here, because it matches with the first 2 years of work of the Living Our Visions project. She wrote,

> This is a vision of the world that is pro-sex and –woman, a world where women and men are free to live creative lives, in security and with bodily health and integrity, where they are free to choose whom they love, and whom they set up house with, and whether they want to have or not have children; a world where pleasure rather than just duty and drudgery determine our choices, where free and imaginative exploration of the mind is a fundamental right; a vision in which economic stability, ecological sustainability, racial equality, and the redistribution of wealth form the material basis of people's well-being. Finally, my vision is one in which democratic and socialist practices and institutions provide the conditions for public participation and decision making for people regardless of economic and social location. In strategic terms, this vision entails putting in place antiracist feminist and democratic principles of participation and relationality, and it means working on many fronts, in many different kinds of collectivities in order to organize against repressive systems of rule. It also means being attentive to small as well as large struggles and processes that lead to radical change – not just working (or waiting) for a revolution. Thus everyday feminist, antiracist, anticapitalist practices are as important as larger, organized political movements. (pp. 3-4)

Alcoff and Potter (1993) also put forth a similar definition of feminism that called for an inclusive feminism that goes beyond gender politics and attends to all forms of domination and oppression. They described a web of oppression in which each of us is caught, and they recommended the use of feminist liberatory principles to help "unmake the web of oppressions and reweave the web of life" (p. 4).

Herstory/ History

In this manuscript I will use the term "herstory" rather than the traditional term "history" to talk about and emphasize the historical, contextual, social, and political circumstances of women from a feminist perspective (Mills, 1992). The herstory movement in the 1960s and 1970s in the United States helped to preserve and acknowledge women's work and identities in the writing of history. I also use herstory as

a term of solidarity with and appreciation for the years of feminist and lesbian activism by various members of LOV.

I / We, Co-researcher/ Member

I am both an insider and outsider to the Living Our Visions group, while also holding the role of dissertation writer and graduate student. I will talk about holding these multiple roles and tensions later in the proposal, but for now I would like to propose that I use the pronouns "I" and "we" interchangeably in order to represent these multiple roles. You will also see the words "co-researcher" and "member" used interchangeably throughout this proposal. As I explained earlier, there is a three-pronged focus of the Living Our Visions group – relationship, activism, and research. Some members of LOV do not want to identify as researchers and, instead, use the word member to describe themselves and their connections to relationship and/or activism. Other members of LOV feel a sense of pride with using the term co-researcher; thus, as a way to honor everyone in the group, I will use both terms at different times throughout the proposal.

Old versus Older

In the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender (LGBT) psychological and aging literature I almost always come across the word "older" when LGBT individuals over the age of 50 are being described. However, many aging activists have reclaimed the word "old" as a term of empowerment rather than derision. In solidarity with the mission and vision of the organization, Old Lesbians Organizing for Change (OLOC), I will use the

term old from here forward, instead of older, in describing the experiences of lesbians and others over the age of 50. Engaging in a radical act of social change OLOC wrote,

> Society calls us old behind our backs while calling us "older" to our faces. "Old" has become a term of insult and shame. To be "old" means to be ignored and scorned, to be made invisible and expendable. We refute the lie that it is shameful to be an "old" woman. We name ourselves "old lesbians" because we will no longer accommodate ourselves to language that implies in any way that "old" means inferior. We call ourselves OLD with pride. In doing so, we challenge the stereotypes directly. Thus, we empower and change ourselves, each other, and the world. (Retrieved from http://www.oloc.org/about/why_old.php)

White Supremacist Capitalist Patriarchy

This is a term used by bell hooks in order to remind us of the interlocking systems of domination that define our reality rather than acknowledge only one identity such as gender as the focal issue (hooks, 1997). All of our social identities are functioning simultaneously in all of our lives, and the interaction of those identities within a system of privilege and oppression is what determines an individual's access to social and economic resources. Although this manuscript emerges from a feminist perspective, this perspective also includes other identities, such as age, sexual orientation, social class, race, ethnicity, nationality, ability status, spiritual tradition, etcetera.

Additionally, an important distinction in social justice language lies between using the term "White supremacy" versus "racism." The term racism does not allow for a discourse on colonization and decolonization and also tends to focus on individual racist thoughts and behaviors. Whiteness and White people remain at the center of the discussion on race and racism as well as at the center of attention. Instead, discussions about race should go beyond the ways in which White individuals perpetrate acts of racism on people of color, in order to acknowledge that there is a system in place of

domination and subordination. White supremacy is a term that allows us to discuss our complex acts of collusion and resistance within this system without being stuck in binary thinking about racist and nonracist thoughts, feelings, and behaviors.

Literature Review

This study will review the current literature in the fields of aging and activism, LGBT aging and activism, lesbian aging and activism, and a brief rationale for using participatory action research as an approach to study and document lesbian aging and activism. To provide the relevant background, I will review the conceptual and empirical literature of these fields while highlighting major themes, exploring the limitations or gaps in the existing literature, and discussing how the proposed study will advance the existing literature.

Review of the Aging and Activism Literature

As the industrial revolution and capitalism took hold in the early 20th century of the United States, being a valued and respected U.S. citizen became equated with being a productive worker in society. However, when citizens retired from the workforce and no longer contributed to the economy in that same way, they were left to fend for themselves with little to no support available to them by the federal government, their own children, or other family members. At that time, the definition of aging was created in the United States to largely delineate individuals who had retired from the workforce from the rest of the population (Henrard, 1996). For over 70 years of the 20th century, poverty rates for aging individuals in the U.S. grew higher and higher, from 23% to 66%, until the federal

Supplemental Security Income (SSI) program was introduced and elder poverty rates dropped down to 16% (Sanjek, 2009). At the same time this economic oppression was occurring, there was also a social oppression happening to old adults, and the combined impact was named "ageism."

Butler (1969) coined the term ageism and described it as a form of discrimination and stereotyping against old individuals that is manifested through individual, national, and societal behaviors that negatively impact their lives. Examples of ageism include perceptions of old adults as infirm or delicate, assumptions that an old adult is useless in society after retirement, and stereotypes of old adults as dependent and helpless individuals. Perceived age discrimination for old adults is associated with higher psychological distress and lower positive well-being, and this association is stronger for old women than for men (Yuan, 2007). Perceived age discrimination can lead to an individual internalizing negative and harmful stereotypes about aging throughout the lifespan. When an individual reaches the age of 60, these internalized stereotypes have already become self-perceptions about aging. Levy, Slade, Kunkel, and Kasl (2002) found that self-perceptions of aging not only impact psychological distress and well-being but also survival and longevity. Participants with positive self-perceptions about aging lived an average of 7.5 years longer than participants with negative self-perceptions on aging.

The impact of ageism becomes compounded when an individual experiences ageism in conjunction with another form of oppression such as sexism or homophobia. This experience has been named "double jeopardy" because the combined effects of multiple forms of oppression are additive (Palmore, 1999). In a longitudinal study over

the course of 15 years, aging Black participants experienced more serious illness, more rapid declines, and higher rates of disability than White participants (Ferraro & Farmer, 1996). As ageism began to impact the lives of old individuals and communities, more and more individuals began to speak out about ending ageism. Soon those individuals began connecting with others and organizing groups that tackled issues of ageism from the individual to local, state, and national levels. Although research has been helpful in delineating the effects of ageism, grassroots activism has profoundly impacted the lives of aging individuals through its focus on social change, equity, and increased access to social and economic resources.

Maggie Kuhn was one activist who spoke out by starting the aging activist group, the Gray Panthers, which emerged onto the scene fighting for rights and equity for old U.S. citizens. Although aging activism had existed throughout the 20th century in different pockets of the country, it was the formation of the Gray Panthers that propelled aging rights into a powerful political place. Sanjek (2009) wrote,

> The Panthers would make their mark by attacking mandatory retirement, critiquing ageist stereotypes, opposing the Vietnam War and nuclear weapons, demanding universal health care, calling for decent housing through the life cycle, defending Social Security and adequate incomes for all, and epitomizing an active and politically engaged old age. (p. 5)

In other words, it was activism and grassroots community organizing that turned the tide for how old individuals are perceived and what resources they have access to in the United States. In fact, the Gray Panthers have contributed to major social change that has impacted all of us, no matter our age. The current Gray Panthers website suggests that the Gray Panthers collaborate with individuals across various age groups (http://www.graypanthers.org/).

Many smaller aging activist projects have sprung up since the Gray Panthers to focus on specific needs of aging individuals. In a Dutch long-term care residential home, seven women became the "Taste Buddies," which was an action research project based in participatory democratic principles and relational empowerment theory that advocated for higher quality and more nutritious meals for the residents of the home as well as more power and participation within the decision-making at the home (Bauer & Abma, 2012). Sawchuk (2009) conducted a case study with an old women's activist group called the "Raging Grannies," where old women dress up as stereotypes of "grannies" and change the words in popular songs to convey political messages about ageism and empowerment for old women. The raging grannies also participate in identity exploration as old women and conduct workshops that guide women in embracing their age and unlearning ageist stereotypes. "Gaggles" of Raging Grannies can be found in Canada and the U.S. promoting peace and social justice initiatives through song and humor (http://raginggrannies.org/). Sadly, it is not often that activist groups like these are documented in the research literature unless they achieve a certain amount of national notoriety or fame.

An activist group that has received a great deal of notoriety over the years and who has focused specifically on the needs of aging women is the Older Women's League (OWL). OWL recognized that aging women have unique needs from men due to the marginalization of their gender in U.S. society. Although today the word "older" comes with negative connotations in radical activist communities, at the time that OWL was forming they insisted on using the term "older" rather than "mature" to take a stand and be proud of aging. Sommers (1994) wrote, "Age is part of our identity. To deny it is to

say to the deepest layers of ourselves, as well as to the world, 'I am unacceptable.' Denial of age slowly erodes our self-esteem" (p. 428). OWL members participated in consciousness-raising activities about their own social identities in order to increase self-esteem, self-love, and compassion. They stood in solidarity with old women within their own communities through activities such as filing complaints to the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission; legal advocacy for women with disabilities; and providing workshops in their community to build bridges across generations and reduce ageism. OWL is still thriving today and includes an online hub at http://www.owl-national.org/, where they publish annual reports about the status of old women in the U.S. and convene a national convention each year to build community and provide a space for activist work.

However, in the last 3 years of the annual "Mother's Day Reports" on issues such as end of life care, affordable health care, and women in the work force, there was no mention of sexual orientation as a factor that impacts an aging woman's experiences in these areas (OWL, 2012; OWL, 2011; OWL, 2010). Although it is clear that OWL does actively acknowledge other forms of oppression in their advocacy for and with old women, a woman's sexual orientation also clearly impacts her later life experiences. For example, the Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA) restricts who can and cannot be considered a spouse or life partner to women. Lesbian women living in states with anti-gay marriage amendments have demonstrated higher rates of minority stress and psychological distress than lesbian women living in other states (Riggle, Rostosky, & Horne, 2010; Rostosky, Riggle, Horne, & Miller, 2009). Thus, old lesbians may experience even higher rates of psychological distress than their heterosexual

counterparts, who do not have to cope with homophobia when having to deal with end of life care, healthcare eligibility, and interactions with healthcare professionals, among other issues.

Review of the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Aging and Activism Literature

The American Psychological Association Presidential Task Force on Integrated Health Care for an Aging Population (2008) declared that the United States (U.S.) is facing a "demographic imperative" as the generation known as the "baby boomers" are entering their 60s. This aging generational group makes up approximately 18% of the U.S. population, and the task force has been convened to address health care needs for this significant proportion of U.S. society. They wrote, "In a hierarchical resource-limited system, old people are disadvantaged by care that is not sensitive to multiple morbidities, life span experiences, fragmented care, marginalization, ageism and stigma, as well as unique characteristics such as age, gender, class, race, religion, and ethnicity" (APA, 2008, p. 1). The APA Guidelines for Psychological Practice with Older Adults (APA, 2004) also attended to socio-cultural factors in its guidelines for psychologists (including the above characteristics as well as sexual orientation, disability status, and urban/rural dwelling). These unique characteristics and factors play an important role in determining appropriate healthcare services for old adults as the aging population becomes increasingly more diverse over the next several years.

According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2008), women make up 58% of the population over 65, and the percentages keep climbing for women as they continue to

age. By the year 2030, the number of women over 65 is projected to double to 40 million (U.S. Census Bureau Population Division, 2008). Women are not the only aging group to increase over the next 25 years. The Administration on Aging (AOA, 2008) projected that, while White individuals over 65 will increase only by 68%, all other racial/ethnic groups over 65 will increase exponentially, including Hispanic/Latino (244%); African American/Black (126%); American Indian, Eskimo, and Aleut (167%); and Asian American/Pacific Islander (213%). The National Gay and Lesbian Task Force (2009) reported that, although it is difficult to approximate the number of LGBT elders (individuals over 65 who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, and/or transgender) because of poor reporting procedures and difficulties with defining sexual orientation, they estimated there are approximately 1 to 3 million LGBT individuals over 65 in the U.S. They also projected that, as the baby boomers continue to age, this number will increase to between 2 and 7 million LGBT elders.

Although much has been written within the domain of LGBT counseling psychology about the lived experiences and identities of LGBT individuals, until recently there has been little published about the lives of LGBT elders. There has been even less published about each individual aging reference group (e.g., lesbians); and, yet, differences in historical, political, and social contexts lead each reference group to have unique lived experiences, needs, and concerns. For example, old lesbians are more vulnerable to experiences of classism than old gay men because, as people living in female bodies in a patriarchal and sexist society, they have less access to financial resources, rights, and security than gay men or heterosexual men and women. Thus, a feminist and social justice framework can bring an analysis of power, privilege, and

oppression to the experiences, needs, and concerns that old lesbians face while also centering their wisdom and ideas for change for their community.

In their recent review of the literature on LGB aging, Fredriksen-Goldsen and Muraco (2010) wrote, "Because many older LGB adults have spent a majority of their lives 'in the closet,' or masking their sexual orientation, their lives have remained largely silenced; thus, we are only beginning to understand the experiences and needs of these populations" (p. 373). According to these various reports (AOA, 2008; APA, 2004; APA, 2008; National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, 2009), individuals who hold marginalized identities have less access to adequate health care. When individuals have multiple marginalized and intersecting identities, their access to resources that address later life needs becomes even more diminished due to structural and institutionalized forms of violence and oppression.

In recent years, psychologists have begun to pay close attention to the mental and physical health impacts of marginalization and discrimination of multiple social identities. After thorough analysis of research on prevalence of mental health "disorders" and LGB individuals, Meyer (2003) proposed a minority-stress model as a conceptual framework to describe stress processes evoked through experiences of oppression. Lehavot and Simoni (2011) reported direct links between experiences of victimization and substance use as well as internalized homophobia and substance use for sexual minority women. Majied (2003) found statistically significant relationships between the experiences of incidental oppression (cumulative acts of oppression), internalized oppression, and diagnosis of depression. From an institutional/structural perspective, Horne, Rostosky, and Riggle (2011) revealed that both LGB individuals and family

members of LGB individuals experienced increased stress and a negative impact on their relational health in states that had passed constitutional marriage amendments restricting marriage rights to individuals in heterosexual couples. Harper and Schneider (2003) have also documented the psychological and social impact of LGBT discrimination that includes living with the everyday threat of violence to denial of basic human rights such as housing, employment, and access to medical services. Overt and explicit forms of oppression are not the only types that impact an LGB individual's health. Shelton and Delgado-Romero (2011) documented the negative psychological impact of the messages given to LGBT individuals via sexual orientation microaggressions (often by well-intentioned healthcare professionals).

Cahill, South, and Spade (2000) documented a higher incidence of ageism within the LGBT community than in the general public. Kimmel, Rose, Orel, and Greene (2006) wrote,

> Like the heterosexist attitudes that go widely unchallenged in the aging network, ageist attitudes within the LGBT community often go uncontested… LGBT elders sometimes believe that the gay and lesbian community focuses all of its attention and resources on the needs of its younger members but ignores the needs of its senior members. (p. 13)

Once again, when an LGBT individual holds more than one marginalized identity, such as old, woman, person of color, or poor and/or working class, she or he is exposed to additional forms of discrimination and powerlessness and increasing risks to mental and physical health (Murphy, 2003; Smith, 2005; Williams, Neighbors, & Jackson, 2003). Hall and Greene (2002) described increased health risks due to living at the lower end of the social class spectrum for African American lesbians. Abatiell and Adams (2011) wrote,

> The harsh reality is that LGBT people face countless forms of discrimination and bias as they age, and the accumulated consequences of these institutionalized prejudices both create and powerfully reinforce the impoverishment and alienation of many LGBT old people. For example, a lifetime of being denied employment opportunities and spousal benefits, coupled with a lack of access to legal protections around inheritance and property rights, vastly diminishes the ability of LGBT individuals to accumulate the resources needed for healthy aging and to plan successfully for their financial futures. (p. 881)

Holding an aging LGBT identity in what bell hooks (1997) described as a White supremacist capitalist patriarchy has pushed LGBT elders to the outer bounds of marginalization in society through the restriction of legal rights and access to social and economic resources. Thus, LGBT elders are considered a highly vulnerable population who may require a complex set of coping and resiliency skills in order to survive and thrive in current U.S. society.

In 1978, another activist group was created that would follow in the footsteps of the Gray Panthers and engage activism that would reduce ageism and increase old individuals' access to social and economic resources. This activist group was named Services and Advocacy for GLBT Elders (SAGE; formerly Senior Action in a Gay Environment), and it emerged to empower LGBT elders and work towards social change and greater equity (Kling & Kimmel, 2006). SAGE began in New York City as a non-profit organization that provided LGBT-friendly services such as support groups for the unique needs of LGBT elders, homebound services, social work programs, and legal services to provide greater access to economic and healthcare benefits.

Over the years, SAGE has set itself apart from other aging activist organizations and other organizations offering LGBT-friendly mental health and other services. SAGE does this through democratic processes such as incorporating the ideas, feedback, and suggestions of its members in order to effectively meet the needs of its community. For

example, a group of SAGE members started a program called SAGE Neighbors, which employs volunteer teams in various neighborhoods of Manhattan to assist individuals recovering from illness or injury. Kling and Kimmel (2006) wrote, "This is a departure from the traditional relationship between client-in-need and professional service provider, which places power and authority largely in the hands of the 'professional,' often at the expense of participation and empowerment of the 'client" (pp. 268-269). Instead, SAGE has placed the wisdom, ideas, and creativity of its members at the center of knowledge production. In addition to this, SAGE has created a space for its members to empower themselves and to believe in their own capacity to create social change.

SAGE's grassroots activism does not happen simply at the individual or local level, however. SAGE has conducted national needs assessments of LGBT elders, created trainings for social service workers that attend to creating LGBT-affirmative policies and practices, and participated in national legislative actions that impact the lives of LGBT elders. One of the concerns of SAGE over the years has been recruiting and retaining women, transgender individuals, and people of color. Despite its programming efforts over the years to increase members of these social locations, gender and racial/ethnic parity has not been met in the organization. Kling and Kimmel (2006) recommended that local SAGE organizations engage in consciousness-raising and examining issues of bias, power, and privilege that exist within the members themselves as well as within the organization. Until such examinations of patriarchy, White supremacy, capitalism, and internalized homophobia occur, the organization may continue to struggle with retaining members of multiple marginalized identities.

Many activist efforts have cropped up since SAGE began its advocacy and activism work, such as the LGBT Aging project (http://www.lgbtagingproject.org/), the National Resource Center on LGBT Aging (http://www.lgbtagingcenter.org/), and a film on LGBT aging called "Gen Silent" (Maddux & Maddux, 2012; http://stumaddux.com/GEN_SILENT.html). Activism tends to be ignored in the academic literature, but through Google searches and personal networks and relationships, I was able to locate several grassroots activist groups advocating for and with LGBT elders. For example, the Delaware Valley LGBT Elder Initiative (http://www.lgbtei.org/p/about-us.html) was founded in 2010 and has created and distributed an annual community resource guide for old LGBT individuals in that area. They have also researched LGBT-affirmative housing options and alternatives, provided trainings in their communities for healthcare providers, and organized community events on issues such as HIV/AIDS and aging. Activists with the Los Angeles Gay and Lesbian Center formed an organization called The Gay and Lesbian Elder Housing Project (http://gleh.org/), which eventually funded a 22 million dollar building that is now providing 104 aging LGBT individuals/families with affordable housing. Although they may be challenging to locate in the literature or online, there are many more examples of amazing communities of old LGBT individuals working together and with other organizations in order to create a more socially just world.

Review of the Lesbian Aging and Activism Literature

Herdt, Beeler, and Rawls (1997) found that old lesbians and old gay men have lived very different lives within different identities and social contexts due to differing

experiences of oppression and privilege, and they called for future researchers to study the unique needs and experiences of old lesbians (as well as old gay men, bisexual men and women, and transgender individuals) rather than lumping them into one "LGBT" category. Fassinger and Arseneau (2007) made a similar call to clinicians and researchers and wrote, "Although common experiences of invisibility, oppression, isolation, and marginalization are faced by all or most LGBT people, these populations also encounter issues that are shared uniquely by their reference groups…" (p. 43). For old lesbians, one component of the historical, political, and social landscape that leads to their unique lived experiences is living within a patriarchy. Greene (2007), citing Kaschak (1992), wrote, "In a patriarchal society, biological sex matters. Whether you are male or female is a determinant in your access to social opportunity and the way you are seen in all arenas of your life" (p. 187).

In her early work on lesbians in later life, Kehoe (1988) stated that old lesbians are "triply invisible" due to the intersections of *at least* three marginalized statuses – old, female, and lesbian. Old lesbians are discriminated against and have less access to the resources they need for holding these identities in a society that embraces ageism, patriarchy/sexism, and homophobia/heterosexism (among other social inequities such as racism and transphobia). In addition, old lesbians have reported lower incomes, lower social class statuses, and less access to financial resources than old gay men, leaving many old lesbians vulnerable to experiences of classism (Grossman, D'Augelli, & Hershberger, 2000). Greene (2007) argued that classism is rarely examined within LGB communities, but that it impacts LGB individuals in a multitude of ways. She wrote,

> Social class can directly influence the degree to which a client can literally afford to be out, if being out can result in the loss of one's job. It also affects the degree

> to which the client has access to the venues in which LGB people often meet and interact, given that socializing at such venues usually requires some level of disposable income. (p. 189)

Although many old lesbians are excluded altogether from participation in social and community events and services due to the interlocking systems of oppression within a White supremacist capitalist patriarchy, women who have the resources may exclude themselves from social services due to perceived bias against old lesbians in health service organizations and workers (hooks, 1997; Richard & Brown, 2006). Old lesbians may be using self-imposed exclusion as a coping skill in order to mitigate further experiences of discrimination.

Early Old Lesbian Research

Research regarding old lesbians has been sparse over the last 30 years. Gabbay and Wahler (2002) found only 11 articles total, and within that only 6 research studies (2 of which were master's theses) published between the years of 1979 and 1997 that discussed experiences and identities of old lesbians. Although Kehoe's (1988) sample appeared to be representative of the diverse social locations of old lesbians across race, urban and rural settings, social class, and occupation in the United States, most of the studies cited by Gabbay and Wahler focused primarily on White, urban-dwelling lesbians' experiences and have been criticized for their narrow scope.

There has been a remarkable increase in published literature on LGBT aging in the last 15 years. However, these studies have mainly used mixed samples of gay men and lesbians. For example, in Fredriksen-Goldsen and Muraco (2010), the authors reviewed the literature of 58 articles found on LGB aging. Of these 58 articles, only 13

contained all lesbian/bisexual women samples, and included within these 13 was a study with only 5% of the sample over the age of 50, and another with only 11% of the study's sample over the age of 60. Of the 32 mixed gay/lesbian/bisexual studies included, only 6 had lesbian samples over 45% of the total sample or female/woman percentage of 50% or higher. The sample ratios were clearly skewed towards gay/bisexual men participants; and, when this happens, it is likely that the study focuses primarily on gay men's experiences, needs, concerns, and worldviews. Overall, Fredriksen-Goldsen and Muraco summarized the early research as highly positive, featuring "favorable feelings about aging" (p. 397) and positive coping and management of marginalized identities. However, without an analysis of power, privilege, and oppression included in their analysis, it is difficult to know whose lives are actually represented and whether the studies go beyond centering White, male, middle and upper class gay men.

These statistics also play out in old lesbians' everyday lives. For example, Salt Lake City has a SAGE program under the auspices of the Utah Pride Center. The work they do in the community is highly important; and yet, with only two women/lesbian board members, it seems unlikely that issues pertaining to sexism/patriarchy, classism, and concerns/frameworks unique to old lesbians gain enough ground to move forward with initiatives and projects that concern lesbians. In fact, one local SAGE Utah board member has shared that many women have stopped coming to the meetings because their voices have not been heard (P. Stewart, personal communication, March 4, 2012).

Although missing important voices and experiences, the earlier research does hit the mark in certain ways. A few researchers began to expand the experiences and voices of old lesbians by intentionally sampling lesbians in rural settings in the United States

(Butler & Hope, 1999; Comerford, Henson-Stroud, Sionainn, & Wheeler, 2004). Authors of these rural studies found a much broader range of both social class and degree of "outness" among old lesbians sampled than in previous research. Butler and Hope (1999) and Comerford et al. (2004) both reported a variety of benefits of rural living to old lesbians, such as greater self-reliance, more freedom, identifying neighbors as part of a social support system, having access to alternative health systems and healing methods, and more tolerance of a lesbian identity. Although both studies reported benefits of rural living, Comerford et al. also found that old lesbians experienced some disadvantages to living rurally, including fear of rejection by others because of lesbian identity, limited opportunities for social interaction, limited support from an organized community of lesbians, limited access to medical technology and healthcare systems, and reliance on neighbors for social support. The latter was limited to daily living support and did not include emotional support. It seems that rural living for old lesbians is a double-edged sword that provides a mixture of protective and limiting or possibly harmful factors around aging.

Old Lesbian Research in the Past Fifteen Years

According to Fredriksen-Goldsen and Muraco (2010), earlier old lesbian studies appear to be more exploratory and ask broader questions about experiences of aging, relationships, coping styles, and interactions with health care systems. They have also served to debunk stereotypes and myths of old lesbians as "unattractive, unemotional, and lonely" and as mentally ill (Friend, 1990, p. 99). Research in the last 15 years has shifted the focus to a closer look at lifespan/developmental concerns, coping/resiliency, legal and

public policy concerns, and taking action with community-based support to address later life concerns. For example, Jones and Nystrom (2002) found that loss of social support and struggling with illness were major concerns and obstacles to positive coping and resiliency for old lesbians. Powell (2004) reported that degree of "outness" can counteract these obstacles, as it is positively correlated with several positive factors, such as validation of choices and relationships, respect for lifestyle, access to medical and social services, and the amount of benefit one receives from social support networks. Frye (2008) also explored old lesbians' views on aging as a part of the life cycle and found that old lesbians who viewed aging as the next step in their lives coped more positively than old lesbians who viewed aging as an ending stage that is filled with grief, loss, and decline. Despite these shifts, the newer studies have continued to produce few lesbian-only samples and have only slightly expanded demographic variables of participants (mainly just broadening social class and urban/rural demographic variables) and the range of questions that are asked.

Lastly, Nystrom and Jones (2003) pushed the bounds of research with old lesbians into the realm of action. This is the first and possibly the only research study published that takes a community activist approach to addressing later life concerns with old lesbians. In this article, the authors do not formally write about methodology, participatory action research, or the theoretical underpinnings of their work. However, what they do describe is a process by which they join with a community of old lesbians to co-create a project called "The Elder Initiative" that addressed concerns such as housing; financial, economic, and social support; and interacting with healthcare providers. The project continued after the researchers wrote the article and stepped out of the project. In

essence, this action research project served to assess and address the needs of old lesbians in a community and directly impacted the quality of life and access to health and other resources for these women.

With these research limitations in mind, Fredriksen-Goldsen and Muraco (2010) found that the components of successful aging for old LGB adults included "good health," "higher social status," "increased social support," and "community involvement" (p. 398). Once again, experiences of oppression may interrupt an old lesbian's ability to access these ingredients for successful aging. For example, Deevey (1990) found that 80% of her all-lesbian sample reported experiencing homophobia and heterosexism, and over half of the entire sample lived in fear of someone discovering their lesbian identity. Living in fear of being "outed" may very well restrict access to community involvement, social support, and, ultimately, a lesbian's experience of good health through the body's response to chronic stress. These fears may be specific to cohort, as younger lesbians today may not express coming out fears in the same way as pre-Stonewall generations of lesbians.

Kimmel, Rose, Orel, and Greene (2006) and Liddle (2007) confirmed that a lesbian's identity and values are influenced by the historical era, as well as political and social contexts in which a woman's lesbian identity is first formed. Lesbians currently over the age of 65 are women who lived some of their lives before and/or during the gay rights movement, the women's movement, and even the civil rights movement. Additionally, many women from these earlier generations have been involved in activism throughout their lives. For example, the identity of lesbian was formed in the prestonewall era for many members of the Living Our Visions (LOV) project, and this

informs the way that they live their lives, form communities and relationships, access resources and support, and even how they view themselves. One of LOV's members moved to Utah in the 1970s specifically to work on the getting the Equal Rights Amendment passed (which did not pass in Utah). Another member of LOV has been working with the disability rights movement for over 25 years and has political connections all over the state. Two other members moved to Utah over 20 years ago and spearheaded one of the strongest feminist-multicultural therapy communities in the country. Members of LOV are powerful, and they come to the project with incredible herstories of social justice activism and a wealth of knowledge and ideas. Within the first few months of LOV, members discussed and decided to center the work of the project in feminist and social justice principles and to take on the label of being a "feminist multicultural activist" group. Thus, a feminist paradigm and social justice framework provides the appropriate lenses to study and document the work of the Living Our Visions project, because it matches with the historical, political, and social fabric of many old lesbians' lives and certainly the ones in this group.

Lesbian Activism

Grassroots activism has preceded much of the research and work of the academic realm, and the absence of scholarly documentation of important social change work has relegated activism to a marginalized status and left it out of many knowledge bases. Through extant literature, personal communications, and oral herstory projects (both formal and informal) the stories of lesbian activists' lives and work have trickled down through the generations. However, due to women's marginalized status in society and

within the LGBT community, there are many instances of lesbian activism that go unacknowledged and undocumented. For example, Brier (2007) shed light on the large-scale activist efforts of lesbians during the beginning of the HIV/AIDS epidemic in the early 1980s in the U.S. She pointed out that many contemporary journalists and academics are rendering invisible the enormous contributions that feminist lesbians made, which include framing the national dialogue around HIV/AIDS during those early years; helping build an alternative response to the AIDS epidemic with gay men; organizing fundraisers and research projects; and collaboratively shaping healthy pro-sexual behaviors within a feminist framework for the decades that followed.

Gartrell and Rothblum (2001) noted, "Activism raises issues of income and social class [for lesbians]" (p. xiv), due to the fact that on average women continue to earn less money than men and may struggle to make ends meet on their own. Earning lower wages, combined with the fact that "less than 0.3% of philanthropic dollars are awarded to lesbian and gay projects each year (and how much of that goes to gay men versus lesbians?)" (p. xiii), can make participating in activist projects challenging, to say the least. Yet, lesbians across the country are finding ways to participate in activism that significantly impacts the lives of lesbian and bisexual women.

A rich example comes out of an ethnography of a working class lesbian activist community in Buffalo, New York. Kennedy and Davis (1993) documented the lives and activist work of lesbians from this community between the 1930s and1960s. These working class lesbian activists were out in their own communities and involved in the formation of the homophile (Esterberg, 1994; Rupp, 2011) and gay liberation movements (Cruikshank, 1992). They were among the first to create openly lesbian communities and

a sense of "family" among one another. Kennedy and Davis wrote, "We suspected that they had forged a culture for survival and resistance under difficult conditions, and had passed this sense of community onto newcomers; in our minds these were signs of a movement in its prepolitical stage" (p. 2). The authors partially credited the visibility of today's gay men and lesbian women and the ability to live a more open life to the efforts of women in this lesbian activist community.

The Buffalo lesbian community certainly paved the way for life-long lesbian activists and life partners Phyllis Lyon and Del Martin. Lyon and Martin co-founded the Daughters of Bilitis (DOB) organization, which laid the foundation for the gay liberation movement of the 1970s and today's LGBT marriage equality movement (Gallo, 2006). Once again, "Despite the availability of lesbian and gay history today, there has been relatively little written about lesbians in general, and even less about the Daughters of Bilitis specifically" (Gallo, 2006, p. xxi). When the DOB is written about in the LGBT community, it is most often critiqued as an assimilationist group for lesbians wanting to "pass" and fit in to a society that deemed heterosexuality as the norm and anything other than that as pathology. Although the DOB was concerned with framing a specific image of a lesbian as "normal" women, in reality they were so much more than that. The DOB served as one of the most accessible organizations for lesbians between the mid 1950s to mid 1980s in the U.S. and offered services, groups, programs, and newsletters in order to help facilitate the coming out process for lesbians and the letting go of internalized sexism and homophobia. In a time when the feminist movement was pandering to middle class White heterosexual women's needs and excluding women of color and lesbians, the DOB actively worked to be inclusive of women of color as well as women of various

social class identities. By 1966, the DOB's national president was Cleo Bonner, the first Black lesbian to lead a lesbian or gay rights organization. Across racial and economic lines, the DOB worked on issues that were pertinent to other marginalized groups, such as the Civil Rights movement. They also organized and funded research projects that would positively impact the lives of lesbians and gay men (Gallo, 2006).

Although perhaps not their intention, the Daughters of Bilitis opened the doorway for lesbians to speak out in more radical ways over the next few decades. Although mainstream liberal and lesbian feminist communities continued to struggle with White supremacy, capitalism, and homophobia, many womanists and feminists of color stood in solidarity with people of other marginalized identities and began forging a new radical feminist vision that focused on liberation and decolonization. Zimmerman (2000) wrote,

> Deeply affected by the African American and Third World [sic] liberation politics, and committed to lesbian and feminist organizing, African American lesbians like Anita Cornwell, Margaret Sloan, Joan Gibbs, and Gwendolyn Rogers organized during the 1970s against pervasive racism in the predominantly white woman's movement. (p. 15)

The work of these lesbian activists led to more lesbians of color speaking out and writing about their frustration and betrayal from the predominantly White lesbian feminist movement. For example, the Combahee River Collective was created in Boston in 1974 for radical Black feminists and organized around lesbian separatist identity and politics (Zimmerman, 2000).

Cheryl Clarke (1983) proclaimed the identity of lesbian itself an act of resistance against a "male-supremacist, capitalist, misogynist, racist, homophobic, imperialist culture" (p. 128). Clarke also made a call to lesbians of color and White lesbians to stop

separating from one another and come together in order to defy patriarchy, racism, and colonization. She wrote,

> When the Black woman and the White woman become lovers, we bring that history and all those questions to the relationship as well as other people's problems with the relationships. If we, as lesbian-feminists, defy the taboo [of internalized racism], then we begin to transform the history of relationships between Black women and White women. (p. 136)

Clarke saw the potential for liberation and freedom through a lesbian separatist identity where lesbians of various backgrounds banded together and separated from male and heterosexual cultures. Quintanales (1983) also saw this potential for liberation, but from a perspective that valued and respected the needs of Latina lesbian feminists to build and sustain community with one another, apart from White lesbian feminists. Radical lesbian feminist activism continued to bloom in the 1990s when a group called the Lesbian Avengers attacked issues such as homophobia and heterosexism in public space, housing, education, and jobs in New York City (Schulman, 1993). In July, 2011 the group released their third edition of the Lesbian Avengers Handbook, which is published online at http://www.lesbianavengers.com/handbooks/Lesbian_Avenger_handbook3.shtml

Today, lesbian activists are carrying on the work of their predecessors and continuing the fight for equity and radical social change. Similar to the public space, housing and employment work of the Lesbian Avengers of New York City, Norsworthy, Abrams, and Lindlau (2013) discussed the impressive work of out lesbian activist, Kathryn Norsworthy,

> Norsworthy's current political activism is focused on establishing a city and county domestic partner registry. At the state level, she actively worked to defeat the 2008 anti-gay marriage amendment and to repeal the state law banning gays and lesbians from adopting children. Drawing on her knowledge and skills as a feminist multicultural counseling psychologist and, interestingly, Sharon Horne's research on the negative psychological effects of anti-gay marriage amendments,

> Norsworthy has testified at public hearings, consulted with public officials, and trained other activists. (p.474)

Although living and working in a religiously and politically conservative campus and community, Norsworthy has continued to risk exposing herself to homophobia and heterosexism in order to work towards creating a more socially just world for lesbians, gay men, and members of many other marginalized communities. The long lists of activist work by Norsworthy and countless other lesbian activists are rarely documented in the LGBT community.

If lesbian activism has been rendered invisible, then certainly old lesbian activism has been relegated to the fringes of marginalization and ignored by feminist and LGBT communities as well as by U.S. society. Zimmerman (2000) wrote about an old lesbian's experience with ageism:

> She tells her personal story of how it feels to be ignored by younger women, including lesbians and feminists, and speaks to the difficulty of getting them to see the ageist nature of their words and actions. She contends that this is a result of 'age passing,' which promotes denial about their own ageism. (p. 18)

However, the group Old Lesbians Organizing for change, or OLOC (http://www.oloc.org/), has worked hard to document and capture the rich stories of old lesbian activism. Their work includes social support; active community organizing and engagement; feminist activism; political activism from local to national levels; consciousness-raising around social justice issues and social identities; antiracism work; and many other areas. OLOC has been conducting an ongoing oral herstory project since 1997 and has published two books that have come out of the project that bring awareness to the life stories of old lesbians (Eversmeyer & Purcell, 2009, 2012). These stories make visible the lives of old lesbians as well as capture various generations of lesbian activism

and social change work. There are local chapters of OLOC in various communities across the country. Thanks to the work of the Living Our Visions project, the newest chapter of OLOC now resides in Salt Lake City, Utah.

With such rich legacies of activism, old lesbian communities can draw on their own radical roots to continue working towards improving the lives of old lesbians in the future. In addition, these herstories of lesbian activism should be documented and shared with other lesbian communities and acknowledged as important and crucial segments of lesbian and gay liberation. Old lesbian researchers and activists, Bradford and Hilber (2001), noted the importance of bridging the gap between research and activism and urged activists and researchers to come together and work collaboratively on projects that need both an eye to research design as well as an eye to social justice and practical applications. Although they wrote from a clearly postpositivist perspective, their words speak to the relevance and appropriateness of using a participatory action approach to research when studying topics related to lesbian activism. Participatory action research (PAR) includes research participants as co-researchers in the project from beginning to end and relies on the wisdom, knowledge, and ideas of the members of a marginalized community to know the best course of action to take for empowerment and social change in their community (Herr & Anderson, 2005). Thus, conducting PAR with an old lesbian community reduces the impact of ageism, sexism, and homophobia through processes of power-sharing, valuing other forms of knowledge production, and participating in social change efforts that impact a community immediately rather than sitting on a shelf in an academic journal or book.

Purpose of the Study

The aim of this study was to illuminate the lives of old lesbians, who, in our society, are considered at least triply invisible (Kehoe, 1988) and to create an opportunity for old lesbian activist voices to emerge and become empowered as community activists and co-researchers of the project. More specifically, this study documents the work of old lesbian activists of the Living Our Visions project and their experiences with the newly formed Utah Chapter of OLOC and with building old lesbian community along the Wasatch Front in Northern Utah. This documentation, in turn, is intended to become part of the means whereby old lesbian activists understand and modify their efforts and will also serve as a record of community building for other communities.

Research Goals

Traditionally, dissertation research proposals contain research questions that attend to research hypotheses and attempt to answer them. However, participatory action research projects often elect for alternatives to research questions that attend more closely to the complexities of the project (Teram, Schachter, & Stalker, 2005). Thus, the aims of this study were to meet three primary goals: (a) to serve as a catalyst for old lesbians to meet, organize, and identify goals for their community that would enhance the wellbeing of old lesbians and to embark on action to achieve stated goals; (b) to document the activities of the group by actively engaging in the *plan-act-observe-reflect* cycle of participatory action research (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2005); and (c) to serve as a model for community building and action for other old lesbian communities across the country. In summary, we documented the process of change by which old lesbians created

community and engaged in social change as well as the impact of these social change efforts.

The Current Study

This study explored the processes of an ongoing participatory action research project with old lesbians living in the Salt Lake Valley of Utah. This study worked to center the lives, wisdom, and agency of old lesbians living in the Salt Lake Valley of Utah through their participation as co-researchers in a participatory action research project. Thus, this study documented what happened when old lesbians got together to create social change and enhance the lives of old lesbians living in their community.

Based on the review of the literature, a participatory action research approach using qualitative research methods and an emergent design was appropriate for documenting the community building processes and social change efforts of the Living Our Visions project. Quantitative methods were deemed insufficient for capturing the complexities of a participatory action research group that used emergent design from a feminist-multicultural and social justice perspective (Morrow, Castañeda-Sound, & Abrams, 2012). Thus, this dissertation used qualitative research methods within a participatory action research approach to meet the research goals stated above. First, though, in Chapter 2, I include the first phase of this study, which was already presented and approved as a predissertation research project (PDRP) in my program and forms the entry point for the current study.

CHAPTER 2

THE ENTRY PROCESS OF THE LIVING OUR VISIONS PROJECT

In this predissertation research project, I explored the meanings, processes, and sources of thriving for old lesbians involved in the Living Our Visions project. I performed two tasks during this project: (a) I completed a literature review of old lesbian research and created a clear rationale for using participatory action research as a tool for liberation in this community; and (b) I documented the entry processes of the first year of LOV as a participatory action research project. During this project, I co-facilitated a series of focus groups with the co-researchers of LOV, where we assessed the needs and concerns of the old lesbian community of the Salt Lake Valley of Utah. This project was conducted under the mentorship and supervision of my research advisor and dissertation chair, Dr. Susan Morrow, and was submitted to the Counseling Psychology faculty for final approval in July 2011. The final PDRP was approved in August 2011.

Although PAR is an approach or a framework to use when conducting research and not a research design per se, there are phases and processes involved, such as the entry process, which may look somewhat similar across various projects. The entry phase of a PAR project is the first step to engaging in PAR; and Herr and Anderson (2005) wrote, “PAR depends on a careful initial building of relationships and negotiation of

roles, often referred to as the entry process" (p. 92). Although the entry process is considered a crucial part of any PAR project, little has been published on the entry process into a PAR project (Burke et al., 2003). Thus, the main purpose of the PDRP was to explore processes that can take place in the entry phase of a PAR project. These processes emerged through a qualitative analysis of multiple sources of data that were collected within the first year of the "Living Our Visions" project with old lesbians living in the Salt Lake Valley of Utah.

Commencing a PAR project takes time and energy in building solid, respectful, and trustworthy relationships before the project even begins. Further, a feminist framework for conducting such research also requires a focus on collaboration and on the relationships and associated power dynamics of the co-researchers (principal investigator and group members). The PDRP set the stage for my dissertation project through building these relationships with participatory learning and attending to social contexts in ways that increase the prospects of all voices being heard. I was interested in engaging in the research process in ways that promoted social justice and brought a set of ethics to the work we did in community with others. I believe this predissertation research project honored these ways of building knowledge and will contribute to the literatures of counseling psychology and gerontology, both in terms of the research approach (using PAR in our field) and in understanding and changing the lived experiences of old lesbians.

Paradigm Underpinning the Research

Feminist multicultural and action research theories provided the overarching paradigm for this project. In their chapter exploring the practices and problems of feminist research, Grossman et al. (1997) concluded that feminist research includes the following tenets: "It (a) illuminates the lives of women and girls, (b) gives voice to marginalized women, (c) develops a critique of the discipline of psychology, and (d) reflects feminist values" (p. 89). These tenets are broad, but how do they specifically relate to this particular study? By exploring the "entry into the field" processes of a PAR project and naming participants as co-researchers, I have developed a critique of traditional research in psychology. Grossman et al. (1997) wrote, "This approach to participants is in contrast to traditional psychological research, which positions the researcher as spokesperson for, and interpreter of, the experiences of the research 'subjects'" (p. 77). Additionally, although Fine and Gordon (1995) discussed whether "feminist psychology" is an inherent contradiction, they also pointed out that moving women from being the "objects" of psychological conversations to "subjects" in itself has "interrupted the discipline [of psychology]" (p. 1).

The PDRP study aimed to illuminate the lives of old lesbians, who in our society are considered at least triply invisible (Kehoe, 1988), and to create space for voices to emerge from the members/ co-researchers of the project. Finally, there are many iterations of feminist thought, and this project specifically reflected Chandra Mohanty's (2006) and bell hooks's (2000) views of an inclusive, antiracist, and decolonizing multicultural feminism.

Finally, feminist multicultural and action research theories include explicit analyses of power that intersect with individuals' and communities' various identities and contexts. They also aim to transform the lives of people who hold marginalized identities. Irish feminist liberation psychologist Geraldine Moane (2006) provided a link between feminist and liberation theories and psychology: "A feminist political psychology must aim to transform internalized oppression if it is to facilitate taking action, thus linking a psychological analysis to a political analysis" (p. 74). Recently, as more feminist psychologists have begun to integrate feminist and liberation theories into their research and practice, Lykes and Moane (2009) have co-edited a special issue of the journal *Feminism & Psychology* that explores this integration and intersection and provides a rationale for using participatory action research within feminist and liberatory paradigms.

Research Design

The entry phase of the current study emerged from the Living Our Visions project and combined a participatory action research approach with grounded theory methods of coding and data analysis. Action research, like feminist theory, comes in many forms, but Herr and Anderson (2005) provided central principles of PAR and wrote, "Action research is inquiry that is done *by* or *with* insiders to an organization or community, but never *to* or *on* them. It is a reflective process… and generally requires that some form of evidence be presented to support assertions" (p. 3). In their chapter on PAR, Kemmis and McTaggart (2005) shared the process of PAR that includes "planning a change; acting and observing a process and consequences of the change; reflecting on these processes

and consequences; replanning; acting and observing again; reflecting again, and so on…" (p. 563).

In this prelude to a PAR project I share the experiences the Living Our Visions group had with "the entry process" into collaborative research (Herr & Anderson, 2005). This process included establishing credibility; identifying stakeholders; building relationships amongst women with marginalized identities; co-creating a group process; addressing issues of feminism and racial, social, and economic justice; and identifying initial research design and data collection strategies. I demonstrate the ways that LOV attended to each of these components since the group formed. Additionally, I discuss strategies that have emerged as LOV engaged in the continual cycle of participatory action research, which included *planning, acting, observing,* and *reflecting* (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2005). Finally, I share reflections of joys, tensions, and challenges that arose from interacting with this social justice-oriented approach to research.

Grounded theory methods of coding and data analysis fit well with liberatory and social justice approaches to research (Charmaz, 2005; Teram, Schachter, & Stalker, 2005) and provide tools for studying processes located within communities and structures. Charmaz (2005) wrote,

> Grounded theory can supply analytic tools to move social justice studies beyond description, while keeping them anchored in their respective empirical worlds. Not only are justice and injustice abstract concepts, but they are, moreover, *enacted processes*, made real through actions performed again and again. (p. 508)

Additionally, Fassinger (2005) recommended that grounded theory methods can be effectively combined with a feminist approach to research that explores power dynamics.

Researcher as Instrument

Morrow (2005) wrote, "All research is subject to researcher bias" (p. 254); and each approach to research handles this bias differently. In feminist and action-oriented qualitative research, the researcher may embrace and utilize rather than "bracket off" her or his biases and subjectivities. This is called using reflexivity. Reflexivity was defined by Rennie (2004) as "self-awareness and agency within that self-awareness" (p. 183). A researcher's background, identities, contexts, interests, and assumptions all affect the research; and it is important to investigate and explore the ways these are connecting and/or interfering with the research. Morrow (2005) recommended several strategies for self-reflection, such as keeping a self-reflective journal and using a peer team of debriefers for suggesting alternative meanings as a way to balance the trustworthiness of the research.

As the academic researcher in this study, I identity as a White, queer, feminist and social justice activist in her late 30s who is also a graduate student in the field of counseling psychology. So, how is it that I came to be involved with research with old lesbians and later life issues? My research advisor was already working on a national interview study with old lesbians around later life issues, and we both wanted to engage in PAR together. Something that resonated with me years ago in a PAR workshop with Eve Tuck and Maria Elena Torre was when Tuck shared that doing collaborative, decolonizing, social justice- oriented PAR was the only way she could "ethically hang out in the world of research" (E. Tuck, personal communication, May 21, 2007). As a White person living in a highly racialized and colonized world, I find those words

echoing in my mind often as I wonder how I can connect with psychological research in a nonvoyeuristic and decolonizing way (Lykes & Moane, 2009; Tuhiwai-Smith, 1999).

I have been mentored by several old lesbians who hold feminist identities. I have shared in the Living Our Visions group on multiple occasions (especially when new members join the group) that this mentoring has changed my life in enormous ways, and I feel it is important to give back to this community. Deeply personal ties connect me to both the approaches to research as well as to the topic itself. It was important for me to continually reflect on and critically analyze the ways that these connections could both benefit and detract from the Living Our Visions project. Strategies that were employed from the start included a self-reflective journal and co-researcher checks, as well as having a team of peer debriefers read and provide feedback on analysis. As we moved out of the entry process and into the full PAR project that became my dissertation, members of Living Our Visions became more centrally involved as co-researchers in the project.

Co-researchers/ Members

Following themes from "The Elder Initiative" (Nystrom & Jones, 2003) and the national interview study of old lesbians that is currently in data collection and analysis phase, I launched a local participatory action research project with old lesbians in the community in which I live. Co-researchers/ members for the Living Our Visions (LOV) project included 18 women, ages 45 to 71, who identified as lesbians and who identified as living or wanting to retire in the Salt Lake Valley of Utah. The term woman/ womyn has been contested and critiqued in lesbian/ feminist spaces and in women's music festival culture for years (Browne, 2011; Morris, 1999); and some communities, such as

the Michigan Womyn's Music Festival, define woman to be "womyn born womyn." In LOV, there was a clear desire for lesbian- and woman-only space that came from the members. At the same time, some members of the group proposed the term "woman" to include anyone who identifies as a woman and is inclusive of transgender old lesbian women. The group did not settle on this, though. LOV was also a group that strove to be diverse in terms of race/ phenotype, ethnicity/ cultural background, social class, ability status, spiritual tradition, gender identity, nationality, primary language, degree of outness, and activist and feminist identities. Although the project centered around the needs of old lesbians, we included lesbians age 40 and over, because many women were interested in making an investment in a project they would want to rely on later for support and services. Women varied in their primary interest in the group. Some women were primarily interested in activism and the social change aspect of the group, while others were more interested in community building and connection, and still others were interested in the research and documentation of the Living Our Visions group as a model for other old lesbian communities to create positive change. Maximum variation sampling was conducted to recruit as diverse a sample as possible. No interested participants were excluded unless they decided they would be unable to participate due to physical or other limitations. Every accommodation was made to be inclusive of women with varying ability statuses, including choice of meeting space, transportation, and type of chair available in meeting space, among other things.

Members/ co-researchers were recruited initially through a flyer for an all-day workshop on later life issues for old lesbians that I co-facilitated with my research advisor. I was also contacted by a local LGBTQ newspaper, and a short article

advertising the all-day workshop was written up and published 2 weeks before the date of the workshop. I connected with our local Pride Center, which graciously offered the space for us to meet for free. Staff of the Pride Center also got the word out about the workshop to interested Pride Center members. Flyers were distributed at the Pride Center and around town in various places such as coffee shops (See Appendix A for original recruitment flyer). After the original recruitment, snowball sampling strategies were employed by co-researchers to recruit more women, with a particular goal of increasing diversity within the project.

What is interesting about being a PAR researcher is that my role with the Living Our Visions project continued to evolve and transform as time went on. At our initial meeting, my role was to co-facilitate an all-day workshop and to lead discussion around later life concerns with old lesbians in our community. I created an agenda that was very structured; and, although I allowed for dialogue to follow the issues brought up by members of the group, I still followed the outline in covering the topics we (the academic researchers) wanted to cover. At the next meeting, there was an outline but less structure in the facilitation; and, at the third focus group meeting, there emerged a meeting "agenda" that was sent out ahead of time on our listserv to members, so that co-researchers could add to the agenda for the day.

In many PAR studies, co-researchers choose to use their own names when documenting the work they have been doing in the project. In LOV, some members were out in every context, some were out in some contexts and not others, and there were also members who were not out at all and would fear reprisal if their names were associated with the term lesbian. In the results section, talk of women's music festivals and women/

lesbian musicians ignited several processes in the group. I contacted the group and asked about the possibility of using pseudonyms that matched women/ lesbian musicians that had been mentioned in our meetings. I also let members know that they could choose their real name if it felt more liberating to do so. Pseudonyms of women musicians caught on like a firestorm, and soon members were proposing other musician names, choosing names for themselves and one another. Thus, in the results section you will see names such as Meg, Bernice, and Mary, which would represent musicians like Meg Christian, Bernice Johnson Reagon, and Mary Watkins.

Sources of Data

In qualitative research, researchers use multiple data sources as a way to triangulate the data and increase trustworthiness and rigor of a study (Marshall & Rossman, 2011; Morrow, 2005; Morrow & Smith, 2000). In the entry phase of this PAR project, data were gathered from multiple sources that included participant observation, field notes, focus groups, co-researcher checks, a grant proposal, journals, and electronic listserv data. Four focus group meetings were recorded and transcribed between October 30, 2010 and June 19, 2011. Co-researchers completed participant observation, field notes, journals, and saved data from emails on the electronic listserv for LOV that included discussions and negotiations on various topics as well as sharing about meetings with members who were not there. Sources of data also included extant literature, because the context of women-only spaces and lesbian-only spaces is about setting up an alternative space in which to live that requires thinking "outside the box" and incorporating traditionally marginalized ideas. By including literature that is marginalized

within academia, this project also purported to set up a space that was alternative to the traditional power structures within academia and inclusive of various ideas and knowledge bases. PAR includes different sets of skills, training, and knowledge-building that can only add to the value of existing knowledge bases.

Data Analysis and Writing

The coding process for the PDRP began with a type of initial coding called line-by-line coding in grounded theory analysis. Charmaz (2006) wrote, "Initial codes help you to separate data into categories and to see processes. Line-by-line coding frees you from becoming so immersed in your respondents' worldviews that you accept them without question" (p. 51). I combed through the interview transcript, line-by-line, asking questions such as, "What is going on here?" and "What processes are at work here?" I also used a process penned by a professor in a Grounded Theory course as "verbifying" (R. Oswald, personal communication, October 6, 2008). Verbifying uses gerunds and action words to start seeing movement within the transcript. I eventually moved into coding chunks of lines and then discussed these chunks and what was coming out of the data with the members of LOV. I wrote memos about the codes, categories, and families that emerged out of the coding process and noted what initial codes called for further exploration.

As I began to relate categories to one another I participated in what is called *axial coding* by grounded theorists. Charmaz (2006) wrote, "Axial coding relates categories to subcategories, specifies the properties and dimensions of a category, and reassembles the data you have fractured during initial coding to give coherence to the emerging analysis"

(p. 60). During axial coding I fleshed out the categories of the focused codes to start seeing how they related to one another as well as looking at each of the dimensions, actions, and processes involved.

The next step in developing these categories is to move into the crux of grounded theory analysis, which is *theoretical coding* (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). One way to engage in theoretical coding is to use Glaser's "Six C's" (causes, contexts, contingencies, consequences, covariances, and conditions) as a guide to honing categories and analyses. For example, I asked questions like, "What disciplinary concerns am I working within?"

Trustworthiness

Criteria listed as useful by Charmaz (2006) and others in evaluating GT and other emergent design studies are particularly appropriate to this study. *Credibility* is the idea that the researcher's data and theory provide enough evidence of one another, and that the overall depth of the theory is sufficient. This means providing evidence for engaging in theory development, such as making constant comparisons through each stage of the research process, memo writing, and using techniques such as diagramming or sorting of the data to provide different ways of looking at the data. A second criterion to use with GT studies is *originality*, as Charmaz (2006) wrote, "How does your grounded theory challenge, extend, or refine current ideas, concepts, and practices?" (p. 182). This criterion looks at whether or not the researcher has offered something new or fresh to the field of study. A third criterion is *resonance*, which judges whether or not the members/ co-researchers, intended audience, and field of study resonate with the theory that is developing. Does this theory make sense to people and fit the data in in-depth ways?

Grounded theorists can participate in member checking throughout the various stages of data collection and analysis to make sure that the emerging conceptualizations are fitting with participant ideas and experiences. Lastly, Charmaz (2006) wrote of the criterion of *usefulness*: "How does your work contribute to knowledge? How does it contribute to making a better world?" (p. 183). This is the idea that a researcher is doing good social science and making a contribution that actually expands a particular (or more than one) knowledge base and, because of that, transforms the world in some way. These four criteria can be used as a starting point for evaluating the trustworthiness of a GT study. However, GT researchers and reviewers are encouraged to attend to additional criteria that may be paradigm-specific, particular to a field of study and/or to the aesthetics of writing, or significant to the intended audience, so as to bolster support for evidence of rigor (Charmaz, 2006).

Results

So much rich data emerged from the focus group meetings that a results section could be much longer and include a number of areas that the group ventured into during process and dialogue than are included here. For the purposes of this dissertation, these results are restricted to include processes that explicitly speak to the entry process of this PAR project. These processes include sections on establishing credibility; identifying stakeholders; building relationships amongst women with marginalized identities; co-creating a group process; addressing feminism and social justice issues in the group; and formulating the initial research design and data collection. Results include data from audio- and video-recorded transcripts of focus group meetings, field notes and participant

observation notes, journals and memos written during or immediately following interactions or events pertaining to the project, a completed grant proposal and meeting notes from this action cycle, research meetings, focus group agendas/ outlines, co-researcher field notes, and emails with local stakeholder groups and the electronic listserv for Living Our Visions. It was my intention to create a shift in voice as the narrative continued, from hearing more of the academic co-researchers' voices towards the beginning to hearing more of the community co-researchers' voices towards the end. This intentional shift was meant to parallel the process that the group went through together, where at the first meeting my research advisor and I kicked off the project and structured the meeting, to eventually at the third meeting where co-researchers determined the agenda for the meeting together and shared co-facilitation of the process and ownership of the group.

Establishing Credibility

As I imagine all processes to be in PAR, establishing credibility was ongoing and required a mindful and authentic presence. People holding marginalized identities have long been exploited by traditional forms of research (Norsworthy & Khuankaew, 2006; Tuhiwai-Smith, 1999), so it is essential that an "outsider" (Herr & Anderson, 2005) entering into a community prepare carefully for avoiding potential harm. A gatekeeper who is a member of the community can screen access into the community to decrease the potential for harm into the community. As early as interview day for my graduate program, I began speaking with my advisor about ideas for launching a PAR project with old lesbians. During that interview my potential graduate advisor, an old lesbian herself,

asked me why I found a project like this meaningful. After sitting with the question for a moment I replied that the most important mentors in my life have been old lesbians and that participating in a project that works to increase thriving and well-being in their lives feels like an important way to give back to a community that raised me in terms of politics, values, ethics, and feminist identity. This disclosure helped to establish my credibility with my potential advisor and PAR collaborator, who also holds an "insider" position in the community of old lesbians.

Beyond screening access into a community, it is equally important to provide all the information possible to potential PAR co-researchers so that they can make an informed decision on whether to join a PAR project or not. During recruitment for the first all-day workshop for Living Our Visions, the flyer clearly stated that this project included both social action and research components and outlined the research components as follows:

> This purpose of this workshop is fourfold:
>
> 1. To bring together the wise minds of our old lesbian community, so that we can begin to gather information about important later life concerns for old lesbians.
> 2. To work together to bring about changes that promote well-being, health, equity, and a vibrant community for old lesbians living in the Salt Lake Valley.
> 3. To create a record of our activities so that our work can serve as a model for other communities.
> 4. To record and publish our process and the outcomes of our project in the

> academic / professional literature.
>
> To these ends, we would like to audio- and video-record this workshop. Our recordings will remain confidential, except to those of us in attendance. If you are interested in this workshop, but hesitant about video recording, PLEASE do contact us to talk about these concerns in more depth. We would hate to lose out on your presence and important contributions due to video recording concerns!

Putting the information about research out there right away allowed potential co-researchers to decide for themselves if they felt comfortable pursuing this type of project. At the beginning of the meeting I said, "We're going to turn on the recording now, but only as we (the co-facilitators) talk about ourselves and introduce our workshop. Then we'll turn the recording back off while we have a conversation about confidentiality, the recordings, and answer questions" (T1, P1). At this point, I introduced and welcomed everyone and all of our identities into the room. My advisor and I introduced ourselves and how we came to put this workshop together. Then we talked about how we envisioned the Living Our Visions project in terms of both research and social action. We shared that we saw ourselves as advisors to the process in terms of having facilitation and research skills to share and by taking responsibility for kicking things off. We introduced terms such as PAR, participatory research, co-researchers, and collaborative research; and we shared the ways that PAR looks different from traditional forms of research. We also shared our positions as both "insiders" and "outsiders" to the project and encouraged discussion, questions, and critique of having a PAR focus in this project.

At the second meeting, a month and a half later, the conversation began again with a discussion about research and recordings. I was scheduled to co-facilitate this meeting also, but, due to a death in the family, I was not available to be there. This may have actually worked out well for the co-researchers to ask more critical questions about my position in the group and how the research would unfold without me being there. Meg asked more about PAR, what it is, and the time frame for the research that would be my predissertation research project and dissertation project (T2, P1) and then reflected back to the facilitators what she had heard. She said, "What I hear you saying is, there's a pre-dissertation thing, and then when she [Liz] comes back to do the dissertation, we, if we're able to do this, we will have spent x number of months sort of coalescing, or gathering, having ideas or whatever. And she actually needs that in order to do her research" (T2, P2). Mary, another member of LOV, responded with her understanding of how LOV ties in with PAR. She said,

> Even when the research is done and, and Liz's dissertation is finished, we hope there will be something in place that will go on here, that will, that will be, that will serve and meet a need for old lesbians in this community. And, I mean, I think, that's what's participatory action research, that there's some goal on some level. I mean to really do something that we all become a part of and that, and that we carry on. The research is just almost incidental in some ways, even though that's what's sparking the project, so it's pretty exciting. (T2, P2)

Meg then asked if there were some readings that could be sent on PAR, and Sue responded by saying she would send something out to the group on the email listserv. The group continued to ask questions about the informed consent forms and checked in about what they were understanding about PAR and the research process. The conversation did not move on until everyone felt comfortable leaving the discussions having to do with credibility.

Identifying Stakeholders

The Living Our Visions project was a self-sustaining project from the start, but that does not mean there were not stakeholders involved. At the outset of the project, my advisor and I wanted to include a local pride center as a potential partner for the project. A series of emails transpired between my advisor and her contacts at the center to describe the project and request support in the forms of meeting space and publicity (S. Morrow, personal communication, September 20, 2010). The center staff immediately supported the project and began speaking with us about recent programming they had developed to attend to the needs of old LGBTQ individuals. This began the delicate dance of sharing support and resources while also holding our ground as a self-sustaining project that combined both activism and research. On the one hand, we desired the support and blessing of the Pride Center and acknowledged their vision for working with old LGBTQ individuals. On the other hand, we were clear we did not want the substance of the LOV project to become dissolved into another organization's vision, a vision that was a departure from our own vision.

The term *stakeholder* itself held tension for our group, and I wondered how this tension would unfold in different ways as the LOV project moved forward, becoming more known in our community and perhaps becoming a model for other old lesbian communities. I was reminded of the well-documented cooptation of LGBTQ Gay Pride festivals by major corporations. As pride festivals become larger, corporations provide more funding but also gain more power in how decisions are made within the festivals. What results is a mainstreaming of LGBTQ culture, as radical and progressive and separatist groups become marginalized within this already marginalized group in society.

As LOV would move forward, new individuals and organizations might identify themselves as stakeholders. How might these potential stakeholders direct the process of LOV? How might the group prevent losing autonomy, power, or choices? Lastly, the group itself might become a stakeholder in our own community, and how might the group attend to power dynamics and not lose its collaborative and power-sharing spirit it had developed thus far?

Building Relationships Amongst Women with Marginalized Identities

PAR is an approach to research that is both liberating and exciting as well as challenging. It's important to share the challenges so that we (collaborative researchers) can use them as tools for learning. Although the building of relationships in this project was quite supportive and positive for members of LOV, this section begins with a very challenging experience that occurred as I was preparing for the first all-day workshop for Living Our Visions, in October 2010. This experience is shared via a memo/ journal entry. *Today I had an "ugly" experience with entering into the field. A woman called me regarding the workshop and seemed to want to talk about her concerns with the video recording of the workshop.* [In the journal, I go on to describe our interaction, which I experienced as very adversarial despite my best efforts to listen and support her.] *I had reached my limit. I was too emotional to speak to her any further in a calm way. I said with as much kindness as I could muster, "Thank you for calling, but it sounds like this might not work out. Goodbye." . . . Then, silence. I could feel the tears welling up, and I felt awful. Had I botched this workshop before it even began?*

My advisor, an insider to old lesbian community, debriefed the experience with me. As I reflect back on the experience, I am reminded of "unpredictable realities" that Adams and Moore (2007) shared:

> PAR researchers are quick to celebrate the ordinariness of participants and the term sometimes takes on a rather sacred tone, suggesting benign, eager to be involved, perhaps disenfranchised persons. This can blind us, however, to the sometimes harsh and unpredictable realities of the vulnerable groups with whom PAR researchers often work and obscure the simple fact that some ordinary people and some everyday places can be dangerous. (p. 42)

This experience taught me some important lessons. First, I was thinking that only relationally-oriented and feminist-identified out lesbians would be showing up to the workshop. But, in reality, the workshop was the first of its kind in our community. This phenomenon drew women from various identities and contexts. This shocked me back into reality that all kinds of women would be welcome to the group--and that the experience would not fit for some women--and that introducing group guidelines could be helpful. What would it be that would make people feel safe to share with one another, and to feel respected? How could we be both our whole selves in the group and also respect each other's differences? How might I work with situations like this while still holding onto my center and not being thrown totally off kilter from it? And if something like this did happen in the group, how might we repair the relationship(s) and keep going? At that time I also began to think about stages of group work and that conflict is inevitable in any working group, and I asked how the group might be able to talk about conflict together. Mackewn (2008) wrote about the process of facilitation in action research as a "continual process of inquiry" (p. 615) that requires attention to the present moment and an ability to engage with paradox and both ends of a continuum such as the capability of being both nurturing and challenging when necessary in a group. This

resonated for me, and I began to think about how to introduce these questions to the group so that we could collaboratively process them together rather than answering them by myself.

Co-Creating a Group Process

The beginning of the LOV project also warranted a conversation on being a part of a social action project where the group might be out in the spotlight and what this might be like for individual members. Initially, I thought the project could work for both women who are out and for women who are not out as lesbians. This view evolved in the group over the 1st year, as we had calls to be written about in a local newspaper as well as talk of developing educational programs for the community that members would collaboratively put together. The purpose of this group was to make change in the Salt Lake valley community, and, because of this vision, there were times and may be times in the future when the group is asked to share and document the work we have done with our larger community. There has been a desire to make the group visible to old lesbians who may be isolated, in order for them to access resources that the group will offer in the future.

The group is inclusive of both women who are out and not out, and yet there also seems to be a degree of comfort with being out that all of the women who come regularly to the meetings share. Each person had a right to decide her own degree of outness and how much she would like to be a part of this project. In fact, at the beginning of every meeting in the first year, we opened this up for discussion. We asked how we could acknowledge the very real fears (of loss of family and friends, of loss of spiritual/cultural

community, of reprisal) that many old lesbians in the Salt Lake Valley had if they were to be out and about with this project, but still have them a part of the project if they wanted to be. Manzo and Brightbill (2007) wrote, "Where research is a 'two-way conversation' an insistence on anonymity can muffle the voices of participants while authorizing that of the researcher" (p. 36). We asked whether this project could be done without muffling the voices of co-researchers and yet provide adequate protection of identities of those who requested it. These were questions that had to be brought explicitly into our group process on a regular basis.

Alongside the challenges of building relationships, there were also joys. There is a community that was being built through in-person interactions as well as online interactions via the LOV listserv. As women introduced themselves in the first all-day workshop, the discussion quickly turned to the sacredness of women-only and/ or lesbian-only spaces. Talk about women's music festivals (WMF) and women- and lesbian-only spaces consistently emerged in the focus group meetings. Initially this talk appeared to be tangential, but, through continued coding, I found that the connections between WMFs, women- and lesbian-only space, and feminism served as catalysts for several entry processes that occurred in the group. Women in LOV had differing experiences with WMFs, and they shared and filled in the gaps about musicians, activism, and feminist and lesbian herstory. One such purpose was to interact and co-create remembrances of lesbian and feminist herstories with one another. This discussion was unsolicited by the facilitators of the meeting and came up as one of the members, KD, was introducing herself to the group and why she was there. She stated, "We get a little isolated, in [name of city], and the women that are there that we do somewhat

associate with, their political views are much different from ours. And so, the social interaction is sometimes a little bit tough. So, it's good for me to be able to get out and meet people that have like-minded ideas and learn from them" (T1, P3). Although this quote does not explicitly state "women-only" space, it seemed to invite this type of discussion as Teresa, the next speaker, immediately responded with, "So, the whole concept of women getting together and just having a bond and knowing people and not feeling isolated and having, feeling safe is very exciting to me…" (T1, P3). The introductions meandered through various topics after this, but each member of the group commented on separatism in general and if/how they envisioned it for LOV.

Separatist spaces have long been both embraced and contested in feminist and lesbian political communities. The idea of women-only and /or lesbian-only space formally emerged in the 1960s during the Women's Rights Movement (Morris, 1999). Benefits of women-only spaces include freedom from men's violence against women; valuing cooperation and nurturance; having a supportive environment for working against sexism, racism, homophobia, etc.; not having to fight invisibility due to gender; freedom from oppression; not having to be hypervigilant regarding physical safety; and not having to unconsciously respond to men with internalized messages of sexism (Ruby, 2003). Women-only spaces provide a special type of amnesty, or a freedom from retaliation or reprisal without consequences for speaking out and a freedom from interactional oppression around gender. KD described her experience on the lesbian-only space of an Olivia Cruise, sponsored by a women-only, predominantly lesbian tour company. She said,

> I really thought we lived our life pretty good and were happy and we don't have to be guarded so much, and then we went on an Olivia Cruise and spent seven

> days with all women, and it, uh, it hit home so hard that, no matter how free we think we are with our feelings, and we act in a community, outside of an all lesbian community you act differently. (T3, P19)

In the second meeting Chabela described the feeling that arose when involved with a predominantly male group in an LGBT space. She initiated a discussion about the gender/sex borders of the LOV group when she said, "[The LGBT group] was predominantly male, and then once a male comes into the room, it kind of takes out all the oxygen for females. And how are we going to address that? Are we looking at something that is lesbian-oriented or is it the whole gamut? What are we doing?" (T3, P13). What followed this question in the discussion is a clear desire for LOV to remain a woman-only group and primarily lesbian-only group. Bernice described her vision of a woman-only space:

> What we've done is we've created a community, not like a physical community, like close community, close to all our hearts, where there are, like, people that we call when we need help. You know, people we can help when they need help. Do you know what I'm saying? That intentional community. (T3, P15)

However, there was also talk about partnering with local groups working on similar issues to share resources and not re-create the wheel. Mary shared, " I mean, it clearly is, um, a woman, a lesbian only kind of vision that we'll have and, I think, and find common ground with other resources that can improve the Pride Center, SAGE, uh, different religious groups, but that is also free standing and open" (T3, P21).

Although critics of separatist spaces have commented on the unrealistic goals of having a dichotomous viewpoint such as complete separatism, the LOV group included a complex understanding of the value of separatism while also holding values of collaboration and resource-sharing outside of the immediate community. Meg spoke of partnering with other groups while also preserving woman-only space. She said, "I would

not dream of suggesting that men be included in our study, but I'm thinking that we would be crazy if we can't join with common causes with SAGE for sharing sources of knowledge" (T3, P13). Cris responded soon after and said,

> You kind of cross market so for the all woman group, you say, "Oh, gosh, there's this thing that already exists and is already happening that involved grants, it's over at the [Pride Center]"; and then, to the SAGE group, you say, "Gosh, we have certain people in the community that just need that women's space and no men, and we'll see where the overlap is, but we're not one and the same. (T3, P13)

Feminism and Social, Racial, and Economic Justice

Without a critical analysis of power, attempts for antiracist work are superficial at best and harmful to communities of color at worst. In the world of women's music festivals and the feminist movement, true inclusion of women of color has been a struggle since the beginning. Hayes (2010) wrote about the myths that Black women do not camp, as well as other myths that emerge when celebrations of multiculturalism and inclusion aren't meaningful in any way other than to provide lip service and co-optation of these words. When confronted with the question of why women of color don't come to women's music festivals, the answer by White feminists often transfers blame to women of color rather than engaging in an open and honest look at what White feminists may be doing to exclude and fail to create safe spaces.

Given that Utah is predominantly White (U.S. Census Bureau, 2008), dialogues about race, power, and privilege are frequently absent. This may lead to well-intentioned White grassroots activists wondering why people of color are not accepting their "open invitations" (Hayes, 2010) to join community activist groups. In what ways was the Living Our Visions group, then, attending or not attending to these dynamics? In the first

focus group, there was only one woman of color present, and 14 women who identified as White. Mary, a White member of the group, was the first to address race, power, and privilege, and did so in the first half hour of the group. She said,

> One of the things that I hope for is how we can be sure that we're being inclusive. It's sort of like looking at the women who, thinking about the women who aren't here today, and wondering why, where most of us are White and wondering how we create a space that includes and clearly is a safe space and a welcoming space for lesbians of color and lesbians with disabilities. I mean that's really important to me and I hope we can keep that in the conversation. (T1, P5)

As the conversation unfolded another White member, Cris, spoke about both the value and challenges of separatist spaces and how she did not want separatist space in this group to equal "the marginalization of people of color or marginalization of one kind of person or another kind of person. You know, ' us'es and the 'them's" (T1, P6). Within the first hour there was explicit talk about privilege and power, and although the conversation appeared abstract and removed at first, it soon moved within the boundaries of the group when Mary said, "And part of that is expecting myself and all of us who are part of this project to keep doing our own work, around privilege and power (T1, P12).

In the first meeting, members also shared the shadowy side of feminist history, which in the past (and often currently) has excluded women of color and focused primarily on issues pertinent to White, middle and upper class, straight women. For example, Alix shared, "Feminism was really White, middle class feminism for such a long time. And I think for me, my feminist consciousness has got to be more inclusive than focus on women or focus on lesbians," (T1, P13). For Alix, this became a distinction between "feminism" and "multicultural feminism" in the group (T1, P13). The first meeting was full of promise, creativity, and ideas, and Alix's vision for an intentional community was described as "building across ages and across racial/ ethnic groups and

religious/ spiritual backgrounds, and socioeconomic classes, and ability/ disability" – (T1, P13).

Despite very real struggles with race, power, and privilege, women's music festivals (WMF) began as events that were centered around the marginalization of women and feminist consciousness-raising efforts. Many artists, such as Alix Dobkin, would schedule a concert with the contingency that she would also facilitate a community dialogue with women about the needs of their community and community organizing efforts (D. Hawxhurst, personal communication, April 23, 2011). These dialogues can be challenging when women take the risks to look at their own identities of privilege and to hear others speak about their marginalization within this supposedly inclusive community. This legacy of WMFs has set the stage for women to be open and assertive with their concerns, ideas, questions, and to stay "at the table" through difficult conversations about privilege and oppression.

The legacy of sitting with discomfort allows for more complexity and for understanding phenomena such as intersecting identities. At the first meeting, a member of the group came out to the group as a Mormon lesbian and shared about the internal struggle she experienced walking in both communities, neither of which she wanted to give up. Therese said,

> I'm concerned about listening to all of you, it sounds like all of you, if not, well, most of you, are out. I'm not… I never used to tell people about this because it's, like, nobody goes to church. I don't care if they know I'm Mormon now or go to church; and the reason I go, like I told Linda, there's people there and they're like my family because I don't have any family. And maybe I'm a hypocrite. (T1, P19)

In the second meeting of LOV, a member of our group spoke about the intersections of her identities as a woman of color and a lesbian, and how homophobia

has sometimes isolated her from communities of color. Although participating in a still predominantly White group, Linda risked to say,

> In Utah people always talk about religion because they talk about the Mormon church, but for me, there's a whole Black community that I, that I have to figure out where I can intersect in. The homophobia is huge there. But a Black community, not to have that is devastating, and in some ways I don't have that because of homophobia. (T3, P33)

Linda reiterated the possibilities of seeing the LOV group as open to women of color. Immediately a White woman member, Chabela, attended to the racial dynamics in the room and asked "Are there, I mean, do you, do you know Black lesbian women who are, um, who would want to join the group? Does it feel like they don't have a space in here?" (T3, P33).

Although, in the first meeting, women were stating intentions for the community they would like to build, in the second meeting the building actually began by bringing ideas of race, power, privilege, and intersections of identities into the present moment of the group. Asking questions about why more women of color are not here, and if women of color were not feeling welcome here, opened the group up to critique itself in a very productive way. The group looked even deeper at itself as one White member, Alix, shared that she noticed how Linda, one of a few women of color in the group, was the first person to bring up awareness of race and privilege, and she noted,

> It's really good, Linda, that you brought that up; but I'm aware that you brought it up twice and I haven't brought it up and I'd like to take more responsibility for, um, for generating that dialogue, too, so that you don't have to be the one that does that. (T3, P34)

What followed was agreement from other White members of the group and a meaningful discussion about how the group could be open to the inclusion of women of various intersecting identities and their ideas and needs.

Initial Research Design and Data Collection

In the first four meetings, LOV members spent time at the beginning of each meeting orienting members to the research process by discussing PAR, feminist research, collaborative research, and what it means to be a co-researcher. For example, at the first meeting, Sue and I put audio recorders, pens, and notepads on each chair in the circle. I introduced the concept of playing with the identity of co-researcher and thinking about how we might each use the materials given to us today to capture important processes happening in our group. Sue Morrow remarked,

> I was picking up on a lot of interest on, just, the research part of this. If you will take notes about anything that you think is important, share them with us, we'll get them back to you, we'll just photocopy them and send them back to you. That would be very wonderful, too. So, you can decide how active a researcher you wish to be, by the notes that you share with us. (T1, P1)

Each member was encouraged to try on the role of researcher for herself to see how it fit for her, and we were also given the choice to decide how much we each wanted to be involved in the research processes.

One of the ideas that resurfaced in each meeting was the idea of inclusion of old lesbians who lived rurally or who were otherwise isolated from support and community. Gladys shared in the third meeting,

> We all have cliques and groups that we flow into. We're used to that. But I know people who have no one… [Speaking of an extremely closeted woman] I felt such sadness for her because there are women such as she everywhere. How do we address them? How do we give them a social network? Someone that,--they're afraid and alone and they're 80 or 85--that they can call? (T3, P8)

By the beginning of the fourth meeting, this idea of reaching out to isolated old lesbians began to take the form of a social action project. Once again, the talk of women's music festivals (WMF) emerged as a catalyst for talking about how lesbian community had

coalesced and grown bigger in the past. Members spoke of lesbian potluck culture, women's bookstores, lesbian dances, attending music festivals together, and which musicians came through Salt Lake City on a regular basis in the past. One member, Margie, remembered the culture of the dances in Salt Lake. She said, "And there was one group, and then there was another group, and there would be initially quite a few people coming and then sort of fizzle. In the '80s we used to meet at the church, the Unitarian church, and have the dances there" (T4, P21). Meg added to that herstory with her recollection,

> When we first moved here in 1993, there were 5 branches of A Woman's Place Bookstore. There were five, and they were huge, and they brought in individual concert performers. There were concerts going on all the time, and then it just sort of tapered off, but it's, like, those were great connecting places. Because that's how you'd get in touch with what's going on with lesbians in this community. (T4, P21)

Pretty soon Alix pulled together the ideas of community organizing, reaching out to lesbians, and women's music as a connector and talked about how she and her partner used to organize Alix Dobkin concerts. She said, "We'd sit all the way around the pool and some people would sit back in chairs in the shade and Alix would sit down and she would just lead this whole community discussion, and it was so cool" (T4, P26). Mary also continued the herstory related to Alix Dobkin concerts and explained that she would not come to town to do a concert unless she could also facilitate a community dialogue. Mary shared how Alix was now very active with OLOC (Old Lesbians Organizing for Change). Alix Dobkin is a name that old lesbians in Utah would know, and she has traveled here on a number of occasions. The group decided that younger lesbians would not know who she was, but this became less important because the women the group were targeting to reach is old lesbians. This conversation ignited a firestorm of ideas that

led from conducting research in order to find out where old lesbians were residing in our community and how we could reach them, to using an Alix Dobkin performance and community dialogue event to reach lesbians in the community who may be more isolated from support groups, and on to becoming a Utah chapter of OLOC. At this meeting, some members decided to pursue gathering materials on how to become an OLOC chapter, to be presented at the next meeting.

Other members decided to work on a grant proposal together that would be submitted as an LGBT educational program to fund an Alix Dobkin community dialogue and concert event. Two LOV co-researchers met at the University of Utah Marriott Library to work on a literature review and the grant proposal together. Another co-researcher created a sample flyer, to be included in the grant proposal. Other co-researchers got in touch with Alix Dobkin herself and OLOC to request materials for becoming a chapter of OLOC. On May 23, 2011, the group submitted a grant proposal to the American Psychological Association for LGBT Educational Programming funding. LOV also continued to discuss the pros and cons of becoming an OLOC chapter, because OLOC's values fit the values of LOV, and LOV wanted to honor the grassroots activist work that OLOC has been doing for years. With very little research training up to this point, this is what the group had already accomplished. Having completed its first several cycles of *plan-act-observe-reflect* (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2005), it was important to think about where the group would go next and the ripple effect of our group as it began to plan the Alix Dobkin event for the community.

Discussion

By participating in the dialogues above and making actions based on those dialogues, the Living Our Visions group said over and over again, "We are not insular. We are inclusive, and we are self-sustaining." Members of LOV understood that LOV served a purpose in their community, as did other community groups. Members felt it was important to both preserve the identity of the group as women- and lesbian-only while also making smart decisions about partnering with other groups to share resources and find out what innovative things other groups were offering to the community of old lesbians. As the group continued in its work, it would be important to attend to questions of separatism vs. collaboration in the community. When is it important to protect lesbian-only space in the group? In the future, it might be important to discuss the differences in the group process when I was present or absent (being the youngest and only woman who didn't identify as lesbian in the group). What made it easier or more difficult to discuss when I was present with the group? My dissertation depended on the continuation of this PAR project, so how could I, as a stakeholder, use my power to make decisions for the group? LOV was also committed to reaching out to lesbians who were isolated and without community support. Old lesbians are considered triply invisible; and, even without holding other marginalized identities, they may be blocked access to health care and to social and economic justice (Kehoe, 1988). The group began talking about race, power, and privilege, but how would members take these discussions to a deeper level and make equitable decisions that would be truly inclusive and welcoming of old lesbians of color, old lesbians with disabilities, and old lesbians with various intersecting

marginalized identities? LOV had stated its intentions of not being insular, and the next year might be a crucial time for following through on these intentions.

Although the group had launched into research and action, we had not included much research training at this point. How was this decision to not include research training affecting who considered themselves co-researchers at this point? Some members of LOV came with their own backgrounds in research, while others did not. Without more explicit conversation and skills training in research, we might be alienating potential co-researchers from joining, continuing, or participating in the research. Additionally, how would the group decide which research project to pursue together in the future? How could research serve this community? For many indigenous, LGBT, and communities of color, the history of exploitation by researchers might cause an appropriate response of distrust and suspicion around research. Would the LOV project be able to process potential suspicions around research and eventually find our way to research that would be liberating and serving the community of old lesbians? For women with busy lives and various commitments, how could research become something enjoyable?

Throughout the results section of the entry phase of the project, I also noticed an absence of dialogue between myself and my advisor, in terms of our own complex and many roles with one another throughout this project. Given our roles as academic researchers, as advisor/student, as members of LOV, as both insiders and outsiders, and as mentor/ mentee, the intersections and boundaries of these roles must have affected the group process in various ways. How could we attend to these multiple relationships in ways that would not feel like boundary crossings for either of us? For example, I noticed

that I hesitated before sharing quotes from my advisor, even though I did not hesitate sharing quotes from other members of LOV. I wondered when to use "my advisor" and when to use a pseudonym in my writing, and how she might perceive the way I was relating her words in text. It could be useful for both of us to engage in continued writing about our multiple roles with one another as they come up and what we've done to attend to them each time. How might I be able to tease apart the idea that she was my advisor and she was also a member of LOV? Would I able to completely see her as a member of LOV, or would she always also be my advisor, mentor, and role model?

I include these reflections because these are questions I stumbled upon "in process" as a student PAR researcher attempting collaborative research for the very first time. Herr and Anderson (2005) called this process "designing the plane while flying it" (p. 69). What I learned is that doing PAR requires being ok with discomfort and ambiguity. It requires a mindful presence when sitting with others and an acute attention to both interpersonal and group process. It has been an exciting project to be involved in, and one where I absolutely loved being immersed in the data. It was also challenging at times, and, as our group was really just getting off the ground, I imagined there were many more challenges to come. These questions and reflections served to offer hope, help, and examples to other students or faculty who may be interested in beginning a PAR project.

CHAPTER 3

METHOD

> Lesbian activists, with a history of building community in a hostile context, have been pushed in immediate and concrete ways to confront culture- and class-based obstacles to sisterhood. Thus, writings that emerge from these contexts often have the grounded clarity that can come only from actual face-to-face struggle considered too important to abandon – struggle upon which survival depends. (DeVault, 1999, p. 44)

Paradigm Underpinning the Research

In this participatory action research study, I documented the community-building and social change efforts of the Living Our Visions project, a PAR group of old lesbians living in northern Utah. The methods of this study were guided by feminist multicultural and social justice paradigms, which matched with the stated foundational philosophies of the LOV project. Traditional quantitative psychological research does not discuss its postpositivist paradigm, because the underlying philosophies are assumed. However, PAR and qualitative inquiry approaches may select from a variety of different philosophies and epistemologies; thus, it is important to devote time to the choice and use of paradigm. After explaining the theoretical underpinnings, I define and explain the use of PAR in this study. Next, I describe and discuss my roles as well as co-researcher roles of the study. From there, I describe the research design, process, and data collection

procedures. Next, I outline data management and analysis procedures. I discuss various criteria of trustworthiness that I used in this study in order to enhance the quality and stay true to a feminist multicultural and social justice perspective. Finally, I name ethical considerations of this study and discuss how I attended to them throughout the study.

Feminist Epistemologies and Methodologies

Members of the Living Our Visions project unanimously decided to ground the group in feminist multicultural principles and ethics. Thus, feminist epistemologies and methodologies provided the foundation of the framework for this study. In this section, I will discuss epistemologies and methodologies together because one informs the other and they may overlap at times. For example, feminist researchers are concerned with theories of power dynamics in society as well as within the research process itself (DeVault, 1999). They may bring their knowledge and understanding of power dynamics to bear on the research process, documenting their own negotiations of power with co-researchers and participants as an additional source of data.

Feminist epistemologies/ methodologies therefore include explicit analyses of power that intersect with individuals' and communities' various identities and contexts. Collins (1990) raised issues of power in the production of knowledge and paved the way for feminist researchers to critique traditional forms of knowledge creation and to unearth subjugated knowledge from communities of marginalized individuals such as African American women. In the LOV project, group members shifted the center of knowledge production and, thus, the balance of power, from old gay men's experiences or old

straight men and women's experiences to those of old lesbian women through their focus group meetings and activist work together.

DeVault (1999) noted three criteria for participating in feminist theory and research: (a) "Feminists seek a methodology that will do the work of 'excavation,' shifting the focus of standard practice from men's concerns in order to reveal the locations and perspectives of (all) women"; (b) "feminists seek a science that minimizes harm and control in the research process"; and (c) "feminists seek a methodology that will support research of value to women, leading to social change or action beneficial to women" (pp. 31-32). By shifting the focus of knowledge production, creating liberatory research processes, and enacting social change for women, LOV also engaged in social change that impacts all individuals of various intersecting identities, not just individuals holding the identity of woman or lesbian. Ultimately, the idea that "feminism is for everybody" (hooks, 2000) works to change the entire system of domination and subordination for all people caught in the web of oppression.

Some traditional philosophers have criticized feminist epistemologies as an oxymoron and as a theory of politics rather than of philosophy (DeVault, 1999; Nye, 2000). However, Alcoff and Potter (1993) noted the "uneasy alliance" (p. 1) of feminism and philosophy and at the same time vetted feminist philosophy as a true philosophy that tackles not only the problems of politics and identities but also the production of knowledge. They wrote, "Once we recognize that values, politics, and knowledge are *intrinsically* connected, the hierarchies and divisions within philosophy will be replaced by more holistic and coherentist models" (p. 3). Rather than look for one unifying feminist philosophy, Longino (1993) proposed the idea that multiple feminist theories are

important because they attend to local cultures and communities of women rather than putting forth a model of a "universal" woman that is false and only serves to perpetuate the myth that "what is liberatory for us is liberatory for all women" (Alcoff & Potter, 1993, p. 14). Longino's proposal resonated with Mohanty's (2006) critique of the myth of the "universal" woman as colonizing and oppressive to women of the Global South. Nelson (1993) extended this idea by saying that communities, rather than individuals, were the main producers and holders of knowledge and that each community may hold different sets of knowledge that fit for that group. As the Living Our Visions project moved forward over the last 3 years, members generated knowledge together in a collaborative way that supported the community of old lesbian feminists they co-created. Nelson's and others' visions of communities giving birth to knowledge out of the wisdom and lived experience of the community and subsequent action also fits with the process of participatory action research.

The narration of experience of a woman's life also becomes a core of knowledge production in feminist epistemologies. Again, traditional philosophers have critiqued women's experiences as unphilosophical because they are not "objective" truth and also come dangerously close to recreating structures of domination through devising categories of group identity (Harding, 1991; Scott, 1988). However, Stone-Mediatore (2000) analyzed Chandra Mohanty's rereading of the use of experience in feminist epistemologies through the work of Gloria Anzaldua and found radical elements of resistance to dominant discourses in Anzaldua's narration of her life experiences. Stone-Mediatore redefined experience "as a resource for confronting and renarrating the complex forces that constitute experience" (p. 118) and proposed that this then creates

"perceptual clarity" (p. 118) and a new consciousness that paves the way for agency and action.

It's not simply the recording of a woman's experience that leads to social change, but how the experience is internalized, reflected upon, recorded, and then disseminated to other individuals and communities. For example, a member of LOV spoke to the group about her experience of sexism at LGBTQ pride festivals she attended. Together, group members reflected on their own experiences of this and dialogued about the oppression of women within the LGBTQ community. They audio-recorded their dialogue about it and then decided right then what to do about it. Co-researchers rallied support for the member who brought up the experience and decided to march together in solidarity with her in the pride parade. While marching, not only did they provide a corrective emotional experience for group members who had experienced sexism from the LGBTQ community and homophobia from the larger Salt Lake City community, but they also created visibility and acknowledgement of old lesbian concerns and needs. The initial sharing and recording of experience provided the foundation for this change to eventually occur.

The Living Our Visions project focused on questions of social science research, specifically those in the realm of psychology. Feminist psychological researchers aim to transform the lives of people who hold marginalized identities and contribute towards creating a socially just world. Irish feminist psychologist Geraldine Moane (2006) spoke to the overtly political nature of feminist epistemologies and wrote, "A feminist political psychology must aim to transform internalized oppression if it is to facilitate taking action, thus linking a psychological analysis to a political analysis" (p. 74). Moane's

feminist psychological framework fits with feminist philosophy but adds a feminist critique of psychology and its focus on individual pathology. She boldly stated that there is no psychological analysis without a political and contextual analysis and that anything that falls short of that may do further harm to individuals and serve the current system of oppression.

In their chapter exploring the practices of feminist research, Grossman et al. (1997) concluded that a feminist epistemological approach to research in the field of psychology includes the following tenets: "It (a) illuminates the lives of women and girls, (b) gives voice to marginalized women, (c) develops a critique of the discipline of psychology, and (d) reflects feminist values" (p. 89). These tenets are broad, but they specifically relate to this study. In their discussion about whether "feminist psychology" is an inherent contradiction, Fine and Gordon (1995) pointed out that moving women from being the "objects" of psychological conversations to "subjects" in itself has "interrupted the discipline [of psychology]" (p. 1). In this study with the Living Our Visions project, we took the next equitable step forward by moving old lesbian women, who are considered at least triply invisible, from "subjects" to "co-researchers" and valued knowledge producers (Kehoe, 1988). In addition, this project also provided an opportunity for co-researchers to engage in social action projects that aim to transform the lives of old lesbians and ultimately the LGBTQ community.

Postcolonial Perspectives and Feminist Psychological Research

> They say it came first from Africa, carried in the screams of the enslaved; that it was the death bane of the Tainos, uttered just as one world perished and another began; that it was a demon drawn into Creation through a nightmare door that was cracked open in the Antilles. *Fukú americanus*, or more colloquially, fukú –

> generally a curse or doom of some kind . . . No matter what its name or provenance, it is believed that the arrival of Europeans on Hispaniola unleashed the fukú on the world, and we've all been in the shit ever since. (Diaz, 2007, p. 1)

Feminist psychological researchers have critiqued the field of psychology and traditional psychological researchers for contributing to what Diaz called the *Fuku americanus* through the focus on individual problems; the privileging of White, male, cisgender, heterosexual, able-bodied, middle and upper class U.S. citizens; the promotion of assimilation to White U.S. culture; and the practice of psychological colonization with marginalized, indigenous, and/or international individuals/ cultures over the years (Gerstein, Heppner, Aegisdottir, Leung, & Norsworthy, 2009; Martin-Baró, 1994; Prilleltensky & Nelson, 2002). According to Hall and Livingston (2003), colonization occurs when a country or political power settles in an area that was already inhabited by indigenous people. For example, the country of Haiti was colonized by the French, and, although indigenous Haitians had their own customs, language, and culture, eventually they were forced to learn new customs and language determined by the colonizing country, France. Psychological colonization picks up where physical/ geographical colonization left off. Psychological colonization occurs when the colonizing country creates norms or standards of ideas and cultural practices, and the individual indigenous to that country must assimilate to these practices or be deemed deviant or pathological. Although many psychologists may be well intentioned when it comes to practicing crosscultural competencies, without a critical and complex understanding of power, oppression, and privilege, the dynamics of psychological colonization are repeated within marginalized communities over and over again. In fact, even with a critical eye

towards these matters, one cannot necessarily avoid privilege, hierarchy, and the trap of expertness in psychological research and practice (Lykes & Moane, 2009; Norsworthy & Khuankaew, 2006).

Norsworthy and Khuankaew (2006) gave examples of the invitation to psychologically colonize that emerged when co-facilitating workshops together in the Global South. As a White psychologist from the U.S., Norsworthy is often considered to be the facilitator, and Khuankaew, a Thai activist of color, is often considered to be the translator at worst and not as knowledgeable at best by their audiences. Without a complex understanding of what is happening, Norsworthy could easily accept the invitation to colonize her co-facilitator and workshop participants by speaking first or more often and by taking up more space in the workshop in other ways. Instead, they both work together to address these recurring issues and model a decolonizing and equitable cofacilitator relationship.

Many psychological researchers and practitioners do not follow this model and, instead, have created a history of participating in colonial practices such as top-down relationships; patriarchy and paternalism; and "othering" those who do not hold dominant identities such as White, able-bodied, middle and upper class, and heterosexual. However, a hopeful and growing number of feminist activists and helping professionals have claimed the identity of activist and acknowledge the political realities of psychological research and practice. These individuals have engaged in research processes that aim to create narratives of resistance to psychological colonization and marginalization. They have also taken a particular standpoint of social justice solidarity and have actively chosen to do their own work

in unlearning privilege and creating truly collaborative relationships across borders (Horne & Matthews, 2004; Lykes & Moane, 2009; McIntyre & Lykes, 1998; Norsworthy & Khuankaew, 2006; Smith, 2005; Smith & Romero, 2010).

Another example comes from Norsworthy and Khuankaew (2006) and Norwood and Zahau (2011). They documented the ways that Western privilege and power crop up in their own working relationships in activism/ helping professions across Global North (e.g., United States) – South (e.g., Thailand) lines, as well as the process they use to arrive at creating the kind of relationship that embraces power-sharing models. Horne and Matthews (2004) have written extensively of the feminist-based international consultation model they use that equalizes power and promotes capacity-building when working across "borders" such as geographical, political, social status, and identity. McIntyre and Lykes (1998) wrote about White privilege and other power differences that emerged in their feminist-based participatory action research in Guatemala, from varying perspectives within the project.

Within the larger field of psychology, the specialty of counseling psychology has begun to incorporate and promote the use of critical feminist and indigenous frameworks as well as participatory action research in order to reverse the *Fuku americanus* and move beyond psychological colonization, and instead towards justice and inclusive forms of knowledge production (Fine, 2007; Kidd & Kral, 2005; Smith & Romero, 2010). Although the impact is still in its infancy, Michelle Fine (2007) put forth a call for counseling psychology to expand the "methodological imagination" of research through taking a decidedly overtly

political stance in order to produce social justice methods and research in psychology. She also encouraged interdisciplinary work and the incorporation of participatory action research approaches to help us achieve this expansion of the imagination of a socially just world.

Participatory Action Research

Maguire (1987) succinctly described the need for participatory action research approaches and wrote,

> Ordinary people are rarely considered knowledgeable, in the scientific sense, or capable of knowing about their own reality. They are excluded from the increasingly more specialized research industry, barred by the requirements of the "scientific method," and by intimidating concepts and jargon, money, time, skills, and experience. In addition to being excluded from meaningful participation in knowledge creation processes, oppressed and ordinary people are subjected to research processes which treat them as objects and things. Hence, traditional research processes are often alienating and dehumanizing. (p. 36)

What happens when generations of individuals and communities are treated as if they have no business in the realms of knowledge production? What happens when generations of individuals are given the message that they are not capable, insightful, or experts on their own lives? This is one very potent form of psychological colonization that many psychological researchers have been perpetrating for years, often unintentionally. Participatory action research is an approach to research that explicitly works to undo the impact of colonizing research, and it allows us to hold out hope that healing and justice are available for people in the here and now. Not only does it allow marginalized individuals to liberate themselves from oppression, but it also allows those of us who hold dominant social identities to know that we are all caught in the web of

oppression together and to illustrate the importance of each of us examining our own roles and statuses of power. Finally, engaging in participatory action research allows people with both dominant and marginalized identities to know that their own liberation is bound up with the others' liberation, and that we must work together in solidarity to achieve peace and justice.

Through partnering with a community made up of old lesbians to engage in participatory action research together, the Living Our Visions project actively engaged in a critique of traditional power hierarchies in psychological research as well as the creation of new power structures, knowledge, and voices in social justice action. According to Grossman et al. (1997), a PAR project can subvert these traditional power structures by expanding the role of researcher so that the research "subjects" can become the recorders, interpreters and spokespersons for their own experiences. Participatory action research comes in many iterations, much like feminist philosophy, and has deep roots in Paulo Freire's Popular Education model (1970); Kurt Lewin's social psychology (Lewin & Gold, 1999); various critiques of psychological colonization (Martin-Baró, 1994; Memmi, 1965; Tuhiwai-Smith, 1999); and analyses of forms of knowledge production (Fay, 1975; Habermas, 1971). Brydon-Miller (1997) reported that the first use of the term "participatory research" occurred by Marja Swantz in the 1970s when she described working in Tanzania in a way that "drew on the knowledge and expertise of community members in creating locally controlled development projects" (p. 658). Since that time, PAR has continued to grow and spread across disciplines and communities as a valid form of knowledge production and social justice action. As the spread of PAR occurred, the mainstream field of psychology has been forced to grapple with issues of

power and privilege within the research process and with making its commitment to social justice a reality, with which it is still grappling. Traditional views of psychology include the belief that politics and psychology don't mix well and that reliability and validity in psychological research should include the tenets of being objective and value-free (Brydon-Miller, 1997).

However, as the field of psychology and, in particular, the specialty of counseling psychology came to heed Speight and Vera's (2004) call for a strong commitment to social justice, the field has had to discover new ways to conceptualize, design, implement, and evaluate research. PAR emerged as an approach that attends to social justice within every piece of a research process - from conceptualization to evaluation. Additionally, PAR adds an action component, where research is taken out of the academic world and implemented in real time in order to make a social change impact. Today, PAR is in its infancy within counseling psychology, but there are important efforts being made in order to move it forward as a valid and reliable approach to research (Fine, 2007; Kidd & Kral, 2005; Morrow, Castañeda-Sound, & Abrams, 2012; Smith, Rosenzweig, & Schmidt, 2010). Other than its relatively unknown status to many counseling psychologists, other obstacles to PAR becoming a utilized form of research include the fact that many faculty advisors and students do not know how to start the process of PAR (Herr & Anderson, 2005). In Chapter 2 of this proposal, I addressed some of the questions that faculty/ student mentor pairs may come across when deciding whether to engage in PAR for research programs or dissertation work. Additionally, Smith, Rosenzweig, and Schmidt (2010) found that reports on PAR projects vary widely in terms of writing style, content, and quality/ trustworthiness. They then scoured and

analyzed eight years of PAR literature in order to formulate best practices for reporting PAR in the counseling psychology literature. I have incorporated their suggestions in the methods that follow, as a standard for ensuring quality and trustworthiness of this study.

Definitions of PAR

Herr and Anderson (2005) delineated participatory action research (PAR) from other types of action research and wrote, "Action research is inquiry that is done *by* or *with* insiders to an organization or community, but never *to* or *on* them. It is a reflective process… and generally requires that some form of evidence be presented to support assertions" (p. 3). In their chapter on PAR, Kemmis and McTaggart (2005) shared the process of PAR that includes "planning a change; acting and observing a process and consequences of the change; reflecting on these processes and consequences; replanning; acting and observing again; reflecting again, and so on…" (p. 563). Essentially, PAR is a process by which academic and community researchers intentionally come together to examine issues of power, knowledge production, social locations, privilege, and oppression both within their PAR group and in their larger community. PAR groups intentionally change the power structures, rely on the expertise of community members or "insiders," and relocate knowledge production and wisdom back to the community.

Participation, as Defined by LOV

One of the best practices of PAR, outlined by Smith, Rosenzweig, and Schmidt (2010), includes explaining the level of participation for members/ co-researchers of the project. It is important for readers to be able to trace the audit trail of participation and to

know how participation was discussed as well as how it manifested in the group. If the work of the PAR group is decided upon and carried out mostly by academic researchers, then that would undermine the philosophies and methods of the project. By openly discussing participation, we are cuing the audience to whose points of view, life experiences, and social locations are represented. I envisioned participation in two forms: Participation with an upper-case P and participation with a lower-case p. Participation with an upper-case P describes the participation level of the group as a whole. In what direction is the group headed, in terms of participation? What level of participation has the group come to consensus about, and how will they continually attend to this level of participation? Members of LOV openly discussed the issue of participation in the group on multiple occasions. During the beginning months of the project, Sue Morrow, Donna Hawxhurst, and I initiated conversations about definitions and levels of participation on different occasions in order to create a norm that it is appropriate to ask questions and critique the group, especially in terms of participation. At one meeting, I drew Arnstein's (1969) ladder of participation, and we discussed the advantages and drawbacks of each rung of the ladder. The rungs are representative of a continuum of participation and include (from least participatory to most participatory) the following forms of participation: Manipulation, therapy, informing, consultation, placation, partnership, delegated power, and citizen control. We talked about if and how we could achieve "citizen control" in the Living Our Visions project, where the direction and decisions made by the group required the full engagement of women identifying as old lesbians in the group. In this study I initiated an explicit discussion of participation at a focus group meeting, to revisit the ladder of participation, and have the group come up with strategies

and/ or principles that match the group's stated level of participation. One example we discussed was to cut out "rung-shaped" pieces of paper, and ask co-researchers to create their own rungs, and then experiment with revising the ladder to fit the perspectives of the group. Using an experiential activity such as this allowed members' wisdom and creativity to guide the PAR process and the direction of the group.

The second type is participation with a lower-case p. This type of participation describes how individual members of the project engaged and participated in the group. For example, in the LOV Project, each member came to the group with different interests and different statuses of being out in the larger community as an old lesbian. Some members were more interested in the activism part of the LOV project and wanted to devote more time and energy participating in discussions and actions centered around activism. Other members found their participation leaning more heavily in the direction of building support, connections, and relationships among group members. We attended to these issues throughout the duration of the study. Where were members' comfort zones in terms of personal participation, and where were the growth edges? What was the right balance of staying in our comfort zones to create a safe community versus pushing ourselves individually in the group in order to grow and deepen the work of the group?

The Entry Process for LOV

For every PAR group, this cycle of plan-act-observe-reflect (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2005) begins with some kind of an "entry process" (Herr & Anderson, 2005, p. 92). The entry process occurs when a PAR group is in its formation stage and is starting to build relationships and negotiate roles and power both inside and outside of the

group. The entry process should be handled with care and thoughtfulness by the PAR group because it is critical in determining the vision and practical pathways of the group. It is also a form of crossing borders that requires everyone involved to look at issues of power and oppression in order to not recreate the kinds of psychological colonization that can occur in many traditional forms of research. Chapter 2 described the experiences of the entry process of the LOV project and included the following processes: (a) establishing credibility; (b) identifying stakeholders; (c) building relationships amongst women with marginalized identities; (d) co-creating a group process; (e) issues of feminism and racial, social, and economic justice; and (f) initial research design and data collection. In that chapter, I demonstrated the ways LOV attended to each of those components since the group's formation in 2010. I also discussed strategies that emerged as LOV engaged in the continual cycle of participatory action research, which includes planning, acting, observing, and reflecting (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2005).

Research Design

Researcher as Instrument/ Horizons of Understanding

Although not every research approach acknowledges bias, according to Morrow (2005), "All research is subject to researcher bias" (p. 254). When I refer to the word bias, I assume that this word includes all of the belief systems, social identities, worldviews, assumptions, and biases that each of us comes to the research process with. In feminist and PAR approaches to research, the researcher may embrace and utilize bias rather than "bracket" it off into one quarantined section of the study, never to be heard from or seen again. When a researcher embraces and utilizes bias in the service of

producing quality research, this is called using reflexivity. A researcher's background, identities, contexts, interests, and assumptions all affect the research process and outcomes; and so it is important to investigate and explore the ways these support or work against the research process and/or the empowerment of co-researchers.

For example, as an academic researcher in this study, I identify as a White and mixed ethnicity (Syrian/Irish), queer, feminist and social justice cisgender woman activist in her late 30s who is also a doctoral candidate in counseling psychology. In Chapter 2 I described how I came to be involved with research around later life issues and concerns of old lesbians. My mentoring relationships with several old lesbians are biases that I have that have actually facilitated the creation of the Living Our Visions project and have worked in favor of the development of a PAR project. At the same time, these deeply personal ties to the project for both myself and my dissertation chair, Dr. Sue Morrow, also had the potential to interfere with the PAR study at different points throughout the project. Possibilities existed that our relationships in the group or our motivation to see the project thrive could have kept us from searching for disconfirming evidence or engaging in critical analysis of the project. At times we attended to these potential issues through the use of focus group discussion, where we asked co-researchers to talk about what was working and not working in the group, which allowed the group to engage in observation and reflection and eventually action by ending with a conversation of strategies for moving forward. Morrow (2005) recommended several other strategies for self-reflection throughout the research process that include keeping a self-reflective journal; integrating one's understandings into the analysis; using a peer team of debriefers to provide feedback; and looking for disconfirming evidence during coding

and analyses. These strategies of attending to bias served as a series of checks and balances throughout the research process that increased the trustworthiness and quality of the research. Not only did these strategies allow us to be proactive about the negative impact of bias, but they also allowed us to reflect on how we can use bias, assumptions, worldviews, relationships, etc., in service of the Living Our Visions project.

Co-Researchers/ Members

Co-researchers for this study included the same women from the predissertation research study. One co-researcher died before the conclusion of the study, which inevitably impacted our group process and focus. Please see Chapter 2 for initial information regarding members and recruitment. In this chapter I will give a picture of who actually gathered around the table at LOV meetings and provide some more in depth information about the differences and similarities among members. At the time of this writing, there were currently 17 active members of LOV (including member who died February 2013), and many women attended every meeting. The average number of attendees at each meeting was 12. Out of the 17 active members, 4 identified as women of color, and 12 identified as White. I identify as Syrian American but also identify as White because I have never been perceived as anything but White by others and carry the privileges and benefits that come with that identity. One year ago the group decided to close itself to new members, except for the addition of one to two more women of color in order to bring more diverse voices and perspectives to the work of LOV. The group closed because most members felt that the group had established a certain level of connection and intimacy both as a group and also among members. Although some

women in OLOC have voiced an interest in being a part of LOV, LOV members felt committed to helping OLOC establish their own group bonding and intimacy with one another. Although most members felt this way, it is important to note that not all members felt it was okay to close the group and there were ongoing discussions around this issue.

In terms of social class and educational backgrounds, there was somewhat of a range within the group. At least 12 women in the group completed a college degree, and at least 8 women have completed a graduate degree of some kind (including myself). The group had some conversations about social class and education and which voices were represented or invisible in LOV. The LOV dialogues centered around academic versus community voices in LOV, and the voices and experiences of rural lesbians in Utah and how to reach out to them though they may be isolated and fear reprisal or excommunication from their LDS community for being associated with a lesbian group. We also discussed economic justice issues when talking about housing alternatives for old lesbians, who often earn less for retirement than their gay male peers due to the gender gap in pay. We engaged in dialogues about how social class and economic justice issues impacted the ways that members interacted with LOV and with one another, and members shared experiences where they felt it was a challenge to share their perspective due to the majority of social class and educational privilege in the group. Additionally, the group explored some of the intersections of social class with other identities such as activist and feminist identities and how we engage in activist work.

The identity of being a feminist is somewhat tied to social class identity in the group. Several women in the group identified as long-time feminists and discussed

learning about feminism in college years ago. One feminist activist member of LOV actually moved to Utah more than 20 years ago in order to work on getting the Equal Rights Amendment passed (although it ultimately did not pass). For other members, feminism was a relatively new identity. The group discussed taking a feminist multicultural approach during several group meetings, and some of these discussions are detailed in Chapter 2.

In terms of age, I was the youngest member of the group at 38 years old, and our oldest active member was 74 years old. Besides me, the youngest co-researchers in the group were in their late 40s, so the average age range was between 48 and 73 years old. Although the group focused on the needs of lesbians in their 60th year and older, LOV attracted quite a few women younger than 59 because they wanted to work on issues relevant to their community now so that when they are old they can come to rely on this support network and the social change efforts of the group.

Lastly, the social and religious context of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS, or Mormon, Church) in Utah provided many opportunities for conversations about the intersections of lesbian and religious/ spiritual identities within LOV. Several women in LOV grew up in LDS households. This is significant because the LDS Church actively teaches its members that acting on same-sex attractions (SSA) is a sin, and encourages its LGBT/ SSA members to engage in reorientation therapy or risk excommunication from their LDS community and being shunned by their families. At least two co-researchers of LOV discussed the tensions they personally experienced between their lesbian and LDS identities, noting that at times the only way to resolve the tension was to leave the LDS Church, move away from Utah in order to explore their

lesbian identity, and live among an accepting LGBT community. At the same time, although out lesbians in Utah live in an oppressive context, many members of LOV have found tight-knit committed and politically active LGBT communities in Utah. This may be due to the fact that many LGBT individuals cannot afford to be apathetic about what goes on in Utah politically, and they have banded together to work hard for LGBT equity. Despite the openly hostile political climate for LGBT individuals in Utah, as of December 20, 2013, a federal court struck down the ban on same-sex couple marriages and Utah LGBT couples stood in line to be married in their home state. At least 2 LOV participant couples were married in Salt Lake City after the overturn of the ban, with many LOV members declaring this a historic moment in one of the most socially conservative states in the country. Although the state appealed the federal court decision, resulting in stopping same-sex marriages at the present time, activists are optimistic about regaining their rights.

In Chapter 2, I wrote about members of the LOV project varying in their primary interests in the group and that some women were most interested in relational connections and support, while others were interested in activism and social change, and others were interested in research and documentation of the work of LOV. In at least three focus group meetings, members discussed and explored their interests in the group. In the current study, we discussed these interests again in order to plan effectively for actions such as the creation of the Alix Dobkin/ Utah OLOC chapter event. Focus group meetings took place at the homes of our members. We often met at the home of one couple, although at times we drove outside of Salt Lake City to meet at the home of another couple who live in Brigham City (about an hour north of Salt Lake). Every

meeting was considered a potluck as well as a focus group meeting, and each member brought a dish to share. We spent about an hour connecting and sharing food, and then we engaged in a 2-hour focus group meeting together that was audio recorded by me. Members also engaged with one another between meetings over the email listserv, although most of our contact with one another was face-to-face. Members continued to support one another outside of the group. For example, members aided and supported a member who had to have shoulder and knee surgery in March 2013. The member who died in February 2013 was supported by many in the group through gifts of food, help around the house, home visits, and transportation to and from the hospital.

In Chapter 2, I wrote about how my role with the Living Our Visions project evolved from workshop facilitator to group member and co-facilitator. Through the past year and a half of the study my role continued to evolve. In February, 2013, I was matched with a doctoral internship in psychology at UC-Davis in California. In July 2013 I moved to California to start my internship and LOV members planned a going away dinner with cards and gifts and our final connections together. Since leaving the group and the state of Utah, LOV has gotten together one time for dinner, and one LOV member reported that the dinner felt more superficial and without guidance or structure, and shared it felt disappointing.

Academic and Community Researcher Relationships

Every member of the Living Our Visions group was considered a co-researcher and knowledge producer within the project. Each member positioned herself as an "insider" or an "outsider" to the participatory action research project, but the roles were

not necessarily mutually exclusive, and defining them was a complex process. Being considered an insider meant that one was a part of the community or the context under study. In the Living Our Visions project, women who identified as old lesbians were considered insiders within the project. They carried a unique perspective into the community that could only come from their marginalized status in society and the development of the old lesbian community in response to this marginalization. Additionally, they understood the nuances and complexities of old lesbian culture, communication, and relationships in ways that other women could not understand because they did not live in this community. Old lesbians who were 60 years of age and older also belonged to a particular set of historical and political circumstances and events that younger women did not experience. For example, many women 60+ in LOV had experiences of being activists in the Civil Rights Movement, the Women's Liberation Movement, the Gay Liberation Movement, and/or the Daughters of Bilitis. Younger lesbians, queer women, and straight women involved in this project (which includes myself) may be considered outsiders to the project in many ways due to different sets of herstories and experiences. However, these roles were complicated because many co-researchers of LOV held both insider and outsider identities in the group. For example, my advisor, Sue Morrow, held an insider identity because she identifies as an old lesbian feminist and has been part of that community for a very long time. At the same time, Sue held an outsider identity because she also comes to the LOV project as an academic researcher and someone who positions herself from within the traditional systems of knowledge production.

Herr and Anderson (2005) stated that an ideal form of PAR uses a process of "reciprocal collaboration" and what is called "insider-outsider teams" (p. 38). Insider-outsider teams work towards full reciprocity so that each co-researcher involved in the project possesses agency, no matter their institutional affiliation or sources of societal power. They also reported that this truly collaborative form of PAR can be difficult to achieve because it takes time and effort to fully engage in conversations about stakeholder negotiation, reciprocity, and levels of participation that fit for everyone. However, these insider-outsider teams can be created if these issues are addressed in a pilot study or if the group meets for some period of time before entering into the actual study. The Living Our Visions produced a pilot study (see Chapter 2) where negotiations of stakeholders and other facets of the entry process into a PAR study were analyzed and discussed. The goal of the current study was to start from the foundation that LOV built over the 1st year in creating a truly collaborative and equitable insider-outsider team. In order to continue this foundational work as an insider-outsider team, LOV co-researchers had to consistently engage in self-reflection as well as group discussions of stakeholders, participation, agency, power dynamics, and representations.

Herr and Anderson (2005) reported that there are other forms of positionality to pay attention to within a PAR study beyond the roles and positions within the proposed study. For example, it can be important to pay attention to dominant and oppressed groups within society, levels of formal and informal power within a community, or positions that relate to psychological colonization and how those play out within particular communities. Please see Chapter 2 to read more about how LOV attended to

multiple positionalities over the 1st year. LOV's attention to these concerns provided a springboard for continuing and deepening this work within the current study.

Finally, Patricia Hill Collins (1990) warned of the importance of paying attention to the position termed the "outsider-within," while also avoiding the pitfalls that can occur regarding this position with participatory action research. Collins (1986) described the "outsider-within" in the following ways:

> Some of the potential benefits of outsider within status include: (1) Simmel's definition of "objectivity" as "a peculiar composition of nearness and remoteness, concern and indifference"; (2) the tendency for people to confide in a "stranger" in ways they never would with each other; and (3) the ability of the "stranger" to see patterns that may be more difficult for those immersed in the situation to see. Mannheim (1936) labels the "strangers" in academia "marginal intellectuals" and argues that the critical posture such individuals bring to academic endeavors may be essential to the creative development of academic disciplines themselves. (p. S15)

The outsider-within is an important position within PAR because individuals who hold this position are marginalized within society. In order to survive and thrive within an oppressive environment (such as those created by homophobia or ageism), these individuals must critically observe and interpret the oppressor's actions and behaviors, thus offering a unique and complex understanding of the dominant positions of a society. In other words, marginalized individuals possess knowledge that people holding dominant identities cannot fully know, and this subjugated knowledge is critical for manifesting social change. For example, as a queer academic researcher in a heterosexual relationship, there are experiences that I cannot know about living within a homophobic society because my heterosexual privilege divides me from that knowledge. By centering the wisdom, knowledge, and experiences of old lesbians within this PAR project, we are participating in a decolonizing and truly collaborative form of knowledge production

because we are not reproducing the power hierarchies present within our greater society (i.e., heterosexual experiences are privileged and represented over LGBT experiences).

Collins (1990) reported that there is a catch to attending to the position of outsider-within and that, in order to avoid the dilemma of assuming a constant outsider-within position, co-researchers must continually interrogate this position and recognize that individuals may also hold other dominant positions along with their outsider-within positions. For example, a co-researcher of LOV may hold an outsider-within position as an old lesbian woman in society, but she may also hold the dominant identities and associated privileges of being White, middle class, and able-bodied. If LOV members do not continually attend to the intersection of their multiple identities within the study, then the research runs the risk of a flat and two-dimensional understanding of the research questions as well as reproducing psychological colonization and power hierarchies, an antithesis to the goals of PAR.

Taking Leave

From the beginning of the Living Our Visions project in October 2010, my advisor and I envisioned the long-term potential of the group and our desire for the group to continue beyond the scope of my dissertation. We facilitated conversations at LOV meetings in order to talk about this and to explain that my dissertation is one part of LOV, but clearly not the main purpose for the group, and that our hope is that LOV would continue meeting and expanding after the conclusion of my dissertation project. I was clear about my dissertation timeline as well and when I would step out of the project due to the requirements of my doctoral program such as internship and job applications.

In February 2013, I was matched with a doctoral internship in psychology at the UC-Davis Counseling Center in California. LOV members planned a goodbye dinner for me and my partner in June 2013. We did not audio record this final meeting together and instead chose to spend our time connecting with one another and remembering good times over the last few years. Without my or my advisor's prompting, LOV members planned a meeting in October 2013 to get together and talk about issues related to the group. LOV members appeared open and flexible regarding the future of LOV and acknowledged that the group may expand and transform beyond its former ideas depending on the evolving needs of the old lesbian community. However, my advisor reported that the meeting felt more like a social gathering than anything else and the group did not discuss the future of the group in terms of PAR or activism.

Sources of Data

The Living Our Visions project took a participatory action research approach to qualitative methods that were consistent with a feminist and social justice-oriented paradigm. Qualitative focus groups were used as a foundation and jumping off point for data collection. As discussed in Chapter 2, grounded theory methods of coding were appropriate to use with feminist and PAR approaches to research (Charmaz, 2005; Fassinger, 2005). In May 2013, I participated in a half-day workshop with Kathy Charmaz titled "Grounded Theory Methodologies for Social Justice Projects." I modeled the coding and analysis of this study after Charmaz's approach to focus on community-based knowledge discovery and issues of power, privilege and oppression that emerged in the social change work of the LOV project.

At first glance grounded theory (GT) methods and PAR may seem disparate in nature due to their foundations in different paradigms. GT has been characterized within positivist (Age, 2011; Teram, Schachter, & Stalker, 2005) and constructivist (Charmaz, 2006) paradigms, both of which may differ significantly from the radical roots of PAR and its critical-ideological paradigm (Morrow, 2005). However, looking only at the different traditions of these research approaches sets up false dichotomy between GT and PAR and falsely widens the gap between them. Taking a closer look at GT and PAR uncovers the fact that both approaches are oriented towards processes, and both are especially equipped for working with complex social processes such as action research. Both approaches also engage in a cyclical, or recursive process. For GT, this process involves a continuous cycle of data collection, analysis, and writing. In PAR, this process includes the plan-act-observe-reflect cycle (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2005). Additionally, in both approaches, the data are grounded in the words and lived experiences of the participants/ co-researchers (Teram, Schachter, & Stalker, 2005). Finally, in a PAR project with old lesbians, there may be relevance to other old lesbian communities in seeing a theoretical process model for building old lesbian community. Thus, combining GT methods with a PAR approach in the LOV project may attend to one or more of the research goals stated in Chapter 1.

In the current study with the Living Our Visions project, data were gathered from multiple sources, which provided a way to triangulate the data and increase the quality and trustworthiness of the PAR project (Morrow, 2005; Morrow & Smith, 2000). Morrow (2005) included multiple data sources as a component of determining "adequacy of data" and wrote:

> In order to achieve *adequate variety in kinds of evidence*, it is important to consider the full range of possibilities for types of evidence (Morrow & Smith, 2000) along with the use of multiple data sources… Thus, I recommend the use of multiple data sources—participant observation, field notes, interviews, focus groups, participant checks, site documents, artifacts, journals, electronic data—to achieve the goal of adequate variety. (p. 255)

Before describing the sources of data for this project, it is important to note that this study used a process of emergent design because of the continual plan-act-observe-reflect cycle that is required in participatory action research (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2005). Thus, methods of data collection and analysis that were proposed did change and evolve as the LOV project stumbled upon new knowledge and information in its social change process. Herr and Anderson (2005) proposed,

> The methodology section of the [participatory action research] dissertation proposal is the researcher's best guess as to what will transpire in the field. In the dissertation, the doctoral student is then writing up the actual evolution of the research, documenting the decisions made. (p. 76)

Members of LOV co-determined the direction of the research along with me, and, because of their central involvement, the methods changed depending on their observations and discoveries of the needs of the old lesbian community. The design was emergent, but it is also important to think carefully about the types of methods that were most useful for answering process questions about the social change work of LOV. Charmaz (2006) wrote, "Although methods are merely tools, they do have consequences. Choose methods that help you answer your research questions with ingenuity and incisiveness" (p. 15). Initially, I proposed methods that I thought would be helpful in answering action/ process questions. Once data collection began, then the LOV project discovered new methods of data collection that helped deepen or advance emerging analysis.

Although general qualitative inquiry utilizes purposeful sampling, researchers who use this approach to qualitative research decide on their sample before conducting their research (Hood, 2007; Maxwell, 2005). Grounded theorists use a different approach called *theoretical sampling*, which was defined by Corbin and Strauss (2008) as a "method of data collection based on concepts/themes derived from the data. The purpose of theoretical sampling is to collect data from places, people, and events that will maximize opportunities to develop concepts in terms of their properties and dimensions, uncover variations, and identify relationships between concepts" (p. 143). The grounded theorist researcher may know ahead of time where to begin sampling, but then she or he uses the analysis and emerging codes and categories in the data to determine where to continue sampling after establishing a foundation of data. Rather than sampling for receiving information from a variety of demographic categories, such as in *maximum variation sampling* (Glesne, 2006), Glaser and Strauss (1967) wrote,

> This process of data collection is *controlled* by the emerging theory, whether substantive or formal . . . The emerging theory points to the next steps – the sociologist does not know them until he [sic] is guided by emerging gaps in his [sic] theory and by research questions suggested by previous answers. (pp. 45 – 47)

This process of using theoretical sampling fits with a participatory action research approach because it allows for emergent design and methods and for the plan-act-observe-reflect cycle to be incorporated into the research process (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2005). The process of theoretical sampling allows the researcher to move beyond just identifying themes and descriptions and move into developing theory based on responses in the data. It allows researchers to think critically about their data all along the way and to ask new important questions as they emerge.

Focus Groups

During the predissertation research study, focus group meetings were audio-recorded, transcribed, coded, and analyzed between the dates of October 30, 2010 and June 19, 2011. Focus group recordings were chosen as a main source of data for LOV because they highlighted the processes and decisions of the group while also providing a structured environment to guide social change work. Focus group members used the discussion time to assess the needs of a community, design plans for programs and interventions, evaluate the outcomes of actions, and reflect on growth and learning experiences that occur within the research process. Focus groups that meet for extended periods of time, such as group meetings for a participatory action research project, may also use the discussion time for connection and building relationships across group members. Knowledge that is produced in focus groups allows the group process as a whole to become more than a sum of its individual parts, thus catalyzing group energy and springing wisdom into action.

While there are many benefits to focus group data, Krueger and Casey (2009) also highlighted critiques of focus groups, such as the tendency of members to intellectualize the topic and steer clear of emotion, which may then produce surface-level results and analysis. Another criticism of focus groups is that some members naturally become more dominant than others, which can then skew the results in favor of members who speak up more often. These criticisms are real, but they can also be addressed through careful attention and dialogue that makes these concerns explicit. During the first workshop for the Living Our Visions project in October 2010, Sue Morrow and I attended to these criticisms by asking questions that included emotional content; attending to group members who alluded to emotional content; making process comments about the nature

and depth of group conversations; and talking through group guidelines on participation, safety, and awareness of our own impact on group dialogue. These types of process comments and discussions persisted and became part of the group norms for LOV. For example, at a meeting in September 2012, one LOV member asked another member about the look on her face and inquired about how she was feeling emotionally regarding the current discussion in the group. This process comment allowed the group to explore the complexities and nuances of the discussion topic in more depth than before and allowed the group to move beyond an abstract and intellectual conversation.

According to Krueger and Casey (2009), a focus group contains all of the following characteristics: "(1) people, who (2) possess certain characteristics, (3) provide qualitative data (4) in a focused discussion (5) to help understand the topic of interest" (p. 6). In the current study I included focus group meetings as a main source of data in order to help understand the processes and impact of the Living Our Visions project. For this study, focus group meetings from August 22, 2011 through March 23, 2013 were recorded, transcribed, and analyzed to capture the context, processes, and evolving work of the Living Our Visions project. Two weeks before each focus group, I sent out a request for agenda items to the members of LOV. After receiving requests, I finalized the agenda and connected with the co-facilitators for that meeting to discuss the structure of the meeting and types of questions we wanted to attend to in order to move beyond an intellectual discussion. Although focus group meetings were considered a main source of data, data were also gathered from multiple sources that included participant observation, field notes, co-researcher reflections on the writing of this manuscript, email listserv discussions and emails, and self-reflective journals or memos.

Other Data Sources

Sources of data also included extant literature, because the context of women-only spaces and lesbian-only spaces is about setting up an alternative space in which to live that requires thinking "outside the box" and incorporating traditionally marginalized ideas. By including literature that is marginalized within academia, this study set up a space that was alternative to the traditional power structures within academia and inclusive of various ideas and knowledge bases. PAR includes different sets of skills, training, and knowledge-building that can only add to the value of existing knowledge bases. Examples of extant literature included literature, identified lesbian periodicals such as *Lesbian Connection*, autobiographies, personal correspondence, electronic listserv discussions, public records, or organizational documents such as posters for a LOV-sponsored event. According to Charmaz (2006), extant texts can be analyzed as rich sources of data with stakeholders, processes, and particular viewpoints and agendas rather than objective sources of data.

The Observation of Participation and Field Notes

Although this participatory action research study was not considered an ethnography, participatory action research approaches sometimes call for ethnographic methods of data collection and analysis in order to write in a narrative style that truly accomplishes Geertz's (1973) call for "thick description." It is a delicate thing, though, to use ethnographic methods in PAR because of the vastly different traditions of research from which they stem. For example, traditional ethnographers use the method of *participant observation* (PO) to "remain objective and minimize their impact on the

participants" (Schein, 2008, p. 269). PAR researchers using ethnographic methods must pay close attention to the reasons behind their use as well as the design of how they are used in PAR in order to preserve the liberatory and decolonizing stance of the research and action components (Lassiter, 2005). Barbara Tedlock (1992, p. xiii) called the traditional method of participant observation "morally suspect" and turned the idea on its head to create a new form of PO to be used in feminist critical ethnographies and PAR projects called the "observation of participation." In the observation of participation, Tedlock encouraged ethnographers and others to observe their own social skills in everyday interactions with others as well as observing others' interactions within specific contexts (Tedlock, 1991). Using this new technique, Tedlock was hopeful in reducing the amount of academics writing about the "other" – and instead more academics and community researchers/ participants writing together about themselves and their interactions with one another.

In the LOV project, co-researchers engaged in the observation of participation on a number of levels in order to analyze the processes that LOV engaged in together. As members, we observed the following types of participation: (a) our own participation (or lack thereof) in a group dialogue or conversation; (b) the participation of others in the group either individually or the interactions among co-researchers; (c) and the participation of the LOV group as a whole in different contexts and on different occasions. By engaging in the observation of participation, the LOV group gathered richer information about the layers of processes happening in the group at any one time. We engaged in this process of the observation of participation through writing or audio

recording field notes, memos, and/ or self-reflective journals. I discuss the use of analytic memos and journaling in depth below.

Writing field notes is the bridge between the observation and the analytic memo. It is that very first reflection on a topic, event, action, or process that someone observes. A field note is our initial uncensored and unedited impression of what just occurred, and it can be anything from a keyword to a phrase to a more extensive recounting of an experience. According to Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw (1995) guidelines for writing field notes include the following tenets: (a) recording an "initial impression" that includes everything available to the senses as well as social locations and identities, cognitive and emotional processes; (b) focusing on "key events or incidents" such as ones that elicit strong reactions, feeling tones, or that run counter to certain expectations; and (c) moving beyond the self and our own personal reactions in order to see more clearly what is happening right now (pp. 27-28). We used field notes from our focus group meetings or from emails in order to go back to a particular concept or topic and explore it in more depth.

Analytic Memos and Self-Reflective Journals

Analytic memos and self-reflective journals are integral to participatory action research projects because they attend to the research process and the plan-act-observe-reflect cycle of social action (Herr & Anderson, 2005; Kemmis & McTaggart, 2005). They also provide a good fit for feminist multicultural research, because they focus on aspects of research that have been critiqued by feminist philosophers for being ignored in traditional academic research, such as personal experience, intersections of identity,

power dynamics, and hierarchies. A process that helps grounded theorists make the leap from initial sampling to theoretical sampling is *memo writing* (Charmaz, 2006). As grounded theorists engage in data analysis right away with the first interview and begin conducting line-by-line coding, themes, codes, and categories begin to emerge. The researcher then engages in free-writing about each code while also making sure that what is written about the code is grounded in the data. Writing about a code in this way allows the researcher to see the thickness of description as well as what is missing or still "thin" about this code. This will direct the researcher to ask future questions based on where the gaps are in the data. Additionally, Charmaz (2006) stated that analytic memos provide a bridge between data gathering and analysis because they allow a researcher to begin to make connections and comparisons in the data during the data gathering process rather than waiting until data collection is complete. In a PAR project such as LOV, writing memos and self-reflective journals also provided a way to evaluate the current methods being used and guide co-researchers in developing other appropriate methods.

Social/ Political Action and the Use of the Plan-Act-Observe-Reflect Cycle

A unique form of data in PAR is constituted by the social/ political action itself. In this study, the actions that were generated in the predissertation research project (Chapter 2) formed the basis for the phases of action and reflection that occurred within this study. In the pre-dissertation research project, the LOV group began with an initial workshop experience, which ended with an invitation to become involved in the PAR project. From the beginning, LOV was involved in the plan-act-observe-reflect cycle

(Herr & Anderson, 2005; Kemmis & McTaggart, 2005). Below, I provide some examples of how the co-researchers engaged with each step in the cycle to better understand the cycle and LOV's process with it.

Planning

At our very first workshop in October 2010, workshop attendees engaged in dialogues in both small groups and as one large group. Together, we problematized the oppression experienced by old lesbians in the Salt Lake Valley community and also strategized ideas for change by answering questions such as, "What is working for you and what is missing for you, as an old lesbian in this community?" and "What are the barriers that you see that keep Salt Lake from being the most rockin' old lesbian community in the country?" and "What comes next after today's workshop? How can we map out making our visions for this community a reality?" Over the last 3 years, LOV engaged in the planning process, from planning a weekend-long community organizing workshop with long-time lesbian activist and OLOC member, Alix Dobkin, to beginning to explore problems with housing for old LGBT individuals in this community.

Acting

It can be difficult to discern what is considered "action" in PAR and what is not. I believe that every time the group met we engaged in some kind of action together. At every meeting, members continued to build relationships and strengthen bonds with one another and increased the intimacy of the group through sharing about both self- and group-process issues. At the same time, LOV engaged in large-scale actions, which

included putting on a weekend-long community organizing workshop and house concert with Alix Dobkin in order to connect old lesbians to one another in the community and to create a local chapter of Old Lesbians Organizing for Change (OLOC) in Salt Lake City. Actions occurred consistently throughout the LOV project.

Observing

In the observing section of the cycle, members engaged in observing the results of actions that were carried out. In the LOV project, observations took place after actions within a single focus group meeting, by observing the impact of what someone had said with a particular group member or the group as a whole. Observations also took place in the large-scale, such as noticing and attending to the fact that Alix Dobkin workshop attendees seemed eager and excited to learn more about OLOC and starting a local chapter. Since the creation of the local chapter of OLOC in April 2012, LOV continued to observe the similarities and differences between LOV and OLOC as well as how OLOC members who are not a part of LOV felt about just being involved with LOV. This was an ongoing conversation for LOV that intersected with the dialogues around whether or not to admit new members to LOV.

Reflecting

Co-researchers of the LOV project engaged in self-reflection about the processes of the group. For example, following the observation that some OLOC members may have felt left out of the LOV project, several members brought these observations to a LOV focus group meeting so the group could process these observations together.

Members reflected on their personal feelings as well as tried to take the perspective of people who felt differently. A facilitated group process allowed the group to analyze together what was working and what was not working, and at times the reflection process allowed group members to reshape our understandings of the topic being discussed. It also allowed the group to engage in the research process of the search for disconfirming evidence together, because, inevitably, not every group member felt or thought in the same way about a particular problem. In this study, the self- reflection process continued as it had in the previous focus group meetings.

Data Analysis and Writing

Data Management

Every co-researcher involved in the dissertation project signed an informed consent form that discussed the possibilities for their participation as well as their rights as co-researchers in the project. Each co-researcher decided for herself whether she would like to disclose her real name in the project as well as whether she wanted to be involved in authorship of any materials created and disseminated by LOV. Informed consent forms were stored and locked in a secure location and kept separate from other research materials. Audio and video recordings were kept within a password-protected computer that were only accessed by myself. I changed the password on the computer once per month in order to provide another source of protection of the data. I hired a professional transcriber, trained in confidentiality, to complete transcription. I verified the transcriptions myself by listening to the audio recording while also reading the transcript

at the same time. I wrote analytic memos after reviewing transcriptions, and these memos were also kept in the password-protected computer.

Data analysis was conducted manually and with the use of Microsoft Word and Excel. This analysis also occurred on the password-protected computer. In January 2014 I completed initial coding. Following the creation of initial categories I sent an online survey form to LOV members to complete either anonymously or with their name if they chose to provide it. The following questions were asked:

- Looking back on the group, how do you feel about your own participation in the LOV group?
- What was easy about participating? What was hard/challenging? Would you have participated more/less under different circumstances?
- What are some things you think the LOV group has left unsaid/unaddressed in our meetings, but you wished we would have talked about?
- If we could start over again, what parts of LOV and our meetings would you want to continue? What would you want to do differently?
- What are your thoughts on the future of LOV? Do you want to keep meeting, and if so, what would you want to get out of the meetings (e.g., social connection; continued research; etc.)?

Co-researcher responses to these questions were coded using line-by-line initial coding procedures, similar to the focus group transcription coding processes.

Data Analysis

Although LOV met for approximately 3 years, negotiations of roles for the research project continued to stay in flux and in process, because LOV members requested that the project be broader in scope than simply a research project. For my predissertation research project (see Chapter 2), I transcribed and analyzed focus group meetings of LOV that spoke to the issues, joys, and challenges of the entry process into a PAR project. I was in dialogue with members of LOV throughout the predissertation research project, and members gave permission for me to pursue writing an academic manuscript for my dissertation requirements as well as other articles geared towards academics interested in PAR and activism. At the same time, co-researchers of LOV encouraged the reading audience to stay tuned for further manuscripts that embody the work and authorship of the group. There is no perfect way to engage in PAR work together and power differences and dilemmas about potential projects are always present between and among members (Smith & Romero, 2010). There are also many facets of a PAR project worth writing about and documenting, and members may feel more or less connected to different ones. What is important is the transparency around the levels of participation and collaboration in the group and the ability to engage in a process together. As a doctoral candidate with some sources of power but not others in the group, I found it important to speak to other students and faculty (advisors of students) in my field of counseling psychology about how a student can realistically engage in social justice-oriented research processes.

Initial and Axial Coding

For the current study, I documented, reflected on, and analyzed the negotiations of roles and process in the Living Our Visions project. The coding process began with a type of initial coding called line-by-line coding in grounded theory analysis. Charmaz (2006) wrote, "Initial codes help you to separate data into categories and to see processes. Line-by-line coding frees you from becoming so immersed in your respondents' worldviews that you accept them without question" (p. 51). I was immersed in the Living Our Visions project; this being the case, it was challenging for me at times to question the processes of the group. Line-by-line coding allowed me an opportunity to take a critical look at the processes of the group and engage in a different vantage point. I combed through each focus group and interview transcript, line-by-line, asking such questions as, "What is going on here?" and "What processes are at work here?" I used gerunds for coding, which is the process of "verbifying," as described in Chapter 2. I eventually moved into coding chunks of lines and then discussed these chunks and what was emerging from the data with the members of LOV and my advisor. I engaged in the process of constant comparison and wrote memos about the codes, categories, and families that emerged from the coding process and noted initial codes that called for further exploration. As described in Chapter 2, I also engaged in the process of axial coding, which defined relationships between categories and other categories or subcategories and pieced the data back together and into a coherent narrative (Charmaz, 2006).

Theoretical Coding and Analysis

The next step was to move into the crux of grounded theory analysis, which was theoretical coding (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). One way to engage in theoretical coding is to use Glaser's "Six C's" (causes, contexts, contingencies, consequences, covariances, and conditions) as a guide to honing categories and analyses. I asked questions of the data, such as, "What disciplinary concerns am I working within?" or "What are the anticipated and unanticipated consequences of members' educational differences in the Living Our Visions project?" I launched the online survey in January 2014 after initial codes had been completed as a way to engage in theoretical coding with co-researchers. This allowed the group to stay engaged in the research process in ways that fit with their interests, schedules and lives.

The term *saturation* is used in qualitative inquiry when no new information comes from the data and data collection is then terminated. Data saturation is an important criterion that is used for evaluating rigor and trustworthiness of a qualitative study. There are three types of saturation that are commonly used and misused: *sampling saturation*, *substantive saturation*, and *theoretical saturation*. If qualitative researchers mention saturation at all (a random search for psychology-related qualitative studies on Ebsco found that only 4 out of 23 studies used the term saturation in describing their sampling and analysis procedures) in their publications, they often remark that they are using theoretical saturation when, in fact, they are really using substantive saturation (Brenner et al., 2008; Hood, 2007; McCarthy, Downes, & Sherman, 2008; Mackenzie, Carlson, Munoz, & Speca, 2007). Substantive saturation refers specifically to the part of the sampling process when research participants are no longer providing new information

about events or themes, and instead giving only repetition of information already collected for the study. This type of saturation is commonly used in the General Inductive Qualitative Method (Maxwell, 2005), but does not assist the researcher(s) in developing theory and usually stops at identifying themes, events, or categories.

Grounded theorists, however, use a more in-depth method called theoretical saturation (Hood, 2007). This type of saturation calls for the researcher to continue sampling until all of the chosen codes and categories are dimensionalized and fleshed out to a point where no new information is coming in about them or related to them. Theoretical saturation is difficult to achieve, because there are many possible directions to follow in saturating dimensions, properties, and relationships within and between categories. Charmaz (2006) offered the following questions as a guide when thinking about whether a researcher has achieved theoretical saturation:

- Which comparisons do you make between data within and between categories?
- What sense do you make of these comparisons?
- Where do they lead you?
- How do your comparisons illuminate your theoretical categories?
- In what other directions, if any, do they take you?
- What new conceptual relationships, if any, might you see? (pp. 113-114)

Ultimately, it is up to the researcher to decide when theoretical saturation has occurred, and, even when one is engaging in a thoughtful and careful process, it can still be a subjective and/or arbitrary decision to end data collection. Researchers face tough practical concerns, such as feeling disciplinary pressure to graduate and finish their dissertations, losing or running out of funding for a project, having to keep up with the

publishing timeline for the tenure process, and other challenges. There are many times when the research has not been saturated, and yet the researcher may need to stop collecting data at that time. Due to the real-life situations in which researchers find themselves and their projects, Charmaz (2006) argued for using a term coined by Dey (1999) instead, *theoretical sufficiency*. Theoretical sufficiency may not deem full saturation; however, it still connotes a thoughtful process whereby researchers engage fully with the emerging codes and categories while "be[ing] open to what is happening in the field and be[ing] willing to grapple with it" (Charmaz, 2006, p. 115). In this study, I aimed for theoretical saturation while understanding that my own real-world limits on data collection made this difficult to achieve. I set theoretical sufficiency as a minimum criterion for the study and believe I have achieved this criterion.

Finally, throughout data collection and analysis, I consistently searched for disconfirming evidence in the coding categories and families in order to strengthen and refine the analysis. I sought disconfirming evidence through the discussions of the LOV focus group meetings, discussions with my advisor, discussions with co-researchers, my self-reflective journal, and the analysis of focus group data.

Writing

Data analyses resulted in a written narrative that explored the processes and impact of the work of the Living Our Visions project. The written narrative was centered in the wisdom, knowledge, and actions of the co-researchers of the Living Our Visions project, as *triply invisible* old lesbians, or outsiders within an ageist, homophobic, sexist, racist, and colonizing society. Throughout the writing process, I elicited feedback from the

Living Our Visions members on the unfolding analysis and incorporated that feedback into the analysis and writing of Chapter 4. In order to follow the appropriate guidelines for completing a dissertation in my department at the University of Utah, this written narrative was entirely written by me, even though co-researchers of LOV were engaged in the research process throughout the project. This is another tension that I wrestled with in completing a PAR dissertation: although the PAR project was a joint effort, I had to embark on a sole research project in order to meet the requirements for graduation with a Ph.D. However, please note that this written narrative was not the sole purpose for the Living Our Visions project, and that the LOV project may produce multiple narratives, products, and activist efforts that will be co-created and co-authored by the group in the future.

Trustworthiness and Quality

In Chapter 2 I discussed Charmaz's (2006) four criteria for evaluating GT studies from a feminist perspective, which include credibility, originality, resonance, and usefulness. I continued to utilize these criteria, particularly to evaluate the quality of the use of GT methods in this study. These criteria can also be used as a starting point for evaluating the trustworthiness of the use of a PAR approach for this study. In addition to Charmaz's criteria for evaluating the trustworthiness of a study that uses grounded theory methods of coding and analysis, it is important to take Guba and Lincoln's (1989) *authenticity* criteria into consideration when evaluating PAR and other research projects that fall within the critical-ideological paradigm (Morrow, 2005). Morrow (2005) wrote that authenticity criteria include the following four subcategories:

> *Fairness* demands that different constructions be solicited and honored. In *ontological authenticity*, participants' individual constructions are improved, matured, expanded, and elaborated. *Educative authenticity* requires that participants' understandings of and appreciation for the constructions of others be enhanced. *Catalytic authenticity* speaks to the extent to which action is stimulated. (pp. 252-253)

The principle of fairness was explicit from the onset of the Living Our Visions project. Members actively recruited and looked for new members who held diverse social locations, life experiences, and perspectives. Although the group decidedly embraced a feminist multicultural perspective, members privileged diverse voices and representations and held a space for new or challenging perspectives. In my analysis and writing process for the proposed project, I searched for disconfirming evidence and a diversity of views in order to preserve fairness.

As an outsider to the population and as someone who holds particular dominant social locations, I made a constant effort to preserve the ontological authenticity of the voices and meanings of LOV members. Without constant attention toward this criterion of trustworthiness, I could unintentionally impose my own views, values, and meaning-making systems on members of LOV, thus recreating oppressive hierarchies and power dynamics. I engaged LOV co-researchers at every level of data collection and analysis and explicitly questioned the dynamics of power within LOV so that my writing voice was consistent with the wisdom that emerged from the group.

Educative authenticity happened all the time in the LOV project. The focus group discussion format allowed members of LOV to listen to and learn from other members of LOV at every meeting. Each member of LOV wrestled with others' points of view. At the same time, each member of LOV was also a teacher and shared her own perspective

or experience with a certain topic. The feminist principle of mutuality was evoked in LOV, where everyone was both student and teacher in an active learning environment.

Catalytic authenticity is related to the usefulness criterion listed above and may be one of the most important criteria for a participatory action research project. Over the past 3 years, the Living Our Visions project actively engaged in creating social change, especially in service of the lives of old lesbians. I paid particular attention to the plan-act-observe-reflect cycle that occurred in LOV, and documented the processes of social change as well as the impact of the group's social change efforts. Beyond the social change that was created by the LOV project, I also aimed to contribute to change in the field of counseling psychology by completing and disseminating a participatory action research dissertation in our field. It is time to heed Michelle Fine's (2007) call to expand our "methodological imagination" and move beyond socially just research *content* into socially just research *processes*.

In summary, multiple sources of data were triangulated in this proposed study in thoughtful ways that attended to both the research goals as well as to the trustworthiness criteria. The trustworthiness of this study was strengthened and increased through careful immersion in the data; co-researcher analysis sessions; searches for disconfirming evidence; attention to power dynamics; feedback from peer research team; and the use of an audit trail. The recursive nature of grounded theory data collection, analysis, and writing was enhanced by the PAR plan-act-observe-reflect cycle. I also attended to issues of researcher reflexivity and bias through the use of self-reflective journals, ongoing dialogue with LOV co-researchers, and analytic memos.

In order to systematically engage in the above activities, I used an audit trail to help organize and monitor these important issues. Morrow (2005) described an audit trail as a "detailed chronology of research activities and processes; influences on the data, collection and analysis; emerging themes, categories, or models; and analytic memos" (p. 252). I catalogued my self-reflective journals, analytic memos, co-researcher reflections, and other research activities such as data collection and analysis within the audit trail. I removed any identifying information from the audit trail and submitted it to my advisor, Dr. Susan Morrow.

Ethical Considerations

As a counseling psychologist in training, I observed the *Ethical Principles and Code of Conduct for Psychologists* by the American Psychological Association (APA, 2002) as an overarching ethical guide for this proposed study. As such, I submitted a new application for approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of the University of Utah to conduct participatory action research with the Living Our Visions project. The University of Utah IRB deemed this study to be Exempt. According to the university IRB webpage exempt studies are described as:

> Exempt studies are minimal risk and fit within a set of established exemption categories. Studies that qualify for exemption are only required to adhere to certain federal regulations and must also follow state laws and University policies applicable to research. Studies that qualify for exemption must adhere to principles of sound research design and ethics. Participant rights and welfare must also be protected in a manner appropriate for research that poses minimal risk. (Retrieved April 5, 2014 from http://irb.utah.edu/_pdf/IGS%20-%20Exempt%20Research%20020314.pdf)

This study used an emergent research design that was strongly influenced by the directions that the Living Our Visions group determined were important. Within the IRB

informed consent document I attended to any possible benefits and risks to participating in a PAR research study with the Living Our Visions project. Although the IRB was an important part of attending to research ethics, it was just the beginning of understanding ethical issues that presented themselves in this PAR study.

Unique ethical issues arise when engaging in participatory action research with an insider-outsider research team. Due to the fact that the research process is constantly evolving in PAR, it is sometimes impossible to foresee the kinds of ethical dilemmas that may emerge. Herr and Anderson (2005) urged doctoral students to learn how to recognize possible ethical concerns as they arise so that the concerns can be attended to with care and immediacy. One issue that emerged in the Living Our Visions project was the creation of a hierarchy between academic co-researchers and community co-researchers. This issue and others that emerged during the project are explored in detail in Chapter 4. Negotiating power dynamics, roles, and directions that the LOV project decided to take were discussed early in the project, which provided more space to voice them and work through them collectively.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The women of the Living Our Visions project represented here have asked to be represented with the following names: Salma, Alda, Hoda, Debra, Johna, Sandy, Mary, Luci, Claire, Jolene, Cathy, Susan, Sue, Donna, Polly, Sharon. Most women have chosen their real names to represent them, while others have chosen pseudonyms. This study aimed to meet three primary goals: (a) to serve as a catalyst for old lesbians to meet, organize, and identify goals for their community that will enhance the wellbeing of old lesbians and to embark on action to achieve stated goals; (b) to document the activities of the group by actively engaging in the *plan-act-observe-reflect* cycle of participatory action research (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2005); and (c) to serve as a model for community building and action for other old lesbian communities across the country.

Here, I document the process by which old lesbians in the Living Our Visions group in Salt Lake City, Utah, created community and engaged in social change, as well as the impact of these social change efforts. Ten focus groups ranging in time from 1 hour to 2.5 hours were transcribed and analyzed between August 2011 and March 2013. Additionally, I launched a survey in January 2014 asking LOV co-researchers to reflect on their experiences in the group up until that point. I requested LOV co-researchers' comments and reactions to the results categories and to results sections. I received written

comments and reactions from multiple LOV members. Some asked for their reactions to remain out of the dissertation, while others provided permission to have their comments and reactions woven into this section. These comments were cited as personal communications. Quotes from meeting transcripts, email communications, and survey responses are presented below. They are sometimes presented with multiple speakers, as part of a conversation, to preserve the dialogic style and share group processes/dynamics. Six categories emerged from the social justice-oriented qualitative data analysis process. These categories included the following processes: (a) Consciousness-raising; (b) Celebrating our roots; (c) Creating a vision; (d) Taking Action; (e) Belonging; and (f) Envisioning the future. Results and Discussion sections were combined to create a dialogue between the data analysis and the literature. First, I briefly introduce two concepts from the literature that will be discussed throughout the results section. Then I introduce six categories that emerged from the qualitative data analysis, weaving the two literature concepts throughout. Finally I conclude with final thoughts about the discussion and questions to consider for future PAR projects with old lesbian individuals and communities.

Beloved Community

Philosopher and theologian, Josiah Royce, challenged Nietzsche's moral theory of extreme individualism as unsatisfactory and incomplete (Royce, 2001 [1913]). He created a theory of community and wrote, "My life means nothing, either theoretically or practically, unless I am a member of a community" (p. 357). He coined the term *beloved community* (p. ix) to describe a collection of individuals dedicating their lives to a

common cause and set of morals. Later, Martin Luther King, Jr. popularized the term *beloved community* and incorporated it into his Six Principles of Non-Violence (King, 1958). King believed that intergroup dialogue and collaboration focused on justice efforts would result in the end of violence and in the end of systems of oppression, privilege, and hierarchy. He purported that individuals created *beloved community* by non-violently working through conflicts and challenges with one another and with society. King shared that the root of *beloved community* is love. In a 1957 speech he delivered in Montgomery, Alabama, on "Loving Your Enemies," King spoke about a particular kind of love central to the creation of *beloved community*. He shared one of the Greek words for love, *agape*, and he said, "Agape is something of the understanding, creative, redemptive goodwill for all [persons]. It is a love that seeks nothing in return. It is an overflowing love. And when you rise to love on this level, you begin to love [humans], not because they are likeable, but because God loves them" (King, 1957). Additionally, the King Center website stated, "Agape does not begin by discriminating between worthy and unworthy people…It begins by loving others for their sakes" and "makes no distinction between a friend and enemy; it is directed toward both…Agape is love seeking to preserve and create community" (http://www.thekingcenter.org/king-philosophy). King built on Royce's original concept and added principles of justice, non-violence, antiracism, and love to the theory of community.

More recently, bell hooks took up King's work on *beloved community* and expanded upon it further. She wrote, "Martin Luther King Jr. imagined a *beloved community*, conceptualizing a world where people would bond on the basis of shared humanness. His vision remains. King taught that the simple act of coming together would

strengthen community. Yet before he was assassinated he was beginning to see that unlearning racism would require a change in both thinking and action" (hooks, 2003, p. 35-36). hooks' conceptualization of *beloved community* focused on taking action rather than just exploring theory and explanations of oppression and privilege. Through her writings and interviews discussing *beloved community,* hooks took the concept out of the abstract and into our everyday lives. She provided a "how to" instruction booklet by requiring a constant dialogue between theory and action. Here I will share a personal example. As a White antiracist ally I need to understand more about everyday ways that I keep myself separated from relationships with people of color through an exploration of theory. At the same time, I must take action to build those relationships in my life. Understanding can only take me so far. It is through the action of building new relationships that we can truly decolonize our minds, and thus our communities.

I argue that the Living Our Visions project consistently grappled with these iterations of *beloved community* throughout its 3+ years of existence. At times, LOV felt successes in the efforts to build *beloved community*, while other times our group got stuck or distracted and missed opportunities for change. The parallels between the work of the LOV project and the concept of *beloved community* may serve as a jumping off point for LOV or others who want to continue with this work in the future. By documenting both the engagement *and* the struggles the LOV project had with creating *beloved community*, we hope to expand the dialogue on working through conflicts and difficult conversations and honor hooks' (2003) call to action to promote "vigilant awareness of the ways that white-supremacist [capitalist patriarchal] thinking enters our system and also empowers us to break its hold on our consciousness" (p. 38).

Feminist Ethics of Care

Carol Gilligan dealt a huge blow to the moral reasoning psychological and philosophical communities by challenging the assumptions that men are rational, objective, beings with higher moral superiority to women (1982). Gilligan argued that women operated under a different set of ethics than men, an ethics of care. Ethics of care were rooted in relationships and responsibilities and the action of caring for others. Gilligan's work was both hailed and derided and was hugely influential in both second-wave and third-wave and beyond feminist movements. Later feminist scholar, Joan Tronto, transformed the feminist ethics of care by incorporating various cultural definitions of "caring" and expanding beyond Gilligan's gendered paradigm. Featherstone and Morris (2012) shared Tronto's four phases of care, "Caring about, taking care of, caregiving, and carereceiving," and shared that each phase required "four ethical elements of care: attentiveness, responsibility, competence, and responsiveness" (p. 5). Featherstone and Morris argued for Tronto's more nuanced iteration of the ethics of care and wrote, "Thus care as a practice requires more than good intentions. It requires both thought and action, which are inter-related and directed towards an end. The emphasis on practice is important – care is neither a principle nor an emotion. This signals [Tronto's] location within a concern to tackle the power inequalities to be found in care" (p. 6). Hollway (2006) contributed to the ethics of care by critiquing the assumption that every individual experiences capacity for caring and argued for an active process that nurtures and develops caring processes in individuals throughout the lifespan. Ultimately, Featherstone and Morris argued that care and justice work cannot be separated in the process of building healthy communities.

Although *beloved community* and feminist ethics of care hold different premises from one another and are rooted in different theoretical communities, there seems to be much overlap and perhaps similar end goals, which include building healthy and justice-oriented communities, engaging in a dialogue between theory and action, and using relational practices to decolonize individuals. In each of the following results categories I highlight the ways that LOV co-researchers engaged with beloved community and feminist ethics of care. The categories of (a) Consciousness-raising; (b) Celebrating our roots; (c) Creating a vision; (d) Taking Action; (e) Belonging; and (f) Envisioning the future are discussed below.

Raising Consciousness

> Three years ago I'm not sure we would have been at the local school board fighting for the rights of the Gay Straight Alliance. We did not fully understand the strength of who we were in our community and what raising our voices would do to help a cause. Would we have roared quite so loudly about marriage inequality? Maybe so. However, I would argue that participating in the LOV group, rubbing shoulders with some very interesting, politically savvy women and coming to a new understanding of what we could be doing helped us to move forward at a much quicker pace. [Jolene, February 8, 2014, personal communication]

Jolene shared a personal outcome of participating in the Living Our Visions group over the last 3 years. In this quote, she highlighted the process of consciousness-raising and the ways that her emerging consciousness in LOV contributed to building connections and taking action in her own "beloved community." Consciousness-raising was a process that occurred regularly at Living Our Visions meetings and gatherings. This process emerged as a strong category of data analysis. Some LOV members brought long herstories of consciousness-raising experiences to meetings and often shared them

during their check-ins. LOV members also regularly expressed appreciation for the consciousness-raising process that happened at meetings. For example, Donna said, "I love the consciousness-raising that just happens and getting to know each other at other levels. I love the richness that that adds" (T1, P2). Three facets of CR stood out in the data as ways that LOV members engaged with consciousness-raising (CR). These facets included the following: (a) Raising consciousness across social identities; (b) What is feminism today?; and (c) A rich conversation – the process of CR. Each is discussed below.

Raising Consciousness Across Social Identities

What brought LOV together in the first place was a two-fold interest in (a) understanding the impact of multiple oppressions in old lesbian lives (women marginalized in at least three social identities); and (b) creating visions and actions that could address these concerns. During the entry process (see Chapter 2), the LOV group spent time engaging in CR discussions and dialogues together. CR activities allowed LOV co-researchers to share their own identities, experiences, and herstories with one another. CR played a significant role in developing relationships and a sense of belonging with one another. Since the entry process, CR conversations expanded and deepened on issues related to race, ethnicity, social class, education, ability status, gender identity, oppression, and privilege. Regarding the importance of CR discussions, Polly said, "And there are a lot of people who don't realize that they're standing on the shoulders of people who come before them" (T2, P11). LOV members raised their own and the LOV group consciousness across various social identities in order to know the shoulders we stood on

as well as who stood on our shoulders. This process allowed the group to begin the creation of beloved community. hooks (2003) wrote,

> Dominator culture has tried to keep us all afraid, to make us choose safety instead of risk, sameness instead of diversity. Moving through that fear, finding out what connects us, reveling in our differences; this is the process that brings us closer, that gives us a world of shared values of meaningful community. (p. 197)

LOV members practiced being fiercely unafraid by engaging in a CR process across identities.

CR topics eventually became a catalyst for the group's main social action event. This event will be cited as the Alix/ OLOC event. For the Alix/ OLOC event, LOV co-researchers carried out their visions of bringing well-known (to the Utah lesbian community) old lesbian activist, community organizer, and singer/songwriter, Alix Dobkin, to Salt Lake City for a series of events March 29 – April 3, 2012. The purpose of the Alix/ OLOC series of events included: (a) Raise consciousness about issues and concerns uniquely relevant to old lesbians both within and outside old lesbian community; and (b) To assess interest in forming a Utah chapter of the national organization, Old Lesbians Organizing for Change (oloc.org). Alix Dobkin served as a representative of OLOC and also represented a lifetime of experiences in community organizing and activism. She was chosen by LOV as the facilitator of events due to these identities and experiences. The Alix/ OLOC event included the following individual events in which Alix Dobkin facilitated and/or participated: (a) Radio interview on progressive community radio station, KRCL; (b) Book signing for her recent memoir, *My Red Blood*, at local bookseller, The King's English; (c) Full-day CR workshop for old lesbians to discuss issues pertinent to the community and assess interest in forming a Utah OLOC Chapter at the Utah Pride Center; (d) Community discussion on feminist

grassroots organizing facilitated at the Rape Recovery Center; (e) Dialogue between staff of University of Utah's Women's Resource Center and LGBTQ Resource Center on OLOC and lesbian feminist organizing; (f) House concert specifically for old lesbians featuring Alix Dobkin's music; (g) Presentation in two University of Utah classes discussing communication strategies in grassroots feminist organizing and power and privilege topics, and (h) Brunch specifically for Living Our Visions project co-researchers and Alix Dobkin. During the brunch, held at Luci's and Claire's home, LOV members participated in CR discussions with Alix.

From creating the initial vision for the Alix/ OLOC event all the way through to the end of the series of events, LOV co-researchers engaged in CR discussions with one another, with Alix, with lesbian community, and with wider community audience in Salt Lake. Many of these discussions centered around various intersecting social identities and the impact of marginalization due to living within an oppressive society. Ultimately, a Utah chapter of OLOC formed (celebrating its 2nd anniversary April 2014) and LOV's visions and actions helped Utah OLOC to begin its own path of old lesbian organizing with a strong foundation for CR practices.

One of the initial ways that LOV co-researchers engaged with CR was through the identity of ability status. Many LOV members themselves had experienced the temporary nature of able-bodiedness. At the start of each LOV meeting, the group would participate in a relational check-in that included the person's current stressors and/or life experiences outside of LOV. Members shared health statuses at check-in and received care from others during this process. For example, Sue said, "Yeah, I started the year with cancer surgery and it was successful. All my check ups have been fabulous so far,

um, and ended the year with, um, a new hip. This [surgery] was definitely more fun" (T1, P7). Other LOV members lovingly teased Sue by asking if she was going to "come out" to them by sharing her surgery stories, by using reflective listening and showing interest through questions and affirmations of Sue's feelings about her experiences. Featherstone and Morris (2012) shared their thoughts on the key issues involved in the feminist ethics of care and wrote,

> No one is just a giver or receiver of care. Care is an activity binding everyone. In giving and receiving care, everyone can, in the right conditions of mutual respect and material support, learn the civic responsibilities of responsibility, trust, tolerance for human limitation and frailties, and acceptance of diversity. (p. 345)

Using a CR process and a relational check-in at meetings, LOV members understood that care did bind them to one another. Sue's courage in sharing her own health status helped to build mutual trust and responsibility as well as an acceptance for a diversity of health and ability statuses in the group.

Claire worked many years in the Disability community in Utah and often contributed thoughts about ability status, accessibility, and access to financial resources for old lesbians. For example, when the group was in the beginning stages of planning for the Alix Dobkin/OLOC event, Luci and Claire shared,

> Luci: Well, Claire is concerned about having something here because it's not accessible.
>
> Claire: Yeah, we're really limited here, you know, nobody with a wheelchair. (T3, P9)

There was often a focus on the temporal nature of ability, and the group held a deep understanding that ability statuses changed, sometimes with just a moment's notice. It was not something taken for granted in the group, and it seemed natural for the group to

think about accessibility and ability status concerns that old lesbians often faced in the larger community.

One of the ways this happened was through conversations about exposing the fact that many LOV members, although bonded and connected, still did not reach out to others when in need of support regarding changing ability statuses. For example at one meeting a LOV member checked in regarding a challenging time postsurgery and Alda responded with a process comment. She said, "I think we need to try, we still have some room to grow in terms of people feeling comfortable asking [for help] in this group. I know there have been needs in this group, and the group found out after the needs were gone" (T7, P9). In this moment, Alda brought a consciousness to the group that even LOV members, who have obviously bonded and connected with one another, were having trouble reaching out to ask for support or help during times of limited mobility. This consciousness-raising moment in the group became a catalyst for the group to not only attend to its own concerns with asking for support from one another. Debra picked up on this and moved the group into thinking about a structure for support for old lesbians. She said,

> I think people could identify the kind of things that they would be interested, available, and skilled at doing. I mean all of those things really make [this idea] more practical, and then we could really visualize how this might be able to work and be helpful. (T7, P21)

She helped LOV members to envision ideas and projects that would formalize a support network for old lesbians in the community. bell hooks (2003) shared, "To build community requires vigilant awareness of the work we must continually do to undermine all the socialization that leads us to behave in ways that perpetuate domination... Explanations alone do not bring us to the practice of *beloved community*" (p. 36). LOV

co-researchers raised consciousness together by understanding how the dynamics of internalized oppression was operating in the group at that moment by distancing members from one another. They did not stop there, however. They took action by talking about taking more risks in the group to share as well as created new ideas to support the larger old lesbian community.

Regarding social class, hierarchies within lesbian community became apparent in LOV's discussions on social class and access to financial resources. For example, LOV members shared different terms for wealthy LGBTQ individuals. They shared,

Polly: The well, the well-heeled.

Donna: The exec-u-dykes.

Alda: You mean it's the people who live differently than we do. (T3, P17)

The hierarchies were also present within the LOV group, but we did not process or acknowledge these hierarchies much within the group. Our avoidance of processing social class and educational differences and the hierarchies of power that existed stalled the LOV project in its CR process and ultimately in its development of *beloved community*. Social class and education statuses were the most common types of diversity within the LOV group. Some LOV co-researchers were affiliated with academia and held significant power and status in the group because of that identity, myself included. Other co-researchers were affiliated with activist and feminist groups and held long herstories of community organizing. These statuses also held power and status within the group. Still other co-researchers were affiliated with other communities, but not with academic, feminist, or activist projects. These co-researchers held less power and status in the LOV

group. Academic and activist co-researcher's voices were louder and took up more space in the group than others. At times, we steered CR conversations in particular directions.

In January 2014 I sent out the survey, asking LOV members to comment on their experiences in the group. Several LOV co-researchers wrote about the academic and activist voices in the group taking up more space, sometimes leaving community-based members without space to talk. For example, one LOV member speculated that class issues and the little-acknowledged presence of academia interrupted LOV's group process on more than one occasion. She wrote,

> Class issues and issues of education levels caused separation and snobbery. We didn't recognize that there were some of us without college education, some with academic experience as far as Masters Degree, some at the top academic levels of achievement. I think those with lower education felt discriminated against. (Survey, January 2014)

Another LOV co-researcher shared her perspective and wrote,

> We had several women who had degrees in the group. By and large these did not pose a problem. But from time to time some of those degrees got in the way and there were those who felt by virtue of those degrees the rest of the group should acquiesce to their view. (Survey, January 2014)

Although we did not speak about this together in the group, a majority of survey respondents commented on divisive issues of social class and education in the group. A community-based member proposed an idea regarding sharing the space more equitably. She wrote, "I [emailed an academic-based LOV member] asking about whether we could use a "talking stick" because every time I wanted to contribute something I was drowned out. That sort of formality isn't [that member's] sort of 'thing" (Survey, January 2014). One member reflected on what could have been done differently if we had the chance and she wrote, "I think the academics are so used to being in charge that they don't comprehend when they steamroll the group in a direction the group isn't interested in"

(Survey, January 2014). As someone who held an academic identity in the group, it was both challenging and important to read these comments about the impact of unacknowledged privilege in the group. bell hooks (2003) wrote, “When we stop thinking and evaluating along the lines of hierarchy and can value rightly all members of a community we are breaking a culture of domination” (p. 37). Tackling these issues and building a collaborative partnership was a goal from the beginning of the entry process, but clearly not an easy one. We missed opportunities to break the ‘culture of domination’ by not examining the everyday ways that social class and educational privilege showed up within the LOV group itself.

Emotion from these tensions emerged within the January 2014 survey, and I presented the group with these tensions via the listserv in hopes of galvanizing the group to work together through the tensions. In a listserv message to the group I wrote,

> As someone who holds the privileged "academic" identity, I want to call out this privilege and say that I think it's really important for us "academics" to listen non-defensively and learn together how to have more equitable communication and participation in the group. I can definitely see and understand how group norms got set that privileged the "academic" voices in the group over others. It seems like this is an issue that could come up often in community-building and organizing efforts in general and the LOV group could offer ideas and strategies of how to address these kinds of concerns in healthy ways. (personal communication, Liz Abrams, March 15, 2014)

If those of us with more privilege and status (i.e., academics and long-time activists) had acknowledged these power dynamics early on, we may have been able to build more trust and safety in processing these dynamics as a group. Oppressed groups have often felt more willing to work across differences with privileged groups when people with privileged identities do the work of interrogating their privilege rather than

waiting for an oppressed person to bring it up (hooks, 2003). After reading this section Sandy offered her reactions,

> I [see this as] a reflection of the culture in which we live, where education holds more value than experience. My mother, at 60, took the GED test so she could say she graduated from high school. It didn't increase her salary or do anything for her except make her less afraid to have someone ask her about her degree. (personal communication, March 17, 2014)

In a society built upon hierarchies of privilege and oppression, assumptions are made about people's worth and value based on their educational and social class statuses. Even academics who write and teach about privilege, oppression, and social class differences have trouble interrogating their own statuses of privilege and power (hooks, 2012). This issue becomes more complicated when academics themselves hold other marginalized identities such as person of color, woman, lesbian, or person with a disability and then become marginalized within the academic community. Thus, it is even more critical for PAR groups working with both marginalized academics and marginalized community members to develop healthy strategies for acknowledging and interrupting "dominator culture" power dynamics (hooks, 2003, p. 197). The struggle for *beloved community* erupted within the LOV group itself, but, as Sandy deftly pointed out, was a mirror image of what was occurring in wider old lesbian community.

Although we missed opportunities to tackle social class and education privileges within the LOV group itself, LOV co-researchers did attend to these CR issues in other ways. During planning for the Alix/ OLOC event, group members consistently discussed strategies and ideas for making the event more monetarily inclusive for old lesbians of limited means. LOV co-researchers recognized that old lesbians may be marginalized in multiple ways that include limited access to financial resources. The group found ways to

create more access to the Alix/ OLOC event. For example, when discussing Alix's house concert, several members discussed locations that were more accessible and with lower cost involved. Debra offered her home for the house concert and the group decided on that as a way to increase comfort for those who may not be "out" and as a way to offer reduced fee for the concert. Donna offered an idea to decrease cost for women and said, "I think with the house concert, we can ask for a sliding fee donation" (T3, P10). LOV members raised anti-capitalist and anti-corporate ideas that privileged inclusivity of people with varying social class statuses and made an explicit decision to only partner with, or "make common cause" (Polly, T2, P7) with organizations that would not engage in sponsorship practices based on capitalist or corporate ideas. LOV did not want to sacrifice its own ability to make decisions for a sponsorship deal with a corporation interested in tailoring LOV's visions to its own.

In her book, *Respectably Queer,* Ward (2008) critiqued the corporate model adopted by many of today's LGBTQ organizations and shared voices of queer activists who fought back against the pressures to conform to neoliberal and capitalist ideas. Both Ward and colleagues and LOV co-researchers actively engaged with creating *beloved community* through a resistance to the corporate model and by centering integrity in their decision-making processes of community building. Aurora Levins Morales (1998) discussed the concept of integrity as part of *beloved community* and wrote, "Human beings seek integrity like water seeks its level, grow toward creative and just solutions like plants grow toward sunlight, sometimes by crooked paths, but always reaching" (p. 130).

Like social class and educational differences, discussions of age and ageism also continued in the group after the entry process. Age and ageism were often discussed as intersections with other identities such as gender and sexual orientation. Hoda spoke to the experience of ageism and said, “I think the older we get, people don’t see us as real people anymore” (T1, P23). LOV members discussed the invisibility that comes with being labeled “old” in the U.S. and resistance to this invisibility. The group discussed tensions with adopting the word “old” and how some women in the group saw this word as an opportunity to reclaim visibility while others felt adopting the word reaffirmed internalized messages of invisibility. Sue reflected on the use of the word old and said, “Really kind of coming to grips and realizing my own ageism and all that stuff. So, I feel like this is a huge consciousness raiser experience for me” (T1, P46).

At another meeting, Hoda described ageist interactions with healthcare workers. She went to see a physician with a younger male friend and explained how the doctor avoided speaking directly with Hoda even though she was the identified patient. Hoda reported, “So we go in and [the younger male friend is] like in the background, and the doctor is, like, all of the questions are going to [the younger male friend]” (T2, P18). Hoda described the interaction as an experience of the intersections of ageism and sexism resulting in invisibility and a lack of power to determine her own health care needs. Other LOV co-researchers affirmed Hoda’s experience as both ageist and sexist and the group engaged in a longer CR discussion on the impact of ageism, especially when combined with other forms of oppression such as sexism or homophobia.

In more complex discussions of age and ageism, LOV co-researchers discussed whether or not to include young lesbians in old lesbian community building efforts. LOV

members valued bringing young lesbians on board to forge connections across age groups of lesbians and to listen to new ideas and thoughts on building lesbian community. At the same time, LOV members were mindful of the wounds they had experienced because young voices were privileged over old voices in an ageist society. LOV co-researchers shared painful stories of what was characterized as a flippant attitude by young lesbians in recognizing the contributions of old lesbians and feminists to today's social change movements. Polly's warning of not recognizing "those who came before" (Polly, T2, P11) echoed loudly in LOV meetings. The group often engaged in protective distancing from inclusion of younger lesbian/queer voices as a way to avoid potential ageism and invisibility. Sue offered a different take on the conflict and wrote,

> My own experience is that I want separatist old lesbian space because of the tendency for younger womyn to take over the conversation and block old womyn from defining their own agendas. I have been in groups when younger womyn took over and spoke authoritatively as if their youth gave them something more credible to say. This fits with avoiding potential ageism and invisibility, but I don't see it exactly as protective distancing. (Sue, personal communication, March 30, 2014)

I shared a combination of LOV co-researchers' perspectives with my and Sue's different perspectives here as an example of using a "both/ and" framework and seeing the same issue from different vantage points. This is especially important in PAR research because it can be easy for the voices of the manuscript authors to come through more strongly than those not participating in those parts of the research process. Accepting multiple viewpoints as valid can help us to slow down the process of knowledge creation, increase perspective-taking, and listen more deeply in order to find creative solutions.

This conflict is not new to lesbian or feminist communities. As a younger voice in the group I affirmed the presence of painful exchanges between so-called generations of

feminists and LGBTQ individuals. Having been mentored throughout my life by "second wave" feminists and lesbians while also being indoctrinated into "third wave" feminism and "queer community," I shared my empathy with people from all sides of the conflict. Group members were often quick to acknowledge me as different from the younger lesbians they distanced from. But am I so different? Perhaps an important area of growth for the LOV group and other old lesbian community building efforts is to take a fresh critique of the so-called generation gap and the belief that younger lesbians and queer women will not change or acknowledge their differences. By shutting down the option to include younger lesbian voices in building old lesbian community, we shut ourselves off from recognizing the work of younger queer and lesbian activists who have acknowledged this privilege and actively worked towards reducing it.

hooks (1995) reflected on nationalist separatist thinking among Black individuals in the U.S. in the mid-90s and wrote,

> The assumption that white folks will never cease to be racist represents a refusal to privilege the history of those whites (however few) who have been willing to give their lives to the struggle for racial justice over that of white folks who maintain racist thinking. (p. 266)

She called upon both black and white allies to "consistently keep the faith, by always sharing the truth that white people can be anti-racist, that racism is not some immutable character flaw" (p. 270). Only by keeping the faith that privileged individuals can raise their consciousness and transform their lives to be more in alignment with social justice can old lesbians and other marginalized communities work towards *beloved community*. Old and young lesbians can more readily resist the existing power structures of privilege and oppression through cooperation and collaboration. Sue shared her perspective on the complexities of the need for separatism and wrote,

> In all movements, there is a time for separatism in order to define ones' own agendas, to raise consciousness, etc. I see old lesbians in our community (and LOV) as needing to be in this space. That doesn't exclude working with younger lesbian/ bi/ queer activists, but I don't think that's our stage of development yet. (Sue, personal communication, March 30, 2014)

Once again, different voices and experiences need to be featured and heard in order for us to come to a more complex understanding of the ways that separatism functioned in the LOV project and may function in other old lesbian communities.

Race, ethnicity, racism, and inclusion were complicated issues to raise consciousness about in LOV. First, I acknowledge that I wrote these reflections from a White perspective. I personally identify as Syrian-American and White, and I am perceived by most people as White, without question. I have worked and continue to work to be an effective antiracist ally and yet also know there are times I do not recognize my privilege as a White person. Historically, second wave White feminists and lesbians have been rightly criticized for not addressing race or White privilege effectively in women's and LGBTQ movements (hooks, 1981; Lorde, 1983; Smith & Smith, 1983). Most of the women who attended LOV meetings identified as White, and, thus, White perspectives also dominated LOV meetings. Women of color in LOV represented African-American/Black and Arab-American identities. Some White women in the group strongly identified with ethnicities such as Jewish and Italian. When asked about what we could do differently in the group Salma, an Arab-American LOV co-researcher, commented on the recruitment of more women of color to LOV and said, "Of course, more ethnic diversity, but that simply could not be forced to happen because of living in Utah and our own social connections, or lack of them" (Salma, personal communication, January 5, 2014).

During the time when the group was still open to accepting new members, we discussed the importance of adding a diversity of voices to the group. Donna responded,

> Donna: I'd like to be sure that we're staying conscious about adding new people, that we're really being conscious about adding diversity. I get a little nervous when I think about…
>
> Luci: Bringing our friends
>
> Donna: Yeah, because my sense is that it's really important, um, to be thinking about that. (T3, P23)

Donna's reflections launched the group into a discussion about how to invite more diverse representation into the group, despite the limitations of Utah's demographics. During that discussion, Salma asked about recent absences by one LOV member who identified as a woman of color. We rushed past Salma's subtle but powerful question regarding racial dynamics in the group, perhaps to avoid important questions regarding our group's readiness, at that time, to be a truly welcoming space for old lesbians of color. hooks (1995) discussed a White colleague's commitment to being an antiracist ally and wrote, "The will to be vigilant emerged from both her commitment to ending racism and her will to be in loving community with black folks. Not abandoning that longing for community is a perspective we must all embrace if racism is to end" (p. 269). If we had practiced vigilance in that moment, when Salma took the risk to question our assumptions that we were indeed welcoming to women of color, it could have led us to a deeper CR experience in terms of interrogating race, White privilege, and inclusion in terms of the dynamics of the LOV group. It may have allowed us to engage in new ways with historical tensions between White women and women of color in feminist and lesbian communities.

At one meeting, Luci shared historical racial tensions within the feminist movement and said,

> NOW (National Organization for Women) got really split up by the racism issue in the early nineties; and then, you know, that's about when I was starting to phase out, mid-nineties. But, um, the last NOW election there was a very strong radical group of mostly, I think, African-American women….but I think there was some Latinas and they were defeated by the all-White group that's in there now and you can see what NOW's doin' lately....nothing. (T3, P30)

Luci and others in the group shared past experiences where discussions about race became heated and divisive. These experiences seemed related to LOV members' hesitancy to discuss race and privilege within the LOV group itself. LOV co-researchers responded by asking about the tools that the national OLOC organization used to "focus on, deal with race and class issues" (Polly, T3, P31). The national OLOC organization had been working actively on antiracist issues within old lesbian community and had developed strategies and tools for doing this work across racial differences. One of the ways that White supremacy continues to be reinforced in our society is by encouraging a kind of "isolated expertness" where White individuals do not reach out to ask for support and instead insist on already knowing how to solve the problem of racism. Polly's efforts in making common cause with the multiracial antiracist coalitions within national OLOC was an important step in letting go of the trap of expertness and isolation, and instead creating *beloved community*. LOV members engaged in a dialectical movement, at times acknowledging, while at other times avoiding CR about race, racism, and White privilege. On the surface it may appear counterintuitive to bounce back and forth between avoiding and approaching antiracist efforts. However, in a qualitative study about White privilege and White identity development, Todd and Abrams (2011) reported that this kind of dialectical movement signaled change and movement towards an antiracist

identity for White individuals struggling with the concept of White privilege. Groups engaged in continuing antiracist efforts may benefit from discussing the "process" of CR discussions on race, power, and privilege. Interrogating White privilege could happen in the form of noticing when and how the group attends to and avoids these topics, and by collaborating on ideas to help group members stay connected to one another during these conversations.

Focusing on intersections of old and lesbian identities was a primary focus in the work of LOV. Throughout preparation for the Alix/ OLOC event, group members discussed old lesbian needs and concerns. We discussed how to reach out to old lesbians who may live more rurally, or who may not be "out" or connected with LGBTQ community. LOV co-researchers used empathy skills to imagine what it might be like to see the promotional materials for the event and discussed potential questions and concerns from isolated old lesbians. Luci advocated for old lesbians who may be interested but hesitant to attend the event and said,

> Luci: I talk to someone and I say "I want you to come to this concert," and they say "OK, yeah," and they call me a week or two later and there's no tickets left.
>
> Hoda: Means you lose.
>
> Luci: Well, but you can't say that to an old lesbian who's hesitant and thinkin' about it… (T4, P16)

As a response to this section, Sandy wrote, "It's a delicate balance [between] offering something to someone and 'taking care' of someone" (Sandy, personal communication, March 17, 2014). Her reactions were a reminder that consciousness-raising and activist issues are complex, and, at times, it may not be clear when to step up to support someone and when to step back to allow someone to step up for themselves.

Stability versus fluidity of identities emerged often within conversations about sexual orientation, gender, and gender identity. During the entry process of LOV, co-researchers discussed the importance of identity politics, especially regarding the identity of lesbian. Lesbian identity connected women who chose women as lovers, partners, and friends, and who had shared experiences of marginalization bound by the intersections of sexual orientation and gender oppression. "The personal is political" (Hanisch, 1969) for many old lesbians having lived through the second-wave of the women's movement in the U.S., and thus lesbian identity is not only a personal identity but also a political one. For many of the women of LOV, identifying as lesbian was a political statement, and the need for that political statement in an oppressive society encouraged stability within that identity. In particular, women of LOV discussed the culture(s) of feminist and radical lesbians and fears around losing those identities. Luci said,

> We have disowned the words feminism and radical and lesbian, you know, it's now bigger and broader, and lovelier, and "transier," and everything else. Which is great to be all-inclusive, but we have lost some of that, that's why you feel the loss. (T1, P17)

These historical and political connections to the identity of lesbian were strongly rooted in the LOV group. When we discussed fluidity of sexual identity and sexual orientation, discomfort and tensions emerged at the perceived loss of lesbian identity. For example, in discussing a popular singer-songwriter who was previously lesbian-identified, LOV members shared,

Salma: She was lesbian and then... not.

Cathy: Un-lesbian.

Sue: How does she identify?

Salma: Now? I have no idea. But at some point she was a lesbian.

> Sue: Did she call herself heterosexual or bi?
>
> Luci: I don't think she identifies, but she's in a relationship with a man.
>
> Sue: Yeah, I know that.
>
> Susan: I think she said she loves the person who she's with. I think she's married to him, isn't she?
>
> Sue: So, you know, my guess is, given her politics, that I would think that she would identify as bi.
>
> Donna: I think she'd identify as fluid. (T9, P24-25)

LOV co-researchers struggled with accommodating sexual identity fluidity and attempted to label this woman's identity for her. LOV also engaged in conversations about excluding bisexual identified women into the group and often engaged in either/or types of thinking regarding sexual orientation identity. hooks (2003) wrote, "Either/or thinking is crucial to the maintenance of racism and other forms of group oppression. Whenever we think in terms of both/and we are better situated to do the work of community building" (p. 37). By adopting the either/or stance of either someone is clearly identified as lesbian or not, LOV co-researchers may have taken a narrow approach to understanding sexual identity and missed an opportunity to resist participating in the same kinds of exclusionary rhetoric seen in hetero-normative culture. At the same time, Sue wrote, "There may have been other biases at work. Definition is important to old (or any) lesbians. It's mostly been an issue of safety for lesbians to know how womyn identify themselves" (Sue, personal communication, March 30, 2014). Here another opportunity was created for us, as LOV members, to take a both/and perspective. As someone who identifies as bisexual/queer, it was sometimes my experience that LOV members were exclusionary and narrow in sexual orientation labels for women. At the

same time, these perspectives rose out of an oppressive context that deemed separatism as needed for psychological and spiritual survival. It is also useful to remember that, when these women came out, societal labels for women's sexual orientation included heterosexual/ straight, lesbian, or bisexual; the idea of fluidity, along with challenges to binary thinking, had not emerged at that time. As old lesbian community organizing continues in years to come it may be important to keep both ends of this discussion alive in order to grasp the nuances and complexities of these social justice concerns.

The group discussed transgender identities and national OLOC's hesitancy to be inclusive to old lesbians who identified as transgender. One LOV member shared her personal experiences with a transidentified loved one. In relaying a story of a "niece related by love, who we thought was a lovely little dyke, turns out she wants to be a he, and then started on that road" (Alda, T1, P18) she remained open and supportive of this loved one while also sharing her reflections on why old lesbian communities may struggle with this dilemma. She said, "I do think it's foreign for older lesbians to understand that. I would love to have some dialogue around that, because I think we've traveled a different road. These were not options [for us]" (T1, P18). In this example Alda participated in both/and thinking by sharing her own support for transgender-identified loved ones while also highlighting feelings of betrayal that some old lesbian women may feel about women who are perceived as opting out of womanhood and into a privileged male identity.

Other group members also engaged with both/and thinking and shared that gender identity may be about more than opting out of an oppressed identity. For example, Polly shared about meeting transgender women in Alcoholics Anonymous and hearing about

the oppression and violence they experienced as transgender individuals (T1, P27). Alda's story sparked a deluge of both/and thinking that helped us to engage in more complex conversations about inclusion. hooks (2003) wrote, "The inclusive nature of both/and thinking allows us to be inclusive" (p. 39). We continued CR discussions about transgender identity and ultimately decided to declare LOV and eventually Utah OLOC to be inclusive of any person who identified as a lesbian, regardless of gender/sex assigned at birth.

What Is Feminism Today?

LOV's CR discussions led co-researchers to propose a dialogue about the following question, "What is feminism today?" (T3, P5). During the entry process, LOV adopted a feminist-multicultural approach to CR and social action. This approach may have been born out of the approach that Sue and I took at the very first workshop in October, 2010. We both ascribed to a feminist-multicultural and social justice-oriented approach to relationships and community-building in our personal and professional lives. We acknowledged this during the entry process and invited dialogue about using a feminist-multicultural versus other approaches to LOV. We also discussed different iterations of feminist theories that each hold somewhat different perspectives and frameworks for activism and organizing. When the word "feminist" was used, we realized that each of us may have used the word somewhat differently from one another.

Alda initiated the proposal to discuss what feminism is today and said,

> But if we have time, I've been thinking about a question from a couple of times ago... what is feminism today? So I have some, some thoughts I'd like to put on the table to, um… generate some discussion at some point because that's what I've been mulling over. (T3, P5)

This discussion was immediately adopted as LOV members nodded and replied with positive affirmations.

CR discussions on feminism today helped uncover feminist points of tension and connection throughout all 10 focus group meetings. Underlying discussions of race, gender, sexuality, religion, ability status, age, and social class were multiple waves and traditions of feminist thought. Many LOV members brought in stories from their experiences with second wave feminism. For example, some LOV co-researchers discussed earlier feminist groups where the term "lesbian" was still seen as scary. They discussed,

> Polly: Don't you think that there is a strong, uh, impetus by the enemies of feminism to use the term lesbian, to confuse it with the term feminist, and to deliberately scare people?
>
> Luci: Yes absolutely. And that accusation….I remember I went to a NOW meeting 'cause I was trying to meet people, you know. And I was straight, I didn't know anything, and this was 1978….
>
> Hoda: You were straight?
>
> Luci: I thought I was. But I went to this meeting and every woman in the room had a "I'm a lesbian" button on. And I knew some of those women weren't, but that was just, so, I mean it really was like a mind jolt. And what they were trying to, you know, the whole thing was to diffuse that word lesbian. (T3, P30)

Hoda shared her thoughts on feminism by way of a story about her partner's mother. She said,

> I remember I was driving Alda's mom to a doctor appointment and we drove by a van, and she started to tell me a story when they were buying their first home and Alda hadn't been born then, and her mother had two jobs and her dad was unemployed, and women couldn't have a bank accounts at the time. (T1, P22)

Hoda shared this story as a point of connection with feminism for herself but also as a way to connect with "those who came before" and to acknowledge the shoulders she

stood on (Polly, T2, P11). Donna relayed memories from feminist events in the 1980s and acknowledged that women's needs and concerns were sometimes diminished at the same time that lesbian feminist activists were working to care for other communities. She said,

> We were going to the West Coast Music Festivals, and then the whole focus was on the AIDS movement and taking care of our gay brothers, and, and, which is great, but there was this sort of sense, but you know it's sort of like, did we get lost again? (T2, P14)

Through co-sharing group members bonded and transmitted lesbian and feminist herstories with one another. It allowed members newer to feminism to learn about and process pieces of their own stories such as coming-out stories and the development of lesbian culture and activism in Utah. LOV co-researchers used a feminist ethic of care by inviting different voices to share their thoughts about feminism. Orme (2002) wrote, "Feminist ethics listens to and hears multiple voices because it defines morality and moral knowledge as plural and heterogenous" (p. 347). By engaging with feminist ethics of care and both/and thinking regarding the multiple kinds of interactions with feminism LOV members practiced inclusion and *beloved community*.

CR discussions about the intersections of feminism and separatism continued beyond the entry process. LOV co-researchers recognized the needs of marginalized people to have separate space for reconnecting with voice and empowerment while also simultaneously holding the need for collaboration and working together across identities. Through her experiences working with young lesbian women, Donna shared the importance of separatist space for women,

> These women come to my group and don't ever leave because that becomes their community and becomes the one place in the world that young lesbians can be fully themselves, and, you know, some of them have tried [co-ed LGBTQ

> groups]. After two sessions [at a co-ed LGBTQ group] they say "the men run the group" and "I don't really feel welcome there". (T1, P25)

Another LOV co-researcher, Claire, shared her own experiences in Girl Scouts as having had a positive impact on her own development,

> That's why I loved Girl Scouts. I mean, that is where I got my voice, you know. I went to camp every summer, for all summer, and I always felt special in those groups. It had nothing really to do with sexuality at that point. I was able to not be drowned. I was not competing with male voices. (T1, P26)

LOV co-researchers spoke clearly about the need for separatist space for individuals devalued in "dominator culture" (hooks 2003, p. 197). Alda summed up the complexities of separatism and said,

> You have to get your energy from the separatist space so you can go out, and go to the other dimension that we live with all the time. It's not an either/or for any of us. Nobody lives there, we need to come in and soak it up sometimes, and then we have to take it back out. (T1, P43)

In this quote, Alda described a flow or movement happening between separatism and integration that is needed for people who incur microaggressions and experiences of oppression. In later discussions, Claire and Polly kept the discussion of separatism alive and built on Alda's comments and earlier discussions of separatism. Claire shared, "Well and also I'd like to make sure we keep separatism, or the theory of it. What did that mean, and what did it provide and what, how is that different from now?" (T2, P27). Polly added,

> Identity politics was radical. It really was something new and people talk about the good ole days before identity politics, when it was an unquestioned patriarchy and all of that. And, I think there's something healthy in self-identified groups clinging, sticking to their own. (T2, P34)

When discussing feminism, LOV members more readily expressed differences of opinion and thought than we did when discussing social class, education, race, and White

privilege. Feminist philosophies ranged from ideas that saw feminism as a vehicle for women to be able to make choices no matter the choice to analyses of privilege and power and capitalist practices. We engaged in a discussion about whether feminism is about giving women choices, and, if so, some LOV members reported that women such as Sarah Palin and Michelle Bachman would be considered feminists by that definition. Discussions became passionate as co-researchers disagreed and pushed the discussion to a deeper place. They said,

> Salma: Well, I mean what I disagree with is that any of these people are feminists. They may be strong. I mean, heck, we've had plenty of women in history before feminism who did what they wanted to do. But feminism brought in a set of ideas. It's an analysis of society and, and economics and all of that.
>
> Alda: And is it an analysis that has any relevance in today's world?
>
> Salma: So someone saying, you know, I can do it. I'm a woman, I can do it. That's not a feminist. That's not, that's not enough. It would be inaccurate because she'd have to have that analysis which part of it is consciousness-raising, right, and subscribing to sets of ideas. (T3, P43)

Donna also contributed to the idea that feminism was more than about giving women choices. She said,

> Well I, I have to disagree that feminism is about making choices. So the choice now we're dealing with and that we're seeing... sort of an increase of women who are making the choice to have, uh, genital mutilation, or give their daughters breast enhancements for their sixteenth birthday. But I guess I'm hoping we can expand, I mean the, I'm uncomfortable with that, with it all being about choice, because I think it is about an analysis of privilege and power and gender and the intersections of other identities. (T3, P40)

When LOV co-researchers engaged in passionate discussions together and shared different perspectives in an open way, they engaged in the practice of *beloved community.* hooks (2012) wrote, "Most people think that community means that we all think alike, or we'll all be taking the same action, when genuine community is inclusive

and says, 'We're actually different but part of what we are working towards is how to be together in our difference'" (p. 82). During these conversations, differences were shared with energy and each perspective contributed to how the group would come to define feminism collectively.

A Rich Conversation – Process of Consciousness-Raising

At times CR discussions expanded co-researchers' perspectives and helped us consider new ways of thinking about power, privilege, and oppression. We also avoided conflict and discussions about privilege that was being enacted within the group itself. Both seized and missed opportunities for engaging in what Donna called "a rich conversation" (T5, P23) are presented here in the hopes that these opportunities may assist LOV in the future or other communities hoping to also work toward building "the most rockin' old lesbian community in the country" (Sue, T1, P12).

Privilege has been considered similar to "the air we breathe" (Kimmel, 2010, p. xxv) as well as to wearing an invisible knapsack full of passports, maps, keys, and other tools that provide those with privileged identities with more access than those with oppressed identities in a society structured around inequality (McIntosh, 1989). Privilege is easily taken for granted, as it is invisible because it is supported structurally and institutionally by society. In the LOV group we both avoided and attended to privilege and power dynamics, and these experiences served as part of the CR learning experiences for us. As we transitioned away from the entry process and into our main working phase, Alda reflected on our process of CR and said, "Well, we're looking at it within our own group, you know, we have to look at it in our own group before we can do anything in the

larger community" (T1, P44). This important insight served as a connection between CR discussions and action projects that the LOV group engaged in together. It also placed importance on CR as a collective activity that we participated in together. We took time at every group meeting to discuss and deepen our understandings of issues related to power, privilege, and social justice. It was a firm commitment and a group norm that emerged from our very first meeting in October 2010.

At times we missed the mark in attending to privilege, as seen from our struggles with acknowledging privilege regarding social class, education, sexual orientation fluidity, race, and White privilege. At times, either/or thinking got in our way of seeing an issue in a more complex way. For example, one member said "Either you stay solid and identified in your assumed role, whatever it is, or you become inclusive but then you become diluted" (Luci, T2, P14). Attempts at CR almost always included shining moments and growth edges, and we could have benefitted from more discussion about what happened when we hit a growth edge in our group and how to speak up when we felt uncomfortable with what was discussed. When we avoided or distanced ourselves from certain types of conversation, we limited our own abilities to engage in *beloved community*. hooks (2003) wrote, "Of course, we cannot forge boundaries across the barriers that racism creates if we want always to be safe or to avoid conflict" (p. 63).

There were also times that we invited and engaged in challenging conversations and shared our thoughts on the importance of acknowledging privilege. Donna requested more of these group processes,

> I would also like to see us being aware that we really want to be diverse as a group of old lesbians, and that we are certainly in the majority as White women. It feels really important that we have an awareness, and [are] actively looking at, how we can be inclusive in that way. (T2, P19)

We collectively asked why it was important to revisit issues of privilege and oppression. Some LOV members voiced frustration over having to revisit the same issues that lesbian feminists were wrestling with 30-40 years ago in regard to racism within feminist groups (T3, P19). Their frustration stemmed from hearing about the same issues that occurred during second wave movements and feelings of cynicism about that. I shared,

> But it's something that I think will never be solved. That it's something that we probably always have to continue to ask ourselves and be open to those questions and to be open to examining ourselves in a critical way. As long as we live in a society that is patriarchal, that is racist, that is white supremacist, and classist, etc. then we're always gonna be having to revisit these. (T3, P26)

Conversations about acknowledging privilege and critically examining ourselves in the process made it possible for later conversations to emerge regarding power dynamics between LOV and the newly formed Utah OLOC chapter. LOV members were discussing their thoughts on what OLOC should do and Jolene called out the power dynamics in the room and the privilege that LOV members held in discussing OLOC without OLOC members present. Jolene and others said,

> Jolene: But it almost feels to me like puppeteers though. We sit up here and we say, "Oh, this is a good idea. Let's try to push this into OLOC." Why can't we just be in OLOC and say, "Hey here's an idea"? I mean, and it's probably just my own...
>
> Sue: Sensitivity to that.
>
> Jolene: It feels very like I have a crown and, you know, "Here, try that. Here, child. You know, we talked about it in our group. We find it worthy. So here, OLOC". (T9, P11)

Jolene bravely called out the privilege that LOV held in that moment, as an exclusive group, discussing what should happen in OLOC. This was a particularly powerful example of using immediacy to interrupt privilege as it was being enacted in the group. hooks (2003) wrote, "Love of justice cannot be sustained if it is only a manipulation to be

with the in-crowd, whoever they may be" (p. 64). In this moment Jolene chose to side with justice and *beloved community*, and not the in-crowd of LOV members discussing OLOC. At the same time she modeled for the rest of us how to step outside a comfort zone to challenge and resist "dominator culture" (p. 197).

The process of having a rich conversation varied in terms of depth. At times we stayed on the surface level of intellectual concepts and abstract ideas. There were other times we engaged in a deeper level of process that involved personal risk-taking and challenging "dominator culture" (hooks, 2003, p. 197). At the intellectual or surface-level of CR conversations, we avoided connection at a more intimate level. During these conversations, we spoke about power and privilege as it happened outside of the group, such as in local or national politics or in other activist groups or organizing efforts. When co-researchers invited the group to take the conversation to a deeper place, we engaged in avoidance activities such as changing the subject, using humor to deflect, or discussing tasks instead of process. Hoda said,

> I was interested in what you were saying earlier about what we're doing right, and what we're doing wrong. It's the what we're doing wrong that would be interesting to kind of ask other people, because our intention is not to do something wrong. But as a group you know as we're, like, sensitive to different things, you know, if we feel comfortable to, like, have that discussion, you know, "What did I do wrong?" And you guys might notice something that I have said, or whatever, then we can, you know, bring it up. (T3, P28)

I responded and said, "So maybe not even framing it as something we did wrong but [an invisible knapsack] that we all have" (T3, P28). I remember feeling excited about Hoda's invitation for us to take the conversation deeper. Another member moved the conversation back to tasks and said, "I have [person's] phone number so I'll call her" (T3, P28). The conversation quickly rose back to the surface as others chimed in with

task-related items. We were on the edge of breaking into deeper process and, thus, intimacy. We lost our footing and did not find our way back to that particular invitation.

As an outsider-within in the group, and as someone who held an "academic" identity, I worried that my own participation in the group would step on the group's process. I wondered about how much I should participate and tried to manage my academic and other privileges in the group by not getting in the way of the conversation at times. In my own reflections I later realized that without having fully processed these concerns with the entire group, I allowed some opportunities for process to pass by. I impacted the group's process through inaction as well as through action. By not participating as fully as I could have at times, I did not honor the principle of mutuality, where each of us gave something to and received something from the process. Sandy remarked, "You are asking a lot of yourself to break through a very strong culturally supported behavior of non-confrontation. Funny, we will go to war over a loaf of bread but God forbid we ask our neighbor to keep the noise down at 2 a.m." (personal communication, March 17, 2014).

Religious identity, affiliation, and tensions can surround many LGBTQ contexts in Utah. Not having been raised in Utah, it has sometimes been challenging for me to pick up on sensitivities to these conversations and whether or not they are welcomed at any given moment. During the entry process, LOV members engaged in conversations about LDS culture and its intersections with LGBTQ culture. LOV co-researchers had experienced intense reactions to this earlier conversation, so much so that multiple LOV members remarked about it in the January 2014 survey. One member wrote, "What took a lot of time in the beginning of the meetings was the group's preoccupation with the

LDS Church. It was what almost drove me away from the group. It seemed counter-productive and offensive not only to me but others" (Survey, January 2014). Another member, like me, felt empathy for other group members who had been impacted by these conversations, but also did not completely understand the discomfort felt by some LOV members. She wrote, "I didn't think that discussion of LDS influences in the culture in our state should have been a taboo subject. But then, I wasn't raised here nor have I ever been a member, so I am not sensitive on the subject. For some of the members, it is a big part of who they are, for good or ill" (Survey, January 2014). Clearly, the conversations were powerful for some, as another member recalled, "If we were to start over again, I hope that I could have avoided the one conversation where I had a conflict with another member over a conversation about Mormons. Living in a culture where Mormons dominate the outcome of every ideological discourse, it seems impossible to avoid the discussion of Mormon influence. In this instance, I had no idea that I had irritated a member. That incident not only chilled that meeting with everyone, it affected my sense of being accepted by the entire group. I never felt entirely comfortable in the group after that" (Survey, January 2014).

A rupture had occurred in the group process, but I had not seen it nor heard of it until almost 3 years later. It ultimately impacted attachments among members and some members' bonds to the group itself. After the survey went out, the group talked about scheduling a next meeting, but listserv discussions soon dissipated, and no meeting had been scheduled at the time of this writing. However, several LOV co-researchers planned to attend my dissertation defense meeting and to go to dinner together afterwards. hooks (2012) spoke to these challenges with creating *beloved community* and said,

> One of the things that has always made me sad is the extent to which civil rights struggles, black power movements, and feminist movements have, at times, collapsed at the point where there was conflict, and how conflict between people in the groups was often seen as a negative. The truth is that you cannot build community without conflict. The issue is not to be without conflict, but to be able to resolve conflict, and the commitment to community is what gives us the inspiration to come up with ways to resolve conflict. (p. 76)

In the survey, one LOV member wrote, "I liked when we focused on each person and we each had time to express our feelings and be listened to, but this didn't happen much" (Survey, January 2014). We could have built dedicated space in each meeting to check on the "health" of our group process and practiced ways to bring our concerns to the surface together without fear of reprisal. As an outsider-within, I am reminded that it is critical to check in on "process" often so that the group does not get stalled silently. Could I have used my outsider-within position to pick up more on emotional reactions and bring them into the group to be discussed? Is it too late at this point for the group to repair ruptures that occurred 2-3 years ago? Are these ruptures like cracks in the foundation, stalling LOV's future and LOV members' relationships with one another?

As an academic PAR outsider-within researcher, I acknowledged a part of myself that wanted our process to feel copacetic in the group. This may have created blind spots in looking for these ruptures. Maybe I wanted too much to be involved with a "happy, healthy PAR group," and this led to decreased awareness about our group processes as a PAR researcher. Should Sue and I have processed our power dynamics in the group more often, or invited conversations about them? I doubt other co-researchers would have brought up these delicate power issues on their own for fear of reprisal, but if we had invited it, or if, at times, had had a conversation about our power dynamics as a fishbowl-

type conversation and then just listened to the group react to us, perhaps that would have restored more equitable power and talkback abilities in the group.

Alongside ruptures, we also pushed ourselves to engage in deeper process moments together. Multiple LOV members noticed feeling stuck with issues of privilege and oppression in lesbian and feminist communities. They shared,

> Salma: I think the lesbians haven't advanced all that much; it's just that we talk about it. We don't really know how to [address privilege].
>
> Luci: We don't know how to. I think that's why we need the tools.
>
> Salma: We don't know how to do it; and, you know, it's kind of interesting to me after all these years, this question is there.
>
> Luci: Still there.
>
> Salma: Because society is, is….
>
> Donna: It's still there. Nothing's changed, really. (T3, P25)

The wisdom of the group emerged in this conversation, and LOV members offered solutions to problems they experienced in their own community. Sandy brought another point of consciousness-raising to the surface in her comments about this section and wrote, "I have noticed in the quotes how people interrupt in critical parts of the 'I'm-thinking' hesitation of other members. It might be a way of looking at who has the power in the group, or maybe who 'wants' the power" (personal communication, March 18, 2014). Seeing quotes from the LOV group process in writing inspired another level of process for Sandy in reflecting on experiences in LOV. Sandy's words inspired me to think of *beloved community* ideas and practices, where organizing groups shared their processes with one another to help learn more effective ways through conflicts and ruptures. Future PAR or organizing groups could also take a look at their own

conversational style and process by reading transcripts together and noticing what happens during their process of conversation. hooks (2003) wrote, "We need to hear from the individuals who know, because they have lived antiracist lives, what everyone can do to decolonize their minds, to maintain awareness, change behavior, and create beloved community" (p. 40). PAR groups and organizing groups need places of communion; to share their knowledge, their successes, their challenges with one another; and to feel supported in the work of justice.

LOV engaged in many rich conversations using multiple methods of getting to these deeper consciousness-raising conversations. One method the group used was engaging in empathy skills to raise awareness of experiences of old lesbians in Utah who may be hesitant to become involved in old lesbian community organizing. When planning the Alix/ OLOC event, several LOV co-researchers used empathy skills when discussing ideas about filming Alix's house concert. They said,

> Hoda: I think when I was first struggling to come out, you know, if something was being taped, if I knew the news was going to be there I wouldn't go….
>
> Liz: Yeah
>
> Hoda: ….you know.
>
> Salma: I, I, I'm also concerned because to me, you know, the casualness of the house comes very… I wouldn't want to see cameras and technical anything. It's just relaxed and kind of enjoy. I think that's what I would say. (T4, P10-11)

Another method that the group used in the process of engaging in rich conversations together included letting go of labels to focus on working for similar values. Although the group perhaps did not reach its potential in using this method, the intention to work together from similar values and diverse identities and backgrounds was set early on. Donna said,

> It's important for me to know that I'm with women who are not necessarily using the same words or the same labels, but who are working with the same values structure, and the same kind of historical political perspective. I think it's important to not get nit-picky about the labels; and, I mean, I think we could have a woman in this group who identified as queer. (T2, P22)

In this quote, Donna invited inclusivity of identities, language, backgrounds, and experiences while also asking the group to decide on its values and goals together. This method could be offered as a solution to the complex dilemma of having a diverse group in terms of social identities and educational experiences.

When it came to planning the Alix/ OLOC event, LOV members consistently engaged in conversations that promoted the inclusion of old lesbians from diverse communities. Members discussed accessibility of venues, transportation issues related to cost and ability status, event costs and the use of a sliding scale fee, location of venues and possible reactions to those venues, and ways to publicize and reach out to old lesbians who may be "off the grid" or more difficult to reach but who may be interested in finding old lesbian community. In these ways LOV co-researchers infused CR directly into planning and action phases of the PAR project. Finally, when asked about process in the survey, as stated earlier, some members shared the impact of missed opportunities for process in the group. In her survey response Sue summed up her hopes for the future of LOV and wrote, "I would want to keep everything we had, but get into deeper process" (personal communication, January 5, 2014).

Celebrating Our Roots

This category was a continuation from the shared lesbian and feminist herstories and experiences with lesbian music culture that first emerged during the entry process

(See Chapter 2 for more information). Celebrating Our Roots remained a strong thread throughout the LOV project. The subcategories, or facets, of this category included the following: (a) Layers and layers of circles of feminist and lesbian herstory; (b) The legacy of lesbian women's music culture; and (c) Strengthening lesbian community. Each is discussed below.

Layers and Layers of Circles

Each LOV co-researcher brought a unique herstory and set of experiences and networks into the room with her at every meeting. Luci observed, "There's been layers and layers of lesbian and feminist circles, I mean, that all have tentacles" (T1, P10). Overlapping circles and tentacles connected LOV members to lesbian and feminist identities, to one another, and to past and present experiences with the wider old lesbian community. As LOV members shared their herstories, networks, and layers of circles with one another, a beautiful tapestry of women's experiences was woven together to create the culture of the LOV group and the eventual kickoff of a Utah chapter of OLOC.

These circles were layered in multiple ways in the LOV group. One way this happened was through informal sharing of herstory as LOV members discussed consciousness-raising issues. At one meeting, a visiting lesbian couple who knew many LOV members was invited to the meeting because they were staying with Luci and Claire. Group members "shared the LOV" with this couple in ways that included learning about feminist history in Utah, lesbian community development in Utah, activist circles, underground lesbian groups, and places that, surprisingly or not, affirmed lesbian women's identities. The visiting couple added their own layers of circles to help fill in the

gaps and to become part of the tapestry as well. In another conversation, LOV members discussed shared memories of a novel titled *Patience and Sarah,* and the impact of seeing a lesbian novel represented on the shelves of pharmacies and booksellers growing up. Salma and Claire reflected the following:

> Salma: It's the only lesbian novel I know in existence to ever have been in drug stores, 'cause I do remember that.
>
> Claire: Do you remember that?
>
> Salma: Yes, I do remember that.
>
> Claire: That's good to know, 'cause it was in my small town in Ohio, of two-thousand people. I mean it's a different day and age, 'cause you turn on now and you see "Rosie"; and,, you know, I mean you see, you have role models of people. (T3, P35)

Circles were also layered throughout the planning process of the Alix/ OLOC event. During this time, LOV co-researchers interspersed tasks and planning details with stories of lesbians in the Salt Lake community and their contributions to lesbian community. In one conversation, members shared the following:

> Luci: So in the early days there was a big sort of split with [name] running the [organization name] but being such a closeted dyke. And I think in this community some of that still exists.
>
> Donna: I think so too.
>
> Sharon: Is [name] still living?
>
> Donna: No. She's been long gone, yeah. I mean, she's been, I think, a very important woman....
>
> Luci: Oh, catalyst.
>
> Donna: …in this community. I mean she was the original director of the [organization name.
>
> Sue: Yeah. She's been a really important figure. (T8, P40)

Other conversations included sharing details about particular buildings in Salt Lake City that housed clandestine lesbian meetings over the years and discussing pivotal events in the lesbian community. In the end, the Alix/ OLOC series of events in March/April, 2012, also became part of this shared herstory and tapestry.

LOV members also shared about the hierarchies of power and privilege among lesbian community. Some LOV members discussed lesbian women labeled as "queen bees" and "queen of the lesbians" (T2, P26). These hierarchies also existed within LOV itself, but the group did not process or acknowledge these hierarchies among one another. As discussed earlier, some co-researchers came to the LOV project with long herstories, experiences, status, and power in the wider community in northern Utah. Some LOV members were/are very connected to lesbian community. Others were/are not. LOV co-researchers generously shared their poignant memories and experiences of lesbian community organizing. However, some members' voices were louder than others in transmitting lesbian herstory. These hierarchies impacted what was shared and valued in the group as well as what was not shared in terms of celebrating the roots of lesbian and feminist herstory.

The tapestry we created together has impacted all of our lives, and we walked away from LOV meetings with new circles and new connections each time. In October, 2012, I presented the powerpoint presentation from my dissertation proposal meeting to the LOV Group and thus shared the herstory of the Living Our Visions project up to that point. Jolene commented,

> As you were reading that, I was thinking about that first meeting and, just, it was so amazing. And I was, I was thinking, I just blessed [name] for dragging me down there telling me I needed to go. What a difference you have all made in my life. (T8, P9)

Jolene's statement was felt powerfully in the room with verbal affirmations and nods. She gave voice to an experience that we all had at different points in the group, that of being transformed by LOV. hooks (2003) wrote,

> The small circles of love we have managed to form in our individual lives represent a concrete realistic reminder that *beloved community* is not a dream, that it already exists for those of us who have done the work of educating ourselves for critical consciousness... (p. 264)

For many LOV members, the LOV projected represented one of those small circles, and a place where we could come to commune together, to stretch ourselves, and to retain hope for our visions of *beloved community*.

Legacy of Lesbian Music Culture

She's a BD (baby dyke)
She's a PD (possible, probable)
She's a DD (yeah, she's a definite dyke)
She's a POU (positively one of us)
She's got Hi-LP (good potential)
Suffering from PLT (pre-lesbian tension "it's a terrible thing to watch")
She's a wannabe, a DOT
Well, if she can't be a dyke of today, she would be a dyke of tomorrow
Then she'll be a DIT (a dyke in training)
Or an FDA (future dyke of America)
She'll be a Betty, a friend of Dorothy, she'll be our kind, that's OK…
She's a lebesian, lesbonic & I happen to know she's a vagitarian
She's a member of the team
She's a member of the lodge, of the family
She's a member of the church, of the club, of the committee
And she sings in the choir…
Wee da lee da le lesbian code… (Dobkin, 1990, Track 3)

These lyrics appeared lighthearted and celebratory, and indeed they were. They celebrated a community connected by shared experiences of oppression, and thus a shared language. "Lesbian code" (Dobkin, 1990, Track 3) was created and shared across multiple lesbian communities and was spoken and sung with joy and humor and a sense

of belonging to a specific cultural group. There was and still remains a need for people within marginalized communities for speaking in "code" as a strategy for survival in a society structured by oppression and privilege hierarchies. Coded language has helped to develop underground networks of communication and safety. While celebratory, the song also sent a more sobering message of collective resistance and encouraged creativity in thriving in the face of structural inequality and oppression.

During several meetings, LOV members used coded language to describe the legacies of politically radical music geared towards lesbian and feminist women. Codes such as "Mich" or "Michigan" (Luci, T3, P38) were used to describe the Michigan Womyn's Music Festival, a radical "womyn-only" music and art festival occurring every August since 1976 that is owned, created, produced, and staffed by women. At other times creative "lesbian codes" were proposed by LOV co-researchers to reach out to older lesbians who were not "out", who lived rurally, and who desired a less obvious connection with lesbian community. Group members said,

> Luci: And so, you know, maybe what we could do is just say this is an older bowling league…. (group laughter)
>
> Jolene: It's a senior lesbian group.
>
> Hoda: Women who love basketball….who love women's basketball.
>
> Jolene: Who used to play basketball….and now their knees are gone.
>
> Donna: Alix has a song about that!
>
> Luci: Yeah, she does.
>
> Donna: Speaking in Code, Lesbian Code. (T5, P24)

LOV members harkened back to underground language used to communicate among women who feared being "outed" as lesbian in their communities. Among today's

LGBTQ Pride Centers and young LGBTQ adults, an "out and proud" attitude has swept the nation with the changing political climate and more access to resources for thriving in the midst of homophobia, transphobia, and sexism. While there are, of course, significant benefits to living one's life out in the open and without having to check parts of ourselves at the door, LOV members may also have retained a keener sense about those older lesbians who may not be reached with the "out and proud" slogan. hooks discussed the use of language in community-building efforts and wrote, "I think often that community requires a whole new language and a whole new way of communicating because our language itself is so infused with the politics of domination" (p. 77). Not only does the creative development of new language help marginalized communities to thrive, but hooks also recommended a revolutionary overhaul of current language to subvert the dominant paradigm. Creative expression and use of language can be an important part of creating *beloved community*.

LOV co-researchers discussed differences in lesbian music culture then and now and the power of attending lesbian and feminist women's concerts and festivals. Luci said, "But women's festivals were something else. It was like you went and became your own nation or something for a few days and you just forgot about the patriarchy" (T3, P38). LOV members who had women's music festival experiences spoke with passion when remembering them as a time where they felt valued and respected as women and lesbians. These festivals and music culture became an important source of early CR discussions for LOV members, who perceived today's lesbian music culture to be apolitical in comparison. In one conversation, LOV members discussed the mainstreaming of lesbian music,

> Luci: It's like Melissa Etheridge….
>
> Salma: She is mainstream. The other is not mainstream.
>
> Luci: And it was so exciting to have an option that was opposing mainstream….
>
> Alda: And big business.
>
> Luci: …and that we could identify with. And it was women. And it was women-run and women-owned and, you know, uh, the financing came from women; and it was, you know, it was very exciting.
>
> Donna: It was, yeah.
>
> Polly: So, there isn't anything like that today.
>
> Luci: I don't think there is. (T3, P37)

Sandy added her reflections on this section and said, "I'm surprised there was no mention here of Olivia Records. They were a huge influence in bringing women together and provided a way for us to safely identify each other through playing a song or talking about music" (personal communication, March 20, 2014). In her reflections, Sandy shared another account of how coded language impacted people with marginalized identities as helping to "safely identify" one another.

LOV members recounted memories and shared their experiences rooted in lesbian and feminist music culture with one another and lamented the loss of this culture as LGBTQ culture and women's music in general became more mainstream and less overtly political. Co-researchers also discussed the possible implications for current younger lesbians and feminists who may have missed out on events, music, and culture that explicitly centered a radical valuing of women and a resistance to patriarchy and other forms of oppression. During the planning of the Alix Dobkin house concert, LOV members set aside several tickets for younger lesbian feminists who might be interested

in sharing in the experiences of radical lesbian music culture. In this way, LOV members continued to transmit lesbian and feminist herstory to women of a so-called younger generation and, by doing so, reignited the flame of radical politics and resistance of oppression.

Strengthening Lesbian Community

As LOV members shared about lesbian and feminist herstory in terms of women's music festivals, political organizing, activism, and other projects, I wondered what it was like for those of us in the group who may have heard these narratives for the first time. Although several co-researchers did not grow up with these herstories, as a group we did not take time to process this or to invite comments, questions, or feedback. We discussed what it means to strengthen lesbian community outside of the LOV group but perhaps missed some opportunities to process how LOV members themselves were digesting experiences shared in the group. I also wonder if the group's struggles with social class and educational differences led to these missed opportunities. If we had provided a more structured format for talkback and sharing feedback with one another, then potential feelings of being left out of early radical lesbian and feminist culture could have been expressed and worked through. It would have also provided a structure for others to share their own herstories related to lesbian identity and for us, as a group, to value different kinds of experiences as important.

For example, Luci shared that "Jolene and Cathy came out as Mormon lesbian mothers approximately 20 years ago in Northern Utah. They divorced husbands and lived openly as lesbians in Brigham City" (personal communication, March 16, 2014).

Brigham City, a politically and religiously conservative city in northern Utah with a small-town feel is not currently known for an affirming stance of LGBTQ-identified people, let alone 20 years ago. Although many of us in LOV knew this story in bits and pieces, there was never a time where their story was shared at a LOV meeting. It took incredibly heroic courage and a great amount of risk to live openly and raise children as Mormon-identified lesbian mothers. Jolene and Cathy were/are also radical activists. Yet, our group never opened the space up for these stories to be shared and celebrated as part of lesbian herstory. In this way we missed opportunities to both connect with Jolene and Cathy at a deeper level and to connect with potentially common shared experiences among lesbians in Utah. The experiences of being in women-only spaces, dancing naked by the firelight at a woman's music festival, being a part of radical activist groups in the '70s and '80s were also real in our group, but they were not the only real experiences. Sandy shared reactions to this section of writing and wrote, "Right on, and the women who had the music festival experiences hold that with great value. [This is] not unlike experiences in mainstream culture [where] a live performance has more value than a recording, or so we romanticize it to be" (personal communication, March 20, 2014). Sandy's reflections touched on the importance of not falling into the trap of romanticizing past or present experiences with activism or grassroots organizing. If we romanticize experiences we may miss seeing the whole of an experience because it focuses on the sentimental aspects and neglects the challenges or growth edges from which we can learn. In her writing on *beloved community*, hooks (1995) also shared reflections on the trap of 'sentimental love' or bonding. She wrote,

> Understanding that love was the antithesis of the will to dominate and subjugate, we allowed that longing to know love, to love one another, to radicalize us

> politically. That love was not sentimental. It did not blind us to the reality that racism was deeply systemic... (p. 265)

By featuring certain types of radical activism so heavily, we may have inadvertently silenced the development of others. Although it may be that Sue, Donna, and I aimed to be co-researchers and members of LOV, much of the first workshop's philosophy was rooted in Sue's and Donna's earlier book, *Living Our Visions*, that shared principles of radical feminist and lesbian grassroots organizing in the 1970s and 1980s. Our own heavy influence on early (and continuing) foundations for the LOV project may have hindered other's voices at times in the group. It is important for academic PAR researchers to interrogate their own privilege within PAR groups, and future groups may want to do this together regularly, with the entire group, to make explicit space for working through ruptures, splinters, and other ways that power dynamics can impact a group at any given time. As old lesbian organizing continues with LOV, OLOC, or in other communities, it seems critical to attend to everyone's herstories and to make room for the unique and powerful ways that lesbian women have thrived in the face of oppression, both past and present. Making space for different life narratives, ideas, and concepts within the organizing group itself may provide a model for how to reach out and connect with old lesbians outside of our personal networks and frames for understanding old lesbian needs and concerns.

The LOV group did work to strengthen lesbian community by attending to the divide between lesbians under age 40 versus lesbians over age 40. Alda asked, "How can the younger generation push things forward if they don't understand where we've been?" (T1, P47). LOV members shared their own herstories and experiences and discussed ways to transmit these experiences to younger lesbians as well as the potential impact for

younger lesbians. These conversations connected to the CR category and Polly's words about standing on the shoulders of those who came before. As discussed in Chapter 1, lesbian and feminist herstories have not been documented to the same extent that histories of people who hold dominant identities have been. One way that racism, sexism, and other forms of oppression have been institutionalized was/is through the systematic exclusion of marginalized communities from written, oral, and otherwise transmitted histories. Radical and resistance narratives to "dominator culture" (hooks, 2003, p. 197) have especially been made invisible in the service of securing the continuation of a system based on oppression and privilege. The women of LOV expressed a sense of urgency with sharing these stories due to experiences of invisibility within the larger LGBTQ community. Sue summarized one group conversation and shared her own reflections. She said,

> You said our history was being demolished, and we talked about invisibility, and we have talked about wanting the younger women to know what we experience, and who we were and are. It seems to me that, sort of, like thinking about this as a theme of, um, reclaiming or sharing our herstory. That this could be a project that would be a part of what we do. It would be community-building because it would link us to younger lesbians. (T1, P24)

LOV continued to discuss ways to strengthen lesbian community by forging a bond with younger lesbians and a foundation for their own lesbian identities and activism. In another radical act of resistance, Sandy shared her reflections about our conversations of sharing older lesbian herstory with younger generations, and LOV's judgment of younger lesbians as apolitical and ahistorical. She wrote,

> I question the validity of the assumption here that we have to know what has gone before us in order to push things forward. In 1968 I was the first woman groundskeeper at USU in Logan, Utah. The all-male crew did not speak to me for 6 weeks—literally, they would not look at me or speak to me. It was a hostile environment. Finally one guy responded to a question that I asked and then kept

> the conversation going with me—actually asking questions about who I was! Working there was an experience for me, and it opened the door for women to be hired at USU and at U of U. Did the women who stood on my shoulders and took jobs on the grounds crew have to know what I went through in order to continue pushing for their right—no. I think it's interesting to know the herstory of such events; but knowing the herstory does not preclude progress, not knowing the herstory does not exclude perceptions about where we should go next. Where we should go next depends on the now, not so much the past. Do I love it when someone knows my herstory about the grounds crew—absolutely. Do I love it when I meet groundswomen and they say "Some woman at USU got hired on the grounds crew and broke the ice for all of us"—absolutely! Does their knowledge of my story help or hinder their ability to take the next step of asking for the same wage as the male crew member—I don't think so. So I have to ask if it is wanting our "narcissistic supplies," so to speak, that makes us want the acknowledgement of "see what we did for you". I will say that knowing what women went through to give me the right to vote is profound and makes me grateful, but it doesn't drive me to vote—what drives me to vote is that I have a sense of doing what's right—a sense that my mother taught me, not history or herstory. (personal communication, March 26, 2014)

Sandy's conversation with this section on strengthening old lesbian community added critical and often unnamed questions about the purpose and the need to share herstory across age groups of lesbians and feminists. In a bold way she moved the tensions among "waves" of feminists and lesbians out of gridlock and encouraged a fresh expression of sharing herstory. Not all LOV voices have been made visible in our work thus far, and so it is important that this manuscript be one designated place to change that by sharing Sandy's and others' comments and reactions to our work and narrative thus far. We can learn from our missed opportunities and renew our commitment to *beloved community* with each new step that we take.

Creating a Vision

The Creating a Vision category first surfaced during the entry process of the Living Our Visions project. At the very first workshop in October 2010, workshop

participants were asked to 'dream big' about their ideas for creating old lesbian community in Salt Lake City. Creating visions for both the LOV group and for assessing wider old lesbian needs and concerns occurred at every meeting between August 2011 and March 2013. Subcategories of Creating a Vision include the following: (a) Dreaming big--visioning; (b) Defining ourselves more clearly; and (c) Meeting co-researchers' needs of activism, research, and support. Each is discussed below.

Dreaming Big—Visioning

LOV was kicked off in October 2010 with an all-day workshop where old lesbians were encouraged to connect with one another and to dream big in thinking about what they would want in order to create "the most rockin' old lesbian community in the country" (Sue, T1, P12). LOV members continued to engage in visioning activities throughout the project. In August, 2011, at the start of the data collection process for this manuscript, Polly summed up where the group was at that time in terms of proposing ideas and dreams for the LOV Project. She said, "I think we're still just sort of swimming around and trying different things, and I like that a lot" (T1, P2). "Swimming around" was a CR strategy for engaging in visioning slowly and intentionally. Several LOV members voiced their preference to go slowly and not rush through the process of creating old lesbian community.

When LOV members shared their own visions with the group, other members connected to those visions and expanded them. In this conversation, Polly and Sandy said,

> Polly: I mean for me, living my vision would be ensuring a secure, safe place to be surrounded by community when I'm too old to take care of myself. So I, I would like to do something on that.
>
> Sandy: I think that's so important where it's, it's just becoming a discussion in the public, uh, media, really, about lesbians and living situations and people trying to form older lesbian communities. (T7, P15-16)

This vision initially emerged from Polly but was expanded through conversation and dialogue with Sandy and other LOV members. These conversations stirred other LOV members to share their own visions and strengths. Carefully, foundational visions were built upon and added to, and each LOV co-researcher contributed her own perspective and lens to propose ideas and strategies that could help manifest that vision. After a discussion where LOV members envisioned building more support structures for old lesbians, Cathy applied her own knowledge and strengths to support the vision. She said,

> I think that when you talk about housing, what I'm seeing with some of the elderly people, not even just lesbians, just elderly single women, their biggest concern is 'who is safe to call to fix my sink?' We could put a list of that together. I know older lesbians don't have a lot of electronics knowledge or whatever, but they are on Facebook or, I mean, we can use our social, uh, media to get the word out and to give them support. (T8, P13)

LOV co-researchers built upon Cathy's visions and talked about their ideas for engaging old lesbians with social media and/or the internet. hooks (2003) discussed the idea of dreaming as part of what helps sustain hope for *beloved community.* She wrote, "Prophetic imagination, or prophetic dreaming, keeping visions alive is what stimulates diverse groups into becoming a culture of life, a biophilic, a life-loving culture" (p. 196). As LOV members connected with one another's dreams and visions and became inspired to add their own as well, LOV became a living organism that contributed to the 'culture of life'.

Although many LOV members wanted to move slowly in building visions, this preference was not shared by everyone. Hoda expressed her preference for action through the use of an apt Utah metaphor and explained that she much preferred being a "downhill skier" where she could move directly towards action than a "cross-country skier" that moved more slowly and in indirect ways (T1, P24). At times, LOV members felt overwhelmed by experiencing perhaps too many visions at once and not enough goals or action. Polly and Jolene expressed their frustrations with humor,

> Polly: And I'd love to focus on the fears of aging, but I think we ought to do this housing thing.
>
> Jolene: We can't even decide what we wanna do with LOV and OLOC. [Group laughter]. (T8, P22-23)

Earlier in the group it may have been more accepted to dream big, whereas this conversation occurred towards the end of LOV's transcribed meetings. At that later point, LOV members may have wanted to narrow the scope of their visions and agree on a focus moving forward. The visioning process became less potent after the Utah chapter of OLOC was established. At that time, the dilemma of LOV and OLOC (that is discussed in more depth in the Envisioning the Future category) overshadowed the visions, ideas, and dreams shared within LOV. However, in the second to last transcribed meeting, Luci offered the following, "A topic I'd love to see us address, it just came to me, though, is how did this group self-select?" (T9, P27). Luci continued to share that she was interested in how and why groups succeed and fail and whether group member self-selection was a factor. She shared about specific groups she had been a part of and how some failed while others succeeded. If a group wants to succeed in building old lesbian community,

then this may be a critical question to attend to and could be a fruitful question to explore in an explicit PAR group.

Defining Ourselves More Clearly – Solidifying Ideas and Setting Goals

LOV members began to "define ourselves more clearly" (Sue, T1, P14) after the entry process of the 1st year together. Discussion time was spent at multiple meetings solidifying ideas and visions and setting goals for the LOV project. When one discussion became muddled with too many visions, Sharon requested clarity and said,

> I think it'd be really important for everybody to think about articulating what you would like out of this group so that we have kind of a composite. Otherwise, what happens is we just sort of go towards this or go towards that. I'd really like everybody to say, "What do I want for my vision?" (T7, P21)

Before LOV's focus turned to planning for the Alix Dobkin/OLOC event, LOV co-researchers engaged in discussions about the focus of LOV. During the entry process, it appeared that LOV members agreed on taking a feminist and social justice-oriented approach to building old lesbian community. Some members brought these conversations back into the forefront when talking about possible projects or ideas for LOV to move forward with. Alda proposed defining the group's focus in the following,

> So ageism and feminism, I think those are our main platforms. And I think everything that we do or endorse or get involved in as a group. When we are examining a common cause, we use the lenses of feminism and ageism; and if one or both of those lenses aren't there, it's probably not a common cause. (T2, P19)

The group agreed on centering ageism and feminism as foundations for LOV's work in the community. Ultimately, these principles helped the group to propose and choose Alix Dobkin, a long-time lesbian feminist activist and singer/songwriter, to facilitate a series of events at the Alix/ OLOC weekend.

Requests for clarity and making visions practical were made by multiple LOV co-researchers throughout the project. However, conversations continued meandering from vision to vision, especially in conversations after the Alix Dobkin/OLOC event. This may be partially due to the struggles that the LOV project had with defining itself after the creation of the Utah OLOC chapter. If the Living Our Visions project had trouble coming to definitions and goals for the group itself before Utah OLOC, then it makes sense that the ideas and visioning activities would remain untethered and unclear afterwards. The social class and educational differences in the group made academic jargon and abstract intellectual ideas in the group more likely, which may have impacted the group's ability to hone in on solid goals and turning visions into reality. The academics' power in the group may have also impacted the group's larger focus as well as individual members' experiences in the group. Debra attempted to move a visioning conversation into more clarity and said, "But I wanted to just think about those two things: Service and then also the living pieces. We connect those, and then we can make them practical" (T7, P21). The entire LOV project was centered around the visioning experience, and LOV co-researchers engaged thoughtfully in dreaming ideas for building old lesbian community. However, it seemed that LOV was out of practice with fine-tuning those dreams and with bringing in practical considerations and structure. hooks (2012) discussed balancing practices as "crucial to *beloved community*" and discussed her thoughts on incorporating "the practice of balance" from Buddhism in order to create a flourishing community together (p. 82). Moving forward, LOV and other community-building projects could benefit from more practices of balance between creating visions and manifesting those visions into reality.

Meeting Co-Researcher's Needs – Research, Activism, and Support

Speaking of balance, the LOV group discussed sharing time between the different foci of the LOV project – research, activism, and support. LOV members discussed their preferences and how the group could work to meet everyone's needs. Sue shared her own commitment with the group and said, "I feel committed to everybody in the group in terms of trying to help all of us get all of our deepest needs met" (T1, P12). In between the entry process and the planning for the Alix/ OLOC event, however, conversations focused more on support and less on research and action. CR discussions took place often but without a focus on action. Hoda noticed this shift in focus and shared her concerns. She said,

> For me, like the tangible stuff is also something that I would like us not to lose focus on. What can we do? What structures can we grow, that will help people now and down the road? I think, um, faith without actions is like... you know, so theorizing about this, that, and the other without actually doing something, for me, is not as satisfactory. (T2, P27)

Hoda took the risk to share that she was not getting her own needs met in the group of focusing on tangible and practical ways that LOV could make a difference in old lesbian lives. Eventually the group moved into action by planning the Alix Dobkin/OLOC event, but it was important for group members to voice when they were not getting their needs met and when they noticed a shift in the focus or dynamics of the meetings. Each co-researcher brought a unique set of skills and life experiences to the LOV meetings, and without attending to all of these needs, the group was more likely to lose members who were not finding themselves engaged or plugged in to the work of the project.

Discussions about research never reached a level where everyone truly considered themselves co-researchers and engaging in the process of research together. During the

entry process, Sue and I facilitated discussions about participatory action research that included what PAR is, what PAR could look like, Arnstein's ladder (1969), power dynamics in PAR, the history and founding principles, examples of community-based PAR work, and other types of PAR information. LOV members engaged with questions about PAR; and, after some time, it appeared that everyone was sharing similar understandings of LOV as a PAR project. A few LOV co-researchers and I met outside of LOV meetings to write a grant proposal for an American Psychological Association geared towards LGBTQ community projects. At times we asked about potential research ideas and what kind of knowledge we would want to create together that might leave an impact or contribute to old lesbian community. Ultimately, the LOV group made a significant contribution to old lesbians in Northern Utah through the Alix/ OLOC series of events, through the creation of Utah OLOC, and by facilitating CR discussions of older lesbian issues and needs in northern Utah. In this manuscript I used the terms "co-researchers" and "group members" to include the multiple ways we considered our participation in the LOV project. Although not everyone saw themselves as true "co-researchers," I hope in this manuscript to convey that everyone involved in the LOV project is a contributing scholar and activist to old lesbian community-building efforts, whether academically-affiliated or otherwise-affiliated.

The idea that the "research" part of the LOV project was solely my dissertation came up more than once during our meetings. In one discussion, Donna reiterated,

> As a research project it's important to remember that it's, uh, a participatory action research project which is not just Liz's research project, but those of us who signed on for that are participant researchers. And, of course, we have a voice in determining what kind of... I mean one of the actions that it seemed like LOV decided to do was to bring Alix Dobkin here and to explore the possibility of starting an OLOC chapter, which we started. (T7, P3)

In the same conversation, Sandy shared,

> It just seems to me that what LOV stands for is more than a research project. I just kind of assumed that it, you know, the whole point of getting this group together is to live our vision. What's our vision, you know? I don't think it's a research project. (T7, P4)

It is not that one understanding was correct and one was incorrect per se, but I highlighted these conversations because the understandings of LOV's connection to PAR and LOV members to research activities were sometimes vastly different from one co-researcher to another. As a point of growth or learning, future old lesbian community-building groups could take more time to investigate PAR as a model and to decide together through activities and discussions how to best define PAR, research questions, and the research process that best fits that community's needs.

Doing these activities together could help attenuate power dynamics between academically oriented and community-oriented members and get away from traditional notions of academic research and jargon that may not be useful in actually building old lesbian community. It may also be helpful to really talk about traditional notions of research and to critique the ways that traditional academic research and jargon can be elitist and distanced from the actual lives of old lesbians.

After the Alix Dobkin/OLOC event occurred, the group revisited research conversations again, and LOV co-researchers proposed their own research ideas for the group. Alda stated, "I'm hoping we find more research to do after Liz moves on" (T8, P6). Claire also shared, "You know what would be a wonderful research project to actually like try to figure out... how to round up all these old lesbians all over" (T8, P30). Additionally, the group decided to submit a proposal for the interdisciplinary Association for Women in Psychology conference, but then got derailed after hearing Polly's

diagnosis of cancer. Although discussed in more detail in the Belonging results category, grieving Polly's death and the discussions of LOV and OLOC and people feeling left out of LOV may have also contributed to sidelining future research aspirations.

Taking Action

The Taking Action category emerged towards the end of the entry process and became a prominent theme as LOV members chose a specific action project to work towards together in 2011 and 2012. The LOV group moved from primarily engaging in CR activities to planning a community-wide series of events for old lesbians that culminated in the kick-off of a local chapter of Old Lesbians Organizing for Change. Many critical components went into the group's actions. The two subcategories discussed below include the following: (a) Making common cause; and (b) We are the midwives.

Making Common Cause

"Making common cause" (T2, P7) was a phrase first used by Polly, but quickly caught on and was used by various LOV members as a way to talk about the ways that LOV could collaborate, network, and fundraise in order to support old lesbian community in northern Utah. The Living Our Visions project began with absolutely no funding or financial resources. At different points during the project, LOV members discussed the possibilities of applying for grant funding or asking for sponsorship or underwriting for their action tasks. During one earlier meeting Alda suggested connecting with other lesbian groups to ask about their fundraising techniques. Ultimately, though, many LOV members worried about how possible sponsorship could take away LOV's right to make

its own decisions. Co-researchers critiqued the mainstream LGBTQ rights movement's reliance on corporate sponsorship and decided against asking for affiliation in return for financial funds (Ward, 2008). Many LOV members came from grassroots organizing and anticapitalist backgrounds and proposed creative strategies to remain financially independent throughout the planning of the Alix/ OLOC event. It was an amazing feat of creativity and bright ideas that brought together the funds for this level of community event, completely pulled off by one group of old lesbians in Northern Utah. Even more striking was that, after the event, LOV ended up making money on the series of events and put together a treasury of funds that LOV decided to eventually turn over to Utah OLOC in order to support the new chapter's beginnings in Salt Lake.

While planning for the Alix Dobkin event, LOV co-researchers shared their visions for collaborating with others and working together in solidarity for change for older lesbians. They shared,

> Hoda: For me personally, it would be nice to kind of like have people be that inspired to be active, to join, to….you know….
>
> Luci: Common cause it.
>
> Hoda: Yeah, put forward an effort and kind of come together as a group.
>
> Polly: Solidarity!
>
> Hoda: Yes. Yes. And we *can* do it together! (T5, P22)

Collaboration and networking was often discussed during LOV meetings, even during the entry process. LOV members excitedly shared connections they had made or groups they thought might be interested in working in solidarity with LOV. Sue shared her suggestion that LOV stay open to all kinds of collaborations and said, "I don't think that we have to

decide whether sWerve or SAGE is a better connection. I think we should connect with everybody" (T2, P3).

When the LOV group moved into action and planning for the Alix Dobkin event, LOV members engaged with the feminist principle of mutuality and the feminist ethics of caring (Featherstone & Morris, 2012; hooks, 2003; Williams, 2004). Featherstone & Morris (2012) described Williams' characteristics of care that "enable resilience, facilitate commitment and lie at the heart of people's interdependency... They include: fairness; attentiveness to the needs of others; mutual respect; trust; reparation; being non-judgmental; adaptability to new identities; being prepared to be accommodating; and open to communication" (p. 350). Throughout the action phases of preparing for the Alix Dobkin/ OLOC event, LOV members thoughtfully asked questions and made decisions based on the mutual needs of all parties involved. For example, when planning Alix's trip to Salt Lake and multiple speaking/singing engagements, LOV communicated often with Alix about her needs. Members checked with Alix about scheduling a book signing and/or a radio show interview during her trip to promote her recent memoir, *My Red Blood* (2009). We considered Alix's requests for size of venue for her events and with making sure she did not feel over-scheduled or exploited during her time with us in Salt Lake. These characteristics of care and justice served as a foundation for the entire process, as LOV members carefully considered how to also give back to the people and organizations that were supporting us in putting on these events. LOV members talked about how to promote and express appreciation towards the SAGE group for helping to promote and support our series of events. As discussed in the CR category, much thought was also put into reaching out to and accommodating old lesbians who may not have

been networked or part of a community, as well as differently abled old lesbians and old lesbians with limited means and access to transportation. Justice work was woven into most decisions that were made leading up to and during the events,and into every collaboration and "common cause" (T2, P7).

These collaborations and considerations continued long after the Alix Dobkin/OLOC event happened. At one later meeting, a conversation ensued regarding reaching out to rural old lesbians through collaboration and connection with a long-time lesbian magazine called *Lesbian Connection*. LOV co-researchers said,

> Claire: Oh we could do an article I think.
>
> Donna: We could do something with *Lesbian Connection*.
>
> Claire: Yeah, just even figuring-out a way to get connected, you know, sort of a PR campaign to identify people and get people into, uh, one data base or whatever.
>
> Polly: Yes, that's right. What we did a couple of years ago in SAGE is we put out a flyer for all the centers just to notify people about SAGE. But I'm wondering if we might devise some kind of card or pamphlet that could be put there in all those places which say, "Do you know any lesbians that are..." I mean I don't know how we put it...
>
> Claire: "Searching for old lesbians."
>
> Polly: "Are you old, isolated?"
>
> Claire: Not today but... (laughter)
>
> Polly: "Not that you are, but do you know anybody who is?" (laughter)
>
> Jolene: Well maybe we could say, "We're looking for you."
>
> Polly: Yeah, "We're looking for you." Yeah something like that.
>
> Claire: Maybe we could get a spot on [cable company] and, you know, don't they do those little, um, public service announcements? (T8, P18)

This conversation stood out not only for its attention to justice issues and an ethic of care, but also for the ways that LOV members joyfully worked together and collaborated with one another.

Equipped with many community organizing experiences, many LOV members shared the pitfalls of activists going it alone. At one meeting, a conversation ensued about another local group not connecting with others and missing out on important strategies. They shared,

> Salma: But because [this person] totally ignored the gay and lesbian power structure in Utah which has brought together the change that we have seen already, like the Pride Center and Equality Utah. [This person] just, like, went off on [their] own without any political knowledge from what I could tell. I mean, you know, we don't wanna, again, reinvent the wheel. The wheel is there and it's done fairly well….
>
> Luci: I just decided I wasn't going to argue with [this person]. (T10, P8)

At times, newer activists have come to the scene armed with big ideas but without checking in about what the community has already accomplished and what may be currently in the works. These conversations held echoes of Polly's wise words about the importance of knowing whose shoulders we stood on and who has come before us. There was a reverence in LOV for honoring those who came before and who made it possible for the group to have had the conversations we did. The women of LOV also carried a deep respect for working together and for the energy and community that gets built in that process.

Sue often commented on her desire to offer possibilities and ways to attend to older lesbians with different needs and abilities. She discussed collaboration and networking as one powerful tool to do that. She said,

> And, some of us will need assisted living and other kinds of more intensive care if we become disabled. And, um, if we could create this community network of all those possibilities, um, so that we have those options, that would be so awesome. (T7, P16)

Collaborations could help bring better outcomes to older lesbians' living situations. There were also very practical reasons for collaborations and networking. Donna shared her practical views about social change and collaboration and said,

> When I think about activism and change, then it makes sense to think, "Are there other communities or groups out there who share this vision and that we can connect with?" You know change is also about numbers. You notice this group of 6 million women that are part of [organization], I mean, I would want to have them on my team, if we are doing something that's oriented to change. It doesn't mean that we become an integral part of their group. (T1, P19)

Donna shared that it is possible to collaborate and still retain independence of vision and decision-making processes when making common cause with other groups. Although it never came to fruition, LOV discussed planning a shared potluck get-together with OLOC in order to help build relationships across the two groups and reduce feelings of jealousy and increase trust across groups. hooks (2003) discussed critical elements needed in establishing collaborations across *beloved communities*. She wrote, "One principle [of *beloved community*] is the will to form a conscious, cooperative partnership that is rooted in mutuality. Striving to be mutual is the principle that best mediates situations where there is unequal status" (p. 63). Like hooks' comments, Donna's reflections helped the group to engage in CR about making common cause and forming partnerships to build stronger movements.

We Are the Midwives

After the Utah chapter of OLOC formed April 2012, LOV co-researchers explored the relationship between LOV and OLOC. At first, "mother" metaphors were raised but many co-researchers felt uncomfortable with the power dynamics inherent in mother/child relationships being applied to the LOV/OLOC relationship. At the same time, LOV had spent several months dreaming and planning for the weekend of events and had contributed much to the old lesbian community and to the formation of Utah OLOC. It was important to not diminish the time, energy, and commitment each LOV member put into that weekend and into the last 3 years. During the conversation Donna suggested a different metaphor that held different assumptions about power than the mother/child metaphor. She said, "We are the midwives of [Utah OLOC]. I mean it was, it was a very clear decision here by LOV. We looked at OLOC to say, 'That's how we expand'" (T8, P21). In the feminist ethics of care literature, Featherstone and Morris (2012) critiqued earlier theorists who claimed that ethics of care could be reduced to a "mothering" metaphor. They wrote, "Taking care seriously does not just oblige reconsideration of caregiving inequities but also highlights the need for a profound rethinking of what is needed by all human beings for their very existence and flourishing" (p. 346). Similarly, LOV's discomfort with the reduction of the LOV/OLOC relationship to a mothering metaphor prompted LOV members to rethink how the relationship could be defined differently and in a way that promoted "flourishing" of both groups. By claiming midwifery instead, LOV acknowledged its first 2 years of existence and the intense effort and CR that went into planning the Alix/ OLOC event. At the same time, as midwives, LOV also recognized Utah OLOC as its own independent group that, once

fully formed, no longer needed LOV's assistance or decision-making processes. LOV's intention was to be in relationship with OLOC in a way that reduced the power dynamics between the two groups. LOV assisted Utah OLOC with its birth and early development but still supported Utah OLOC to make its own decisions and to forge its own path.

Through planning and taking actions that led up to the series of weekend events, LOV worked in partnership with others and gathered necessary support and provided care and advice on reaching out to a wider community of old lesbians. Polly made the following suggestion during one planning meeting to help LOV co-researchers get on the same page in talking about the Alix/ OLOC event. She said,

> If we're gonna have an outreach to, uh, try to set up these events, I'd like to have some discussion of how to put together a set of talking points so that we all know the same information about Alix, so we'll be saying the same things. (T3, P18)

Part of providing the necessary support was to disseminate accurate and clear information about the Alix/ OLOC event to organizations and people who might want to help LOV promote the events to a wider range of old lesbians in northern Utah.

LOV members also provided necessary support for the Alix/ OLOC event to take place and the eventual formation of Utah OLOC by taking a strengths-based approach with one another during the planning phases. During a planning meeting LOV co-researchers discussed individual strengths and how they could be helpful during planning/preparation phases. For example, Alda shared, "I'm just bold, and will go anywhere and ask anything" (T3, P15). Others shared personal connections in the lesbian community, organizational skills, fundraising and financial strengths, grassroots activism experiences, publicity and technology-based skills, etc. All together LOV co-researchers represented a very wide range of strengths and skills to assist in the midwifery process.

Belonging

The category of Belonging emerged through consistent conversation and action focused on creating and maintaining bonds, relationships, and support among and between LOV co-researchers. Belonging remained a strong theme throughout the LOV project, and the following characteristics or subcategories became apparent through coding and analysis: (a) Interpersonal dynamics and process; (b) Relational mentoring and words on love; (c) How we grieved Polly; and (d) I wanna be in LOV.

Interpersonal Dynamics and Process

The initial workshop for LOV was kicked off in October, 2010, with group bonding activities; dialogues; a documentary film about Pascha, an old lesbian who took the initiative to build an "EarthShip," or an off-the-grid mountain home that she had envisioned for herself (Gunnufson & Gunnufson, 2008); and an experiential activity where participants were asked to *dream big* and discover their inner visions for old lesbian community in northern Utah. Alda later recalled the first LOV workshop fondly and said,

> But that's what I remember from that day. I remember the earthship [film and discussion], and I remember there was kind of a feeling of excitement, but also apprehension. People were not sure what they signed up for. And [Liz and Sue] made that easy by saying, "If you only signed on for today and that's where you want it to end, that's fine; but if you want, there's more." And that was really inviting to me. (T1, P38)

Pretty quickly, those who opted for "more" developed relational group norms and a bond that was cherished among many LOV members. Two years after the group started, Jolene discussed her memory of the first workshop and expressed gratitude for "the difference you all have made in my life" (T8, P9). Claire discussed uncomfortable experiences with

coming out as lesbian and not finding community but being able to find it in the LOV group. She said,

> I was coming [to Utah] thinking, "Now I am an out lesbian. I'm gonna have this whole big community"; and, you know, it just has been hard for me. I mean, I'm not as enthusiastic, I guess that's why I like to be [at LOV meetings]. It is nice to have a community. (T1, P21)

These reflections signaled something powerful that occurred in the LOV project for LOV members – connection. hooks (1995) discussed the power of bonding and connection and wrote,

> Those of us who are not cynical, who still cherish the vision of *beloved community*, sustain our conviction that we need such bonding not because we cling to utopian fantasies but because we have struggled all our lives to create this community. (p. 264)

Claire, Jolene, Alda, and most, if not all, LOV members had been looking for *beloved community* all our lives. Even though, as Alda pointed out, LOV members felt initially apprehensive, we all took the leap together to "sustain our convictions" and because we had hope that we could finally find that place, collectively.

LOV remained an open group for the first year of its existence, and new members were often invited by current group members (see Chapter 2 for more information). In the fall of 2011, LOV co-researchers started to discuss whether or not the group should remain open at that point. We discussed the benefits and drawbacks of closing the LOV group to new members after the entry process. The drawbacks included concern about exclusivity and not being inclusive to old lesbians outside of our own personal networks. However, Luci posed a critical question to the group,

> But is growth good for growth's sake? I mean, do we want this group to get bigger? I think that part of what I got from what Salma said is, do we want to get much bigger than this because then we lose that intrinsic ability to know everybody well and to feel safe. (T1, P29)

We wrestled with this dilemma, and multiple group members came back to Luci's question about the potential loss of safety and intimacy with a large group. The need for safety and security has been real for women who have been marginalized and oppressed in multiple spaces in their lives. In one comment, Sandy discussed her reactions to the changing political climate for LGBTQ individuals in the United States. She said, "It's actually still hard for me to believe that people really accept 'us'. I have straight friends who are adamant about my rights – it always surprises and delights me" (Sandy, personal communication, March 20, 2014). As a younger-identified member of LOV and also as a member who held daily access to heterosexual privileges, I did not carry the same memories and experiences that old lesbian women of LOV carried. This quote by Sandy was a powerful reminder that climate changes towards acceptance and affirmation have been a short blip in the memories and lives of old LGBTQ individuals and that the current cascade of change has really occurred in the last 10-15 years. I included Sandy's comments here to highlight the importance of safety and of the oft taken-for-granted privilege of being able to be oneself in most contexts. A critique of LOV's decision to close its membership after a year's time of meeting together was not taken lightly and cannot be reduced simply to an exclusionary practice.

Feminist, activist, and lesbian Audre Lorde (1988) wrote, "Caring for myself is not self-indulgence. It is self-preservation and that is an act of political warfare" (p. 131). The act of prioritizing ourselves as women in women-only spaces and as women who may hold other marginalized statuses should not be considered lightly and has in fact been a radical act in a society that has encouraged women to ignore their own needs in order to be in the service of others. LOV members reflected back on meaningful

experiences and connections in the group. Salma said, "See, my sense is that this group is where we nourish each other" (T8, P19). Claire discussed the intimacy that LOV had built and said,

> But I think that's it. How do you sit in a group and then say, like, this is who I am? I like that we share stories and everything, because when you're in a group you don't really know, you can't get past the superficial. (T9, P17)

Through the careful construction of supportive relationships, LOV group members engaged in radical activism together and re-energized ourselves and one another through our connections. Featherstone and Morris (2012) discussed the inequities of care in a society structured by oppression and privilege. They wrote, "Inequalities in caregiving and care-receiving are exposed through questioning who benefits and who loses from existing policies" (p. 346). In a patriarchal and misogynist society, men have clearly benefitted from policies that expect men to be cared for and women to be the ones caring for others. Lorde's (1988, p. 131) words echoed with power in the LOV group as LOV members turned these policies on their heads as they cared for and nourished themselves.

In the last two recorded meetings, LOV members discussed the future of LOV (See Envisioning the Future category for more information). LOV members detailed what was most significant for them about the LOV project. The sense of belonging and of being together was healing for many in the group. Donna said, "We're pretty connected here, and just seeing each other has a high kind of value" (T9, P13). In the last meeting, Jolene discussed the LOV group's fear of loss of connection. She said, "How are we gonna do this, because I don't wanna lose this. I don't wanna not see you all" (T10, P13). Quickly, other LOV members chimed in with affirmations and suggestions for how the group could remain connected and continue to ignite the fire of our *beloved community*.

LOV co-researchers both attended to group dynamics and also actively avoided group dynamics on a number of occasions. One of the ways that the LOV group attended to its own group dynamics was by making process comments about what was working and not working in the group. During one conversation after the OLOC chapter got started, Alda asked the group to share their own reactions and said, "Maybe it's important for people to kind of just say where they're at with that. Some people have said and some people haven't... let's just get a sense if there's anybody going the other direction in this conversation" (T7, P13). At times, LOV members tuned in to what was said and unsaid in the group and asked about it. A few times, some LOV co-researchers also called out the academic jargon that sometimes flowed freely in the group.

As the group discussed a possible conference presentation proposal for the Association for Women in Psychology conference, Cathy interrupted the academic-speak and asked "What's a fishbowl, first of all?" (T9, P3). When Cathy spoke during this particular meeting, she brought in important questions and also brought the conversation into everyday conversation. However the conversation quickly moved away from her, and we did not fully address her questions or heed her suggestion to use everyday language and stay away from academic jargon. This was another example of how academic privilege impacted group dynamics and the sense of belonging that people had in the group. Although Cathy interrupted this privilege a few times, the dynamics were never discussed. I even noticed myself hurrying past everyday language conversations and back to academic-speak. Ultimately, Cathy did not participate as much in our conversations, perhaps due to a lack of belonging and a lack of safety from not processing the academic privilege in the room. Morales (1998) wrote,

> The language in which ideas are expressed is never neutral. The language people use reveals important information about who they identify with, what their intentions are, for whom they are writing or speaking… Unnecessarily specialized language is used to humiliate those who are not supposed to feel entitled. It sells the illusion that only those who can wield it can think. (p. 70)

Although academic-speak may not have been intentionally used in this way in the LOV project, Morales warned that the impact could have been different.

Jolene also made process comments, especially in regard to consciousness-raising conversations and conversations involving the LOV/OLOC dilemma. Here Jolene commented on a common challenge found in group dynamics when individuals are involved in two or more groups of a similar nature. Jolene said,

> What happens is we talk about [OLOC] here and then we go [to OLOC] and say we already talked about that, just because that's how we are as humans. "Oh, I've talked about that. I don't need to bring that up." And we dissociate the part that it wasn't in the OLOC meeting. "I've already discussed this' is just your first thought process". (T9, P20)

In this quote she introduced a metadiscussion about the LOV group process and how it was interfering with OLOC's group process. However, the group did not go deeper into this conversation and thus avoided a more meaningful dialogue about LOV's group dynamics. In old lesbian community building it may be critical to pay attention to the group dynamics between and among members as well as the group itself. Checking on the health of the group dynamics, as a maintenance practice, could ensure the longevity of the group by diagnosing and attending to concerns as they arise.

If not, those dynamics could go underground and impact the group in negative ways. These concerns could be especially important in smaller communities of people with marginalized statuses. Feminist and lesbian communities have tended to be small in size, and many women in those communities have known of or about one another for

long periods of time. A group of so-called strangers may not be strangers at all and have likely seen one another or interacted at feminist- or lesbian-centered events and gatherings. Women may have dated one another or had partners in the group who have dated one another, and these relationship dynamics can be tricky to discuss. However difficult, though, these conversations are critical to preventing and healing ruptures in group dynamics that are inevitable. Sandy shared reflections on this section that, when group concerns arise in small communities such as lesbian communities, they are often not discussed "in polite company" and only amongst close friends but "never in the open" (Sandy, personal communication, March 20, 2014). She also shared that alcohol and drugs used to be a larger part of the "lesbian scene"; and that has, at times, brought additional concerns to relationship and group dynamics. Individuals who have experienced daily microaggressions such as homophobia, transphobia, sexism, ageism, ableism, and racism have encountered daily invitations from society to internalize negative self-messages and self-concepts. To resist these messages takes a constant vigilance, courage, and strength; and there are additional relational needs that emerge in communities that face these daily stressors. The practice of building *beloved community* could shift the dynamics from all-knowing academics to a shared community that is capable of producing more complex and more credible knowledge. These practices shift the power dynamics and increase community members' senses of competency and capability.

Relational Mentoring and Words on Love

In the very first LOV workshop in October 2010, Sue introduced me to the workshop participants and asked me to share more about my interest in working with older lesbians in order for the group to get to know me and to build trust and safety. At that time I shared that some of the most important mentors in my life were/are older lesbians and that I felt "raised" by older lesbians both academically/professionally as well as in terms of personal growth. My choice to pursue research in this area was one small way to give back to a community that had "raised me" and mentored me through many years and stages of my own development. Over the last 3 years, the women of LOV also took on informally mentoring me and supporting me through my graduate school process. Reading back through transcripts and listening to our audio recorded meetings, it is clear that LOV members took on a role of welcoming me into the group and caring for me. LOV members regularly asked me about my progress in school and with research. They asked about my partner after he had surgery for broken bones and about our lives in general. They shared messages of support and encouragement throughout the dissertation process. Some LOV members attended my roller derby bouts to cheer for me. After our last meeting, LOV members planned a special dinner with me to celebrate our time together before I left the state for my doctoral internship. I received cards with words of wisdom and expressed gratitude for our connection and a beautiful stone necklace from Luci and Claire that reminds me of our group whenever I wear it. I find this is important to share because these are some of the powerful ways that LOV members engaged in mutuality and in sharing their own wisdom, experiences, and relational ways of being. I have been forever impacted and changed by my relationships with the women of LOV.

LOV has participated in social change inside the old lesbian community as well as outside of it by engaging in an experience together with me that left all of us both giving to the experience and taking something from it as well. Social change activism does not always look like protesting with signs, writing letters to politicians, confronting words and language that hurts/limits, facilitating new social or political structures that create access. Those kinds of efforts are obviously important, but it is also critical to recognize what one of my older lesbian mentors, Fagan Shepherd, shared on multiple occasions, "Everyone has a place in the revolution" (personal communication, 2004). Relational social change efforts are often undervalued due to patriarchy, but I want to highlight the ways that LOV members engaged in social change with one another through the intentional building of intimacy and relationships within the LOV group.

The relational mentoring that LOV co-researchers regularly offered was a message of mutuality – a way to share power and to both give/receive from the group process. It was a powerful experience for me and one that has continued to contribute to my own personal and professional development. The women of LOV helped me to understand and to experience that I was/am not just an outsider to the group. Although I do not share the identities of old nor lesbian, the group members connected with me both in and out of the group and helped me to feel a part of the group. In first writing this dissertation I sent results sections to various LOV members who reported interest in providing their own reactions and comments to my writing and conceptualization of our processes. In earlier drafts of this manuscript, I referred to myself as an "outsider" to the group; and Sandy shared that I was not just an outsider within the LOV project. She wrote,

> I have to wonder if you really can be an outsider. The women in this group at the very least are quite fond of you and some, very attached. You bring an openness to the group that encourages non-judgmental discussion; but, in my honest opinion, it is expecting a lot to hold yourself apart from the group emotion. (Sandy, personal communication, March 15, 2014)

Sandy wrote this passage in response to a paragraph where I had taken full responsibility for group dynamics ruptures. She reminded me that I am part of a community; and, while I am accountable to my actions, I am also a part of the group dynamics. She encouraged me to recognize mistakes without getting stuck in them and reminded me that, as a group, we could recognize and work through conflict together.

Love is often left out of the conversation in academic circles and in the field of psychology. Love has been implicitly labeled a taboo subject and has been seen as "interfering" with our intellectual work in academia. Even in the PAR literature, where relationships are valued, I have noticed a lack of discussion about the tremendous impact and power of relationships that are built over time. But I think one of the greatest gifts LOV members offered to me and to one another was the gift of love. Small tokens of appreciation and expressions of gratitude for one another abounded in this group; and, although we experienced our challenges in group process, we also experienced many successes and achievements. So often, our conversations led back to the need for support, for relationship, for connection. These things were often considered to be paramount in building old lesbian community. hooks (1995) wrote, "Loving ties of care bind us together in our differences. We can not surrender that longing" (p. 264). Using warmth and relational strategies were gifts that LOV co-researchers offered to one another and to me. Love has been discredited in academia but love *is* credible, and is one of our greatest teachers.

How We Grieved Polly

One of the original co-researchers of the Living Our Visions project, Polly, contributed so much knowledge, experience, woman-power, and connection to LOV and to each of its members. Polly's warmth and direct communication style was welcomed by our group, and many of our LOV members stood in awe of the incredible activism and justice work she had achieved in the local LGBTQ community, folklore and music communities, the wider Salt Lake City community, and in other communities in which she worked and lived. After meeting Polly, I began seeing her around the city at different events and activist efforts. The more I saw and heard about Polly, the more I learned about what she represented to many in our community. Polly walked the walk, so to speak, and truly worked towards living her visions every day.

Polly emailed the LOV group October 2012 to share that she had received a diagnosis of cancer. She went into surgery a few days later and recovered slowly. In January 2013, Polly was planning to move into a new apartment and was communicating with people about those plans. I visited her during this time and brought Middle Eastern food at her request, as she was having trouble eating. Other LOV members visited her then, too. However, Polly's health took a sudden turn for the worse at the end of January, and she died on February 3, 2013. About 2 weeks before her death, in January, 2013, she sent me an email in response to a request I sent to OLOC and LOV, apologizing for being too sick to attend the multicultural counseling course and in sharing about her own experiences with the intersections of ageism, sexism, and homophobia. This is a testament to the kind of activist she was, always considering ways that she could help make change.

It is truly hard to put into words the extent of Polly's impact, but, wherever she went, she was present, engaged, and participating in every way that she could think of to help build a better community for LGBTQ individuals. Sharon was close with Polly and shared the following additional details about Polly's amazing life,

> Polly loved music, particularly vocal music. She was a member of Salt Lake Vocal Artists and, as a very young woman, was the Polly of Polly and the Valley Boys (a singing folk music group that included Utah Phillips). She and I attended the HD live broadcasts Live from the Met and also went to the Utah Opera productions. That information has little to no relation to her gay activism, but it was a large part of her life. She was also a long-term (more than two decades) member of AA. She attended four or five meetings every week and served as mentor (I think AA calls them Sponsors) for several people. I cared a lot about her. (Sharon, personal communication, March 23, 2014)

Polly often emailed me between LOV meetings to share thoughts and ideas and the ways that our meetings were inspiring her to think of new ways to build community. A true activist, even during her illness Polly requested a collective process to help her figure out options for living after her planned return from the hospital (Sharon, personal communication, January 1, 2013). After Polly's death, LOV members shared short but heartfelt messages with one another. Donna wrote,

> I too have been shocked and saddened by news of Polly's passing. What an incredible loss to all of us who had the privilege to know her. She was a brilliant, beautiful, soul-sister who came into my life as a result of our LOV group. My time with her was way too brief. May we plan to gather sometime in the not too distant future to honor her presence amongst us and her spirit, which lives on! (Donna, personal communication, February 4, 2013)

With Donna's words as inspiration, we planned a get-together in March 2013, at Claire's and Luci's home to celebrate Polly and to discuss other LOV meeting agenda items. We began this meeting by briefly sharing about Polly, but we did not get into much depth of sharing at that time. I had not been able to attend Polly's memorial service due to being out of town at the time and asked those who went to share about the service.

LOV attendees shared their awe about the turnout at Polly's service and by seeing so many people from different communities across Salt Lake who had been personally impacted by their interactions and relationships with Polly. During this meeting, I also remember discomfort hanging in the air as some LOV members shared feelings of guilt and regret that they had not been able to connect with Polly in person in the month before her death. Feelings of guilt and regret mixed with utter shock about her sudden loss hung in the air throughout the meeting. We moved fairly quickly into discussing LOV meeting agenda items and past the grief that we all so clearly experienced but did not know quite how to talk about at that time. I am left wondering if there was something we could have done differently to turn our individual experiences of shock, regret, and grief into a collective process that may have helped each of us heal from this tragic loss. hooks (2012) shared another activist's vision for *beloved community* and said,

> In *The Different Drum: Community Making and Peace*, M. Scott Peck defines true community as the coming together of a group of individuals who have learned how to communicate honestly with each other, whose relationships go deeper than their masks of composure, and who have developed some significant commitment to 'rejoice together, mourn together' and 'to delight in each other' and make the conditions of others our own. (p. 196)

Was there something else experienced in that room that day of a more existential nature that we also did not talk about, perhaps mixed feelings of grief with one's own sense of mortality and the realization that we might lose people in LOV? The first time being face to face with death and grief within our own bonded group? Since this meeting we have not talked much about Polly or her death; but, to me, she has remained in the room with us at LOV gatherings. I do wonder if the way we did or did not grieve Polly impacted our own group dynamics in LOV.

I Wanna Be in LOV

After Utah OLOC emerged, LOV members wrestled with what it meant to continue with LOV while Utah OLOC attempted to gain momentum and a solid footing as an organization. Multiple LOV members highlighted the differences between LOV and Utah OLOC and focused on the fact that LOV had intentionally moved slowly to build trust, safety, and intimacy together. Although we LOV members at times avoided intimacy with one another, we also created intimacy through sharing personal stories, relational check-ins, reintroductions with one another, sharing food and humor, and coded language together. LOV created its own *beloved community.* As Utah OLOC formed, the founding members had heard about this group called LOV that had been involved with planning the Alix/ OLOC event, but that otherwise remained mysterious. LOV members shared about an embarrassing experience at one of the first Utah OLOC meetings when a LOV member openly RSVP'd to a LOV gathering in front of Utah OLOC members (T8, P26). LOV members froze in those moments of awkward silence and did not know how to address the issue, fearing that Utah OLOC members would feel left out. Earlier, Jolene shared her own feelings about the situation and said,

> I feel uncomfortable with OLOC and LOV. I really, well, I really like this group. So, maybe that's why I feel uncomfortable. I really like this group, but I always have a little trepidation when [OLOC and LOV] cross by accident in conversation... or I feel like [LOV] is a sorority. I don't know what to do with that, maybe that's what it is. (T7, P2)

Other LOV co-researchers responded with confirmation, that they, too, had felt that discomfort. These conversations continued throughout the last three recorded meetings as LOV co-researchers struggled with balancing love for the LOV project and guilt about not allowing new Utah OLOC members entry into LOV.

These conversations led the group to a paralysis of action and moving forward with group goals. Jolene had shared rumblings that some Utah OLOC members had expressed interest in LOV and said to her, "I wanna be in LOV" (T7, P4). This slogan was painful for LOV members to hear, and also to imagine that the LOV group had been exclusionary when we had made so many attempts to be inclusive. LOV worked hard to build *beloved community;* and although we felt sad that not everyone could be in LOV we also felt sad that the LOV group could not openly speak of our tremendous achievements and work for fear of leaving some old lesbians out. In truth, LOV had advertised all around town and was open to anyone who wanted to join during the first year of its existence. It was after we had created our own intimacy together that LOV decided to close to new members. So, in many ways, LOV was actually very open to inviting new members, and several of us reached out to invite new folks. We received little interest until we got our own intimacy thing going and then decided to close the group. Being stuck in this paralysis, the LOV group became a self-fulfilling prophecy and did give off exclusionary messages during that time period.

Some LOV co-researchers shared a different perspective and advocated for LOV to remain a separate, closed group from OLOC due to its achieved intimacy and bonding experiences. Polly shared,

> Polly: Yeah, so I think if we can somehow find a way of explaining ourselves as an entity, and how we started, and all this kind of thing and how we can't be larger than we are now. We, the LOV group, have to stay separate. Yeah, we cannot absorb anybody else.
>
> Donna: Yeah, yeah.
>
> Sue: Yeah, and most of us are members of both. (T8, P31)

There was agreement on going ahead and discussing LOV at the next OLOC meeting, but the LOV group did not come together around whether LOV should have remained separate or not. Concerns were shared about not having the time or the energy for participating in both groups. Although a handful of LOV members continued to be involved in OLOC, most LOV members chose to stay in LOV over OLOC. LOV co-researchers discussed many sides and perspectives but did not come to consensus around what to do. Eventually, at the last recorded meeting in March, 2013, LOV members decided to continue to meet as LOV because the group had bonded and members felt that was important to hold on to with one another. However, my sense is that the group did not fully work through the dilemma and lingering feelings of trepidation that remained for some LOV members. Since March, 2013, there have only been two informal LOV gatherings.

Envisioning the Future

The Envisioning the Future category emerged from consistent discussions attending to the future of the LOV Project, Utah OLOC, and to LOV co-researchers' relationships with one another. The subcategories or facets of Envisioning the Future are discussed below and include the following: (a) Having our cake and eating it, too; (b) Making it visible – LOV's privileged status with OLOC; (c) What's love got to do with it?; and (d) Staying together (LOV after dissertation).

Having Our Cake and Eating It Too

In LOV's first meeting after the entry process, co-researchers discussed the issue of whether LOV should become a closed group or remain open to new members. Donna offered a both/and perspective and shared,

> I mean, if there had been 40 women sitting around this table today, probably the conversation that happened today would not have happened, that is, you know, personal and disclosing, So, um, how do we have our cake and eat it, too? Those don't have to be mutually exclusive. (T1, P30)

This idea resonated with the group, and some members discussed ideas such as "braiding or twining with other groups" (Alda, T1, P30), "soaking up separatist space" (Hoda, T1, P43) in LOV while also being involved with other larger groups, and having LOV become a "facilitator's group" that then branches off to facilitate other small groups (Claire, T3, P22).

Since reaching out to the wider community of old lesbians has been a part of LOV's focus since the beginning, LOV members felt reluctant to let go of this vision, while at the same time acknowledged that the intimacy and bond that LOV had carefully built could be at risk in a much larger group. LOV members continued to discuss ways to reach out to old lesbians and "have our cake and eat it, too" (Donna, T1, P30). In one meeting, LOV members discussed the fact that many older lesbians may not be connected to the internet, social media, or even email in some cases. LOV members shared,

> Donna: But then, I think, we're also dealing with a really large number of lesbians who don't access social media.
>
> Sue: If we get to the old ones, they definitely don't access it.
>
> Jolene: I think our biggest battle is the closeted behavior because they're in Utah.
>
> Donna: But also the fact that they're not hooked-in electronically and don't know, and have no access to that. (T8, P14)

Although not wanting to grow LOV any larger than it currently was, LOV members still found ways to envision helping create more access to resources for older lesbians who may be disconnected from lesbian community. In this quote they also discussed additional barriers that existed for old lesbians due to the religious context of Utah. Once Utah OLOC was established, LOV members talked about ways that LOV could serve as "a model for OLOC" (Polly, T8, P22) as a closed CR group. Donna shared her perspective on why that might be helpful and said, "Yeah, having a group that connects, that is a smaller group, that really bonds and connects and creates some sense of safety and trust over time" (T8, P22). These both/and conversations led LOV co-researchers to explore multiple options for both LOV and Utah OLOC to co-exist with one another. hooks (1995) wrote,

> Like all *beloved communities,* we affirm our differences. It is this generous spirit of affirmation that gives us the courage to challenge one another, to work through misunderstandings, especially those that have to do with race and racism. In a *beloved community* solidarity and trust are grounded in profound commitment to a shared vision. (p. 272)

Although she was referring to relationships among individuals, hooks' words could be applied to the relationship between LOV and Utah OLOC. Working through misunderstandings and building solidarity and trust together would, perhaps, allow both groups to live in harmony with one another and even share visions together.

Making Visible – LOV's Privileged Status with OLOC

Another way that LOV co-researchers engaged in wanting to "have our cake and eat it, too" (Donna, T1, P30) was through managing tensions that existed due to LOV's privileged status within Utah OLOC. Women affiliated with LOV experienced a

privileged status between the two groups for multiple reasons. LOV had been meeting for 1.5 years already when Utah OLOC formed. LOV co-researchers were held in high esteem due to their efforts involved in bringing Alix Dobkin for a series of events geared towards old lesbians. LOV was additionally affiliated with "research" and, thus, academia. Many members of LOV held status and power themselves within lesbian and LGBTQ communities and other communities within Northern Utah. LOV members had privileged statuses attached to us, whether we wanted them or not. That part was out of our control. What we did with those privileged statuses, however, was under our control. One struggle with privilege that LOV wrestled with was discussing Utah OLOC at LOV meetings. There were discussions about ideas that LOV could "funnel" to Utah OLOC (T7, P19) and discussions where LOV members processed Utah OLOC dynamics in the LOV meetings (T10, P6). The fact that we, as LOV members, discussed Utah OLOC at all without Utah OLOC members present (non-LOV OLOC members, that is) was an enactment of privilege and power that supported the persistence of privileged statuses of LOV members and marginalized statuses of Utah OLOC members.

Jolene and others eventually noticed the power dynamics that were occurring within LOV and called out the "puppeteering" that LOV was engaged in when discussing OLOC's plans (Jolene, T9, P11). At first these attempts were acknowledged, but conversations soon meandered back to enacting LOV privilege. Privilege can be difficult to see and to own and at times can take several attempts to fully digest the ways we can be both oppressed and privileged in our identities. Enacting privilege results in someone else experiencing oppression, whether intentional or not. Owning the fact that we may have oppressed others at any given moment was painful, and it makes sense that initial

reactions would be to avoid or to distract ourselves from noticing what was happening. Thus, multiple attempts of calling out privilege in the LOV group occurred before it was truly addressed. With continued efforts, LOV co-researchers started to take a step back to look at what was going on within the group at that time. Donna shared,

> And, I think it's also, for me, important to not see ourselves as the steering committee of OLOC. Our business is not to be sitting around talking about what OLOC needs to do next. We need to be talking about what LOV needs to do, I mean, what we wanna do as LOV. Because I think that's where it gets murky. I mean, we're not OLOC. (T7, P9-10)

Eventually the group decided together to leave discussions of Utah OLOC at Utah OLOC meetings and to focus on LOV during LOV meetings. LOV members also proposed addressing LOV and Utah OLOC's relationship at an upcoming Utah OLOC meeting as well as scheduling a potluck dinner between the two groups. This experience was a powerful reminder for marginalized individuals in organizing groups to regularly examine their own intersections of oppression and privilege in order to work with power dynamics occurring within or between groups. hooks (1995) stated, "To live in anti-racist society we must collectively renew our commitment to a democratic vision of racial justice and equality. Pursuing that vision we create a culture where *beloved community* flourishes and is sustained" (p. 271). Acknowledging LOV's privilege with the Utah OLOC organization and taking action to address ruptures that occurred as a result of the enactment of privilege was an important way for LOV co-researchers to renew our commitments to equality and social justice.

What's LOV Got To Do With It?

LOV spent many hours discussing LOV's direction and relationship with Utah OLOC after it formed. Some LOV members felt pangs of guilt over continuing with LOV but not with Utah OLOC. Members described being involved with Utah OLOC as "work," and LOV became described as a somewhat guilty pleasure for LOV members. During several meetings, LOV members worried about talking about our fondness for the LOV group outside of LOV meetings. At one meeting, a LOV co-researcher brought up some ideas for LOV to engage with, but they were immediately funneled to Utah OLOC. LOV members struggled with feelings of guilt over perceived elitism and exclusion. As this happened, we began to lose hold of LOV's focus. New ideas and visions were funneled to Utah OLOC; and, as this happened, LOV began to lose steam.

Sue proposed giving LOV's financial resources to OLOC in the middle of these conversations, and other LOV members agreed this would be a way to help OLOC get off the ground and move forward (T9, P12). It may also have been a symbolic gesture of LOV giving up its community organizing and activist status. Even though LOV co-researchers said, "We don't have to decide the future of LOV right now" (T9, P12), giving away LOVs resources may actually have made the decision for us. It would have been more difficult to pick up new potential action projects to make LOV's "visions" a reality without any resources. While this was an act of love and an olive branch towards OLOC, it may have also attenuated feelings of guilt and privilege among LOV members. On some level, Polly may have felt similarly when she said, "I believe that, really, the way we're talking, it's as though the things that we would be doing are gonna be, sort of, given away. I mean, the money's gonna be given away, and the process is gonna be, also"

(T9, P21). Had we discussed LOV before the formation of Utah OLOC, the group would have had more time to discuss the potential relationships, concerns, and questions regarding the two groups. This may or may not have changed the fact that LOV gave up its financial resources to Utah OLOC, but it could have affected the reasons why.

In addition to the struggles in defining LOV's relationship with Utah OLOC, LOV co-researchers also discussed not having energy for both groups. Luci shared that she was "more committed to LOV than OLOC" (T7, P9); and some co-researchers agreed. LOV members shared they were feeling tired and overcommitted and wanted to leave the social action to OLOC. Were we forgetting, though, in that conversation the fact that spending several months together planning for the Alix Dobkin/ OLOC events was part of what deepened LOV's intimacy and bond with one another? Being a part of something together, and the shared excitement about the impact of our efforts, assisting in the creation of old lesbian community in northern Utah – these experiences were all part of what created intimacy and bonding in the LOV project.

At the same time that LOV was struggling with its own identity, LOV co-researchers remained thoughtful about how to support Utah OLOC in its early stages. Donna shared her mixed feelings about these two issues and said,

> What's happening with OLOC is really important, and I think we've been a catalyst for that. It feels really important to think about how to do that in a way to support, um, the continuation of an OLOC chapter here, because, I mean, that's part of what this group has been about. I think it's really important that in this process we are also nurturing ourselves and supporting each other in this process. But, but also, how do we expand and create and support something outside of [LOV] that, that we're not necessarily responsible for running or maintaining, um, but I, I feel mixed about that. (T8, P19-20)

After Donna shared these reflections, other LOV members discussed the possibilities of LOV becoming a support group or an affinity group and discussed what they saw as the

differences between LOV and Utah OLOC as a way to support LOV's continued existence. Polly offered her own perspective and said,

> Could I offer a reframing? Because I've always thought of LOV as a research group which was formed for a particular purpose and doesn't have any, uh, existence beyond that. We're doing action research and, uh, we may end up changing, I mean morphing into something else. But it was not meant to be a social group. (T8, P22)

These existential conversations continued even into the last recorded meeting. Perhaps LOV had not fully considered what to do in the case it had put itself out of business.

Staying Together (LOV After Dissertation)

In the last two meetings, LOV was faced with the new challenge of defining itself after my dissertation was completed. One member who had missed a few previous meetings assumed that LOV would end after my dissertation was completed, and other LOV members chimed emphatically with, "No" and "we're staying together" (T10, P6). However, when this member asked more questions, LOV co-researchers got stalled in talking about the reasons for staying together. Had my dissertation become the centerpiece of what the group defined as research, and had it also become a convenient reason to keep LOV going until now? Had we clung to my dissertation as way to circumvent lingering feelings of guilt about the LOV/OLOC dilemma? My dissertation became part of the conversation, and the group moved back and forth between saying, "We are part of Liz's dissertation and an action research group" to "We are more than Liz's dissertation and an action research group." The conversation bounced around between these two poles, never quite settling on one or the other. Sandy shared her reflections on this dialectical movement,

> Sandy: Well, the only question I have about that, though, is that the name of this group is Living Our Visions; and that's kind of what we signed up for was, like, a continuing, um, collaboration to live our vision. So, and, you know, maybe when the dissertation is over, then our vision shifts in some way, but it's still living our vision.
>
> Liz: And so how do we want to continue living our vision if we're gonna shift from doing a lot more planning and organizing? What will we be shifting to instead? What does the group find meaningful for us to focus on? (T9, P15)

Although the LOV group was rocked by the challenges of redefining itself after Utah OLOC's formation, one thing remained clear. LOV members wanted to stay together. Jolene exclaimed, "We wanna stay together" (T8, P19) when another member proposed a disbanding of LOV. Other LOV members quickly affirmed Jolene's statement. Following these affirmations Jolene continued,

> I don't think any of us are willing to give up this group. I don't think we're willing to give this up. We are this group of women who sit at the table and enjoy one another's company and thoughts and the process that we go to. We need to get together. We'll still have philosophical conversations and what we see for lesbians as they age. (T9, P19)

In the very last recorded meeting, the LOV/OLOC dilemma emerged again, but LOV co-researchers soon "put it to bed" (Jolene, T10, P10) and reaffirmed the need to meet based on the intimacy and bond that was created in the group. Sharon said, "I don't think we need to have an excuse to keep going" (P10, 11). It is important to acknowledge that something magical and important occurred for each of us involved with the Living Our Visions project. Although the group pored over these dilemmas again and again, we stuck with these conversations because we each got something immeasurable out of the LOV group and out of our connections with one another. In the end, the group decided to continue to meet, although with less community organizing and more support and with

possibilities for exciting research that may come along. I am reminded of Alda's words from one group meeting on envisioning the future of LOV. She said,

> Well, one day, ten years from now, we'll be sittin' around here, only [Jolene and Cathy] will have moved to Salt Lake, so we'll be sittin' around somewhere else having this discussion, and we'll be talkin' about the chapters we're in, see. But we'll still be living our vision. (T7, P15)

Discussion

Limitations and Implications for Research, Practice, and Social Justice

The initial impetus for the current participatory action research study came from academic researchers, Liz Abrams and Sue Morrow, when they planned and facilitated a full-day workshop for older lesbians in Salt Lake City in October, 2010. Although the local community of older lesbians in Salt Lake City were quickly brought in to guide the Living Our Visions project during that very first workshop, it is possible that the initial academic parameters and foundations helped set the stage for academia to have a large presence in the study. Some LOV members did not fully accept the role of "researcher" in the group, and this may have been due to the fact that some aspects of research remained unexplored in the group. If the LOV project had made the process of "plan-act-observe-reflect" more explicit in the group by designating time at each meeting to discuss one or more of these critical PAR components, it may have allowed LOV members to more fully embrace the role of co-researchers in the group.

The LOV project was based on the identities, experiences, and viewpoints of LOV co-researchers. The LOV project was clearly influenced by the context of the LDS Church as well as lesbian feminists with particular sets of experiences that not all old lesbian communities may include. Although this study was not meant to provide a

representative view of old lesbian community-organizing, it is important to highlight that some categories and themes of old lesbian organizing may or may not be relevant to specific old lesbian communities in other parts of the country. Additionally, the LOV project did not include as much racial, ethnic, and cultural diversity as we had hoped, and, although LOV co-researchers attempted to work through challenges in enacting White privilege (and offered lessons to other communities through its challenges), the experiences and needs of more diverse old lesbian organizing groups may look radically different based on whose voices are featured and heard.

Besides questions and possibilities raised for future PAR research and community-building efforts with old lesbians in the results and discussion section, it is also important to raise questions of community engagement in research and practice within the field of counseling psychology. Based on the findings in the current study, I suggest that the field of counseling psychology focus on: (a) addressing structural barriers to engaging in PAR; (b) authentic engagement with feminist ethics of care and *beloved community*; and (c) raising questions and possibilities for old lesbian community-building efforts.

Addressing Structural Barriers to Engaging in PAR

Academic researchers, Liz Abrams and Sue Morrow, engaged in PAR together for the first time, with the LOV project. As stated in Chapters 1 and 3, PAR is an emergent research process that does not have a fixed or structured format. After the conclusion of this study, Sue Morrow and I discussed the idea that it has been challenging to fully grasp what PAR should and should not look like in terms of knowledge-building

processes in the field of counseling psychology. Although some literature exists that calls for more participatory action research in our field, there are few models and representations to guide us in moving away from the hierarchy of academic research and into more creative and collaborative processes of community-based research. Researchers who have been trained in the traditional academic arena (even those who identify as activists) may need and want time to "unlearn" the traditional power structures and hierarchies that exist within academic research circles. Even qualitative research in counseling psychology such as consensual qualitative research, grounded theory, and phenomenology have been largely situated in more traditional forms of research and hierarchy. Choosing a social justice or multicultural topic to study in research while using post-positivist, social constructionist, or interpretive frameworks and hierarchical methods is not actually manifesting Speight and Vera's (2004) social justice call to action. Using traditional methods of research, no matter the topic or content, give the academic researcher significantly more power to interpret and frame the academic literature, shape public policy, and choose whose voices to feature and whose to silence.

If counseling psychology wants to realize its vision of social justice, then the field must take steps to examine itself in terms of how its research processes and outcomes actually impact the lives of research participants and subjects. It has been 7 years since Fine's (2007) call for counseling psychology to expand the field's "methodological imagination," and yet we are still wrestling with the same barriers and obstacles to becoming social justice agents of change. Structural barriers exist within counseling psychology training programs and within faculty tenure and promotion systems that continue to block faculty and students from opportunities to work with the *plan-act-*

observe-reflect cycle of PAR and to let go of the trap of "expertness" enough to practice mutuality and engage authentically with marginalized communities and their needs.

Authentic Engagement with Feminist Ethics of Care and *Beloved Community*

If counseling psychology seeks to adopt a social justice vision in order to nourish healthy individuals and communities, change must first come from within the field itself. Counseling psychologists and trainees must wrestle with the ways that each of us currently colludes with a system based on privilege, power, and oppression. It may be important to look outside the traditional field of psychology for guidance and possibilities for change. The principles of feminist ethics of care as outlined by Featherstone and Morris (2012), Orne (2002), and Tronto (1993; 2010) provide support for not only valuing relational and caring ways of being but in encouraging skill development for caring competencies across the lifespan for individuals. Counseling psychology is also rooted in responsibilities and actions of caring for others, but the field has not traditionally examined its own power inequities and could move closer to a social justice vision through a consideration of feminist ethics of care. The principles and practices of *beloved community*, as outlined by King (1957; 1958), hooks (1995; 2003; 2012), Morales (1998) and others provide guidance in exploring social justice issues within diverse communities and working through obstacles and barriers to change that often derail people in their efforts towards social action. As the field moves farther away from its relational and humanistic roots and closer to a more mechanized and empirically supported model (restricted to quantitative measures) of working with human beings, it

loses sight of its vision to support and guide development in individuals and communities in culturally sensitive ways through the lifespan. Perhaps it is time for counseling psychology to reconsider the role of love, or *agape*, and regain its foothold on a vision for social justice.

Raising Questions and Possibilities for Old Lesbian Community-Building Efforts

Old lesbian community-building efforts are happening in various communities and in different ways, but little documentation exists. It is difficult to gauge how and what different communities are paying attention to in addressing old lesbian needs and concerns. Future studies are needed to continue assessing old lesbian needs in different contexts and cultures. The LOV co-researchers suggested launching a large-scale assessment of old lesbians to find out needs and concerns across communities. In addition, LOV members discussed strategies for reaching out and creating solid networks for old lesbians that could especially help old lesbians who may not be "out" or who may live more rurally. One challenge that emerged in the LOV project that would be important for other old lesbian communities to address is dealing explicitly with power and privilege within old lesbian communities themselves. Using creativity and ingenuity to devise ways to get old lesbians talking about whose voices are louder, softer, more powerful, excluded, marginalized, etc. would allow communities to organize more effectively and successfully. If academic researchers partner with old lesbian communities, I suggest that academic researchers discuss issues of power inherent in academia and work collectively with the group to decide how to manage and how to call

out unhelpful power dynamics. Old lesbians have been deemed *triply invisible* by at least three marginalized statuses, and it is important to pay attention to the ways that a PAR process does not reinforce and collude with the dominant paradigm of power, privilege, and oppression.

Conclusion

The Living Our Visions project both struggled with and engaged in the formation of *beloved community* based on a vision of addressing old lesbian needs and concerns in northern Utah. Our commitment to personal and collective development was/is ongoing in the creation of cooperative community and exploring issues of justice. Long-time anti-racist activist and supporter of *beloved community* initiatives, Grace Lee Boggs (2012), wrote,

> As Gandhi said and King concurred, 'you must be the change you wish to see in the world...' We must define revolution both by the humanity-stretching *ends* to be achieved and the beloved community-building *means* by which to achieve those ends. (pp. 14-15)

By participating in consciousness-raising and social action activities together, we aimed to "stretch" our humanity. Through our personal, yet political, relationships and bonds with one another, we practiced a feminist ethics of care, and we engaged in subversive acts of love. Morales (1998) shared that "A politics of integrity is a politics of being whole" (p. 5). The sharing of our joys and successes, as well as our pitfalls and challenges, is what makes the LOV project whole. Participatory action research is not a seamless process and is, at times, "gory, tumultuous, hopeful, messy, and inconsistent" (p. 5). But it is only through making all of our processes visible that we can move

forward with greater freedom and act intentionally using self-reflection and self-critique. These are the moments where *beloved community* is possible.

APPENDIX A

ORIGINAL RECRUITMENT FLYER FOR

LOV WORKSHOP

Living Our Visions:

A Workshop for Lesbians Planning Later Life

Saturday, October 30th, 2010

9am - 4pm $5 Cost (Includes Lunch)

Are you:

- A lesbian 60 years or older, or a lesbian 40 years or older but interested in planning for later life living in the Salt Lake valley?
- Willing to talk about your thoughts and experiences about late-life issues ?
- Interested in making positive changes for older lesbians living in the Salt Lake valley?

We would like to invite you to participate in a workshop and talk about your views on aging and late-life issues, concerns and challenges you have with growing older in the Salt Lake valley, and ideas you may have for building community and making positive changes.

The Facilitators: Sue Morrow, older lesbian professor at the University of Utah; Liz Abrams, bisexual woman graduate student at the University of Utah.

If you have questions or are interested in participating, please contact Liz Abrams, liz.abrams@utah.edu, or by phone at 801 - 410 - 0472.

PLEASE SEE BACK OF FLYER FOR MORE INFORMATION!

To Participate, Call:
801 - 410 - 0472
liz.abrams@utah.edu

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Important Workshop Info

This purpose of this workshop is two-fold:

1. To bring together the wise minds of our older lesbian community, so that we can begin to gather information about important later life concerns for older lesbians.
2. To work together to bring about changes that promote well-being, health, equity, and a vibrant community for older lesbians living in the Salt Lake Valley.

Additionally, there are few articles written on this topic in the research literature. We would like to add to this literature and let others know about the exciting work that is happening in Salt Lake Valley – perhaps as a model for other communities! Thus, our plan is to video record this workshop. Our video recording will remain confidential and anonymous, except to those of us in attendance. If you are interested in this workshop, but hesitant about video recording, PLEASE do contact us to talk about these concerns in more depth. We would hate to lose out on your presence and important contributions due to video recording concerns!

APPENDIX B

ONGOING RECRUITMENT FLYER FOR LOV PROJECT

Living Our Visions:

An Ongoing Social Action Project for Lesbians Planning for Later Life in the Salt Lake Valley

Are you:

- A lesbian 60 years or older, or a lesbian 40 years or older but interested in planning for later life living in the Salt Lake valley?
- Willing to talk about your thoughts and experiences about late-life issues ?
- Interested in being part of a vibrant community for older lesbians living in the Salt Lake valley?

We would like to invite you to participate in an ongoing social action project and talk about your views on aging and late-life issues, concerns and challenges you have with growing older in the Salt Lake valley, and ideas you may have for building community and making positive changes.

The Organizers: Sue Morrow, older lesbian professor at the University of Utah; Liz Abrams, bisexual woman graduate student at the University of Utah.

PLEASE SEE BACK OF FLYER FOR MORE INFORMATION!

Interested in making this the most rockin' community for older lesbians in the country?

If you answered yes, then we would love for you to join us!

We are especially interested in involving a diverse group of women!

Contact Liz Abrams at liz.abrams@utah.edu

or 801 - 824 - 8370 for information about our next meeting!

Important Project Info

This purpose of this project is fourfold:

1. To bring together the wise minds of our older lesbian community, so that we can begin to gather information about important later life concerns for older lesbians.
2. To work together to bring about changes that promote well-being, health, equity, and a vibrant community for older lesbians living in the Salt Lake Valley.
3. To create a record of our activities so that our work can serve as a model for other communities.
4. To record and publish our process and the outcomes of our project in the academic/ professional literature.

To these ends, we would like to audio- and/or video-record our meetings. Our recordings will remain confidential, except to those of us in attendance. If you are interested in this project, but hesitant about video recording, PLEASE do contact us to talk about these concerns in more depth. We would hate to lose out on your presence and important contributions due to video recording concerns! The information you share will be used only with your written permission.

We'd like to thank SAGE & the Utah Pride Center for supporting this project and for generously providing the space for us to meet!

APPENDIX C

OUTLINE FOR ORIGINAL LOV WORKSHOP

Living Our Visions Workshop Outline
Saturday, October 30, 2010, 9-4pm
Utah Pride Center
Facilitated by Liz Abrams & Sue Morrow

9:00AM

I. Introductions (30 minutes – including extra time in case we start late)

A. We're going to turn on the recording now, but only as we talk about ourselves and introduce our workshop. Then we'll turn the recording back off while we have a conversation about the recordings and answer questions.

B. Welcome everyone and all of our identities into the room – We'd like to welcome all of our various races and ethnicities into the room, all of our gender identities, each of our sexual orientations, the different spiritual traditions we hold, all of our abilities and places where we may feel less able-bodied than maybe we used to, our educational and professional identities, all of our social class statuses, and all of the other various and sundry identities that we hold dear to our hearts. We want to welcome each of these into the room because we want everyone to feel safe to bring our whole selves into the workshop today. So, welcome!

C. Sue and I introduce ourselves and how we came to put this together – mention national interview study - talk about what this workshop is: both research and workshop – we are advisors to the process in terms of having some skills to share and taking responsibility to kicking things off and the research end of it. Sue and I are collaborating with getting this started, Donna is another advisor to the project, but who is also operating as a community member. Sue will be moving in and out, operating as community member. Some of you may also be researchers and we welcome your input

D. Give clear understanding of PAR

E. Thank Pride Center and SAGE for supporting us and giving us that space

F. We're going to wait to have you all introduce yourselves and participate just as soon as we talk about confidentiality and the recordings

II. Getting Started (45 minutes)

A. Talking about confidentiality and the video tape and possibly re-arranging where to sit b/c of this – play with idea about being researchers, using camcorders and audiorecorders

B. We've got audio and video and our plans are to use them, everything that we're going to do, everybody gets to negotiate what needs to be, feel free to take notes; harnessing creativity and seeing folks as researchers, pens and tablets

C. Check in with folks about questions and ways we can help rearrange ourselves so folks, anytime someone wants to share something very personal and feel uncomfortable with the recording being on, tell us and we'll turn stuff off and then turn it back

D. Give informed consents out and ask folks to sign them

E. Sue turn on video and also extra audio

F. Go around and have folks introduce themselves and what drew them to this workshop

G. Group guidelines – use flip chart to talk about what guidelines might be important for us – wanna be sure that everybody gets a chance to talk, feel safe, some of us are introverts, extroverts, ambiverts, those of us who are more extroverted will find it easier to think out loud, those of us who aren't to feel safe to say "pause" or ask for what they need. How's this feeling? Is everyone getting in as they want? Staying balanced in how much or how little are you spending. Ask about what other guidelines are important for you?

H. If/When conflict arises, how might we handle this together

I. Talk with a partner about two strengths you have to bring to the group, and two things you'd like to learn and receive from others

J. Ask each person to share with their partner a hope and a fear for this workshop, Does anyone want to share a hope or a fear with larger group?

III. Objectives (5 minutes)

A. Share that today's schedule will be largely participant-driven and collaborative

B. Also share what we have tentatively planned for the day, we see this workshop as a beginning. For some of you this workshop will be a self contained experience and we hope you'll have a wonderful time, and for some of you you'll want to continue on in talking and meeting about what we talk about today in terms of aging

IV. Break (10 minutes)

10:30AM

V. The Beginnings (30 minutes)

A. Why did we decide to include this workshop as part of a research project? What are the benefits? Documentation, sharing our work with others and possibly inspiring others to start a social action project for older lesbians in their own community. Together we'll decide all the different ways we want to get this work out into the world. Surely we'll publish some stuff for professionals who want to know the needs of older lesbians, some of you may be actors and want to put together a production. So many possibilities for what may come out of this workshop. We don't want to forget what we've created here today.

B. Why just for older lesbians (why not include gay men)? So we decided for our own reasons that this should be lesbians and bisexual women only, but we'd like to know what you think about why this should be lesbian women only? Why not gay men and allies?

VI. Activity (60 minutes)

A. We'd like to start with a small group discussion, so we'll ask you to get together with a group of 3 or 4 women and talk about the following two questions. We want you to acknowledge what's going well for you as an older lesbian in this community, and then talk about what's missing. What does each of us need personally? Try to stay personal with this. We'll branch out and talk about the whole community later, but right now talk about what's working and what's not working for you as an older lesbian. Take some notes, and we'll come around and help get the recorders on and working. (30 minutes)

B. Come back to large group – write down themes on flip chart. Note how interesting it is to hear about the differences in individual needs as well as the similarities.

C. Now we'd like for you to think BIG. No limits, no barriers. Let your imagination run wild and your creativity flow. What do you think we need to make this the most rockin' older lesbian community?

D. Wrap-Up by Liz & Sue and sharing that although we may have shared some challenging thoughts and feelings about aging in this community, that we look forward to the second half of the day b/c we'll be moving from our focus on what's wrong, to being inspired to make some changes

E. This is so wonderful, feel free to take your lunch with the group or hang out in the café, do what you need to do to take care of yourself over lunch, so hang out in groups or on your own. We have some fun stuff in store for this afternoon, if any of you have some thoughts about what you'd like to see happen this afternoon, then please let us know!

12:00PM

VII. Lunch (60 minutes)

1:00PM

VIII. "Grandma Builds an Earthship" (70 minutes)

A. Watch film – This film is inspirational and fun

B. Ask participants in large group: Reactions? Things that stood out for you? In what ways does this film make you feel hopeful? What other reactions does this film elicit?

C. How can we channel Pascha's creative energy into our own community here?

IX. Break (10 minutes)

2:30PM

X. Living our Vision (90 minutes)

A. What kinds of barriers could Pascha have allowed to keep her from achieving her dream? (In large group)

B. What was it about Pascha that enabled her to move forward regardless of those barriers?

C. Then go into small groups, with all of the dreams that we've been dreaming here, what kinds of barriers do you see in yourself or in our community that would need to be overcome in order to live our visions?

D. Come back to the large group and share some of those barriers. So, there's some challenges here. And how will we overcome them? Where do we go from here?

E. We mentioned this morning that our dream for this is that this becomes a project for this community that keeps going and going, and we hope to be here throughout the process. What needs to happen next?

XI. Over the next several months, our plan would be for those of us who want to move forward, to create a space for us to make this happen. How often? How long? We can probably fit in one meeting before the holidays, and we can talk about in general, but send out email/phone to check in about schedules and calendars.

A. It would be interesting to here, many of you came to just have a good day with older lesbians to talk about these things. Let's just talk about how much interest there is here about moving forward. Here's our thought: What follows this workshop is folks who are interested to meet on some kind of a regular basis to move these dreams forward. We're kinda curious how that sounds to everybody, and we thought maybe another meeting this fall and then some meetings in the spring to move us forward.

B. Action plan – can we map out what comes next in this process? How do we each want to be involved? What kinds of meetings or groups can we set up for continuing making this vision happen? What might we want to cover at the next meeting?

C. Wrap-Up with Liz & Sue – pulling together what we accomplished today and commenting on the strengths of our group. Reiterating hopefulness to continuing this process, we are moving into action together. Thank everyone for coming.

APPENDIX D

ALIX DOBKIN WORKSHOP FLYER

Workshop with Alix Dobkin:

Older Lesbians Exploring Ideas and Taking Action to Create the Communities We Want To Live In

Alix will be signing her memoir, *My Red Blood*, at the King's English on Tuesday, 4/3/12, at 7PM.

Alix will be interviewed on KRCL's show, *Radioactive*, on Friday, 3/30/12, at 6PM.

Are you interested in building support, inclusion, access to resources, and connection for yourself as an older lesbian?

Attend a workshop led by
ALIX DOBKIN
OLOC (Old Lesbians Organizing for Change) national board member, lesbian activist, writer, singer, song writer, musician and story teller
on SATURDAY, MARCH 31st, 2012, from 10AM - 3PM.
The workshop will be at the Utah Pride Center, 361 N 300 W, SLC, UT.

Lunch is FREE and provided.
We are asking for a donation of $5 - 30 for this workshop and lunch.
Seating is limited, so don't forget to register!

Registration Info	
For More Information, please contact Polly Stewart at 801-842-2306 or at pxstewart@salisbury.edu	
Please make checks/money orders out to: Sue Morrow	
Please send checks/money orders to: Sue Morrow, 1125 E. Harrison Ave, SLC, 84105	
Let us know if transportation may be an issue and you have an interest in carpooling.	
Name:	Phone/Email:
Donation Amount:	Dietary Restrictions:

This event is co-sponsored by the Living Our Visions group and SAGE.

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