

The Meaning, Experience and Process of Identity Formation as a Queer Femme

CURTIN UNIVERSITY
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The Meaning, Experience and Process of Identity Formation as a Queer Femme: An
Exploratory Phenomenological Study.

This Research Project/Research Dissertation Is Presented for The Degree Of
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Candidate Statement

“To the best of my knowledge and belief, this research project contains no material previously published by any other person except where due acknowledgment has been made. This research project contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university”.

Signature:

Date: 31/1/2018

Ethics Approval

The research presented and reported in this thesis was conducted in accordance with the National Health and Medical Research Council National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (2007) updated March 2014. The proposed research study received human research ethics approval from the Curtin University Human Research Ethics Committee (EC00262), Approval Number HRE2017-0493.

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I would like to acknowledge the unwavering support of my lecturer Matt Tilley and my family and friends.

I would also like to acknowledge the people who gave of their time and told their stories around Queer Femme Identity.

Dedication

I dedicate this to all the Queer Femme people out there who have struggled to find their community in the face of invisibility and assumptions.

Abstract

Introduction and Objectives: The terms for diverse sexual and gender identity have been expanding over recent years with a variety of terms for both, and often confusion about what they mean. For many years the femme¹ identity was mostly to be found in conversations around butch²/femme relationships between two women, femme was rarely discussed on its own and was often invisible. In the past few decades research has expanded the idea of butch being just a sexual identity and introduced the concept of it being a gender identity as well, but there has been very little exploring femme in the same way. Recently there has been an increase in people identifying as queer femme and for some this has added to the confusion, whether this a sexual orientation, a gender identity or both. The objective of this research is to investigate the process of identity formation, the experiences and meaning of identity for people who identify as Queer Femme, with three specific objectives: to explore the meaning of identity for people who identify as Queer Femme; to explore the individual experiences of identity for people who identify as Queer Femme and to understand the process of identity formation for people who identify as Queer Femme.

Methods: This research was guided by a phenomenological methodology, it is the most appropriate method when researching the lived experience of people who identify with a minority group (Liamputtong, 2013). Sixteen participants who were over the age of eighteen and self-identified as queer femme were interviewed. A pilot interview and 15 subsequent 20-45min interviews were conducted over a 3-month period. After transcription, interviewees were invited to review the transcripts and another interview was offered if necessary to clarify facts. Thematic analysis was conducted on the transcriptions to identify themes.

Results: Thematic analysis of the qualitative data in this research study resulted in sub themes in each of the three themes of Meaning of Queer Femme, Experiences for Queer Femme and Identity Formation Process for Queer Femme. There were three sub themes in the Meaning of Identity: 1. Presentation and Expression, 2. Sense of Being, 3. Non-Conforming, and Diverse. The Experiences of this identity also elicited three sub themes: 1. Assumptions,

¹ Femme is an identity held by some people with a feminine presentation or expression.

² Butch is an identity held by some people with a masculine presentation or expression.

Invisibility and Discrimination, 2. Coming Out and Educating Others, 3. Freedom, Being Seen and Passing Privilege. There were four sub themes in the Process of Identity Formation: 1. Identity Confusion, 2. Finding Community, 3. Conforming to Queer and finally 4. Embracing Identity. The sixteen participants came from several states across Australia, ranging in age from 23 to 53 years of age, with a variety of gender and sexual identities as well as all identifying as queer femme.

Conclusions: The queer femme identity was a seemingly new identity but this study found participants whom had identified in this way for several decades, so the recent emergence seems to be more about the acceptance of diversity and knowledge of terminology, rather than queer femme being a new identity. The identity formation process for queer femme in this study was consistent with several other identity models: initial questioning of identity, finding community, trying to fit in and finally embracing the queer femme identity. The experiences of assumptions of heterosexuality, invisibility and discrimination based on a feminine expression, were consistent with previous research from overseas. The meaning attributed to this identity from the participants in this study showed a combination of sexuality, gender identity, external presentation and expression, an inner sense of self and living authentically.

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List of Abbreviations

LGBTI Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Intersex

**Section 1:
Literature Review**

The Meaning, Experience and Identity Formation Process for Queer Femme

Section 1: Literature Review

1.0 Introduction

The literature review explored the research to date on the experiences and meaning of identity, and the process of identity formation for people who identify as Queer Femme. It analysed the current research on identity formation models related to gender and sexuality in general, the meaning people ascribe to their identity, and the way they experience their diverse identity. The research on queer, femme and queer femme identity was also analysed to highlight the gaps in the research and to support this research topic.

1.1 Identity formation process

There has been a plethora of research, over several decades that has explored the process of sexual identity formation. For many years the stage based sexual identity formation models proposed by Cass (1984) and Fassinger (1996) were seen to be the primary models, but several critics have stated that it was not the process that most lesbian or bisexual women followed (Eliason & Schope, 2007; Gervacio, 2012; Sophie, 1986). Other models were proposed for women loving women, such as the life span model, (Bilodeau & Renn, 2005; D'Aguelli, 2003) and eventually several research projects were conducted that explored the process of identity formation for masculine presenting women who identify as butch. This research found their identity as butch was not just about their sexuality but also their gender, which then led to a small number of research projects on femme women, those women with a feminine gender expression and diverse sexuality (Heistand, 2005; Levitt, Gerrish & Heistand, 2013; Levitt & Heistand, 2005; Levitt & Horne, 2002; Levitt, Puckett, Ippolito & Horne, 2012). These research projects all had merit in exploring identity formation and moved the discussion forward, from focusing on only sexual orientation, to also include gender identity. However, there is still a gap in the research when reviewing how the

intersections of sexual orientation and gender identity occur in the process of identity formation for those who identify as both queer and femme.

2.0 Experiences of Identity

Levitt, et al (2003) researched how the femme experiences her identity. One of the common themes in this experience is invisibility of the femme in both the lesbian and the general community (Blair & Hoskin, 2014; Mishali, 2014). They reported that the heterosexual community thought femme women were too feminine to be lesbians, but some members of the lesbian community did not see them as 'real' lesbians due to their femininity or possible history of relationships with men. Further research into the experiences of femme women found that the femininity of their expression and thus their invisibility in both the heterosexual and lesbian population lead to being distrusted by members of both (Mishali, 2014). Mishali (2014) further explained the perception that reinforces the stereotype of the lesbian as being a masculine woman, who is strong, dependable, secure and confident, while the femme woman is none of these and probably not a 'real' lesbian who is thought to become heterosexual at any time.

Vannewkirk (2006) reported that other lesbians saw femmes as trying to pass as heterosexual and as not being authentic in their identity. While the invisibility and assumption by the heterosexual community led them to experience unwanted sexual advances from heterosexual men, and repeatedly to reveal their diverse identity or 'come out' in both communities. The participants in Vannewkirk's (2006) research revealed how they were often only visible as lesbian when they came out or were seen with a butch partner. Research by Eves (2004) found similar experiences of this coming out often being met with disbelief, surprise or discomfort by the people the femme woman disclosed to, especially heterosexual people.

Many of the women, in Levitt et al's (2003) research, felt that even with these negative reactions to femme lesbians, their identity was becoming more accepted and the identity of femme allowed these women to find their own

niche within the lesbian community without feeling the pressure to look androgynous or more masculine. Levitt et al (2003) reported that for some participants it was a political statement, one that challenged the perception of lesbians while allowing them to live their truth.

Subsequent research by Levitt and Heistand (2005) found a difference between the perception of feminine heterosexual women and femme lesbians, being the object of desire. They reported that heterosexual women were often seen as the object of desire for heterosexual men, whereas femme lesbians were also the object of desire, not from a male gaze, but often that of a butch woman. These femme lesbians, also discussed that they had the ability to demand desire as an active subject from these butch women, which was perceived to be a different experience to that of heterosexual women. Hoopes (2003) reported that heterosexual women were often seen to seek pleasure in their partner's pleasure, whereas the femme woman experienced pleasure by being pleased for her own sake, which is seen as a more masculine trait.

In more recent years research by Pearce (2012) echoed many of the findings by Levitt et al (2003). They reported on the experiences of femme women when coming out, the reactions and perceptions of others to this disclosure, their lack of visibility as lesbians, and the pressure to present in a more masculine or androgynous way to increase visibility. But Pearce (2012) also found some positive aspects associated with passing as heterosexual, that is the level of privilege that led to less experiences of homophobia.

The work of Levitt, et al (2003) was limited in the diversity of the people interviewed as they were all cisgender women, Caucasian and living in a separatist community. This would have provided limited variety of experience in identity. It also faced the same issue as Rosario et al (2009) in that it failed to have a clear definition of femme identity.

3.0 Meaning of Identity

Research by Levitt et al (2003) explored what femme identity meant to femme women and found that it was more than sexuality, it was also about

gender. Their research also showed that it is very difficult to define, even for the women who hold this identity. They reported that it was often best described as being not a typical lesbian and the opposite of butch. For the research participants who defined their gender as femme, it enabled them to integrate both their sexuality as lesbians, with their femininity. Levitt et al (2003) reported that gender is often seen to be about presentation and these research participants agreed that a feminine expression was often associated with a femme gender identity but it was more than that, it also included behaviour and personality traits such as strength, honesty, and openness, rather than passivity or weakness, characteristics not always associated with femininity.

Pearce (2012) also found that the participants found it difficult to describe the meaning of their femme identity. They reported that some participants saw it as primarily their external presentation, others saw it as a mix of both external presentation and internal sense of self, and for some it was political and radical. For some participants their femme gender identity was a natural expression of who they are, while for others it was a conscious choice, made in various contexts. But most women interviewed believed their femme identity was socially constructed, they saw there were many ways to be femme, that this was fluid, and varied in different times and context. While these beliefs pose particular issues in definition, it creates an environment, for researchers, which allows for further exploration of the identity to research the variations across a variety of context. This is where this research fits well, exploring the meaning of the femme identity within the context of identifying as Queer Femme, no matter the sex or gender of the person.

3.1 Queer

The term queer may be used as an overarching term describing the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) community as well as an individual identity term. Bronski (2011) explained that historically the term was used in a discriminatory way against LGBTI people. Dentato (2014) explored the history of the term from the 16th century where it meant strange, peculiar, quaint or odd to the 18th century where the meaning changed to mean

something bad or not worthy. They reported that by the 1920s it had become a derogatory term for homosexual people but was eventually reclaimed by the community in the 1990s, with the advent of queer politics and queer theory within academic circles (Dilley, 1999).

Fricke (2003) proposed that queer was moving beyond and challenging the binary and the discrimination of the assumptions of heterosexuality. Whereas, Menon (2011) placed it outside of normativity rather than just the binary, which were a shift from Butler (1990) who described it as “fundamental unnaturalness” (p. 149). Portwood-Stace (2010) saw queer as “a refusal to accept the legitimacy of socially dominant sexualities on the basis that they are natural or intrinsically valuable” (p.480).

The work of Foucault (1998) is often seen as informing queer theory. When considering sexuality and queer theory, his work hypothesised that sexuality is a societally constructed entity that is an indeterminate and discontinuous historical narrative. Queer theory can be seen as being a non-discipline, a place that is in opposition to the norm, thus where people who are non-heterosexual can group together in the identity of queer (Foucault, 1998). Foucault and Halperin (1995) saw queer identity as encompassing any person who was marginalised due to their sexuality or gender and were informed by LGBT advocacy, societal oppression, discrimination and the intersection of these and queer theory.

Hill (2004) proposed queer as expanding from existing sexual orientations and spanning the diversity of sexual identities. Giffney (2009) saw the queer identity as allowing for fluidity in both sexuality and gender and, for some, were part of an evolving identity moving from gay, bisexual or lesbian to queer. Bronski (2011) explains that when used as an individual identity, it is broader than any one sexuality or gender, yet encompasses many ways of identifying that current terms cannot explain. Stancui (2014) also discusses that queer encompasses a range of identities which she sees as interesting and worthwhile due to the ‘otherness’ and difference it delineates.

3.2 Femme

There has been very little mention of femme identity in research, it was often found in research on butch or the butch/femme dynamic and then it was only briefly mentioned (Eves, 2004; Gibson & Meem, 2016; Hayfield, Clarke, Halliwell & Malson, 2013; Holman, 2002; Lehavot, King & Simoni, 2011; Williams, 2012). It was not until the 21st century that research into femme woman and their identity was conducted and in the past couple of years that queer femme as an identity was seen as a topic for research (Blair & Hoskin, 2016; Blair & Hoskins, 2015; Levitt, Gerrish & Heistand, 2013; Levitt & Horne, 2002; Levitt et al, 2012; Mishali, 2014; Rosario, Scrimshaw, Hunter & Levy-warren, 2009). Research done by Levitt and Horne (2002) explored the understanding of queer orientation and gender expression for queer women. Levitt et al (2012) unpacked this further when they researched the challenges and supports of gender expression for women who identify their gender as butch and femme and Blair and Hoskin (2016) researched femme's understanding of their identity.

Levitt, Gerrish and Heistand (2003) researched how the femme experiences her identity. One of the common themes in this experience is invisibility of the femme in both the lesbian and the general community, as she is seen as not being sexually diverse and often mistaken as being heterosexual due to her feminine presentation (Blair & Hoskin, 2015; Mishali, 2014).

Rosario, Scrimshaw, Hunter and Levy-Warren (2009), reported on the coming out process for both butch and femme women, they discovered it to be slightly different for both identities, butch women cross gender identified from a young age and came out earlier than femme women, who generally came out much later in life and often after identifying as lesbian before femme (Blair & Hoskin, 2015; Mishali, 2014).

The discrimination femme women face from within and outside of the lesbian community was explored by Levitt and Horne (2002), with Blair and Hoskins (2015) adding to this by exploring femmephobia. Further research into the discrimination femme women experience found that the femininity of

their expression and the assumption of heterosexuality, in both the heterosexual and lesbian population, lead to being distrusted by members of both populations (Mishali, 2014). Mishali (2014) further explained the perception that reinforces the stereotype of the lesbian as being a masculine woman, who is strong, dependable, secure and confident, while the femme woman is none of these and probably not a 'real' lesbian, but one who will become heterosexual at any time. Finally, Blair and Hoskin (2016) researched discrimination experienced by the queer femme. None of this research explored the daily experience of being queer femme, from both the wider community and the lesbian community.

3.3 Queer Femme

The research on Queer Femme is minimal and often couched in the terms of being about feminine women who identified other than heterosexual (Black, 2005; Chaplin, 2014; Nagoshi et al, 2014; Jeffreys, 1994). Mishali (2014) placed the queer femme in an important place to reimagine femininity and lesbian identity within a queer framework. They discussed the power to change the queer discussion, to show that lesbians are not all masculine and that not all feminine women are heterosexual, and to further explore the intersections of sexuality, gender expression and feminism. The work of Blair and Hoskin (2016) moved this discussion on to the diversity of the queer femme and reported that not all people who identify in this way are female or lesbian. They explored the understanding queer femmes had about their identity and what discrimination they had faced. Their research showed that people who identify as queer and femme are not always cisgender women, as they had several participants who identified as gender queer, cis or trans men and trans women. They reported that the discrimination these queer femme's experienced was based around femme stereotypes, the perception that they were playing at being diverse in their sexual orientation and therefore not to be trusted (Blair & Hoskins, 2016).

The previously mentioned research has not explored the meaning and expression of the queer femme identity, and to position both queer and femme as sexual and gender identities. Neither has any previous research

been identified which explored the process of identity formation for those who identify as queer femme. This research project proposes to recruit people from all gender identities and sexualities that identify as queer femme, to explore what this journey has entailed, what they have experienced and what does their identity mean to them.

4.0 Conclusion

The review of the literature has highlighted the variety of identity formation models that have been proposed over the past few decades and the change in identity formation processes to be more inclusive of a variety of sexual and gender identities. The variety of ways people gave meaning to queer, femme and finally queer femme were only minimally researched with very little information being available. The experience of identity, including the negative aspects of discrimination and invisibility, and the positive aspect of perceived heterosexual privilege, were explored by several researchers.

The literature review highlighted the gaps in research, which are: the process of queer femme identity formation and the meaning of queer femme for people from a variety of context and backgrounds who hold this identity.

5.0 This Study

This study explored the meaning, experiences and identity formation process for Queer Femme in an Australian context. It interviewed people who identify as queer femme from across several states, with a variety of gender identities, sexual identities and ages.

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Section 2: Journal Article

The Meaning, Experience and Identity Formation Process for Queer Femme

Section 2: Journal Article

1.0 Introduction

In this research a phenomenological approach guided the exploratory investigation of the meaning, experience and the formation process of identity for people who identify as Queer Femme³.

There is research on queer identity, femininity, identity formation and meaning of identity, but little on the Queer Femme identity. It is anticipated that this study will add to the body of information on the experience and meaning of identity and formation for a new and rapidly emerging identity. Sixteen participants were recruited, over a two-month period, following a pilot interview. The research included individual semi-structured, in-depth interviews which were recorded, transcribed and examined using thematic analysis.

The meaning of queer femme was not easily defined, (Levitt et al, 2003; Pearce, 2012). Both Levitt et al, (2003) and Pearce (2012), described femme as being the opposite of masculine and butch, but also not being a stereotypical woman loving woman, one who had a feminine presentation rather than masculine or androgynous one. This research also showed that it was both an external presentation as well as an internal sense of self, that was strong, proud and fierce, rather than weak and passive as is often the perception of people who are feminine. But that it could also be the values and politics of the individual that were radical and progressive. Queer femme as an identity could be innate or it could also be an expression that varied in differencing context, fluid and often socially constructed (Pearce, 2012).

The assumption of heterosexuality and the invisibility as being a queer, woman loving woman was a common experience for femme women (Levitt et

³ Queer Femme is an identity term that may indicate a diversity in sexual orientation and/or gender identity

al, 2003; Mishali, 2014; Pearce, 2012 & Vannewkirk, 2006). This invisibility and assumption of heterosexuality often led to unwanted advances by heterosexual men; discrimination by the queer community, particularly lesbians; and the need to reveal their identity over and over in both the heterosexual and queer community, which was often met with disbelief. (Eves, 2004; Levitt et al, 2003; Mishali, 2014; Pearce, 2012 & Vannewkirk, 2006). Femme women were often assumed by other lesbians, to be either, not being authentic in themselves as women loving women or met with suspicion about their motives by trying to pass as heterosexual. They were only perceived as being visible when with a more masculine partner or wearing some visible sign of queerness (Mishali, 2014).

The research by Pearce (2012) showed that for some women the desire to be more visible within the queer community led to them trying to present in a more masculine or androgynous way and that this often felt ingenuous and uncomfortable. But for many they eventually found a way to incorporate their femininity with their queer identity in their presentation and to feel a sense of embracing their femme identity, while also making a statement that challenged the perception of how a lesbian should be. This was assisted by a growing awareness of the femme identity within the queer community. Pearce (2012) also reported that the ability to pass as heterosexual, afforded a level of privilege that led to less discrimination based on presentation.

The process of identity formation includes exploring identity, assessing what identity fits and finally the integration of the new identity for the individual in many areas of their life. While this process is often believed to occur during adolescence it can occur at any time throughout an individual's life (Marcia, 1989). Identity can include gender, sexuality, race, ethnicity, faith, familial role, and class and is a sense of one's values, goals, and beliefs that inform the sense of self (Erikson, 1950; Marcia, 1989).

There were various models of identity formation proposed over decades, the most popular by Cass's (1974) and McCarn and Fassinger (1996). The majority were stage-based models (Cass, 1974; Chapman & Brannock, 1987; Coleman, 1982; Downing and Roush, 1985; Faderman,

1984; Erikson, 1950; Marcia, 1989; McCarn and Fassinger, 1996; Levitt et al, 2003; Levitt & Heistand, 2005; Minton & MacDonald, 1984; Mosher and Cross, 1971; Ossana, Helms and Leonard, 1992; Pearce, 2012; Sophie, 1985-1986; Yarhouse, 2001). Processes rather than stages were suggested by D'Augelli (1994) and followed by several other researchers (Richardson & Hart, 1981; Rust, 1993; Horowitz & Newcomb, 2002), while Schneider (2001) suggested a trajectory process. Holden and Holden (1995) then offered another alternative, dimensions, instead of stages or processes, where people rate themselves from homosexual to heterosexual along a continuum for each dimension

In the 1990s the discussions about sexual and gender identity changed with the advent of queer politics and queer theory (Kirsch, 2006; Sullivan, 2003). This decade ended with the work of Savin-Williams and Diamond (1999) and the Differential Development Trajectory (DDT) framework and then the Intimate Careers Model (ICM) from Peplau, Spalding, Conley and Veniegas (1999). Both models incorporated internal, external and relationship changes over a lifetime.

This concept was followed by Diamond (2007) with the introduction of the concept of "periodic reorganisation" in the Dynamic Systems Approach. This included the fluidity of sexual orientation and that identities, attraction and behaviours can be flexible over a lifetime, are nonlinear, with multiple trajectories, and with many possible outcomes. Hammack and Cohler (2009) introduced a new paradigm, a narrative and life course perspective, where people make sense of their identities through their narrative in both a historical and societal context. This was then followed by Dillon (2011), incorporating group membership and social processes with the individual, this included five, flexible and nonlinear statuses.

Pearce (2012) continued the non-linear concept with their Non-Linear, Context Dependent Model of Femme Identity Development which was experiential with a variety of alternative paths and outcomes. This model proposed that it is acceptable for a person to depart from the process of identity development at any time, and there is an intersection of life

experiences, and multiple identities. In the same year, Tate (2012) developed the Life-Course Identity Model which posits two models of self-categorisation which can occur at any point these are: the current identity only and identity across any point during the lifetime. The most recent model is the Inclusive Model from Tate and Pearson (2016) which proposes four different convergent experiences: passionate, nonsexual female friendships; sexual contact with both sexes; a diversity of lesbian identifications; and sexual personality considerations.

1.1 Aims

To investigate the process of identity formation, the experiences and meaning of identity for people who identify as Queer Femme.

1.2 Objectives

1. Explore the meaning of identity for people who identify as Queer Femme.
2. Explore the individual experiences of identity for people who identify as Queer Femme.
3. Understand the process of identity formation for people who identify as Queer Femme.

1.3 Public health statement of significance

The process to openly identify as being of a diverse gender or sexuality can often be fraught with confusion, uncertainty and fear. People are generally raised with a societal message that they will be heterosexual and cis-gender⁴ (Johns, Zimmerman, & Bauermeister, 2013; Morgan, 2012).

People with diverse gender and sexual orientation experience stigma and discrimination based on their diversity (Meyer, & Northridge, 2007). These experiences are social determinants of health that lead to health disparities and a greater incidence in the areas of mental health, suicidality (Hatzenbuehler, 2011), substance use and sexual health (Meyer, & Northridge, 2007; Rosenstreich, Comfort & Martin, 2011). Queer Femme is

⁴ Cisgender is when a person identifies their gender in line with their sex assigned at birth.

often experienced as an invisible, but newly emerging, identity that faces layers of discrimination due to a lack of acceptance and understanding, not being visible as sexually diverse and based on stereotypes about women loving women (Rosario, Schrimshaw, Hunter, & Levy-Warren, 2009; Dahl, 2010; Hayfield, Clarke, Halliwell, & Malson, 2013). It is important to research the Queer Femme identity to gain a greater understanding of the experiences of people with this identity. This will inform services to gain a better understanding of people's experiences, how these experiences impact on the person and to then become inclusive in their service provision.

2.0 Methodology

2.1 Study design

This research was guided by a phenomenological methodology, it is the most appropriate methodology when researching the lived experience of people who identify with a minority group, by using a small number of people to inform an understanding of the participant's individual lived experiences (Liamputtong, 2013). This study focuses on the individual's personal experiences, deep thoughts and the interpretation and construction of sexual identity. It was seen that this would be most useful within the context of researching the Queer Femme identity (Dahl, 2010; Holloway & Todres, 2003; Adams, & Jones, 2011; Moustakas, 1994).

A framework of *Social Construction Theory* (Cottone, 2007; Gergen, 2011; Lyddon, 1995) and *Symbolic Interactionism* (Marshall, 1998) underpins this research as, both these frameworks inform identity development. *Social Construction Theory* explores identity formation in a social context that is informed by social interactions and relationship experiences (Cottone, 2007; Gergen, 2011; Lyddon, 1995). *Symbolic Interactionism* explores identity, embodiment, masculinity and femininity and the meaning people give to these within an ever-evolving social context and the remaking of their identity as a social construction (Marshall, 1998). It focuses on the individual's personal experiences, deep thoughts and the interpretation and construction of sexual identity, this will be most useful within the context of Queer Femme identity

(Dahl, 2010; Holloway & Todres, 2003; Adams, & Jones, 2011; Moustakas, 1994).

Building rapport with the research participants is enhanced by the researcher holding the same identity as the participants, which encourages honest answers to questions and increased the opportunity to understand the subjective nature of the responses (Liamputtong, 2013). A researcher working within their own community brings an intimate insider perspective to the research that offers a unique opportunity to create an environment where participants may disclose more than they would to an outsider (Taylor, 2011). The inside outsider research team (i.e. student researcher and supervisor) configuration will enhance the opportunity to bring a diversity of interpretation to the data, with one researcher holding a similar identity to the participants and the other researcher bringing a different lived experience to the team (Thomas, Blacksmith & Reno, 2000).

2.1.1. Interview protocol development

The interview protocol was developed in collaboration with the research supervisor and after a literature review was conducted on the queer, femme and queer femme identity process, meaning and experiences. This review highlighted gaps in research that then informed the interview questions around these particular topics.

A pilot interview was conducted with AB to assess the suitability of the questions from a participant view point. The questions were then reassessed and feedback from the pilot interview informed the final eight questions in the semi structured interviews.

2.2 Participants

Sixteen participants were recruited using purposive, convenience, snowball sampling and utilising an e-flyer distributed via email networks and social media (see Appendix H). In particular Facebook pages that are designated for people who identify as Queer Femme, were used to recruit a purposive convenience sample (Browne, 2005; Burnard, 2004; Vanderleest & Galper, 2009).

Twenty-five people initially expressed an interest in being interviewed, twenty of these returned the participant consent form and sixteen were interviewed.

2.2.1 Inclusion and exclusion criteria

Participants were over 18 years of age, competent in English, living in Australia and self-identified as Queer Femme. Participation in the research was voluntary and all participants were free to withdraw at any time prior to approving the transcript of their interview.

2.2.2 Pilot Interview

A pilot interview was conducted to ascertain that the interview questions were appropriate and easily understood. An example of the pilot interview questions can be found in Appendix A.

2.3 Ethics

It is vital to ensure the cultural safety and support of participants who are members of a marginalised culture (National Health and Medical Research Council, 2013). This was done by providing a confidential and safe place to hold the interview, anonymity and confidentiality of all information and ensuring that the participants understand the participant information and consent forms. The pilot interview guaranteed the interview questions were ethical and easily understood, and an opportunity to debrief after the interview and review the transcript enhanced the safety of participants (Liamputtong, 2013). Providing the opportunity to not answer questions that they are uncomfortable with, the ability to stop the interview at any time, checking in with participants during the interview and supplying them with support resources on conclusion of the interviews created a safe and supportive process (Meyer, 2007).

2.4 Data Collection

The research was conducted over a two-month period and included individual semi-structured, in-depth interviews which were recorded, and transcribed verbatim. The researcher conducted a pilot interview with a person who identifies as Queer Femme (AB), in order to evaluate the research protocol (Appendix C). The pilot interview explored the questions for the one-on-one interviews and research domains relevant to the participants. The interviews were conducted in a safe space, a private meeting room at the QLD AIDs Council, or via Skype for those participants who were not in Brisbane, which provided a confidential and comfortable environment that assisted with building rapport and fostered interview integrity.

The pilot interview contained a pilot participant information sheet (Appendix A), pilot interviewee consent form (Appendix B) and the proposed interview questions (Appendix C). The pilot participant read this information and signed the consent form, before they were asked the questions and for their feedback on all questions regarding the content and their understanding. This feedback on the research questions, in consultation with the research supervisor, allowed adjustment to the questions to ensure participant understanding (Braun & Clarke, 2013). The data from the pilot interview and feedback are reported separately to the final research findings.

The second data collection method was a 20-45 minute, audio recorded, semi structured in-depth interview with the other fifteen participants. These were conducted in the same environment as the pilot interview or via Skype. The interviews followed the same process as the pilot interview with participants reading and understanding the participant information sheet (see Appendix D) and signing the participant consent form (Appendix E), agreeing to participate in a recorded interview. Initial questions elicited specific demographic information on age, sex/gender and identity. Next, open-ended questions investigated the meaning of both Queer, Femme and Queer Femme, the process to identity for the participant and their experiences of this identity (Appendix F). All participants were provided with a resource list of services that offer support and an opportunity to debrief with the researcher (Appendix G).

The researcher recorded a reflective journal throughout the data collection period including their observations during the interviews to highlight the nuances of each interview and the interview process (Braun & Clarke, 2013). The researcher recorded personal reflections on the process of conducting the research, the researcher's personal bias, assumptions, reactions and emotions during the interviews that may influence the analysis of data (Braun & Clarke, 2013; Liamputtong, 2013; Tracy, 2010). These personal reflections were discussed with the supervisor, between interviews, on a regular basis. Recording reflections was also used during data analysis to process the development of theories and any changes in hypotheses. To ensure rigor the researcher provided the opportunity for participants to review their interview transcripts, this also increased trust in the researcher leading to honesty in responses (Liamputtong, 2013; Tong et al., 2007). Attempting to recruit a diverse sample increased the opportunity to gain a variety of responses from lived experience, thus gleaning rich data. This was done by gathering demographics from prospective participants to ensure they cross a variety of ages, genders and cultural backgrounds (Liamputtong, 2013; Tong et al., 2007).

2.5 Data Analysis

Data analysis was conducted using thematic analysis, which is a method that identifies themes as the data is analysed, it provides rich data, is flexible, and useful in participatory research (Braun & Clarke, 2006). During the interview process, while transcribing the interviews and reviewing the reflective journal, themes were identified (Braun & Clarke, 2013; Liamputtong, 2013). A variety of themes were reflected during every stage of the research, with similarities in the participants meaning, experiences and identity formation process. Finally, to maintain accuracy and transparency, the identified themes were discussed with the research supervisor (Tong et al., 2007; Tracy, 2010)

3.0 Results

3.1 Demographics

Participants ranged in age from 20 to 50 years of age. They came from a variety of gender identities including: cisgender women, trans women, and a male assigned at birth non-binary person. They identified their sexuality with various identity terms including: lesbian, queer, bisexual, pansexual, as can be seen in Table 1.

Table 1: Demographics table of participants.

Pseudo-name	Interview location	Age	Sexual Identity	Gender Identity
AB -Pilot	QLD-Regional-face to face	30	Queer	Female
CR	QLD- metro-face to face	35	Gay/queer	Gender queer/boi dyke
ZE	QLD-metro-skype	23	Queer femme homoflexible	Cis female
SS	NSW- regional-skype	23	Hetero/pan	Queer female
JS	QLD-metro-face to face	51	Bi	Queer femme
KW	WA-metro-skype	39	Mostly les	Female
AL	QLD-metro-face to face	33	Queer femme	Female
SG	SA-metro-skype	30	Queer lesbian	Female
EH	QLD-metro-face to face	23	Lesbian	Cis woman
MR	QLD-metro-face to face	27	Bi/queer	Female
KH	QLD-regional-face to face	46	Bi/pansexual	Female
DM	QLD-metro-face to face	53	Bi/ambi/queer	Female
SR	SA-metro-skype	29	Queer	Agender trans woman
KN	QLD- regional-face to face	41	Lesbian	Female
AP	QLD-regional-face to face	38	Lesbian	Cis female
TK	NSW-metro-skype	53	Pan/queer	Cis female

3.2 Summary of Themes

Using thematic data analysis, three main themes were identified with several sub themes across the main themes of: Meaning of Identity for Queer Femme, the Process of Identity formation for Queer Femme and the Experiences of Queer Femme Identity (see Table 2).

Table 2: Themes derived from the data, with supporting sub themes.

Theme	Subthemes
Meaning	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Presentation and Expression2. Sense of Being3. Non-conforming and Diverse
Experiences	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Assumptions, Invisibility and Discrimination2. Coming Out and Educating others3. Freedom and being seen Versus Passing Privilege
Identity Formation	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Confusion2. Finding Community3. Conforming to queer4. Embracing Identity

3.3 Theme 1: Meaning of Identity for Queer Femme

The theme of meaning of identity presented three sub-themes: Presentation and Experience; Sense of Being; and Non-conforming and Diverse. The meaning of identity and how queer, femme and queer femme all come together, elicited both the external presentation and expression as well as the internal sense of being. The ability to finally be recognised by other

queer people and also the freedom to not conform to societal norms and celebrate the diversity of the human experience was reported.

3.3.1 Presentation and Expression

Most of the participants (AB, CR, ZE, SS, KW, AL, SG, EH, KH, KN, AP, MR) felt that their feminine presentation and the expression of their femininity was intrinsic to being queer femme. ZE explained how this worked for her:

I think it's quite a nice way to describe myself because, I look feminine, not something that a lot of people understand and maybe make a lot of assumptions on your sexuality based on that, but I think we are getting to that point where I am actually, I think that being queer and feminine and that is good for me, that was a really nice place to get to.... I can look feminine and embrace feminine and not be less queer

For AB it was the way that the term queer femme encompassed both of the concepts that she identified with, as she discussed:

So, it was about queer encompassed everything I am....so, for me saying that I'm queer femme then identifies that I am not just identifying as queer and I'm not just a femme (...) I am both of those things and they are uniquely me.

Sometimes this expression can be hyper feminine, or over the top, to such an extent that the person could not be assumed to be heterosexual as reported by participant EH, "I'm so feminine I can't possibly touch men".

Or as SR explained it can be “sharp and bold and upfront” and other participants used the terms “Amazing fierce femmes” (TK), “Strong” (CR, SR), “Radical” (SR) and “Proud” (SR) this showed that these participants saw queer femmes as being strong, fierce and proud rather than passive or weak. The dichotomy of this difference is explained by SR:

I mean that means a variety of things on a variety of levels for me. But I suppose that it's a more accurate representation of my perspective on how bodies relate to each other and what it actually means...I think that everything is so mixed up and everything is on such a continuum that actually defining opposites and defining sameness is kind of futile, kind of pointless. That's kind of why I say queer is about, are we the same gender are we a different gender, its complicated.... think about like divorcing femininity from, not necessarily softness, but certainly subservience and all those kinds of things. And making it something that's sharp and bold and upfront I suppose.... But yeah for sure, it's kind of about focusing on the aspects of it that is more radical and yeah sharp.

While AB explained that, for her, queer femme is a femininity that is beyond the experience of being propositioned and the gaze of heterosexual men, “Feminine expression or feeling but it's not within the heteronormative gaze”.

3.3.2 Sense of Being

Many participants (AB, KN, CR, ZE, JS, SG, KW, AL, KH) reported their identity as being more than their presentation or an expression, that the queer part of their identity may be about their sexuality or gender. For KW it was a much broader concept that encompassed their values, politics and often was core to how they saw themselves, KW explained:

I guess feels or maybe even dresses in a more feminine way (...) umm, yeah, I guess, I guess it's not completely dress, you can still feel quite feminine and, um still quite femme without the expression of the external I guess.

Some participants (AB, CR, ZE, SG, SR, TK) saw either queer or femme as their sexuality, and that it was an internal representation of who they were. But it was also acknowledged to be about a broader definition of queer by many (CR, SS, TK, AB, EH, MR, KH, DM, AP) an overarching term for the community and to include politics, Both AB and TK discussed the broader concept of queer, with TK explaining, "But it's (queer) a political, sexual, cultural, socioeconomic identity type label as well, so it's pretty all-encompassing for me", while AB discussed other meanings:

Like I said before queer also extend to other things like just in general the way you live life, your values, politics and things like that.... Queer is my sexuality, but it's also just feels like a core descriptor of who I am.... And that feels like it sits comfortably within queer femme for me. I don't have to explain or justify, or, you know, over think why that is happening, I just know that that's a part of who I am and I am fine with that, cause' I explored that and figured it out I think.

The internal sense of being was reported by several participants (CR, AB, KN, ZE) as something that was intrinsic to who they were, an "energy" (ZE), a "feeling" (AB, CR, AL), a "core descriptor" (AB), something that was different to those around them. This sense of queer femme being intrinsic is described by CR:

It's more than expressing, it's a way of being.... but you know inside I feel like I'm more than just a man or a woman. You know I don't feel one or the other, I feel like I am a blend of both and that that comes through.... So, I'm queer pagan. So, in the concept of femme that does for me tend to take a more female or divine feminine aspect. So, in terms of the identification of femme, clearly, I was a very noticeably not heterosexual, hegemonic masculine child in a very hegemonic community. So, in terms of that I never really had (....) I never had the ability to be other than what I was.

The interaction of butch and femme was only mentioned by the older research participants (JS, DM), those over 40 years of age, JS explained the butch/femme dynamic in her experience:

I think a lot of people just seem to think now anyone who wears lipstick or nail polish is a femme and that's not the idea neither and I have a lot of and know a lot of lesbians who do that too.....It's a whole, to me it's like a, it's like a being, it's a way, for ME.....For ME, it is a dynamic, it's a dance between, a butch and a femme, that nothing else is the same as. It's this relationship, of masculine and feminine, that can mind you fluctuate between both. Because I can consider myself, I consider femme women to be strong.

3.3.3 Non-conforming and Diverse

This concept of being different, not conforming to the norm was reported by most participants (KW, KH, AB, CR, JS, SG, AP, ZE, TK, AP) in one way or another, from not straight or hetero to non-conforming or other. This was described by CR as an otherness that is about being who they see themselves as, rather than as how others see them:

When you put Queer and Femme together, it's basically another form of otherness that sits well.....and it is also as an overarching title for the journey that I've been on. So, which is kind of identity, but that's, for me identity is looking back seeing what I've done. And to see who I am, as opposed to who people have told me and that's that journey towards me.

This sense of otherness and not quite fitting in, but also being very comfortable with that, is a feeling shared by KH:

I feel like I do, I mean it's not like I'm out there, I don't stand out at all, but I always feel like I don't quite sit in the middle of any of the groups that I belong to....and I'm comfortable with that, very comfortable with that.

Femme was often found difficult to describe by participants, this difficulty is often also attributed to the queer femme identity and leaves the identity open to interpretation, AB described as being open to interpretation, "Because no one knows, cause well like what the fuck does queer femme mean. It means anything you want it to mean", while EH described it as being more inclusive, "Yeah, you can be queer in whatever way you want.....I'm a queer community member, rather than anything else because I like the inclusivity of the term".

As opposed to the theme of non-conforming and outside the norm or being excluded, being diverse is about being inclusive of a whole range of identities and ways of being. The participants (AB, CR, ZE, JS, AP, KN, SG, SR, TK) in this study discussed the queer femme identity as embracing fluidity, and being a blend of gender and sexuality, queer and femme. Participants explained it as "a unique blend" (AL, MR), "fluid" (JS), "embracing people as they are" (SS), "encompasses all gender differences and

sexualities” (KH) and as ZE explained it is more than the binary and works when other terms do not quite fit:

But for me I like the term queer, and I believe a lot of young people use the term queer, because it’s almost an umbrella term, it rejects the idea of binary sexuality. So, I call myself queer because to me it feels more accurate. Because I feel as if I would be lying if I called myself a lesbian. I am sometimes sexually active with men, also the term bisexual doesn’t fit. I like to use the word that has negative connotations because I think it is good to reclaim. Yeah, I’m bisexual but at the same time it’s not quite accurate.

For AB the queer femme identity allowed for fluidity that meant their attraction may change but how they identify does not have to:

I think my identity as queer, as queer femme has remained pretty solid and stable since then. Um, but within that I feel like I have freedom to (pause) chop and change, for example, some periods of time I will be really into women and other times I will be really into men and other times I will be really into trans guys. And then, that, that seems to ebb and flow for me.

This opinion is shared by SS, where the queer femme identity allowed for an attraction to a variety of genders:

I think queer embraces everybody, as far as the LGBTQ community goes I feel like queer is a good way to include everybody into who you find attractive...queer means that I identify as a feminine person who just embraces anyone and everyone as they are.

Participants described the meaning of the identity Queer Femme as being both an external feminine expression through their presentation as well as an internal sense of self of being. While also being non-conforming to societal ideals of femininity and showing diversity in identity, whether that be sexuality or gender or both.

3.4 Theme 2: Experiences of Queer Femme

Theme two was based around the experiences of being queer femme and three subthemes were identified: Assumptions, Invisibility and Discrimination; Coming Out and Educating Others; Freedom, Being Seen and Passing Privilege. The experiences of identifying as queer femme were often similar for all participants. There was an assumption of heterosexuality based on their feminine expression that presented as invisibility in both the straight and queer community. This heteronormative assumption led, for some participants, to discrimination such as femme phobia. For many there was a constant disclosure process or coming out and the need to educate others on their identity. This also had the more positive experience of passing privilege in some cases, that the assumption of heterosexuality then meant that some queer femme people did not experience the same discrimination as those who were more visible in their queerness. Eventually many felt a freedom in their identity, a sense of living their truth, knowing themselves and feeling like they had found their place in the world.

3.4.1 Assumptions, Invisibility and Discrimination

The assumption of heterosexuality based on a feminine presentation and thus the invisibility of being queer in both the heterosexual and queer communities was a common experience. All but one of the participants (AB, CR, ZE, SS, JS, KW, AL, SG, EH, MR, KH, DM, SR, KN, AP) discussed the assumption of heterosexuality based on their femininity that lead to the experience of invisibility, JS described this experience of invisibility, “The bad

things are, when I am out anywhere people would not know that I'm gay or queer. Um, they still think I'm a straight, heterosexual woman, in many areas, I've been told".

For DM this was an experience of not being seen as queer:

I've had people say that I don't look gay and that's both in the straight and queer community..... But yeah, I've been told a few times I don't look gay, and then I just laugh and say "What am I supposed to look like?" You know (laughs).

Several participants discussed the issue of the assumption of heterosexuality and invisibility and utilising signals to be visible to other queer people (SG, MR, KH, SR, ZE). Whereas AP feels that she is comfortable in how she presents but would like to be more visible in some way as she explained, "But I guess sometimes I feel that people assuming I'm straight. And actually, maybe I more feel that queer femme identity when a woman has misread me a straight and I want to say 'Well no I'm not'".

For almost half of the participants there was an ongoing theme of constantly coming out when others made an assumption about their identity (AB, CR, ZE, AP) and this often led to having to educate people (AB, CR, KW, EH, MR), this was highlighted by AB, "I guess the biggest thing is that invisibility and that sense of having to come out again and again". and ZE described a similar experience:

Just the biggest one is just the assumed heterosexuality by default, you know questioned asked, its assumed that you like men and sleep with men...I think having longer hair and makeup and being classically feminine was almost and almost an invitation for some men in public to make comments about you..... it's also hard to have to constantly

come out.

Correcting the assumptions about queer femme was an experience KW identified:

Just, everyone assumed that I was straight. And I didn't have any gay friends.... I'm definitely always, correcting people when they assume that I am straight. That's such a big thing for me and I yeah sort of went through a phase where I wanted people to know that I wasn't necessarily a heterosexual woman and it was really frustrating.

Discrimination based on a femininity has been a reoccurring experience for many people with a feminine presentation or expression, often called femmephobia and believed to be based in misogyny and patriarchy. In this research femmephobia was often experienced as being excluded (CR) or mistreated (SR). Femmephobia was discussed by several participants (CR JS, KH and SR) and it was interesting to note that two of these people were assigned male at birth but had a feminine presentation. This experience of femmephobia with gay men was explained by CR:

So, the concept of femmephobia I experienced from a very young age. Everything I did was not right for a boy. And so, in terms of understanding femme it was understanding for me first, why it was not right for somebody that was male bodied.But there was a huge amount of, not just towards gender queer people, but femme phobia against any man that was associated with feminism and their movement....In terms of exclusion from certain activities with groups of gay friends. So, that "Blokes "weekend, C can't come unless C is going to do the washing up or the cooking. Its 4-wheel drive, it's a level of assumed sexism which clearly has made me a pro feminist and my

politic because I have some experiential knowledge of it, that sort of thing...Everything comes down to the concept of the cultural default that there is something innately better in heterosexual, cisgender, hegemonic.

While SR discussed how femmephobia came from both the lesbian community as well as gay men:

It's been really interesting for me kind of engaging with, I suppose kind of dykes, like cis dykes and stuff like that. Where there is that kind of femmephobia, where there is that kind of like weird, like internalised kind of misogyny around femininity. And then on the flip side, like engaging with gay men and having a similar kind of thing, where there's like a real total creation of certain aspects of femininity but no heartfelt engagement with it.

Most participants (AB, ZE, SS, JS, KW, EH, KH, DM, KN, AP) discussed the issue of being harassed or objectified by cisgender, heterosexual men because they were perceived as heterosexual women based on their femininity. To overcome this some participants presented in a more masculine manner, as ZE explained, "I'm almost (sound drops out) sometimes I think it's easier to have a shaved head and to present in this way because I think it's less trouble and being harassed by less guys".

Discrimination from within the queer community was a common experience, as previously discussed this may be due to femmephobia and was often experienced as distrust from other queer people. For the participants in this study, it sometimes presented as a questioning of the validity of a person's identity and their inclusion in queer spaces and the queer community (AL, CR, MR, AL, KH). For AL this became apparent when their partner transitioned from male to female, as they identified:

When I was married to a trans man, that even through the LGBTI community I was viewed more as a heterosexual couple than having my own identity as being a queer femme. When I would go to women's events I would often not be spoken to or not included in things because they saw me with a man. So, that, that was quite isolating, and made me fight a little bit harder for that acknowledgment that my identity is real and who I am is important as well.

The experience for KH was similar when she had a relationship with a man even after being with women for several years:

I am still a part of this community just because I'm in a relationship with a man that doesn't mean you can just dismiss the fact that I'm part of the queer community.... You know just little comments about that I'm not I'm not really part of that community, because to them it's how they see me as a straight woman. Even though they've known me to be in a lesbian relationship in the past.

3.4.2 Coming Out and Educating others

The invisibility and the assumptions of heterosexuality that most participants experienced often led to constantly coming out and having to explain or educate around queer, femme, gender, sexual orientation, attraction and what it all meant for the person or the community. This was not something that was reported in any research identified during the literature review process. For AB it was the constant coming out and educating to tackle assumptions about queer femme that was exhausting, she explained:

I guess the biggest thing is that invisibility and that sense of having to come out again and again. With the mainstream community and the

also the onus of having to educate along with that or having to correct people when they assume that you know, ...why aren't I having babies right now, or getting married and that kind of stuff.

It was often an exhausting experience but one that many participants felt was required so that other people understood who they were and their lives, this was discussed by CR:

But certainly, I often feel that having to make the explanation over and over again, it wears on me.... It can be (tiring) and the expectation that it's your responsibility to do that. So, there are times when you just want to shove your finger up in the air and say "You know what, its none of your fucking business.

While for KW there was a feeling of responsibility to educate but also a frustration that it was required:

I'm definitely always, correcting people when they assume that I am straight. That's such a big thing for me and I yeah sort of went through a phase where I want...And my partner always tells me off if I don't correct people.... And if I don't do that, my partner gets frustrated at me, she's like "Well how are people going to get educated if you don't educate them?" But sometimes I can't be bothered.

3.4.3 Freedom, Being Seen and Passing Privilege

But it was not all bad news, a sense of freedom to be fluid came through from most participants (AL, AB, SS, JS, SG, EH, MR, KH, DM, SR, KN, TK) either in their gender or their sexual orientation. The queer femme

identity allowed for a cessation of the questioning of sexual orientation as a person realised their attraction to identities that were different to their previous experience. For some it was the ability to acknowledge the diversity of who a person may be attracted to, that the attraction may change over time but the identity remains the same, as AB explained:

I know who I am, there's that sense of self confidence, knowing who I am now. And I enjoy that and I enjoy the freedom that comes with that for me.....That freedom within being queer femme. So before when I was like I am bisexual, and only into feminine women and masculine men and then I discover something new and then I am like "goddamit, now I have to think about this and figure this out". Like I don't have that strict, this is how it is. So, if I suddenly develop an attraction to someone that I never thought I would that's not going to weird me out, I going to, I'm more likely to go with the flow now and go like that's really cool.

By coming to a place of accepting the balance between queer and femme there was a place to call home, a realisation that fluidity was acceptable and that it can ebb and flow over time, but that the individual remained the same. This fluidity could take place in gender or sexual orientation or attraction on many levels, not just sexual, as was experience by CR, "Inside I feel like I am more than just a man or a woman. You know I don't feel one or the other, I feel like I am a blend of both and that comes through".

To be seen by your peers was important to many participants (SS, AL, SG, DM, SR, TK, JS), it erased the invisibility that they felt on many other areas of their lives, from the heterosexual community and often also from the queer community, to be seen was validating. Particularly for those queer femmes who were attracted to butch or more masculine of centre women, recognition of them as femme was part of the butch/femme dynamic. While a recognition by other queer femme women was part of being in their

community, finding their tribe, an acceptance and as mentioned by JS, solidarity:

It's like some sort of telepathy or something (laugh) I just don't know. I, you know you can still have men smile at you or flirt with you, yet other lesbians don't usually with me, unless they know I'm on the scene or in the queer scene.....but butch women, there's a difference there, it's sort of like, a silent handshake or something, like a secret handshake that we have, that we can somehow, we can identify each other but I'm not sure how that works...But I guess within our own, within the queer community, I do, yes, I do prefer to be recognised as, and I do get recognised, now, more so as a femme. yes. I never put the distinction between the two, I'd always thought it never bothered me. Doesn't bother out in the real world, but I think it would bother me in the queer femme world.....I miss that solidarity, and that, that you know being a round other femme women, because in many ways it validates who you are. when you're around your own people I think it's important you have that validation, and, I really enjoy that, I like that. I miss that solidarity, and that, that you know being a round other femme women, because in many ways it validates who you are. when you're around your own people I think it's important you have that validation, and, I really enjoy that, I like that.

For TK it was the recognition by others in the community, rather than a self-realisation first, of them as queer femme that supported the process to self-identifying in this way:

In queer circles people understand who I am..... I have a couple of friends, they're funny because they said "We didn't realise that you didn't love being fat all the time. We just thought that you were like a fat queer femme. That's always how we've known you and experienced

you, probably before you even knew that “and I’ve gone “Right “So there was a couple of moments like that where people have always known me, where I was arriving to.... I had no idea at that stage that, that’s what other people saw me as. And I didn’t know it is an identity, but it made me very curious and I went “I actually am a femme and I didn’t realise.

Being seen was also important in the ability to be a role model for other queer femme people, a giving back to others to support them to know they are not alone, their identity is valid and to shatter the assumptions around femininity and heterosexuality. For EH it was about not fitting the stereotype and showing there was a different way to be, as they explained:

And I think it’s really important for me to be a role model and a strong role model. And for people to see you know oh she’s gay but she doesn’t look the way I what assumed she would look.

The invisibility of being queer femme was not necessarily a negative experience, it allowed for protection from discrimination based on sexual orientation, this was mentioned by small number of participants (ZE, AL, SG) but was not noted directly by the other participants but was often an indirect and unrecognised privilege. The ability to blend into mainstream society could be a positive experience that meant a level of acceptance with heterosexual peers. It has been included as an interesting concept that was often missed due to the inability to identify levels of privilege. This privilege was identified by ZE:

I acknowledge that in some ways, like I talk to friends that I have who have voices that are very masculine and have copped a lot of shit for it and have a really, really, hard time their whole lives. I think I

acknowledge in some ways it makes things easier, that I can pass and stuff like that.

The sub themes identified within the theme of the experience of being Queer Femme were similar as those found in previous research on Femme identity. The experience of being invisible to both the heterosexual and the queer world, due to the assumption of heterosexuality based on a feminine presentation was universal. This led to discrimination and the need to constantly come out and educate others about identity. Several participants however, were able to identify the passing privilege they experienced and the dichotomy of the freedom to be themselves and the desire to be seen as queer, even if this may mean another form of discrimination.

3.5 Theme 3: Process of Identity Formation for Queer Femme

The identity formation process for Queer Femme identified through this study includes the four themes of: Identity Confusion, Finding Community, Conforming to Queer and Embracing Identity. The process of coming to identify as queer femme followed a trajectory of confusion and the realisation of difference that often encompassed several different identities along the way. This was often followed by either research to resolve the confusion or a connection to another queer femme or the queer community. For many there was a process of trying to be more visible as queer or even butch, to then be recognised or to fit in. But eventually a growing realisation that this did not work for them and finally embracing their femininity and the identity of queer femme.

3.5.1 Identity Confusion

For most of the participants (AB, ZE, SS, JS, KW, AL, SG, EH, MR, KN, DM) there was a shared experience of confusion around their identity, some feeling that because they were feminine that they should be

heterosexual, for most a shift from bisexuality to lesbian and finally to femme (AB, ZE, SS, JS, KW, AL, SG, EH, MR, SR, KN, DM, TK, AP, KH).

Often it was the older participants (JS, DM) that had only ever seen lesbians with a masculine presentation, there had been a lack of visible feminine women attracted to other women. This led them to be quite confused about who they were, when they had experienced an attraction to women but they did not fit the lesbian stereotype. For JS the only visible lesbians when she was growing up were people that she did not identify with, as she explained:

I only knew lesbians at school that were very, what people classified as a bull dyke. I just remember hearing the term bull dyke back then. And knowing that I wasn't like that so I couldn't be lesbian.....They were just masculine, rough girls and I didn't feel like that's who I was so I didn't think I was a lesbian.

This confusion could be compounded if the participant felt that even though they had a feminine expression there were parts of their personality that society would deem to be more masculine, as was the experience of SR:

I think it's one of this interesting thing where I think a lot of people that identify as femme have similar dilemmas about their supposedly less feminine aspects of themselves, whether because they are a naturally dominant or aggressive person or it's because like their style of dress is daggy or muted or something like that. So, like finding that within yourself fits comfortable and also in a way that intersects comfortable for your sexuality is an ongoing process for lots of people. And it's something I am still kind of wangling with in some way.

Several had an attraction to men early in the identity development, whether this was based in societal expectations or a natural attraction was not discussed in the interviews (AB, KW, MR, DM, KN, KH, TK). Some participants, like KW, identified as bisexual due to this attraction to men:

I thought it might have just been a bisexual fantasy I guess. So, I don't know whether I would explain myself, like describe myself as bisexual. But, yeah, I just kind of...like if that was comfortable with me at first. But I didn't really tell anybody that.

For others like MR, their sexual behaviour with men made them feel that they could not identify as lesbian or femme:

I was very confused about my sexuality for a long time. And I was probably, I was probably in my early to mid-20s before I was comfortable with being Bisexual.... I think, I think it took me a long time to go yes, I am attracted to women in a way that other women aren't. And the fact that I was sleeping with men, kind of invalidated that to some degree or I felt like it did and I think, it took me a long time to get to the point that actually both is ok.

While AL, never felt like the bisexual identity worked for them either:

I think for me. It's always been that little bit left of centre. I didn't feel I identified, as a lesbian. Because I have dated men in the past. But however, I didn't identify as Bi because my preference was still always women.

The experience of biphobia, discrimination towards bisexual people from both the straight and lesbian communities, often meant that many people would not identify with the term bisexual even though they were sexually attracted to both men and women. This led to DM initially identifying as queer, then later bi and eventually queer femme as she explained:

I was starting to think I was attracted both ways and what does that mean. I didn't ever come up with any conclusions either way.... I think I started identifying as queer before that though, because like I said there was the pressure on some of the forums, that if you were bisexual you were considered to be, what was it, questioning, that you were still unsure.... So, I thought well, what does this queer label mean, maybe I fit in there better...I did some Sacred Sexuality workshops, so it was very fascinating to me. One of the terms they put up was, Ambisexual basically means attracted to one sex predominantly but would change (attraction to) sex, change genders for the right person.

For some, like AB an attraction to women started early and then the attraction to men came later, "I actually thought I was going to be a lesbian then attraction to men kicked in".

There was a common theme that ran through most of the participants (AB, ZE, SS, JS, KW, AL, SG, EH, MR, SR, KN, DM, TK, AP, KH) stories, the feeling of not fitting in, in either the heterosexual or the queer community. This sense of difference was described by AP, "I've always wanted to fit in but I've always known that I was different".

And as TK described, that feeling of not quite fitting in can continue after a realisation of the queer femme identity, even if there is a connection to community:

I never really had a coming out as queer. I think I've just been quietly morphing from straight to pansexual and what I've discovered is that

where ever its queer, that's where I belong. That's where I fit. And it's taken me a while for me to give myself permission to be in that world because I thought I wasn't queer enough, or this enough or that enough.... And for me I just feel like, and I can't say newbie, as everyone gets mad at me for saying a newbie in the queer world, and so I'm not, but I'm not experienced. Especially in girls, I've kissed lots of girls in my time, I'm friends with lots of women, I understand the sexuality but I aint got down and done it. So, in calling myself a queer femme seems little bit like cheating.

3.5.2 Finding Community

Self-recognition as queer femme often came about after research (ZE, AL, AP), a connection with either community (AB, CR, JS, KW, AL, EH, KH, DM, SR, TK), a role model or another person who identified in that way (CR, JS, SG, KN, TK). It provided knowledge about the identity and a realisation that this described how the participant was feeling. The concept of knowing that something existed but not knowing if it was real is described by JS as being like a mythical creature:

I found what the actual identity, that name meant to me...I now know there are other people like myself..... Yes, it's like the unicorn that I'd always thought existed, but hadn't, then suddenly next thing there's this unicorn walking in front of me and I thought, oh my god, it really does.

Both JS and AL explained this sense of coming home after connecting with community, for AL it was within the broader LGBTI community that they felt this:

I started making connections with a broader LGBTI community and I kind of felt like finally I was home. There was, not every person was the

same, they didn't have the same views, same opinions and they celebrated that diversity.

For JS it was in particular a connection to the butch/femme community that they found their place:

I actually met some people in the states that were gay and queer and I saw there was a different group and I felt that I radiated towards them, and that's when I first heard the term butch/femme. SO, and I just thought, Oh my goodness.... I felt like I was home. I thought this is what I have always felt, this feminine and masculine dynamic that wasn't necessarily cis male or female. So yes, that's where I found what the actual identity, that name meant to me...I now know there are other people like myself.

Visible representation in the media also gave a sense of community and the ability to identify with other feminine women of a diverse sexuality, the positive portrayal of a feminine lesbian was empowering for EH:

I've always been really, really, really girly like, (laughs) like since I was really little. Um so I think, and the concept of lipstick lesbian was something really empowering for me. Because it was something that I kind of learnt about it when I was watching TV and things in the media. When I was maybe, maybe thinking that that might be something, that I had interest in. So, I think being able to see, oh you don't have to be a flannel wearing, short hair person to be a lesbian. You can be frilly and like you know, lace and hair and makeup and still be queer.....And I think if I had, you know been involved with a very diverse group of queer people that I would have been able to really accept that as, what I wanted to be and how I wanted to present.

Other areas of the media, such as online communities and blogs were places that queer femmes were seen and a place to research the identity, AP, found this particularly useful:

I guess it all coincided with when I started reading a lot more from feminist perspectives, from lesbian perspectives. Like blogs and everything and social media and that kind of stuff, whereas before I'd read a lot that was in books that was based around either coming out for um, fictional works, about being a lesbian....More so the reading I think, being, I guess seeing other lesbian women, particularly online, not so much face to face but more online I guess you can search around and find someone or someone's story that equates closer to yours.....And maybe it's nice to see more of that where you get to see a girl that I can kind of associate with that it's kind of representing me.....But yeah, I guess if I came across a group of women that very much like me, queer women very much like me then yes, I'll be like "Oh my god, were have you people been all my life?" (laughs).

Role models were the introduction to queer femme identity for a few participants, this was an opportunity to see themselves in others and to learn about the identity and terminology, KN explained what this process was like for her:

Well I guess hanging with R in my younger 30s, they were always so, expressive and comfortable and stuff like that. So, in way it kind of allowed me to be comfortable with who I was as well. So, I guess the influences of other queer femme women were also, like a real, pinnacle point for me, to be able to be myself.

For TK, being exposed to the queer community felt safe but they did not feel that they completely fitted in until a role model recognised them as being queer femme and this validation was an entrance into the identity:

And a conversation that I had with Janet Hardy who wrote the Ethical Slut with Dossy Easton and various other books about being kinky and topping. And she wrote a book called Girl Fags and Boi Dykes.... when I think of a girl fag the imagery in my mind that pops up is a fairly butch, dykey lesbian and I don't really identify with that" and she went "Oh no, no, no. You are definitely a femme"....I kind of had a conversation that was a bit political and a bit sexual and a bit "How the fuck do I fit in the queer community "and she just gave me my golden key to the community with that chat.....: And I didn't have to explain it to other people, it was just a knowing of it that landed me in there going "Right, ah ha, this is, this is who I am and how I am....I think it's been the feminist and then finding community and immersing myself in it. I'm a very social and have a lot of contacts in the queer community and just sort of easing myself in I guess, more a more.... So, you know, then I'm finding community with like amazing, fierce femmes and, so I think again I was just quietly drawn into where I belong rather than chasing it.

Once this community or people with the queer femme identity are found there is a sense of coming home, finding your people or a kinship as AB explained:

I did feel a sense of kinship with those people who were different to the norm...I think as the connection with the community was kinda my lead in, but then it still took a while in that kind of personal exploration of

what that was and the exactly where I would fit within that communities that I felt that connection and kinship with.

3.5.3 Conforming to Queer

Around half of the participants (ZE, AB, KW, EH, MR, AL, SR, KN) had a period in the identity formation process where they tried to be more visible within the queer community. Some adopted queer identifiers such as clothes or jewellery, others may have cut their hair or presented in a more masculine way. It was interesting that this was part of the process for a significant number of the participants, this may be due to less understanding of the queer femme identity in Australian queer communities, especially in Queensland where most of the participants originated. This process of trying to look queer to be seen by other queer people informs both the objective of the research to identify the process of identifying as queer femme and also the experiences that are particular to queer femme people. The lack of visible queer femmes made AL feel that if she was lesbian then she needed to look more masculine as that was the only role model she had seen growing up:

All the lesbians that I knew growing up were shaved heads, combat boots, vegetarian men haters. And I truly thought that I needed to be like that to, to be able to love women. And so, when I was 14, I shaved my head and I gave up meat and I, it was like the worst 6 months of my life. All I wanted was meat (laughs) like no, clearly the steak does not affect my ability to love women. Um (laughs) so I realised that its ok to be more than what people perceive. That's what you should be to do something.

For AB and EH trying to look more queer was about being visible within the LGBTI community and being seen as part of the community. The desire to

fit in and be visible led EH to present in a more masculine way but that was not the way she felt most comfortable presenting:

I think I did have a bit of a moment in kind of my first year of Uni where I was like, you've got to present as a more butch kind of personality so that I can be seen in the community. But once I got my partner I was like sooo, I'm done (laughs)..... So, then I came to Brisbane and there were these queer, visible queer people. I was like, I want to be a visible queer person and then that wasn't actually something that I, it wasn't my style it wasn't what I wanted to be presenting as.

Whereas AB feels that she is comfortable in how she presents but would like to be more visible in some way:

Like, I often feel like sometimes I'd love to queer it up a bit, physically. I'm talking about I just need to shave like half my head, you know, it would be right (laughs)... So, for me, if I was to go full out with that, that would be more tattoos, that would be doing something more...just non-conformative like with my hair, like I've often thought like putting colour in it but I'm just too lazy.

For SR there was the expectation to look a particular way, if she was going to identify as lesbian then she should be more masculine but then as a trans woman to pass as female she had to be hyperfeminine. Finally, she found the place in between that worked for her, that place was queer femme:

So, for me I kind of went from being very masculine, very tough and all of that kind of stuff and then going kind of the opposite direction. And I kind of went probably too, feminine on some level, I mean I went to, I

kind of capitulated a little bit too much to what I thought what the expectation toward me as a trans women.

3.5.4 Embracing Identity

The final sub theme is, coming to a place where the queer femme identity is embraced. There is a celebration and a sense of authenticity in having a feminine expression and also a being diverse in sexuality and/or gender. This came across in many of the interviews (ZE, JS, AL, SG, KH, SR, TK). This process of identity formation was felt to be ongoing and finding a place to encompass both queer and femme as ZE explained:

I feel like not on the Kinsey scale. I'm getting queerer and queerer, I think I'm getting gayer and gayer. At the same time, I have always felt very, very feminine. And like I think I know that because I tried for a little while to look more masculine. I understand what that was and that was a part of my identity. I can look feminine and embrace my feminine and not be less queer.

Taking back the word queer and being empowered by a term that was previously seen as derogatory was important to AL, "I guess ultimately for me queer femme is about empowerment. And taking that power back for MYSELF, for words that are often seen as slurs".

Once the identity was embraced, part of the process for the participants was the desire to tell others about it and be recognised, this was important to SG:

I think it is because it took me sooo long to come out, it took so much effort, it was so hard that I kind of like, now that I've done all the hard work I'm kinda like I want to scream it from the roof tops kind of thing.

And I know that that's probably really almost an immature or young experience to say, but yeah, it's kind of being like, I've finally accepted it in my skull but I just want other people now to recognise it.

By embracing the queer femme identity there was often an understanding and strength in who the person was, a sense of peace as described by KH:

I guess queer femme for me now has given me more, I have a boldness now about my own sexuality because of that, to me it's not pigeon holing myself, it's not, I'm confident of that term, it makes me feel confidence in myself.... queer femme helps me explain that, helps ME understand me, it helps other people who love me understand me. And to me, it gave me great, I don't know if peace is the right word but I really found my space within the queer community with that label I guess um cause like I said it just made me feel like it just explained who I was.

Playing with the concept of femme and moving towards a more empowered and harder concept that is not about the more common notion that femme is soft and pretty, but feeling at home there, was explained by SR:

And then now where I kind of sit with it is in that kind of hard femme territory works for me. It's like, it's what I make of it on some level and how do I incorporate femininity and colour and vibrancy in to, I get more cohesive and kind of holistic understanding of myself.... You know I actually enjoy engaging with femininity, genuinely, privately, personally, spiritually and all that stuff. It's not funny to me nor is it repulsive to me and so, yeah that's kind of always been a confronting thing.... I mean to be hard femme is almost like Souxie and the

Banshees or whatever that kind of stuff. You know it's kind of like you might wear pants and all black and put lipstick on and still be scary and be glamorous at the same time. That kind of thing.

For TK the slow process of moving toward queer femme was about broadening who she was attracted to rather than narrowing it and this is an ongoing process:

And realising this is where I belong, to the point that I actually feel uncomfortable in a straight crowd now...It's just been, it's like a slow blossoming I think...., I kind of see lesbian as a label for women who like ladies and I haven't always been like that. And I will probably never morph entirely that way, I am more morphing to broadening my mix rather than exclude where I've come from. That's what I, you know at the moment it's really quiet fluxy and it's up to me to make a few things happen and I've been holding myself back and being a bit funny, I don't know, yeah.

The process of identity formation for queer femme people was defined by the four subthemes of: Identity Confusion, Finding Community, Conforming to Queer and finally Embracing Identity. For all of the participants there was a diverse sexual identity, often lesbian, bisexual or queer, before identifying as queer femme. This was often confusing due to their feminine presentation and the societal messages that feminine women were heterosexual. A connection to an individual or the LGBTI community was often the first time they came across the identity of queer femme and found that this was something that explained who they were. For many an attempt to be visible within the queer community meant trying to present in a more visibly queer way, but this was not a comfortable space for the participants. Eventually they came to a place where they could embrace their queer identity and their feminine presentation

and sense of being to identify as queer femme, a place where they felt they were truly who they knew they were.

4.0 Discussion

The aim of this study was to use an exploratory, phenomenological approach to explore the meaning, experiences and identity formation process for people who identified as queer femme. These aims were achieved by interviewing sixteen people who identified as queer femme with a range of ages, genders and sexualities from both urban and regional areas.

These themes of experience, meaning and identity formation process, and the subsequent sub themes, have been discussed along with the limitations of this study and recommendations for future research.

4.1 Objective 1: Explore the meaning of identity for people who identify as Queer Femme.

This research explored the meaning that people who identify as queer femme give to that identity, unpacking queer, femme and then queer femme. There were three sub themes around meaning of all of these identities: Presentation and Expression; Sense of Being; and Non-conforming and Diverse.

Holding a feminine presentation or expression was important to the research participants in the meaning of being queer femme, this reflects the findings of Levitt et al (2003) where the research participants reported that the feminine expression was part of a femme gender identity, whereas Tortice (2002) saw the feminine expression to not just be about clothing but behaviour and attitude as well. Eves (2004) discussed how this may often be a hyperfeminine presentation to highlight a queer identity, which was discussed by several participants.

This feminine presentation often led to an assumption of heterosexuality, which often led to unwanted advances by heterosexual men. Levitt and Heistand (2005) discussed the difference between being objectified by heterosexual men and being the object of desire from the butch or

masculine woman's gaze. Mishali (2014) found this stereotype of femininity was found in both the heterosexual and the queer community with an assumption that all women attracted to other women were masculine and that a feminine woman was not a real lesbian, several participants discussed this.

But queer femmes were not aligning with the notion of feminine women as weak and passive, but as strong, honest and open, as was found by Levitt et al (2003). While Mishali (2014) discussed the reimagining of femininity within a queer framework, that was reported by several participants.

Eves (2004) and Vannewkirk (2006), in their prospective research studies, discussed the mix of both the external expression and the internal sense of self. This reiterates the research of Pearce (2012), where femme identity was found by participants to be a natural expression, this was reported by several participants. For some it was about gender and others sexuality, as reported by Stancui (2014) and that it was an internal representation of who they were. This was reflected in the current research.

The interaction of butch and femme came through quite heavily in other research (Eves, 2004; Gibson & Meem, 2016; Hayfield, Clarke, Halliwell & Malson, 2013; Lehavot, King & Simoni, 2011; Williams, 2012), but was only discussed by some of the older participants. There is insufficient research on this topic but it may be due to the fact that the butch/femme dynamic was stronger and more visible in previous decades, before the second wave of feminism, where this dynamic was seen as trying to look like a heterosexual couple (Eves, 2004). The dynamic was discussed by participants as being attractive to them due to the old-fashioned values and mannerisms it epitomised. The recent rise of sexual and gender fluidity may also explain the diversity now seen in the relationships queer femme people engage in and the lack of visibility of the butch/femme dichotomy.

For some this internal sense of being also encompassed values and beliefs while it could also be seen as an overarching term for the community and that include politics and values (Bronski, 2011; Hill, 2004; Levitt et al, 2003). The concept of non-conforming, and an otherness has been discussed by several participants and researchers (Butler, 1990; Fricke, 2003; Menon, 2011; Portwood-Stace, 2010; Stancui, 2014). While idea of diversity and fluidity of identity was described by Bronski (2011), Giffney (2009), Hill, (2004)

and Stancui (2014). This was discussed by most participants in one way or another.

But femme has often been found difficult to describe by participants in this and previous research, this was noted by Levitt, et al (2003) and Pearce (2012). This difficulty is often also attributed to the queer femme identity and leaves the identity open to interpretation. This then allows for a variety of meanings, and a diversity of presentations, relationships and attraction.

4.2 Objective 2: Explore the individual experiences of identity for people who identify as Queer Femme

The participants shared freely of the experiences they had as queer femme people, many were negative but for some there was also a positive aspect of finally being free to be themselves and the privilege that comes with passing as heterosexual. The three sub themes identified were: Assumptions, Invisibility and Discrimination; Coming Out and Educating Others, Freedom, Being Seen and Passing Privilege.

Being harassed or objectified by cisgender, heterosexual men because they were perceived as heterosexual women based on their femininity, was a common experience. This was a reoccurring theme in the research of Blair and Hoskins (2015), Levitt and Horne (2002) and Levitt et al (2003).

The assumption of heterosexuality based on a feminine presentation and thus the invisibility of being queer in both the heterosexual and queer communities was an experience reported by all participants and one that previous research had identified (Blair & Hoskin, 2014; Levitt et al, 2003; Levitt & Horne, 2002; Mishali, 2014, Pearce, 2012; Vannewkirk, 2006). When exploring this discrimination within the queer community the term femmephobia is often used, this was researched by Levitt and Horne (2002) and then Blair and Horne in 2015 in regards to the femme identity then again in 2016 around the queer femme identity, this was a particular experience of several participants. This distrust then led to discrimination for people with a feminine presentation or expression, which is often believed to be based in misogyny and patriarchy. Discrimination from within the queer community was

a common experience, this may be due to femmophobia and was often experienced as distrust from other queer people and a belief that queer femme women were not real lesbians and would become heterosexual and want to be with a man. (Blair & Hoskins, 2015; Levitt et al, 2003; Mishali, 2014, Vannewkirk, 2006). This experience of distrust was also reported by Vannewkirk (2006) and Mishali (2014) and often was experienced as being excluded.

Eves (2004) and Vannewkirk (2006) reported on the ongoing experience of people with a diverse sexual orientation having to reveal their identity or come out in every new encounter. This was a common experience for the research participants, and often is for most people of diverse sexuality or gender, due to the fact that assumptions are often made about people by the way they express their gender. Those with a feminine presentation are assumed to be female and to be heterosexual, thus rendering queer femme people invisible.

The invisibility and the assumptions of heterosexuality that most participants experienced often led to having to explain or educate around queer, femme, gender, sexual orientation, attraction and what it all meant for the person or the community. This was not something that was reported in any research identified during the literature review process.

There were also some more positive aspects to the queer femme identity, it allowed for a cessation of the questioning of sexual orientation as a person realised their attraction to identities that were different to their previous experience and a sense of freedom to be fluid. (Blair and Hoskins, 2015; Macias, 2011).

There was also a certain level of protection from discrimination based on sexual orientation, due to passing privilege. The ability to blend into mainstream society could be a positive experience that meant a level of acceptance with heterosexual peers. Pearce (2012) found that this ability to pass as heterosexual led to a level of privilege and less direct experiences of homophobia. While only a small number of participants were explicit in naming this it was alluded to by most. It has been included as an interesting concept that was often missed due to the inability to identify levels of privilege (Budge, 2006; Kirkhart, 2015; Ray & Zarestky, 2016).

4.3 Objective 3: Understand the process of identity formation for people who identify as Queer Femme.

The process of identity formation was similar as had been found in previous research (Levitt et al, 2003; Pearce, 2012), initial questioning of identity prior to coming out, holding a diverse identity, connection to an individual or community, and eventually coming out as queer femme. The four sub themes identified in the Queer Femme identity formation process were: Identity Confusion; Finding Community; Conforming to Queer and Embracing Identity.

The process of identity formation identified through this research most closely aligns with the models proposed by Levitt et al (2003) and Pearce (2012). Levitt et al (2003) conducted research on femme identity that resulted in the development of a four-stage model: childhood memories; coming out as lesbian; learning about femme identity after joining the lesbian culture; and finally coming out as femme. This was expanded by Pearce (2012) who provided a *Non-Linear, Context Dependent Model of Femme Identity Development* which was experiential with a variety of alternative paths and outcomes. This model proposed that it is acceptable for a person to depart from the process of identity development at any time, and there is an intersection of life experiences, and multiple identities. This was a three-stage model of femme identity: pre-coming out experiences; identifying as lesbian; and identifying as femme.

The experience of confusion around identity and previously holding various identities discussed by the participants, aligned with the research by Levitt et al (2003), Pearce (2012) and Tate and Pearson (2016), where all reported a confusion around and diversity of identities prior to coming to identify as femme.

D'Augelli (1994) included connection to the lesbian, gay and bisexual community as one of the stages in their *Life Span Approach* to sexuality and gender identity. While Levitt et al (2003) described this as the third stage in their four-stage model of identity development: learning about femme identity

after joining the lesbian culture before finally coming out as femme. This was experienced by all participants in one way or another, research, connection to community or an individual.

It was reported by Levitt et al (2003) that women had felt a pressure to conform to a queer stereotype or expression, but as there was becoming more acceptance, the pressure had lessened to look more androgynous or masculine. But research by Pearce (2012) noted that it was still part of the process for some feminine presenting women, originating in the desire to be seen within their own community, several participants discussed engaging in this but eventually feeling more comfortable in their femininity.

Embracing Identity was the final step in the process of identity formation. Levitt and Heistand (2005) and Dillon (2011) both explained this final process, in Dillon's model (2011) it was called Synthesis, a merging of the identity into a sense of self. The ability to embrace both femininity and queerness and for this to become a part, that was important but not all encompassing, was often the final step in the integration of all aspects of identity. This was a place that all but one participant had reached.

5.0 Limitations to the Present Study

This study was limited by the lack of participants from regional and remote areas. The participants involved from regional areas were still only a few hours' drive from a major metropolitan area or capitol city. This lack of engagement by people further from a major centre may have been informed by a lack of knowledge of queer femme identity or access to queer community. All participants self-identified with the term queer femme, so a lack of representation or visibility of queer femme in some regions may have contributed to the low numbers from some states. There were also several states across the country that were not represented, an inclusion of these may have provided different experiences.

The participants were a homogenous group with little gender or cultural diversity, with only one participant disclosing that they came from a culturally diverse background. This may be due to limitations in language, as the term

queer femme may not be known in some cultural groups, or they may use another term to describe a similar identity.

There was also a lack of gender diversity, the majority of participants were cisgender females with only a couple of people who were assigned male at birth but identified other than male as their gender. There was a complete lack of people who were assigned female at birth but identified as male or another gender identity, it was unfortunate that those who identified in this way and had shown interest in the study were eventually unable to be involved for one reason or another.

Time limitations were an important factor, partly due to a short time frame to recruit, and to a severe influenza A outbreak affecting participants and causing interview cancellations, meaning that many interviews were postponed and some participants were unable to commit to an interview within the required time frame. Only the pilot and another fifteen interviews were able to be conducted in the time allowed.

6.0 Recommendations for Future Study

Future recommendations would include a more targeted recruitment to enable people from more regional and remote areas, across all states to be involved. A greater mix of gender identities that included trans men and more non-binary identities would have added richness to the data.

Further research into the interaction between the desire to be more visible and then to possibly present in a queerer way, would be valuable. Moving from invisibility to visibility as queer would lead to discrimination based on presentation and the loss of passing privilege, this is an area that warrants further investigation.

The lack of visibility of the butch/femme dynamic is worthy of further research. There may be several factors at play, including the rise of sexual and gender fluidity, the death of the importance of old fashioned values and mannerisms, the lingering effect of second wave feminism and the influence of post-modern feminism.

Exploration into other terms for queer femme identity would allow for a more diverse group of participants and the ability to recruit across a variety of cultural groups. This would entail an increase in the knowledge around this identity and a greater understanding of queer femme people and the meaning, experiences and process that may vary across different contexts.

Future study into the queer femme identity may also increase the knowledge to inform education around the identity. This would lead to an increase in the visibility and a decrease in assumptions which would impact on the incidence of the need to come out and educate others. This would then eventually flow on to a decrease in the discrimination that queer femme people experience due to an understanding of the diversity of queer femme people.

7.0 Conclusion

The meaning of identity described by the participants in this study discussed both the external presentation and internal sense of being, this echoed previous research by Levitt et al (2003) and Pearce (2012). While the sub themes of non-conforming and being diverse spoke to the inclusivity of attraction and the divergence away from the societal norm of heterosexuality (Foucault, 1998; Giffney, 2009; Halperin, 1995; Hill, 2004; Portwood-Stace, 2010; Stancui, 2014).

The negative experiences of the assumption of heterosexuality, invisibility, discrimination, educating others and coming out as queer femme and the positive experience of finally feeling free and being seen by other queer people also aligned with previous research (Eves, 2004; Levitt et al, 2003; Pearce, 2012; Vannewkirk, 2006). While the concept of passing privilege was not seen as central to, or explicitly expressed by participants, the way that most participants alluded to the fact that they did not experience discrimination that more visibly queer people did, showed a level of privilege that was not consciously recognised by the participants, but should be acknowledged.

Levitt et al (2003) conducted research on femme identity that resulted in the development of a four-stage model: childhood memories; coming out as

lesbian; learning about femme identity after joining the lesbian culture; and finally coming out as femme. This was expanded by Pearce (2012) who provided a *Non-Linear, Context Dependent Model of Femme Identity Development* which was experiential with a variety of alternative paths and outcomes. This model proposed that it is acceptable for a person to depart from the process of identity development at any time, and there is an intersection of life experiences, and multiple identities. This was a three-stage model of femme identity: pre-coming out experiences; identifying as lesbian; and identifying as femme.

The identity formation process for Queer Femme identified through this study includes the four themes of: Identity Confusion, Finding Community, Conforming to Queer and Embracing Identity, which crosses over both the models identified by Levitt et al (2003) and Pearce (2012). There is the commonality with both Levitt et al (2003) and Pearce (2012) in the pre-coming out experience and childhood memories, which in this study is Identity Confusion. Both of these previous studies identified the process of coming out as lesbian before coming out as femme, but this current study found the as part of identity confusion the participants may identify as bisexual, heterosexual, gay, lesbian or queer before femme or queer femme.

For Levitt et al (2003) this coming out process involved a connection with the lesbian community, the current study found it may be the same or a connection with the broader queer community, an individual or by doing research into identity, this was the Finding Community stage of the process. The final outcome of this connection to others, for this study, was being exposed to and educated about queer femme and the feeling that this identity worked for them.

The part of the process that came out strongly in this study that was either not mentioned or was not statistically significant in both Levitt et al (2003) and Pearce (2012), was the experience of trying to fit in to the queer community, by presenting in a more masculine or androgynous way, the Conforming to Queer theme. This was often part of the process that then identified to the participants that they were not comfortable in this presentation and that their femininity was more about who they were. But some still felt the

desire to be queerer in their presentation to combat invisibility of their queerness.

All of the studies found that the final part of the process was identifying as femme or in the case of this study, queer femme. The current study found that it was not just identifying with the is term but also embracing it and finding a sense of peace and a home within it, this is the final part of the process, Embracing Identity.

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Appendix A: Pilot Information Sheet



Department of Sexology
School of Public Health

PILOT PARTICIPANT INFORMATION STATEMENT

HREC Project Number:	HRE2017-093
Project Title:	The Meaning, Experience and Process of Identity Formation as a Queer Femme.
Chief Investigator:	Matt Tilley Lecturer, Postgraduate Courses Coordinator, Department of Sexology
Student researcher:	Richelle Menzies
Version Number:	1
Version Date:	16 March 2017

My name is Richelle Menzies. I am currently completing the research component of a Masters of Sexology at Curtin University. I am seeking individuals to participate and review interview questions to assist my research.

What is the Project About?

- Queer Femme is an invisible but newly emerging identity that faces various layers of discrimination due to lack of visibility, acceptance, and understanding and to stereotypes about women loving women
- There is research on queer identity, femininity, identity formation and meaning of identity, but little on the Queer Femme identity, this study will add to the

body of information on the experience and meaning of identity and formation for a new and rapidly emerging identity

- This research will investigate the process of identity formation and the experiences and meaning of identity for people who identify as Queer Femme.'

The objectives are to:

- Explore the meaning of identity for people who identify as Queer Femme.
- Explore the individual experiences of identity for people who identify as Queer Femme.
- Understand the process of identity formation for people who identify as Queer Femme.

Who is doing the Research?

- The project is being conducted by Richelle Menzies a Masters of Sexology student at Curtin University, supervised by Matt Tilley, lecturer, Curtin University.

Why am I being asked to take part and what will I have to do?

- You are being invited to participate in the research because you identify as Queer Femme, are over 18 years of age and I believe may be able to provide a unique insight.
- The purpose of this interview is to investigate your lived experience of your identity as Queer Femme and to review the questions posed for future participants
- There will be no cost to you for taking part in this research and you will not be paid for taking part.
- The interview will take approximately 60 minutes and you will be asked to review the transcript of the interview at a later date.
- I will make a digital audio recording so I can concentrate on what you have to say and not distract ourselves with taking notes. After the interview I will make a full written copy of the recording.
- If you want to review the final report or my dissertation, you can also do that by letting me know in the second interview and providing your contact details.

- The study will take place at either the QLD AIDS Council in Teneriffe, Brisbane or via skype for those who are not in Brisbane.

Are there any benefits' to being in the research project?

- There may be no direct benefit to you from participating in this research.
- Sometimes, people appreciate the opportunity to discuss their stories.
- We hope the results of this research will allow us to add to the knowledge we have about the Queer Femme identity.

Are there any risks, side-effects, discomforts or inconveniences from being in the research project?

- We have been careful to make sure that the questions in the survey do not cause you any distress. But, if you feel anxious about any of the questions they do not need to answer them. If the questions cause any concerns or upset you, we can refer you to services for support.
- Sometimes just thinking about our identity process can be upsetting. If you chose not to be in this research but feel distressed from considering it then please contact Diverse Voices, 1800 184 527.
- Apart from giving up your time, we do not expect that there will be any risks or inconveniences associated with taking part in this study.

Who will have access to my information?

- The information collected is anonymous and will include a code number but not a name. No one, except the research team (as per the consent form) will be able to identify your information. Any information we collect and use during this research will be treated as confidential. The following people will have access to the information we collect in this research: the research team and, in the event of an audit or investigation, staff from the Curtin University Office of Research and Development
- Electronic data will be password-protected and hard copy data (including audio tapes) will be in locked storage.

- The information we collect in this study will be kept under secure conditions at Curtin University for 7 years after the research has ended and then it will be destroyed.
- The results of this research may be presented at conferences or published in professional journals. You will not be identified in any results that are published or presented.

Will you tell me the results of the research?

- If requested and contact details provided at the time of the transcript review, I will inform you of the results of the research when it is finalised (in about 6 months). Results will not be individual but based on all the information we collect and review as part of the research.
- The results may possibly be available in publications or on websites

Do I have to take part in the research project?

- Taking part in a research project is voluntary. It is your choice to take part or not. You do not have to agree if you do not want to.
- If you decide to take part and then change your mind, that is okay, you can withdraw from the project up until you have approved the transcript of your interview. You do not have to give us a reason; just tell us that you want to stop.
- Please let us know you want to stop so we can make sure you are aware of any thing that needs to be done so you can withdraw safely.
- If you choose not to take part or start and then stop the study, it will not affect your relationship with the University, staff or colleagues.
- If you chose to leave the study we will destroy any information we have collected from you.

What happens next and who can I contact about the research?

- If you would like further information about the study please feel free to contact me by email at **r.menzies@postgrad.curtin.edu.au**.
- If you wish to speak to my supervisor about your rights as a volunteer, or about the conduct of the study, you may also contact Matt Tilley on **08 9266 4579** or by email at **m.tilley@curtin.edu.au**.
- If you decide to take part in this research we will ask you to sign the consent form. By signing it is telling us that you understand what you have read and what has been discussed. Signing the consent indicates that you agree to be in the research project and have your health information used as described. Please take your time and ask any questions you have before you decide what to do. You will be given a copy of this information and the consent form to keep.

Ethics approval

Curtin University Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) has approved this study (HREC number XX/XXXX). Should you wish to discuss the study with someone not directly involved, in particular, any matters concerning the conduct of the study or your rights as a participant, or you wish to make a confidential complaint, you may contact the Ethics Officer on (08) 9266 9223 or the Manager, Research Integrity on (08) 9266 7093 or email hrec@curtin.edu.au.

**Thank you for your input into this research. Your participation is greatly appreciated.
Please keep this document for your information.**

Appendix B: Pilot Consent Form



Department of Sexology
School of Public Health

PILOT CONSENT FORM

HREC Project Number:	HRE2017-093
Project Title:	The Meaning, Experience and Process of Identity Formation as a Queer Femme.
Chief Investigator:	Matt Tilley Lecturer, Postgraduate Courses Coordinator, Department of Sexology
Student researcher:	Richelle Menzies
Version Number:	1
Version Date:	16 March 2017

- I have read, the information statement that has been given to me and I understand its contents.
- I believe I understand the purpose, extent and possible risks of my involvement in this project.
- I voluntarily consent to take part in this research project.
- I understand that I may not benefit from taking part.
- I understand that, while information gained during the study may be published, I will not be identified and my personal information will remain confidential.
- I understand that I can choose to not respond to any question(s) with any consequences, now or in the future.
- I understand that I can withdraw from the study at any time up until I have reviewed my interview transcript and that this will not affect my medical care, now or in the future.

- I agree for my interview to be taped allowing all data that I provide to be recorded
- I have had an opportunity to ask questions and I am satisfied with the answers I have received.
- I understand that this project has been approved by Curtin University Human Research Ethics Committee and will be carried out in line with the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (2007).
- I understand I will receive a copy of this Information Statement and Consent Form

Participant Name	
Participant Signature	
Date	

Declaration by researcher: I have supplied an Information Letter and Consent Form to the participant who has signed above, and believe that they understand the purpose, extent and possible risks of their involvement in this project.

Researcher Name	Richelle Menzies
Researcher Signature	
Date	

Appendix C: Pilot Instrument for Data Collection



Department of Sexology
School of Public Health

Thank you for agreeing to be interviewed for the pilot of my dissertation project.

There are 3 broad areas of questions that I would like to ask you and get your feedback on, demographics, meaning of identity and your experiences, but before that do you have any questions about the Pilot Information Sheet or the Resources handout?

- ✓ **Ensure pilot participant has signed the Consent Form.**

I will ask for your feedback throughout the interview.

Firstly, I will ask the participants some demographic questions.

Demographics:

Q1. How old are you?

Q2. How do you identify your sex/gender?

- How do you think/feel participants would feel about these questions?
- Do you think/feel any wording could be more appropriate?
- Do you think/feel any questions may be perceived as inappropriate?
- What more can you tell me about this?
- Do you think/feel that any questions are missing?

Then I will ask some questions relating to the meaning of identity:

Q3. What does Queer mean to you?

Q4. What does Femme mean to you?

Q5. What does Queer Femme mean to you?

- How do you think/feel participants would feel about these questions?
- Do you think/feel any wording could be more appropriate?
- Do you think/feel any questions may be perceived as inappropriate?
- What more can you tell me about this?
- Do you think/feel that any questions are missing?

How are you travelling, would you like to take a break?

Do you have any questions for me at this point?

I will then ask the participants about their Process with identifying as Queer Femme:

Q6. What has been your Process to identifying with Queer Femme?

- How do you think/feel participants would feel about these questions?
- Do you think/feel any wording could be more appropriate?
- Do you think/feel any questions may be perceived as inappropriate?
- What more can you tell me about this?
- Do you think/feel that any questions are missing?

We are almost done with the interview. It will probably take about 20 more minutes.

Finally, I will ask the participants about their experiences with identifying as Queer Femme:

Q7. What have been your experiences of your identity as Queer Femme?

- How do you think/feel participants would feel about these questions?
- Do you think/feel any wording could be more appropriate?
- Do you think/feel any questions may be perceived as inappropriate?
- What more can you tell me about this?
- Do you think/feel that any questions are missing?

We are now finished the interview.

Is there anything else you would like to add, is there anything we have left out or that you would like to discuss further?

Are there any final questions that you have for me?

Please review the resources list and give me your opinion.

- ✓ **Give participant the resource list**

Appendix D: Participant Information Sheet



Department of Sexology
School of Public Health

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION STATEMENT

HREC Project Number:	HRE2017-093
Project Title:	The Meaning, Experience and Process of Identity Formation as a Queer Femme.
Chief Investigator:	Matt Tilley Lecturer, Postgraduate Courses Coordinator, Department of Sexology
Student researcher:	Richelle Menzies
Version Number:	1
Version Date:	16 March 2017

Hello, my name is Richelle Menzies. I am currently completing the research component of a Masters of Sexology at Curtin University

What is the Project About?

- Queer Femme is an invisible but newly emerging identity that faces various layers of discrimination due to lack of visibility, acceptance, and understanding and to stereotypes about women loving women
- There is research on queer identity, femininity, identity formation and meaning of identity, but little on the Queer Femme identity, this study will add to the body of information on the experience and meaning of identity and formation for a new and rapidly emerging identity

- This research will investigate the process of identity formation and the experiences and meaning of identity for people who identify as Queer Femme.'
- The objectives are to:
 - Explore the meaning of identity for people who identify as Queer Femme.
 - Explore the individual experiences of identity for people who identify as Queer Femme.
 - Understand the Process of identity formation for people who identify as Queer Femme.

Who is doing the Research?

- The project is being conducted by Richelle Menzies

Why am I being asked to take part and what will I have to do?

- You are being invited to participate in the research because you identify as Queer Femme, live in Queensland, are over 18 years of age and I believe you may be able to provide a unique insight.
- There will be no cost to you for taking part in this research and you will not be paid for taking part.
- The interview will take approximately 60 minutes and you will be asked to review the transcript of the interview at a later date.
- I will make a digital audio recording so I can concentrate on what you have to say and not distract ourselves with taking notes. After the interview I will make a full written copy of the recording.
- If you want to review the final report or my dissertation, you can also do that by letting me know in the second interview and providing your contact details.
- The study will take place at either the QLD AIDS Council in Teneriffe, Brisbane or a mutually convenient location.

Are there any benefits' to being in the research project?

- There may be no direct benefit to you from participating in this research.
- Sometimes, people appreciate the opportunity to discuss their story

- We hope the results of this research will allow us to add to the knowledge we have about the Queer Femme identity.

Are there any risks, side-effects, discomforts or inconveniences from being in the research project?

- We have been careful to make sure that the questions in the survey do not cause you any distress. But, if you feel anxious about any of the questions they do not need to answer them. If the questions cause any concerns or upset you, we can refer you to services for support.
- Sometimes just thinking about {our identity Process can be upsetting. If you chose not to be in this research but feel distressed from considering it then please contact Diverse Voices, 1800 184 527.
- Apart from giving up your time, we do not expect that there will be any risks or inconveniences associated with taking part in this study.

Who will have access to my information?

- The information collected is anonymous and will not include a code number or name. No one, not even the research team will be able to identify your information. Any information we collect and use during this research will be treated as confidential. The following people will have access to the information we collect in this research: the research team and, in the event of an audit or investigation, staff from the Curtin University Office of Research and Development
- Electronic data will be password-protected and hard copy data (including video or audio tapes) will be in locked storage.
- The information we collect in this study will be kept under secure conditions at Curtin University for 7 years after the research has ended and then it will be destroyed.
- The results of this research may be presented at conferences or published in professional journals. You will not be identified in any results that are published or presented.

Will you tell me the results of the research?

- I will contact you at the end of the research (in about 6 months) and let you know the results of the research if you have requested me to and provided your contact details. Results will not be individual but based on all the information we collect and review as part of the research.
- The results may possibly be available in publications or on websites.

Do I have to take part in the research project?

- Taking part in a research project is voluntary. It is your choice to take part or not. You do not have to agree if you do not want to. If you decide to take part and then change your mind, that is okay, you can withdraw from the project. You do not have to give us a reason; just tell us that you want to stop. Please let us know you want to stop so we can make sure you are aware of any thing that needs to be done so you can withdraw safely. If you choose not to take part or start and then stop the study, it will not affect your relationship with the University, staff or colleagues. If you chose to leave the study we will destroy any information we have collected from you.

What happens next and who can I contact about the research?

- If you would like further information about the study please feel free to contact me by email at **r.menzies@postgrad.curtin.edu.au**.
- If you wish to speak to my supervisor about your rights as a volunteer, or about the conduct of the study, you may also contact Matt Tilley on **08 9266 4579** or by email at **m.tilley@curtin.edu.au**.
- If you decide to take part in this research we will ask you to sign the consent form. By signing it is telling us that you understand what you have read and what has been discussed. Signing the consent indicates that you agree to be in the research project and have your health information used as described. Please take your time and ask any

questions you have before you decide what to do. You will be given a copy of this information and the consent form to keep.

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**Thank you for your input into this research. Your participation is greatly appreciated.
Please keep this document for your information.**

Appendix E: Consent Form



Department of Sexology
School of Public Health

CONSENT FORM

HREC Project Number:	HRE2017-093
Project Title:	The Meaning, Experience and Process of Identity Formation as a Queer Femme.
Chief Investigator:	Matt Tilley Lecturer, Postgraduate Courses Coordinator, Department of Sexology
Student researcher:	Richelle Menzies
Version Number:	1
Version Date:	16 March 2017

- I have read, the information statement that has been given to me and I understand its contents.
- I believe I understand the purpose, extent and possible risks of my involvement in this project.
- I voluntarily consent to take part in this research project.
- I understand that I may not benefit from taking part.
- I understand that, while information gained during the study may be published, I will not be identified and my personal information will remain confidential.
- I understand that I can choose to not respond to any question(s) with any consequences, now or in the future.
- I understand that I can withdraw from the study at any time up until I have reviewed my interview transcript and that this will not affect my medical care, now or in the future.

- I agree for my interview to be taped allowing all data that I provide to be recorded
- I have had an opportunity to ask questions and I am satisfied with the answers I have received.
- I understand that this project has been approved by Curtin University Human Research Ethics Committee and will be carried out in line with the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (2007).
- I understand I will receive a copy of this Information Statement and Consent Form.

Participant Name	
Participant Signature	
Date	

Declaration by researcher: I have supplied an Information Letter and Consent Form to the participant who has signed above, and believe that they understand the purpose, extent and possible risks of their involvement in this project.

Researcher Name	Richelle Menzies
Researcher Signature	
Date	

Appendix F: Instrument for Data Collection



Department of Sexology
School of Public Health

Thank you for agreeing to be interviewed for my dissertation project.

There are 3 broad areas of questions that I would like to ask you, some demographics, meaning of identity and your experiences, but before that do you have any questions about the Participant Information Sheet or the Resources handout?

- ✓ **Ensure participant has signed the Consent Form.**

Demographics:

Question 1. How old are you?

Question 2. How do you identify your sex/gender?

Question 3. How do you identify your sexuality?

Would you like to take a short break? Do you have any questions for me? I am now going to ask you some questions about the meaning of identity:

Question 4. What does Queer mean to you?

Question 5. What does Femme mean to you?

Question 6. What does Queer Femme mean as your identity?

Would you like to take a short break? Do you have any questions for me?

Now I am going to ask you about your process to your identity:

Question 7. What has been the process to identifying as Queer Femme?

Would you like to take a short break? Do you have any questions for me?

We are almost done with the interview. It will probably take about 15 more minutes. I am now going to ask you about your experiences:

Question 8. What have been your experiences of identifying as Queer Femme?

We are now finished the interview.

Is there anything else you would like to add, is there anything we have left out or that you would like to discuss further?

Are there any final questions that you have for me?

✓ **Review the resources list**

Appendix G: Resource List



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School of Public Health
Resource List

In the event that you experience emotional or psychological difficulties or distress due to the interviews you can contact the following services:

Diverse Voices/Q Life

After hours telephone counselling service 3pm-12pm

1800 184 527

www.diversevoices.org.au

Relationships Australia Rainbow Counselling Service

Service is located in Spring Hill Brisbane but Rainbow Counsellors are in all offices

1300 364 277

<http://www.raq.org.au/services/rainbow-counselling-service>

Lifeline

13 11 14

<http://www.lifeline.org.au>

Australian Psychological Society

<http://psychology.org.au/Findapsychologist>

QuAC

07 3017 1777

www.quac.org.au

TRUE Relationships and Reproductive Health

Clinic 07 3250 0200

www.true.org.au

Appendix H. Recruitment e-flyer



Department of Sexology
School of Public Health

Are you over 18 years of age?

Do you identify as Queer Femme?

No matter your gender or sexuality if you identify as Queer Femme, we want to hear from you.



This is an opportunity to take part in research that will explore the meaning, experiences and process of identity formation for people who identify as Queer Femme.

Research on the Queer Femme identity is limited and we would like to learn about your experiences and we would like to gain insight into how you came to identify as Queer Femme. This research is part of a Masters Dissertation from the Sexology program at Curtin University.

The study is based on one in-depth, one-hour interview with the researcher from Curtin University, and confidentiality is guaranteed. After the interview there will be a brief follow up via email to enable participants to review or add to their responses.

If you are willing to dedicate some time and share your experiences, please email: richelle.menzies@student.curtin.edu.au for more information on how to participate.

Alternatively, you may contact the project supervisor, Matt Tilley on (08) 92664579, m.tilley@curtin.edu.au

Please consider forwarding this email through your networks.

Ethical Approval Number:

Curtin University Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) has approved this study (HRE2017-093)

