According to latest estimates, there are approximately 6,000 to 20,000 older lesbians in Connecticut (Laumann, Gagnon, Michael, & Michael, 1994; US Census Bureau, 2000). This estimate is likely conservative due to the limited ability of survey research to capture sensitive information about sexual minorities (Dean et al., 2000). Despite the growing number of older lesbians in Connecticut, there is little empirical research on their lives and their social service needs as aging individuals.

This study endeavored to ameliorate the current lack of information about older lesbians by examining 25 women’s life experiences and current daily negotiations as older lesbians (i.e., aged 55-73). Specific attention was paid to the roles of formal and informal social support in the participants’ lives. The data provides an in-depth understanding of these 25 older lesbians who currently reside in Connecticut.

Five research questions were used to guide the qualitative investigation of the lives of older lesbians as well as their experiences with and attitudes toward the availability of social services. While the interviews were semi-structured according to the research questions, participants were encouraged to expound upon their experiences in order to generate a rich picture of the diversity of their individual lives.
The interview data was analyzed utilizing qualitative data analysis software (ATLAS.ti) and three broad themes were identified for presentation in this dissertation: 1) “perceptions of others, perceptions of self;” which focuses on participants’ experiences of discrimination and perceptions of themselves as aging individuals; 2) “participants’ main concerns;” which focuses on current concerns such as finances and health; and 3) “configurations of social support;” which focuses on participants’ perspectives on both formal and informal social support mechanisms in their lives. Conclusions focus on the uniqueness of aging lesbians’ lives in contrast to their heterosexual counterparts.

Findings from this study will, ideally, be used by service providers and others who may need more information to understand this unique, growing population and to respond appropriately and comprehensively to their needs.

