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# Lesbians and Their Mothers: A Taiwanese Experience

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ABSTRACT

Many studies, both in the United States and in Taiwan, have explored how the coming-out experience influenced LGBT individuals and their families, and some studies have also addressed how their familial relationships have been shaped because of the experience. As a Taiwanese who has studied family therapy in the United States, my personal experience as well as research and professional interest brought me to conduct this qualitative study focusing on the experience of coming out in mother-daughter relationships in Taiwan. Nine dyads of mothers and daughters were interviewed and provided their retrospective accounts of their experience of disclosure and how they made meaning of this particular experience. Both parties shared their perspectives on the process of coming out, and mothers addressed their process of acceptance as well as other family members' reactions. Results indicated that disclosure could be seen as a special event that was embedded and then processed in the mother-daughter relationship; therefore the nature of the parent-child relationship was very influential in how the disclosure was treated. In addition, Confucianism beliefs address the importance of the role of each family member, and these beliefs appear to influence how mothers and daughters interact and shape their relationship. Also, family dynamics had a great impact on these dyads' experience of coming out and mothers' levels of acceptance, which resonated with previous findings that family values are crucial to people from Asian cultural heritage. Rather than focusing on preparing a perfect disclosure event, it seems as if therapists should pay more attention to disclosure and acceptance as an ongoing process.

LESBIANS AND THEIR MOTHERS: A TAIWANESE EXPERIENCE

By

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你們之間愛的流動可以被更多人看見。

Last but not the least, 謝謝我的家人和父母。你們多年來的包容與關心，以及你們無止盡的付出，除了是支持我完成學業的最大動力，更帶領我用愛的角度來理解並書寫這個研究主題。謹以此論文獻給你們，還有我相信的大愛。

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

This study explores how mother-daughter relationships in Taiwan deal with the issue of

coming out. By interviewing both mother and daughter together, I, the researcher, wanted to

examine what disclosure means to both mothers and daughters, and how it impacts the

mother-daughter relationship. Additionally, the study also addresses how family dynamics shape

the process of coming out in Taiwan. The results of this research may be compared with results

found in studies conducted in the U.S. and could provide suggestions for further research and for

clinical work both in Taiwan and in the U.S.

**My Narrative**

This study starts from my personal experience. I came from Taiwan to the U.S. to study

in 2002. Since my arrival in the U. S., when people asked me why I had come there to study, I

told them that I wanted to run away from my family. I was tired of being in the middle of my

parents' relationship and being a mediator for my mother and my brother. I had to choose sides

when my father had an affair and when my mother and my brother got into arguments. I felt torn

because I had to consider everyone else's perspective while dealing with my own emotions and

struggles at the same time. I felt that I really needed space just to take care of myself. However,

there was another reason I needed more space.

Just one year before I came to the U.S, at the age of 30, I had my first intimate

relationship. Although I used to have crushes on men, I shared my first romance with a woman.

Our relationship only lasted for three months, but it was long enough to cause me to feel

desperate and in pain when breaking up with her. Moreover, that relationship made me question

myself on many levels. First, I was very confused about my sexual orientation. I used to feel

attracted to males, but I was never able to build an intimate relationship with them. On the other

hand, dating this woman seemed very natural to me. Actually, I was the pursuer in the

relationship, which was never the case when I felt attracted to a man. After the relationship was

over and I was able to reflect on it, I was more shocked and bewildered than ever. I wondered,

what brought me into the relationship, her gender or her personality? Who would be my next

partner, a male or a female? Did the relationship end because I did not know how to have an

intimate relationship with her as an individual? Was it because I did not know how to be with a

woman? Or was it because I did not know how to have relationships in general?

Carrying so much confusion and pain with me after the breakup caused me a lot of stress.

At this time my relationship with my mother became complex too. After witnessing how my

father's affair hurt my mother, I promised myself never to get involved in a love triangle. I had

so much compassion toward my mother from the perspective of her as a victim and also a shared

female's life experience: men seemed to always have the ultimate power with everything no

matter how much women had devoted to the marriage and to the family. From the adulterous

affairs which had impacted my family and friends, I felt that women were usually mistreated and

disadvantaged in their marriages. Therefore, I blamed the man who had the affair and also

decided at a young age that I would not become a third party in a love triangle so as not to hurt

the other woman.

Ironically enough, I was the third party when I started the relationship with my first

girlfriend. After being a third party myself, I learned it was more complicated than I had

imagined when I was younger. The dynamics of our relationship were not about men versus

women; they were influenced by our other relationships with women, like past partners and our

mothers. For instance, my ex-girlfriend told me that she yearned for unconditional love from her

partner because she had never experienced unconditional love from her mother. For me, my

mother requires immediate appreciation for what she gives in relationships, so I learned to have

the same expectations from other people I was in relationship with, while frequently being

uncertain if I was giving enough, or giving in the right way. At the end of our relationship, my

first girlfriend broke up with me because she felt that I could not give her unconditional love

since I expected appreciation constantly. Although there might be other reasons our relationship

ended, this was my first experience of how the relationship between lesbian daughters and their

mothers impacts the lives of lesbian daughters. Neither my ex-girlfriend nor I came out to our

mothers, and yet our relationships with our mothers seemed to have impacts on our relational

dynamics.

This experience not only challenged my heterosexist assumption that a love affair was

usually composed of a man and a woman, it also helped me to see how much I was influenced by

my mother. When I grew up, I thought of several times that I did not want to be like my mother. I

did not like her criticism, I did not like her rigid thinking, and I felt that I knew more than she did.

I tried to differentiate myself from her as much as possible. However, when I realized that I was

similar to her in many subtle ways, I knew that I needed to learn more about my mother and

understand our conflicts as well as our closeness from a new perspective.

My journey of understanding my mother and exploring our relationship did not start right

away. As my relationship with my first girlfriend came to the end, my relationship with my

mother also became intense. My mother was with me at the house when I broke up with my

ex-girlfriend on the phone. We talked and argued until 2 a.m. Since it was a quiet night and I was

loud, my mother must have heard something, but she never asked me what happened. Instead,

she commented later that I was not allowed to hang out with my "bad friend" anymore. I felt

heartbroken but I could not share this with her. Not only did I think that my mother could not

understand my relationship with my ex-girlfriend, I also felt rejected by her cold response. Not

being able to share my same-sex relationship with my mother prevented me from feeling

connected to her at a deeper level. I felt instead that I would need to find my own path, a path

that would be very different from hers. In order to re-define a path which was different from a

heterosexist perspective, I felt it was essential to reconnect to myself before I could feel

connected to my family again. That was the core reason that brought me to the U.S.

I met my second girlfriend during my first semester studying in the U.S. As my

relationship with her got closer, my relationship with my mother became more distant. I only

maintained basic contact with her and the rest of my family. During my first two trips back to

Taiwan, I split my time equally between staying with my girlfriend and staying at home. My

mother finally exploded and wrote me a letter full of anger. She suspected my relationship with

my girlfriend was not "normal" and blamed me for spending too much money in Taiwan. My

mother felt like she was losing me and then wrote me that angry letter to remind me I should

have a relationship with her, as her daughter. I was so hurt that I did not want to contact my

mother for a period of time. In fact, I disconnected myself from the heterosexual world around

me. Only one friend knew about my love life. I did not want to come out to my parents or my

friends, because I did not know how to interact with heterosexism without devaluing myself. I

still had not figured out what my path would look like.

It was by accident that my disconnection from the heterosexual world changed. A friend

outed me unintentionally to my other close female friends. I decided to take a risk and tell them about my ongoing same-sex relationship. I feared being questioned about my sexual orientation, especially by my married friends. I was also afraid that I would not know how to connect with them anymore. I felt as if our lives would be like railroad tracks forever running along side of each other, but never connecting. Surprisingly, they all seemed very accepting and told me, "As long as you are happy, it is not a problem for me." However, although, on the one hand, I felt loved by their caring and accepting comments, on the other hand, I felt sad because I wished to hear those words from my mother. I wanted to feel accepted by her as well as my family. But, with such a different sexual orientation from hers, how could we create bonds and connections in our mother-daughter relationship?

With this longing for feeling connected with my mother, sadly, my second relationship came to an end. It was heartbreaking, but not really surprising. I learned one precious lesson: there was no way that I could love a person unconditionally, meaning that holding certain expectations toward the people I loved seemed to be part of human nature, so how could I expect unconditional love from my mother? With this new understanding, I felt that I might develop a new perspective to re-examine my relationship with my mother. Maybe my sexual orientation or whom I am with is not the key to decide my bond and connection with my mother. The key may be how I see love or how I define love.

Luckily, I came out to my parents before I began to interview my participants. I chose

my father to come out to first unexpectedly one night. Also, I told my father that I wanted to

come out to my mother by myself. My father did not really follow my words; he ended up telling

my mother a few months later that I broke up with my girlfriend. To my surprise, my mother

initiated a conversation, and I finally could share some of my struggles along the way and some

complex feelings with her. I felt that my mother had really seen who I am, and felt being loved in

our conversation. Although the conversation did not last long, I felt the gap that had existed for

years had suddenly vanished. Hence, I completed the challenging task of coming-out four years

ago. I will discuss more about how my coming-out experience influences my research process as

well as my long-term experience after disclosure in the following chapters.

My personal experience might not represent other mother-daughter relationships. Indeed,

every mother-daughter dyad connects differently. Even within the same family, each sister's

experience of her relationship with her mother varies. Nevertheless, there are still some general

rules about mother-daughter relationships. From a heterosexual viewpoint, and, in a patriarchal

society, part of a mother's connection to her daughter is to teach her how to be a good wife and

pass on the family legacy (Rosen, 1997). This has been a shared, needless-to-be-talked-about

knowledge between mothers and daughters in a heterosexual world. Most mothers have been

raised to see all romantic relationships as heterosexual relationships, and to think of

heterosexuality as normative. Therefore, my curiosity is still there: how does a straight mother

connect to her lesbian daughter? When a mother learns that her daughter is a lesbian, how will

this new information affect the existing connection in the dyad? If this new information shatters

the connection between a mother and a daughter, how might they figure out a way to reconnect?

**Multicultural Theoretical Approach**

Coming from Taiwan, my mother-daughter relationship and all the stories that I hear from

my female friends and relatives are reflections of Taiwanese society. Many of their stories reflect

their oppressed experiences due to their gender. As for me, being a lesbian adds another layer of

experience with oppression in Taiwanese society in which heterosexualism is dominant.

Therefore, I have adopted a multicultural theoretical approach as my theoretical lens to examine

how various dimensions of culture impact the relational dynamics in a mother-daughter

relationship. I have utilized the multicultural approach (Hardy, 2001), which is an approach

based on family system and developed by family therapists, as my theoretical perspective to

conduct my research. A mother-daughter relationship is embedded in a family and it reflects part

of the family's interactions. Furthermore, each family reflects and recreates the social norms and

beliefs. Betty Carter explained in an interview that no family works in a vacuum; every family is

embedded in social contexts (Markowitz, 2001). Although the conversation and interactions is

between the mother and the daughter, they communicate and convey the social norms and each

other's beliefs based on their contexts. In my research, the conversation between a heterosexual

mother and a lesbian daughter represents two different sets of values and beliefs colliding

together. Mothers and sexual minority daughters with different values and beliefs may not be

able to find a way to create connections, but they may also find a way to respect each other and

leave each other space to have a voice when working on their relationship.

Coming from the stance of challenging racial injustice, multiculturalism further addresses

injustice in other social contexts, like class, ethnicity, sexual orientation (Hardy, 1989; Hardy &

Laszloffy, 1992; Hardy & Laszloffy, 2002). From a multicultural perspective, every relationship,

interaction, or conversation we have is a channel to exercise each person's beliefs and values that

are attached to his or her position in social contexts. In other words, our position in social

contexts shapes our reality and decides what we believe about ourselves and our society. Those

beliefs are further reinforced and passed on through our actions. Since different values and

beliefs are weighted differently, it is not unusual for the dominant voice to be heard and

respected while the marginalized voice is neglected and devalued in most of our relationships,

interactions, and conversations. As a result, people who constantly experience devaluation and

dehumanizing loss on numerous occasions may accumulate unexpressed rage and develop

self-hatred (Hardy & Laszloffy, 2002; Hardy & Lazzloffy, 2005).

Since no family can live outside any context—actually, one's family works as one of the

most influential agencies to pass on the dominant beliefs and values of our society—the

relationship in the family can work as an arena in which family members may suffer from the

experience of being devalued and not seen. It can be a devastating experience for a sexual

minority in his/her family (Hardy, 1997; Green, 2002). In his article, Hardy (1997) stated what

"home" means: "(Home) is also a state of being, a sense of intrinsically fitting in to the

community around you and being welcomed, invited, accepted and free to be complete" (p. 7).

However, to the majority of sexual minorities, home may not be "home" because of homophobia

and the dominant heterosexual values that pervade most families. Sexual minority individuals

may need to hide a significant part of their life and suppress that part of their nature. This is such

a dehumanizing loss for many sexual minority individuals that they may turn to hurting

themselves (Hardy & Laszloffy, 2002). Therefore, a very prominent task is to help those sexual

minority individuals to recognize their loss and have their own voice (Hardy, 1997).

Like Hardy (1997) stated in his article, I also believe the lost voice needs to be reclaimed

in order to regain one's sense of self. It is essential that the lost voice be heard in a relationship

because that will help those in the fragmented relationships feel connected again around their

humanity, even though people may still disagree on some of each other's beliefs and values.

Hence, this research focuses on the relationship between heterosexual mothers and their lesbian

daughters and explores how they have worked to keep their connections with each other. I

believe their experiences can be used as a demonstration that even a controversy over sexual

orientation between two parties can be expressed within a sacred parent-child relationship.

My yearning that my mother could embrace my lesbian identity is a shared experience

among many children with LGBT identities (e.g. Laird, 1996; Pearlman, 1992; Savin-Williams,

1998a, 1998b, 2001). Furthermore, our shared experience is one of the human experiences that

are involved in acknowledging the domination and the subjugation co-existing in every

relationship. Hence, in exploring how these mother-daughter dyads work through their conflicts,

I hope to be able to bring more understanding about the complexity of human relationships.

Ultimately, with the goal of helping my clients' transform their wounds and hurt in their

relationship, my hope for myself as well as my profession is to devote myself to work on

transforming the beliefs and values which may bring "separateness, hate and misunderstanding"

(Hardy, 2001, p. 53).

### Main Research Questions

I proposed to explore the following questions in this research:

1. How do mother-daughter dyads experience and make meaning of the coming-out

process?

2. What are the essential structures of those mother-daughter dyads' experiences of

disclosure and what are the similarities and differences across those dyads' experiences?

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

Studies that are reviewed and discussed in the following sections are conducted in the

United States unless otherwise indicated.

**The Relationship between Mother and Adult Daughter**

**Mother-daughter Bonds**

**The nature of the mother-daughter relationship.** Chodorow (1978) was one of the first

modern day U.S. theorists to address the impact of gender and sociocultural factors on the

development of boys and girls and their experiences of interpersonal relationships. Based on her

psychoanalytically feminist theory, the mother-daughter relationship provides the arena for girls

to learn empathy and relational skills. The relationship also generates a process of reciprocal

identification for mothers and daughters. The mother tends to be more empathic and to share

more thoughts and feelings with the daughter than the son because she can more easily identify

with the child of the same gender. As a result, daughters and sons have very different experiences

in their early relationship with their mother. The mother is more likely to see the daughter as the

extension of her self, and not differentiated from her, whereas her relationship with her son is

based on differences. The daughter's sense of self, then, is more likely rooted in mutual

identification and mirroring, which will enhance her ability to build connections and maintain

relationships.

Rooted in the mother-daughter relationship, women's sense of self depends on how she sees herself affiliating in relationships (Miller, 1976). This "self-in-relation" notion has been elaborated on by other scholars. For example, Jordan and Surrey (1986) stated, "Women organize their sense of identity, find existential meaning, achieve a sense of coherence and continuity, and are motivated in the context of a relationship" (p. 271). Scholars also suggested that women's self-esteem increases through experiencing a mutual relationship (Gilligan, Lyons, & Hammer, 1990; Jordan, Kaplan, Miller, Stiver, & Surrey, 1991). Mutual relationships are ones in which, whenever one chooses to disclose, she will be respected and understood in a non-judgmental way by the other. Moreover, this mutual empathy and mutual engagement happens with the ultimate goal of protecting and improving the quality of the relationship (Jordan et al., 1991). In other words, in a mother-daughter relationship, both parties feel the most satisfied with the relationship as well as with themselves when they have the sense that they can be authentic in this relationship and have the realization that they both want the best for their relationship.

**Identification and individuation**. Based on the theories discussed above, it seems that the themes of identification and individuation constantly emerge in the mother-daughter relationship. While both parties may report needs for closeness in their relationship, daughters usually add yearning for autonomy as well (Smith, Mullis, & Hill, 1995). The issues of

attachment, separation, self-esteem, empathy, and conflict in the mother-daughter relationship

among different developmental stages have been addressed by other researchers (e.g. Bergman &

Fahey, 1996; Girard, 1997; Groh, 1995; Hall, 1997; Kabat, 1998; Kritis, 1999; Smith, Hill &

Mullis, 1995; Smith, Hill & Mullis, 1998). For both mothers and daughters, the dynamics in their

relationship shift when they reach different life stages and need to adjust to the emergence of

their new identities. It is a process of creating a balance between autonomy and intimacy in this

relationship. Kabat (1998) stated how the mother-daughter bond enables this process, "When a

loving bond between mother and daughter exists, it acts as a buffer against the pain and hurt the

mother feels in letting go. For the daughter, this bond permits separation and allows potential

differences to be expressed against a backdrop of security and acceptance" (p. 77).

  Focusing on that dynamic in mother-daughter relationships, McCarter (2000) conducted a

qualitative study in which she interviewed seven women to explore how adult daughters weave a

unique personhood relative to their mothers. Six of her participants were white and one was

black. The participants ranged in age from 33 to 62, all had been married, and all had children.

Four themes emerged from McCarter's participants' stories. First, daughters tended to develop

abilities or interests that complement those of their mothers' interests. Second, daughters were

able to articulate their mothers' strengths and their own growth both individually and relationally.

Third, daughters addressed their adult development within the context of relationships, especially

their relationships with their mothers. The tension between individuation and continuing

connection was constantly a struggle for daughters. Last, the experience of being oppressed in a

patriarchal society became "roots of connectedness" (p. 359) in the mother-daughter relationship

even though the daughters may not have discussed this with their mothers.

In summary, there is a special bond between mothers and daughters that is highlighted

with the process of identification and individuation, in which both parties learn how to maintain

connections while striving for autonomy in different stages of their life. Furthermore, it is an

interactive process and both mothers and daughters have an impact on the quality of their

relationship.

**Others Studies Conducted in the U.S. Focusing on Adult Mother-daughter Relationships**

Although the mother-daughter relationship has been described as the strongest and the

most enduring familial bond (Kritis, 1999), researchers have noted that this particular

relationship tends to be less addressed in the research literature. When addressed, studies often

focus on clinical issues and on non-normative, pathologic adult mother-daughter relationships

(Shrier, Tompsett, & Shrier, 2004). Among those completed studies, topics include: aging

mothers and their adult daughters (e.g., Cicirelli, 2006; Fingerman, 1996, 2001, 2003; Fingerman,

Chen, Hay, Cichy, & Lefkowitz, 2006; Henwood, 2004; Hollis-Sawyer, 2003; Lefkowitz &

Fingerman, 2003; Michalczyk, 2002; Ray, 2003; Russell-Miller, 1997; Schiff, 1997; Suitor &

Pillemer, 2006); different communication styles that daughters apply in the mother-daughter

relationship (e.g., Cotton-Huston & Johnson, 1998; Miller-Day, 2004; Morgan, 1999; Trees,

2002); the way mothering or mother-blaming impacts the interactions between mothers and

daughters and also the quality of the relationship (e.g., Bjorklund, 1997; Himsel, 2005; Korn,

2002; McNab & Kavner, 2001; Moss, 2004); the multigenerational dynamics in the

mother-daughter relationship (Zax & Poulter, 1997); the influence of daughters' perceptions of

expected life events in the mother-daughter relationship (Curtis, 2006); the way that life

experiences passes from mothers to their daughters (e.g., Ben-Levi, 2005; Casey-Cannon, 2003;

Kritis, 1999; Welleford, 1999); and the loss of one's mother (Douglass, 1998).

**Asian Adult Mother-daughter Relationships**

Among those studies focusing on mother-daughter relationships in the U.S., most of the

subjects are from white, middle class, and college-educated populations; few studies are

conducted to examine the mother-daughter relationship from racial/ethnic minority backgrounds

(Chin, 2000; Shrier, et al, 2004). In fact, the interactions and expectations in mother-daughter

relationships are shaped by various ethnic or cultural values. Ethnic background usually forms

the beliefs and values regarding self and others in any relationship, therefore researchers need to

consider ethnicity and related cultural frameworks when studying mother-daughter relationships

(Girard, 1997; Rastogi & Wampler, 1999).

Asian cultures share different values than Western cultures about familial relationships and gender roles. It has been discussed that Asian cultures are seen as putting familial needs and interpersonal connections before one's personal desires (Shrier, et al, 2004), therefore, the way that mothers and daughters impact each other weighs enormously on their relationship. For example, filial piety has been characterized as the most worshiped value in many Asian cultures, especially in East Asia (Chin, 2000; Gonzales, Hiraga, & Cauce, 1998; Lee & Mock, 2005). It means that Asian offspring are expected to consider their parents' well-being whenever they make any decision. Another related notion is "saving face"—a reflection of protecting one's family reputation even it means that individuals sacrifice their own personal needs. It is a notion related to shame. Researchers have found that the notion of saving face created challenges when they wanted to observe the interactions between Asian mother-daughter dyads to capture the closeness in the relationship (Gonzales, Hiraga, & Cauce, 1998). The participants tended to withhold some information from the researchers if they felt that the information would bring shame to the family.

In terms of gender roles in Asian families, in an article specifically addressing Chinese families, the authors described that traditional Chinese mothers were usually portrayed as "self-sacrificing, suffering, overbearing, guilt inducing, and over involved with their children" (Lee & Mock, 2005, p. 305). In addition, women are to be defined in relation to men, a belief

derived from Confucianism, a dominant philosophy that has been practiced for thousands of years in East Asia. Gender roles thus inform individuals how to behave in a family and even in a society. This philosophy will be further elaborated in the following section on sexual minority literature. Daughters are also taught to assist their mothers to take care of the household chores and male family members. As a result, daughters learn what is expected of good women from their mothers. Although Asian women have become more educated and have more power in contemporary society, some expectations about female gender roles in a family still exist, especially in East Asia (Ma, Chow, Lee, & Lai, 2002).

In summary, recent findings about Asian families and mother-daughter relationships show that there are some distinct elements specific to Asian mother-daughter relationships. For instance, the pressure to pass on cultural values to the next generation, the notion of "saving face" that makes Asian daughters consider their mothers' reactions before making decisions, and the cultural adjustment between generations. Asian culture has an impact on the mother-daughter relationship greatly.

**Studies in Taiwan**

Chuang (2005) examined how interpersonal theory, relational-models theory, and Confucian ethics determined family interaction as well as family harmony and well-being. Two studies were conducted in southern Taiwan, involving 242 and 245 families respectively. Each

family member (father, mother, son, and daughter) completed a questionnaire to assess one's

behavior toward the other three family members. The results showed that Confucian ethics had a

strong effect on family interaction; when family members interacted based on Confucian ethics,

which means that every family member meets his or her role-expectation in the relationship,

family members saw their family with greater harmony and also experienced higher well-being

themselves. In a parent-child relationship, for instance, it meant that children showed respect to

their parents rather than their parents showing respect to them. The results not only showed that

roles rather than personal needs influenced people's behaviors predominantly in family

interactions, but that family members also examined themselves in terms of whether they met

their role-expectations.

In another research study focusing on Taiwanese college students and the family

differentiation among different familial relationships, Sun (2001) reported finding a strong

emotional connectedness and sometimes enmeshment in the mother-daughter relationship.

Therefore, he suggested that researchers and clinicians needed to pay attention to gender-effects

in a parent-child relationship. On the other hand, Chou (2001) conducted a study in Taiwan

focusing on intimacy as well as bitter resentment between mother and daughter, by addressing

how mothers passed on their gender roles to their daughters and then examined how daughters

perceived their gender roles. She proposed that mothers and daughters could form alliances to

fight against the oppressive patriarchy rather than fighting against each other.

**Conclusion**

The mother-daughter relationship has been demonstrated by the above researchers as a

relationship full of complex emotions and cultural factors. As a result, based on the studies

conducted in the U.S, mothers and daughters can be each other's best support (e.g. Fingerman,

1996, 2001, 2003). On the other hand, studies conducted in Taiwan showed that mother-daughter

relationships were ruled by gender roles regulated by Confucian ethics (Chuang, 2005). But,

Chou's study (2001) also implies that mothers and daughters can learn to embrace their apparent

differences by working on similar challenges in a patriarchal society. However, when the

differences between mothers and daughters cross the border—the border where the dominant

heterosexual culture claims what is legitimate or appropriate and what is not— how do

mother-daughter dyads work to sustain their connectedness and empathy? It seems not clarified

much in the literature.

<p align="center">**Sexual Minority Literature**</p>

Throughout this dissertation, I will apply the terms that have been used by the authors in

their articles when discussing the findings of their studies.

**Development of Identity**

**Identity developmental stage models.** "Lesbians are in the unusual position of

belonging to a culture to which their parents do not belong." (Zitter, 1987, p. 185) Actually, for

most sexual minority individuals, this is a shared experience. Most grow up without a role model,

which sexual majority individuals take for granted. For almost every sexual minority individual,

s/he must struggle with the question "who am I ?" It is a cumulative process and identity

develops over time (Johnson & Jenkins, 2004; Morris, 1997). Among the existing models of

sexual minority identity development, Cass's model (1979) has been widely cited as the most

well-known work in the field. Her model includes the following six stages: identity confusion,

identity comparison, identity tolerance, identity acceptance, identity pride, and identity synthesis.

However, this model has been confronted with its linear progress, self-designated stage

allocation, and lack of contextual components (e.g., Esterberg, 1997; Kahn, 1991; McCarn &

Fassinger, 1996; Morris, 1997; Ritter & Temdrup, 2002; Sophie, 1986-1987).

　　　McCarn and Fassinger (1996) also addressed their concerns about the existing models of

sexual identity development. They noticed that most models either lacked empirical research or

were tested with samples that lacked diversity. Hence, they pulled in racial/ethnic and gender

issues in lesbian identity development and developed a dual-process model. Based on preceding

studies on sexual minority identity developmental models, the researchers also argued that men

and women have different paths in developing their sexual minority identity. Women are taught

that their sexual desire is inappropriate, and that the object they desired is inhibited. Therefore,

women tend to come out later than men and they tend to do so while in a relationship.

The four phases of their model are: 1) awareness, 2) exploration, 3) deepening/commitment, 4) internalization/synthesis. Although McCarn and Fassinger described their model in a progression, they saw the processes as "continuous and circular; every new relationship raises new issues about individual sexuality, and every new context requires renewed awareness of group oppression" (1996, p. 522). Disclosure of one's sexual orientation is seen as a declaration of the person's group membership identity and a response to the contexts, and disclosure sometimes may not an appropriate choice and needs to be understood in the context of family, racial and ethnic contexts.

On the other hand, some concerns have been brought up about stage models. Esterberg (1997) indicated that stage models usually reflect researchers' values, goals, and understandings rather than their research participants'. In addition, most stage models show lesbians and gays as sharing a similar developmental process, which neglects some women's experience of building up a lesbian identity through feminism as a political stance (Elliot, 1985; Esterberg, 1997), or experiences of bisexual identities (Esterberg, 1997; Ritter & Temdrup, 2002). Moreover, the final stage of developmental stage models usually suggests that a lesbian (or other sexual minority individuals) should be able to be proud of her lesbianism, integrate the sexual minority identity well into every aspect of her life, and feel comfortable in a heterosexual society. Some

researchers suggest that the developmental model may reinforce lesbians or other sexual

minority adults to look for psychotherapy to help them adjust or integrate better if they have not

reached the "highest" stage (Kitzinger & Perkins, 1993). As a result, those models might serve to

increase the internal anxiety for lesbians or sexual minority adults because they imply there is

still a "paradigm" to be a sexual minority.

Unlike developmental stage models, social constructionism and queer theory argue that

"categories" or "identities" only represent differences and are changing and fluid (Esterberg,

1997). Therefore, each individual is in his/her own particular phase and can define whatever the

person feels right for himself/herself. These two theories encourage everyone to deconstruct the

existing social codes and practice the power of constructing one's reality. However, Esterberg

also pointed out that these two theories may miss the role that identities play in ordinary

individuals' lives; while social constructionism claims that "categories" are created for specific

purposes in different contexts and queer theory further challenges the concept of "category" itself,

"the critique of identity seems to remain a deconstructive project, not a constructive one, without

a vision for a future." (p. 24) Naming one's self actually provides an affirmation for the person.

Therefore, Esterberg stated that "far more important are the real and varied accounts women tell

about who they are and how they came to be that way—and the implications of these accounts

for building social networks and political alliances" (1997, p. 29).

Similar to Esterberg's belief that claiming one's identity indicates how the person

perceives her contexts, Mosher (2001) argues that sexual identity is fluid and dynamic, and how

and when to declare one's identity is influenced by parental reactions as well as the reactions of

others. It is a continuing process for sexual minority individuals to assess who they are, come up

with several possible answers, and reassess this in many situations, in order to solidify their

sexual identity. Then they decide to come out. During this process, others' reactions are used to

contrast and evaluate their own identity formation. Heterosexism, for instance, has been

indicated as having an impact on the development of lesbian identity cross-culturally in studies

(Whitam, Daskalos, Sobolewski, & Padilla, 1998).

**Grief and loss issues for sexual minorities.** Sexual minorities may experience grief and

loss issues during their process of searching for their non-heterosexual identities (Kleingerg,

1986; Thompson, 1996). In her article focusing on grief and loss issues from a lesbian

perspective, Thompson (1996) argued that lesbians are raised to value a heterosexual lifestyle,

therefore it is natural to experience grief and loss during the process of coming out. Their loss

may be related to the rituals and privileges that they could inherit from heterosexual customs,

like marriage, insurance benefits, societal acceptance of the relationship, and connections to the

dominant culture. Not every lesbian may experience grief and loss during their coming-out

process. But for those who have such struggles, Thompson suggested that acknowledging and

expressing their loss was needed in order to fully integrate their lesbianism into their lives. In Thompson's stage model describing lesbians' process of embracing their loss, she addressed the importance of being heard and supported. However, it is unclear in Thompson's article how these stages of acknowledging loss work in relationships to impact individuals' various decisions related to their coming-out.

In summary, researchers have found an identity development process that is unique to lesbians, although the particulars of the process vary for each individual. Lesbians tend to define themselves through their relationships with others before they have an awareness of their sexuality, and their awareness may further influence their coming-out process. Furthermore, some researchers emphasize that loss and grief issues are crucial for lesbians to address as they come to terms with accepting their sexual minority identity, which also may influence their coming-out.

**Coming out to Parents**

Although there is more than disclosing one's sexual identity in the relationship between a sexual minority child and heterosexual parents, the decision to reveal one's sexual orientation still has a significant meaning to a sexual minority offspring developmentally as well as in the parent-child relationship (Laird, 1996). On the other hand, since the action of disclosing one's sexual orientation directly challenges the upheld and assumed heterosexual tradition for most

families, how the disclosure is handled in a familial context then reflects the family's value,

morality, and legacy. Therefore, even though the action of disclosure itself looks like a personal

decision, the decision is made and the possible repercussions are taken place under the influence

of the family's value system. Sexual minority children and their parents both act and react based

on their specific contexts. So, while they share a family context, they are dissimilar in their

developmental contexts when it comes to their roles in the family and their relationship with

homosexuality. While children have had time to consider their sexual minority status, parents

may be in a different stage of acknowledgement. The process of coming out then also represents

the process of parents and their offspring trying to figure out the overlap of their contexts.

**Factors related to coming out.** One of the critical decisions for all sexual minority

individuals is if and when to come out to their families (Savin-Williams, 1998a; Coolhart, 2006;

Harvey, 2007). Coming out to parents may be seen as the most challenging task of the coming

out process. Some researchers found that sexual minority youths who come out to their parents

are victimized by their families more than those who did not disclose (D'Augelli, Grossman, &

Starks, 2005). The decision-making process is often very personal, and it depends on one's

sociocultural position and his/her available resources (Green, 2002; Coolhart, 2006). One's

psychosocial developmental stage is also crucial to the process (Savin-Williams, 2001; Johnson

& Jenkins, 2004; Swann & Anastas, 2003; Coolhart, 2006). Green (2000) states that adult sexual

minority offspring make their decisions about whether to come out to their parents based on the

following factors: (1) the importance of the parents as a source of social support, social identity,

and economic support; (2) the accessibility of other resources of support besides family ones;

and (3) the likely cost-benefit to themselves, to family members, and to their relationship.

Although some researchers argue that it meant maturity and integrity for sexual minority

offspring to eventually come out to their parents (LaSala, 2000), others disagree (Green, 2000;

2002). Regardless of whether they come out to families or not, sexual minority offspring have to

deal with more complexities than heterosexuals.

For example, Savin-Williams (1998a) examined studies focusing on youths coming out to

their families between 1987 and 1995. Participants' average age varied from 18.3 to 22.5. For

youths in early adulthood, their primary fear in coming out to their parents was that they might

cut them off financially. In addition, youths did not come out to their families if they had not

found other support systems as resources to assist them to go through struggles and negative

responses they might encounter from their families during the coming out process.

Perceptions of parents' responses when being told that their child is a sexual minority

definitely influence the sexual minority offspring's decision to disclose their sexual orientation.

Cramer and Roach (1988) used a sample of gay men to explore the relationship between coming

out to parents and his perceived parental attitude as well as his perceived parental relationship.

They found that the more gay sons expected their parents to be hurt and upset about their sexual

identity, the less they would choose to come out to their parents. But when they chose to come

out to their parents, the most common reasons were a desire to share their life with parents,

feeling tired of hiding their sexuality, wanting more freedom, and longing for more intimacy in

the relationship with their parents. Not surprisingly, mothers were perceived as the parent who

would be more accepting of the disclosure.

Savin-Williams (1998b) argued that when the parents were more liberal or the child was

more gender atypical, the child would feel less needed to be closeted. On the other hand, if the

child anticipated more negative responses from parents or family members, s/he would be less

likely to disclose.

In a study based on questionnaires from 103 lesbian and bisexual women

(Savin-Williams, 1989), the researcher found that sexual minority offspring usually reported

feeling satisfied with the relationship with their mother or their father when that particular parent

had known about their same-sex attractions. However, it was not clear whether the satisfying

relationship made the sexual minority child come out to the parent or if the relationship became

more satisfying after they came out. No matter what, being known as a full self in the

relationship with their parent(s) had obviously created a more positive perception of their

relationship with the parent(s). Interestingly, if sexual minority youths chose not to come out, the

main reasons were not fear of being rejected by their parents. Instead, it was usually the desire

not to hurt or disappoint their parents that made them decide to keep this part of their life a secret

(Cramer & Roach, 1988; Savin-Williams, 1998b). This can be interpreted as implying that sexual

minority youths do not want to ruin their relationship with parents if they perceive their parents

as not being able to deal with their disclosure well.

Similar to the findings of Cramer's & Roach's study (1988), lesbians also experience a

strong desire of wanting to share an important part of their life with their parents when

considering coming out (Kleinberg, 1986). In her qualitative study, all of Kleinberg's five

interviewees spoke about the need to break the silence between themselves and their parents

about their sexual identity status, because of the pain and distance caused from hiding a crucial

aspect of their lives. In the process of coming out, they were able to feel reconnected and

reaffirm the positive aspects of their relationship with their parents. While they struggled in the

process of disclosure to balance the needs of self and others, they learned to work through

familial struggles and still feel connected to their parents. It was a process of moving towards

integration. No demographic information of her interviewees was mentioned in her article,

however.

**To whom the sexual minority offspring come out**. Fitting the typical role expectation

that mothers are responsible for emotional support, they were usually reported as the parent to

whom sexual minority children first came out (Savin-Williams, 1998a, 2001; Coolhart, 2006).

Actually, compared with fathers, mothers are less likely to cut-off the relationship with their

sexual minority offspring after being told the child's sexual orientation (Herdt & Koff, 2000). In

addition, siblings usually were the first family members sexual minority offspring came out to,

then mothers, and fathers were usually the last person to know (Harvey, 2007). Taking gender

differences into consideration, lesbian daughters were more likely to feel rejected by at least one

parent and it was usually their fathers (Savin-Williams, 1998a). Furthermore, lesbians were

reported to have more negative experiences than gay sons with both parents, whether it is before

coming out or afterwards (Herdt & Koff, 2000; Ritter & Temdrup, 2002).

Rosen (1991) suggested that mothers are seen as responsible for passing on cultural

beliefs and values of a traditional woman's role to their daughters. Having a daughter whose

sexuality was counter to traditional heterosexuality was hard for mothers to either understand or

accept. Mothers are likely to develop a sense of failure because their lesbian daughter challenges

the cultural definition of womanhood. As a result, the relationship between a lesbian daughter

and her mother may be difficult.

**Lesbians and their mothers.** Although mothers are usually the first choice for sexual

minority youths to come out to, mothers still have unique challenges when dealing with their

daughter's disclosure. In an early article addressing the coming out process in a mother-daughter

relationship, Zitter (1987) proposed some interesting points about relationship dynamics between mothers and daughters. She pointed that a mother tended to see herself as the most important woman in her daughter's life, even after the daughter was married. Therefore, when mothers learn about their daughters' lesbianism, loss and jealousy may get in the way of positively relating to their daughters. On the other hand, if the father had a closer relationship with the daughter, the mother might see her daughter as a competitor. Hence, the mother might feel a sense of relief when learning the daughter was a lesbian. That sense of relief can even help the mother be more open to her lesbianism.

From a lesbian daughter's perspective, she might feel that she was validating womanhood and escaping from a double bind (men were better than women but they were also untrustworthy) by practicing lesbianism. Furthermore, the coming out process was also a process of gaining greater independence from one's mother. The process might be filled with pain and loss, but it might bring growth and strength.

Zitter's discourse about the dynamics between a heterosexual mother and a lesbian daughter may reflect some truths about a mother-daughter relationship. However, it lacks empirical studies to prove her viewpoints, especially around the assumption that daughter's lesbianism can reduce the mother's anxiety of treating the daughter as an opponent in her marriage. Although the author wishes to address the idea that lesbianism can create more than

just loss, she fails to challenge the power of heterosexism and patriarchy, which Rosen explores

in her research (Rosen, 1991; 1997).

Rosen (1991) first explored how lesbians learned about themselves through their

relationships with their mothers. She recruited her participants through three local newspapers

and flyers in a local women's bookstore. She ended up interviewing 30 self-identified Caucasian

lesbians whose ages ranged from 24 to 35. Her participants labeled themselves as lesbians

ranging in age from 14 to 31 years old, and the number of years they had been out to their

mothers ranged from 6 months to 6 years. Twenty-seven participants had completed at least a

college education, and more than half the participants (n=18) were in a relationship when

interviewed.

Most of Rosen's participants in the study indicated that they struggled in their childhood:

they usually were more connected to their fathers and experienced empathic rupture with their

mothers. Moreover, the realization of being attracted to women during late adolescence and

gradually coming out to themselves caused them to withdraw from their relationships with their

mothers. On the other hand, they felt the withdrawal was a mutual process because they

experienced their mothers also feeling frustrated about their daughters' presenting non-traditional

gender roles. However, coming-out to mothers was important because "it provided the only

opportunity for more mature relational responsibility to occur" (p. 137). According to

"self-in-relation" theory, disclosure created a mutually empathic moment for the relationship.

A relational aspect which Rosen (1991) pointed out was the subtle responsibility that had been put on a mother's shoulder to educate her daughter to pass on traditional gender roles. Therefore, it might create a complex loss for a mother when learning that her daughter is lesbian. Rosen further illustrated her viewpoint in a later study (Rosen, 1997). She used a case example to discuss the dynamics between a mother's feeling of loss and a daughter's fear when a daughter did not know how to tell her mother that she was a lesbian. Both the mother's loss and the daughter's fear were triggered by not being able to fulfill the mother's dream of seeing the daughter getting married. The subject in this case was a white lesbian, growing up in an Italian, middle class family, whose mother had a strong affiliation with Catholicism. To understand why the mother-daughter relationship was strained by the daughter's sexual identity, the author argued that the mother-daughter relationship was a great source for women to learn mutual empathy, relationship authenticity, and relationship differentiation to enhance their relational development. However, under the dominant influence of sexism and heterosexism, there left no room for lesbianism to be seen as one possible choice culturally. As a result, it created a very challenging task for a heterosexual mother and a lesbian daughter to develop mutual empathy in their relationship. It also added another layer of difficulty to maintain an authentic relationship between a heterosexual mother and a lesbian daughter because being authentic in the

mother-daughter relationship meant that the lesbian daughter had to disclose her sexuality, which would be out of cultural reference both in content and in context.

Regarding those extra burdens in the relationship between a heterosexual mother and a lesbian daughter, Rosen (1997) then addressed that learning to be more differentiated in the mother-daughter relationship was an important process for the lesbian daughter to have a more integrated self. Mutual empathy and relationship authenticity might not be available in such a mother-daughter relationship. However, a lesbian could experience genuine connections with other important women and then felt more comfortable to disclose her lesbian identity to her mother. Then both daughter and mother were able to really acknowledge the strength and loss in their relationship.

Rosen's analysis of the dynamics between a heterosexual mother and a lesbian daughter is pretty thorough, especially her focus on the oppression of sexism and heterosexism on women and sexual minority individuals. Her case study also fits well with her discourse of relational development. Actually, similar relationship dynamics can also be found in other studies (e.g. Iasenza, Colucci, and Rothberg, 1996).

The negative impact of sexism and heterosexism on women and sexual minority individuals was addressed strongly in Rosen's article, but it was hard to find evidence of how the heterosexual mother and the sexual minority daughter were able to challenge the sexist and

heterosexist values through the disclosure of the daughter's sexual minority identity. In other words, it seemed that the relational development followed a one-way direction in her study—from the mother to the daughter, from the sexism and heterosexism to women and sexual minority individuals, and from the oppressor to the oppressed. The possibility that the daughter's disclosure might stir up the mother's awareness of her gender in a heterosexual society was not discussed in Rosen's analysis. While the lesbian daughter begins to have a greater voice in the relationship, her mother may be impacted by her daughter. Rosen's analysis leaves the reader with a great curiosity about the mother's reactions and what is beyond her grief and loss.

Reflecting Rosen's discourse of the importance of a mother-daughter relationship, Savin-Williams (2001) in his study focusing on sexual minority adolescents and young adults pointed out that the majority of his female subjects expressed that "the most important thing was acceptance from Mom" (p. 68). His sample included 78 lesbian/bisexual/unlabeled young women, their age ranging from 17 to 25 ($M$=20.8). The ethnic/racial majority was white (78%), and more than half of them lived in small cities or suburban areas in the U.S. Based on the information collected by either telephone or in-person interviews, their reasons for coming out to their mother were mostly either wanting to share their life with the mother, being asked by the mother, and being outed by others. Over 60% of sexual minority daughters reported that their relationship with their mother remained the same, and half of them reported that their

relationship improved gradually. For those sexual minority daughters who experienced a positive relationship with their mother over the years after disclosure, they usually had shared a close relationship with their mother before coming out (Savin-Williams, 2001).

Iasenza, Colucci, and Rothberg (1996) used two case examples to illustrate how the mother-daughter bond influenced and was affected by the daughter's sexual identity. One example was a woman who had a Jewish background, identified herself as a lesbian around twenty years old, and kept working on her relationship with her mother for 15 years. The other example was a couple; one partner had a strong lesbian identity while the other was ambivalent about her sexual identity. Little demographic information was revealed about this couple. Both of them had not come out to their mothers at the beginning of their relationship in order to protect their mothers' emotions. Both cases showed stronger connections between mothers and daughters over time: the mother of the first example became more accepting about the daughter's lesbian identity and her same-sex partner, and the couple in the second example came out to their mothers eventually.

Based on these two case examples, the researchers concluded that Bowenian theoretical approach about differentiation and multigenerational patterns were helpful to lesbian daughters to work on the relationships with their mothers. The more the daughter was able to stand up for herself, the more the mother learned to adapt to the truth that her daughter was non-heterosexual.

The more the daughters understood the intergenerational dynamics, the more they were ready to disclose their lesbian identity to their mothers.

**The impact on the parent-child relationship after disclosure**. There are not many empirical studies focusing on the whole family life or changes of family dynamics after a child's disclosure of sexual identity (Savin-Williams, 1998a). Most studies examine the dynamics between parents and offspring, either from the parents' perspective or the offspring's. (Parents' reactions and responses will be reviewed in the following sections.) However, among those studies that explored what happened immediately after coming out (Savin-Williams, 2001; Ritter & Temdrup, 2002), parents' reactions and the consequences of the disclosure varied. From sexual minority children's perspectives, more daughters than sons reported experiencing negative responses from fathers after disclosure (Herdt & Boxer, 1993). A possible explanation for this finding was articulated by the researchers. They suggested that daughters might have had a closer relationship with parents than sons had had, and that this relationship was jeopardized after the daughters' disclosure. Because gay sons were less close, their relationships had more room for improvement (Savin-Williams, 1998b).

The quality of the parent-child relationship impacts how sexual minority children will be affected by their parents' reactions (Savin-Williams, 1998b). The closer a sexual minority child is to the parent being told the child's sexual identity, the greater the child will be impacted by the

parent's reaction. On the other hand, a positive prior relationship between parents and the child

usually helps both parties keep working on the relationship after disclosure (Savin-Williams &

Debé, 1998; D'Augelli, 2003). Hence, researchers suggested that "Perhaps more important than

predicting the initial response to disclosure is to better understand what leads to a healthy

long-term relationship" (Savin-Williams & Dubé, 1998, p. 11). According to Laird and Green

(1996), parents' reactions and their impact on parent-child interactions reflect how the family

deals with a crisis in general and also the family's attitude and beliefs about gender and sexuality.

In other words, the parents' reactions will not come from nowhere; they reflect contexts in which

the parents as well as the family are embedded.

Laird (1996) conducted a study focusing on the use of the language of lesbianism in

different contexts, especially in their families of origin. When exploring lesbians' narratives, the

researcher paid special attention to those stories conveying strengths and productive lives that

were seldom heard about in previous studies. She interviewed nineteen lesbians who were white,

had completed high school or above in terms of education, but were very diverse in ethnic,

religious, and social class background. They ranged in age from 26 to 69.

Several themes were found in those varying narratives. Every interviewee in the study

tried to maintain a certain relationship with her family. Distancing from the family for a while,

either physically or emotionally, and then returning to negotiate the relationship with the family

was a common phenomenon. Owning a lesbian identity also helped some women to differentiate

from their families and expanded the once-limited options they had as females in their families

of origin. Great resiliency was also found among those lesbians, and they all shared stories about

possibilities and opportunities despite their internal struggle and external conflicts. One of

Laird's interviewees stressed this when talking about her relationship with her mother, "it wasn't

about being gay; it was about how she connected with her children" (Laird, 1996, p. 113).

However, not all interviewees in her study had verbally outed themselves to their families.

Although they were all out behaviorally, the shock or the devastation that one family experienced

would be very different from another family, in which the daughter revealed her sexual minority

status directly by words.

D'Augelli, Hershberger, and Pilkington (1998) conducted a survey on patterns of

disclosure of sexual orientation to families. The sample was composed of 194 lesbians, gays, and

bisexuals who were aged 14-21 in metropolitan areas. Only those who lived with their parents

were included for further analysis. Among these 105 subjects, 29% of them were females and

32% of them were youths of color. Lesbians were more threatened with physical attacks and

actually experienced such attacks more than gay males after disclosing their sexual orientation.

Mothers were usually the perpetrators. The researchers concluded that disclosure did not always

create positive outcomes. Only half of the subjects found their mothers and siblings were

accepting, and fathers' reactions were more negative. The researchers suggested that the mothers'

reactions play an important role when LGB youths decided to tell others about their sexual

orientation.

In another research study mainly focused on lesbian and bisexual youths and their

families' reactions to the disclosure, D'Augelli (2003) found similar results. In this sample of

206 females identifying themselves as lesbians or bisexuals, the average age was 18.9 years old

and 77% of subjects were white. About one-third (37%) lived with their parents, others lived

with partners (11%), friends (16%), or in campus housing (14%). Through analyzing subjects'

responses to several instruments and scales, mothers were perceived as the parent who was more

accepting and knowledgeable about daughters' sexual orientation. However, even though

mothers were usually seen as more supportive than fathers, it had a strong impact on their

daughters' health if they were less accepting. The finding indicated that the more negative

mothers were about daughters' sexual orientation, the more symptoms daughters reported.

To explore how familial dynamics prior to disclosure was related to the experience after

disclosure, Ben-Ari (1995) interviewed 32 gay and lesbian offspring and 27 parents. The method

of snowballing was used to recruit participants. In addition, the majority of parents were

recruited from support groups for parents of gays and lesbians in the San Francisco Bay Area.

Nineteen males and thirteen females comprised the queer offspring sample, and eight fathers (six

of them had gay sons and two of them had lesbian daughters) and 19 mothers (10 of them had

gay sons and 9 of them had lesbian daughters) comprised the parents' sample in this study.

Racial/ethnic background was not indicated in the research. In addition, data was not obtained

from the same set of parents and gay sons and lesbian daughters.

The important contribution of this study is that Ben-Ari asked similar questions to both

samples to describe their counterparts' and their own experiences in order to examine how the

coming-out process was perceived by parents and offspring separately. For example, although

"not to hide, not live a lie" was cited as the most common motive of coming out by both parents

and offspring, parents perceived the other two common motives were "needed help" and "feel

respected and loved" while sexual minority offspring mentioned "share happiness with parents"

and "stand up as a person". In terms of relational dynamics, Ben-Ari reported that parents were

more likely to acknowledge and accept their offspring's homosexuality if the motive of coming

out was "being honest, not to hide and live a lie". In addition, parents and sexual minority

offspring who cited "not to hide, not live a lie" as the motive for disclosure also reported that

their parent-child relationship improved afterwards. Parents also reported positive relationships

with offspring afterwards if they were told directly about their child's sexual minority status.

Two findings were related to the child and the parents' gender in Ben-Ari's study. The

parent of a child of the opposite sex tended to experience more guilt than the parent of the same

sex. It was also found that parents of gay sons were more accepting than parents of lesbian daughters. Ben-Ari then concluded that while very few parents fully accepted the fact that their child is sexual minority, most parents learned to acknowledge it.

In a more recent study, Coolhart (2006) examined ten relatively young sexual minority women (age ranged from 18-21 and nine of them are white) about their experiences after coming out at home. According to her findings, the quality of relationship would influence young queer women to decide which person to come out to but not be the motivation for them when they thought about disclosure. In that case, the mother was usually the first parent to know their sexual minority identity. Their motivations tended to be "not wanting to lie anymore" and "parents would find out anyway". The researcher pointed out that they might be more concerned with avoiding undesirable effects of getting caught because of their age and the living-at-home status. After they came out, the parents' immediately reactions were negative more than positive, but parents' reactions improved over time. Based on the participants' self-reported, their parents showed higher levels of acceptance when the parents were open-minded, seeing sexual identity as part of their daughter, being able to see a positive future for their daughter, and having contact with other queer people and parents of queer people.

In summary, coming out to parents is the most challenging task for most sexual minority offspring, and there are various factors and concerns that influence sexual minority offspring's

decisions about how and when to come out to their parents. Sexual minority daughters usually

face more difficulties after coming out to their parents than sexual minority sons. Researchers

suggest that heterosexism and sexism create more struggles for female dyads. Some studies

showed that mothers and daughters could continue the bond of an oppressed group in patriarchy,

while others showed that it was harder for heterosexual mothers to accept their daughters'

lesbianism. However, the lack of diversity in terms of the racial or ethnic background of the

research sample limits the generalizability of their results.

The findings reported in this section, however, are mostly based on sexual minority

offspring's reports except for Ben-Ari's study (1995). There are also no descriptions of the

process of how parent (mother) and offspring (daughter) influence each other's reactions before

and after coming-out.

**Parents' Experiences of Their Child's Coming-out**

**The parents' grieving model.** Ben-Ari's research reminds us that parents have their own

experiences of their child's coming-out process as well. As a parent of a gay son and lesbian

daughter, Wells-Lurie (1996) shared her personal experience of strong anxiety, loss, and longing

for acceptance and assimilation by society and other parents. She also addressed her appreciation

of having sexual minority children and her recognition that her life was enriched with a greater

diversity of people because of her sexual minority children: she could not meet with people of

great diversity if not being their parent. Actually, it is not uncommon for many parents to go

through their own acceptance process of having a sexual minority child (Allen, 1999; Borhek,

1993; Herdt & Koff, 2000; Hom, 1994). However, grieving has been identified as a central

metaphor to represent and describe the experience of most families and parents after the

disclosure; it is the parents' grieving for the loss of the hopes and dreams for their child (Beeler

& DiProva, 1999; Henderson, 1998; Savin-Williams & Dubé, 1998). According to

Savin-Williams (2001), parents' reactions are divided into several stages. These emotional stages

were adopted from Kubler-Ross' (1970) concepts of learning one's own forthcoming death. Such

a grieving model includes the following stages: denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and

acceptance. Parents go through these stages progressively, according to Savin-Williams, after

their sexual minority children come out to them.

Savin-Williams' research (2001) included youth's perceptions of their parent's reactions

to the coming out process. He asked his 78 participants to describe those perceptions. (The

demographic information of these participants has been stated in a previous section on page 30.)

In his analysis of the mother-daughter relationship, he found that a mother was more supportive

of her daughter's sexual minority status if she was able to overcome her own feelings of guilt and

shame that it was her fault. It was also more likely that a mother could maintain a good

relationship with her daughter if she had a trusting relationship with the daughter before the

disclosure. Savin-Williams (2001) admitted that most daughters had difficulties describing the exact process their mothers had been through to become more accepting about their same-sex attractions. Since his findings were dependent on the daughters' self-report, this limitation is unavoidable.

Savin-Williams (2001) suggested that more research should explore how parents react to their children's coming out. For example, it is still unclear how parents reach the final stage of acceptance and which parents are capable of completing all the stages. Parents have their own "coming out" process to deal with, which may not be so different from their children's. Besides, not every parent will experience each of these stages. If a child has shown atypical gender identity in childhood, shock might not a common reaction to the parents when the child comes out to them. Also, many studies were conducted with mainly white, highly educated, and relatively liberal parents. Therefore, they were more likely to articulate their feelings and name their emotions. After all, those stages may represent some parents' experience but not all of them. Even "acceptance" may means different things in different cultures (e.g. Hom, 1994; Rosen, 1997; Rafkin, 1996).

**Parents' reactions, reflections, and their process after youths come out.** After reviewing the literature on sexual minority children's perceptions about parents' reactions, it is intriguing to read parents' perspectives. It is not unusual that parents feel stunned, angry,

disappointed, or even that they are being punished when being told that a child is gay or lesbian

(e.g. Allen, 1999; Borhek, 1993; Herdt & Koff, 2000; Liu & Chan, 1996). Questions like "Where

did we go wrong?", "Why is my child gay?", or "How could you do this to us?" are frequently

asked of themselves as well as the child in the process of coming out, especially in the initial

stage of learning the child's sexual minority identity. Researchers have pointed out that the

heterosexual family myth may play a big part of those initial reactions (Herdt & Koff, 2000).

Therefore, once the child reveals that he/she falls out of the designation of "heterosexual", the

parents are forced to give up the dream of seeing the child get married and have children, which

are viewed as a large part of the formula of happiness that is defined by the heterosexual family

myth.

This heterosexual family myth may even impact the way that lesbian daughters and gay

sons are integrated in families. Based on their study, Herdt and Koff (2000) found that among the

families in the integration phase, 82% had gay sons and 18.2% had lesbian daughters. On the

other hand, among the families in the disintegration phase, 57.1% had gay sons and 42.9% had

lesbian daughters. While this finding resonates with other researchers' findings (e.g. Ben-Ari,

1995), Herdt and Koff provide a more detailed speculation. They suspect that it was because of

gender role expectations. Males are valued based on their work and financial contribution to

families, while females are valued based on their motherhood and carrying on the responsibility

to create a warm and loving family of their own. Therefore, having a gay son does not

necessarily ruin their contribution to their families, but having a lesbian daughter makes the

parents feel desperate because their daughter seems to reject the expectation in a way that may

impinge on core family values.

No matter what, when a sexual minority child comes out of the closet, most parents will

go into the closet, at least for a while. They will go through the process of wanting acceptance

and assimilation from others, just like their sexual minority offspring (Henderson, 1998; Herdt

and Koff, 2000; Wells-Lurie, 1996). Nevertheless, Herdt and Koff (2000) also pointed out factors

that could help parents' gain resilience after learning their child was a sexual minority from their

interview with parents from Parents, Families, and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG), a

nonprofit voluntary organization whose mission is to support families and educate the public

about issues of sexual minority. When the parents have experienced other loss, trauma, or

chronic illness prior the disclosure, it might be easier for them to feel connected to their sexual

minority child even when they were still in a stage of trying to make sense of the shocking

information. Similarly, if parents have experienced being "different" in their own lives, it might

help them to embrace their sexual minority child.

Time is definitely crucial for parents' acceptance (Henderson, 1998). As a member of

PFLAG, Henderson (1998) pointed out that few families respond initially with support and

acceptance. Parents not only have to face the shock that their heterosexual dream for their child will not be fulfilled, they also have realistic fears that their child as well as themselves will be abandoned by the homophobic society. However, time is an important factor that often changes parents' attitudes. With the assistance of sexual minority children, parents can reach a better understanding about their child's sexual identity and be content with a new relationship with their children.

In another study, Greenfield (1992) also focused on the time factor. She conducted a survey with 37 mothers, 22 fathers and 54 daughters coming from 65 families. The author hypothesized that parents would have a higher acceptance of their daughter's same-sex orientation and better communication with their daughter if parents had known the daughter's sexual orientation longer. Interestingly, the hypothesis was confirmed from the daughter's perspective but there was no significant difference based on the parents' perspective. Greenfield concluded that it might be daughters' sense of relief after coming out that contributed to a generally better relationship with parents. No matter what, since participants were not paired up, we are unable to know if this discrepancy comes from parents and daughters that are in the same family.

On the other hand, Freedman (2003) addressed the importance of having others' support, like friends or close relatives, to help parents go through the process of accepting their adult

child's sexual minority identity. A total of 59 qualitative telephone interviews complemented a

Likert-type survey to examine what factors influenced parents' acceptance of their child. The

sample was mainly Caucasian, well-educated, affluent, geographically diverse, and aged between

47-83 years old. The result indicated that only parents' homophobia was important in predicting

acceptance of their child's sexual orientation. Parents reported anger at a homophobic society

and fears for the child's future which created conflicts to their generalized acceptance of their

offspring's disclosure.

**Mothers' reactions after daughters' coming-out.** There are several studies that address

mother-daughter dyads, only from the mothers' perspective. To examine how mothers reacted to

lesbian daughter's coming out, Pearlman (1992) interviewed 10 Caucasian mothers who lived in

New England, U.S., and had known their daughter's lesbianism for at least three years. Seven

mothers had bachelors' and/or masters' degrees. Seven mothers were married, two were divorced,

and one was widowed. They were all members of PFLAG and were interviewed twice by the

researcher.

In this study, Pearlman was curious about whether mothers developed a process which

had certain stages when moving towards accepting their daughters' lesbianism, and if the process

was similar to the process of lesbian identity formation described by Cass (1979). The researcher

found that it was a complex process for a mother learning of her daughter's lesbianism; most

mothers shared the struggle between respecting their daughter's wish to be herself and showing

genuine acceptance of their daughter's lesbianism. Furthermore, these mothers began to take on

the behaviors of an oppressed and stigmatized group, sharing similarities with their daughters.

Even though mothers and daughters were found to share similar experiences, mother's

acceptance overall, appeared to be "a matter of degree and may never be complete" (p. 4).

Most mothers in Pearlman's study experienced "a stage-based sequence of confusion,

devastation and loss, struggle to come to terms with their daughters' lesbianism, increasing

tolerance, and finally an acceptance accompanied by residual regret" (1992, p.7). Pearlman

concluded that this sequence parallels the identity formation process that Cass (1979) proposed,

which was stages of confusion, comparison, tolerance, acceptance, pride and ambivalence, and

synthesis. Participants also pointed out several milestone events during the process of accepting

their daughters' lesbianism. For example, they were able to identify disclosure as an important

step to assert acceptance of their daughter's sexual identity as well as self-acceptance of being a

parent of a sexual minority. They came to understand that their daughters wanted to come out to

them to have a true intimate relationship with them. It helped them to see the meaning of

disclosure from a relational perspective and encouraged them to keep working on their process of

acceptance. Mothers understood that their connections with their daughters were a key basis of

their daughters' self-esteem and self-affirmation. It became an important motivation for those

mothers moving towards acceptance even though they needed to deal with their own struggles.

On the other hand, the fact that their daughters took an active role to maintain the relationship

and assisted them to have a better understanding about lesbianism kept the mother-daughter dyad

in contact (1992).

In addition to similar experiences that mothers and daughters shared as members of

subjugated groups, feelings of loss and residual sorrow were also the experience that mothers

and daughters could share, even though their feelings came from different perspectives.

Pearlman addressed it in this way:

"While mothers experienced loss of commonality based on traditional sex role

interests and activities, lesbian daughters often feel a similar loss of connection

and wish for common interests, and compare their relationship to their mothers

with their heterosexual siblings. While mothers struggle with feelings of residual

sorrow over the loss of dreams based on the heterosexuality of their daughters,

their daughters too may have to manage a re-surfacing of residual sorrow as

lesbian-a non-neurotic response to the loss of heterosexual privilege and the

chronic traumatizing of homosexuals who need to exist amidst a social context of

institutional hatred" (1992, p. 15-16)

Overall, Pearlman (1992) demonstrated from her participants' interviews that the process

of acceptance of a daughter's sexual identity really varied at different times and mothers' feelings

and behaviors changed. In her later study, Pearlman (2005) further explored what contributed to

a mother's acceptance of her daughter's sexual orientation and "if there was an identifiable

process or sequence by which mothers come to accept a daughter's lesbianism" (2005, p. 120)

with a bigger sample. She conducted a study in which she interviewed three groups of mothers

who learned their daughters were lesbians initially at two different time periods. The first group

of 10 mothers was the participants in her study done in 1990. The second group of 16 mothers

was interviewed in 2000-2001, and the third group of 14 mothers, whose daughters initially came

out as lesbians but later identified as transgender, was also interviewed in 2000-2001.

Among those participants who were recruited from different periods of time, all but one

mother in these three groups were Caucasian and all but one were heterosexual. They were

relatively highly-educated; 60% of them had college and higher degrees. More than half of these

mothers (63%) had participated in or identified with social justice movements before their

daughters' disclosure. After disclosure, 65% of them were or had been members of PFLAG.

However, there were some slight differences among these three groups of mothers. In the first

group, each mother had only one daughter who identified herself as lesbian and no gay son, and

she had known her daughter's lesbianism for at least 2 years. In the second and third groups, the

selection criteria of participants had been less restrictive. Mothers needed to be aware of

daughters' lesbianism for at least 6 months, and some of them had more than one sexual minority child.

Those mothers were asked these following questions: 1) first reactions to learning a daughter's sexual orientation; 2) their feelings, thoughts, and behaviors after learning the daughter's sexual orientation; and 3) the crucial events that helped them to accept the daughter's lesbianism better. Pearlman found that while a mother's personal characteristics and her familiarity with gay and lesbian issues and networks both created a higher level of a mother's acceptance of her daughter's lesbianism, these following relational factors had also been identified as helping mothers accept their daughters' lesbianism better. They were the degree of prior mother-child closeness, the approval of and liking a daughter's partner, and observations that daughters were happier and more comfortable with themselves after coming-out.

In an early-published book, Rafkin (1996) gathered more than 30 mothers' narratives about their thoughts and reflections after they were told of their daughter's sexual orientation. The ethnic/racial background is not clearly indicated in the book, however. Mothers reflected on male partners who their daughters used to date (denial), wonder what they have done to make their daughters "become" like this (self-blaming), and felt that they were unable to understand their daughters' world (loss). Some of them were able to work through these internal struggles and become proud of their daughters, while others continued to struggle with finding a way to fix

the relationship. These personal reflections actually are not very different from sexual minority

children's perceptions which have been stated in previous sections of this review. Those who

already had a close relationship with their daughters took less time to embrace their daughters'

sexual minority identity. Those who held stronger family values against individual happiness and

saw their daughters' sexual orientation as a personal choice were less likely to reach a better

acceptance. Nevertheless, most mothers in this book tended to attribute their puzzles or

difficulties when rearing their lesbian daughters to their daughters' untraditional sexual

orientation.

In summary, this section focuses on parents' reports of their reactions and reflections

upon learning that their child was sexual minority. Parents experienced a similar "coming-out"

process to their sexual minority offspring. Although the level of acceptance varied, parents

basically reported their love and worries for their children. It is noticeable that many parents who

participated in these studies were members of PFLAG or of organizations which advocate sexual

minority rights. While it is an understandable phenomenon, we are nevertheless still left with a

lack of knowledge about how other parents react to their children's self disclosure of a sexual

minority identity.

**Asian-American Sexual Minority and Their Families**

   **The influence of Asian culture.** Several research findings addressed the fact that Asian

culture has been considered relatively conservative regarding issues related to sexual identity and

sexual orientation (Chan, 1997; Hom, 1994; Liu & Chan, 1996). Therefore, sexual minority

individuals with Asian heritage are less likely to "out" themselves to others or participate in

public events. Even though Asian Americans are the most diverse population within themselves

among all major ethnic categories (Ritter and Temdrup, 2002), it is still widely believed in most

Asian subgroups that Asian families take a stronger position in fighting for their family values

(Liu & Chan, 1996; Ritter & Temdrup, 2002; Savin-Williams, 1998b). Moreover, sexual

minority children in Asian American families have to carry guilt that they made their parents fail

to be good parents if they disclose their sexual minority identity. As a result, many of them chose

to stay in the closet (Savin-Williams, 1998b; 2001).

Generally speaking, in Asia, it appears that the vast majority of the sexual minority

population is not out to their families. Despite fearing the consequence of challenging the family

system, the concept of "coming-out" is actually adapted from Western constructs of sexuality and

sexual expressions (Chan, 1997). There is a lack of a language or context to bring up such a topic

in a general family conversation. As a result, even if both parties have sensed unusual dynamics

in their relationship, it is natural for parents to adopt a "don't ask" attitude about their children's

sexual orientation, and for their children have a "don't tell" attitude toward their parents about

their sexual orientation, and for both parents and children to maintain a "not knowing" position

when dealing with sexual minority issues (Chan, 1997).

Same-sex relationships are not recognized in Asian culture, particularly in East Asia, because they do not fit into traditional cultural values, such as Confucianism and Taoism. Liu and Chan (1996) explained Confucianism in this way,

> "The profound influence of Confucianism can be seen in the highly structured
>
> gender and generational roles seen within the East Asian family, in which
>
> parent-child, father-mother, and older sibling-younger sibling roles are well
>
> defined." (p. 139)

In fact, based on Confucianism, the parent-child relationship is the most important one and the foundation of a family. Roles, characteristics and expected social behaviors of individuals, define how people should interact and what to expect in the society. In addition, the highly respected belief of Confucianism has the following two implications: 1) individual identity is less important than familial values and expectations; 2) it is a child's duty to accept the parents' demands and set rules (Liu & Chan, 1996). In claiming one's sexual minority identity "not only is the child rejecting the traditional role of a wife-daughter or son-father, but also that the parents have failed in their role and that the child is rejecting the importance of family and Asian culture" (Chan, 1993, p. 378). Furthermore, there are simply no rules that dictate the hierarchical roles for a same-sex partner in Confucianism. Therefore, the same-sex relationship is

not seen or recognized by society. This causes difficulty for same-sex couples when they

negotiate rules in their relationships. Additionally, under Confucian order, roles for parents and

their children's heterosexual spouse are clearly defined. With same-sex couples, there is no

greater social order to guide parents and the couple to negotiate their roles with one another.

Taoism is also a philosophy and religion which has a great influence in East Asia. This

religion is centered upon the ancient principles of yin and yang, which asserts that "harmony of

yin and yang is the key to happiness and rightful order" (Liu & Chan, 1996, p. 139). Under this

kind of principle, males are associated with yang and females are associated with yin. Therefore,

same-sex relationships are perceived as disruptive to the harmony of the natural order. Buddhism,

another dominant religion that impacts the cultural beliefs in East Asia, has been seen as a

religion that discourages pursuing any form of sexual desire, including homosexual behaviors.

As a result, these three philosophies interweave together in East Asia to create a very solid

system of beliefs about family and interpersonal relationships in which same-sex relationships

are forced to become something not seen and not talked about. In addition, since family systems

have been highly valued and worshiped, individuals who insist on pursuing something that is

against traditional hierarchical family systems, are seen as a shame to the family.

**Asian-American parents' reactions after youth come out**. When there is a conflict

between traditional family systems and individual values, it creates a phenomenon of "not

talking, not knowing" about children's sexual orientation and sexual identity in Asian culture. In

her article, Hom (1994), who was motivated to study Asian American parents' experience

because they were underrepresented in PFLAG, interviewed thirteen parents comprising two

couples and nine mothers. Their ethnicities consisted of four Chinese, four Japanese, three

Filipinos, one Vietnamese, and one Korean. Most of them lived in California. All of the

interviews were conducted in English except one mother who spoke Japanese with her lesbian

daughter as the translator.

There are several interesting findings in Hom's study. First, most parents did not blame

Anglo American culture and assimilation for their children's sexual orientation. Rather, they

questioned themselves about what they might have done to "cause" their children's same-sex

attractions. Second, it was hard for those parents to associate their children's same-sex attractions

with the whole range of affectional, emotional, intellectual and sexual components. They usually

only related same-sex attractions to their dress or behaviors based on traditional gender roles.

Third, those parents often expressed their attitude like this mother, "I can't relate to anything

that's going on with my daughter, but I'm accepting." (1994, p. 23) Last, many parents were

concerned about how their extended family as well as their community thought of their children

and them because of shame. They had fears that they were going to lose the face of the family.

Hom (1994) then suggested that it would be helpful to have parents and children share their

perspectives side by side and learn from each other.

Herdt and Koff (2000) described another interesting adjustment in the process of Asian-American parents' acknowledgement of their child's non-heterosexuality. Even though there is no equivalent concept for a "gay" identity in Asian culture, to uphold strong familial loyalty, it is observed that some Asian parents may put great efforts to integrate the child's sexual minority status into their relationships. On the other hand, for other Asian families, parents will try to accommodate to the child's sexual minority identity as long as the child does not discuss the topic overtly.

In summary, there are only a few studies which focus on sexual minority Asian Americans. These studies did show, however, that Asian American individuals are more likely than whites to experience difficulties when considering coming out to their parents because of feeling strong conflicts with their familial values. In addition, the lack of language about sexuality in Asian culture made it harder to openly address such issues. Parents also tended to adopt an attitude of "not talking, not knowing" as a way to avoid the difficult dialogue. However, some of the parents would try to accept their sexual minority offspring even when they could not relate to their children—because they felt the need to uphold familial loyalty.

**Studies in Taiwan**

Compared with other Asian countries, especially among those countries and regions

which are believed to be strongly affected by Chinese culture, Taiwan is relatively open to sexual

minority issues. Taiwan held its first gay pride parade in 2003, and the parade has become an

annual event since then, with support from LGBT groups and the Taipei City Government, the

biggest city in Taiwan. However, with the atmosphere of homophobia in the society and carrying

the burden of making their family "lose face," which means putting down a family's honor and

dignity, many participants will wear masks or walk along with the parade from a distance. For

many LGBT individuals in Taiwan, coming-out is still "the unbearable heaviness of being".

Chou remarked on the difference between Chinese and Western cultures. For sexual

minority people raised in Chinese culture, Chou (1995) stated that the main pressure comes

from families, not legislation, jobs, government, or religion. It is a phenomenon that is different

from the Western world. For many researchers in Taiwan, this observation of cultural difference

is one motivation to conduct research on the experience of Taiwanese sexual minorities (e.g.,

Chiang, 2007; Chuang, 2008; Kuo 2007). Of those researchers studying sexual minorities in

Taiwan, Cheng (1997) is counted as one of the pioneers.

**Perspectives of sexual minority individuals**. Cheng's study, which was conducted in

1995, was the first field work in Taiwan that I have found which focuses on how gender and

sexuality influences lesbians' relationships with their partners and families of origin (Cheng,

1997). Her participants ranged in age from 25 to 45 and seven of the 18 participants were

coupled. Six participants were or used to be in heterosexual marriages. Eight individuals had

come out to their whole family, others had come out to only a few family members, and a few

participants were still in the closet at the time of Cheng's interviews.

Cheng found that the interwoven impact of heterosexism and patriarchy influenced how

her participants negotiated the coming-out process. Cheng's participants had a shared experience:

they felt less valued by their families because of their gender. There were outliers, but those

daughters had to experience feeling valued by being a main bread earner, for example. In

addition, their families usually expected them to support other family members, but they could

not get reciprocal investment from the family since they were assumed to get married and leave

the family someday (Cheng, 1997).

Cheng also found that her participants tended to feel torn more in their relationships with

their mothers than with their fathers (Cheng, 1997). Their gender and sexual orientation created

extra complexity in the mother-daughter relationship. Brought up as caretakers and trained to

develop a sense of empathy, these daughters were raised as allies of their mothers. They stated

that, while they resonated with the subjugated position that their mothers held in a patriarchal

culture, they also knew that they would not walk the same path that their mothers had taken. As a

result, they experienced strong guilt and a sense of betrayal in the mother-daughter relationship

because they failed to meet their mothers' expectations. Also, their mothers usually were the

persons who urged them to follow heterosexual rules, to suppress their same-sex attractions, and

to behave like straight women to attract men. While they were urged by their mothers to follow

traditional rules, mothers were also found to protect their daughters from the pressure of

patriarchy (Cheng, 1997).

Lack of concepts and the language of practicing or even just describing same-sex

relationships, coming out becomes an enormous pressure to handle. As a result, people tended to

be "not talking, not knowing", which is similar to Hom's (1994) and Chan's finding (1997).

Cheng's participants reported that they evaluated their relationship with family and also the

family's beliefs to decide if they wanted to take any action to reveal their same-sex sexual

orientation. But, since the pressure was huge, very few participants came out to families with a

thorough plan. The truth was that their families usually found out about their sexual orientation

accidentally. If participants did come out, the most common reason given was that they wanted

their families to accept their partners and stop living double lives.

The coming-out process is also very gender-specific. Some researchers have pointed out

that lesbians have to face subjugated positions both in patriarchy and heterosexism. Compared

with gay men, lesbians are more invisible in the Taiwanese society (Chiang, 2007; Kuo, 2007;

Lin, 2003; Yang, 2003). While gay men constantly encounter overt hostility in media or verbal

assaults in slang language, lesbians are simply not discussed or addressed culturally. As a result,

gay men and lesbians may have different experiences in terms of the coming-out process. For example, both Su (2007) and Chuang (2008) conducted studies on the coming-out process. Su's participants were all gay men, while Chuang's were all lesbians. The results showed that one motivation gay men had to come out to their parents was that they felt that their parents could respect their individuality (Su, 2007). However, this motivation was never mentioned by the Chuang's all-lesbian sample.

Lesbians may experience different levels of pressure depending on their gender performance. Butch lesbians tended to be corrected by family members, especially mothers, to modify their masculine behaviors or outfits (Cheng, 1997; Cheng, 2007; Chiang, 2007; Kuo, 2007). Their behavior was gender atypical enough to be spotted and thereby they were more likely to be confronted by their families. On the other hand, femme lesbians had to deal with more "invisible issues" both in the family and in the community (Cheng, 1997).

Regarding how the parents of sexual minority children dealt with disclosure, some researchers addressed this topic based on the child's self-report. Like Lin & Chan (1996), Cheng (1997) also discussed how homosexuality is perceived in Chinese culture. Cheng pointed out that the dichotomous concept of "yin-yang" reinforces heterosexual beliefs. As a result, daughters in her study said that some parents were concerned that their daughters would become unhealthy if they dated women. In addition, many daughters believed that parents were not against

homosexuality; it was the fear of losing face that hindered them from accepting their daughter's

sexual orientation. They feared being seen as inadequate parents if they had LGBT offspring.

Furthermore, some daughters were told that their parents were fine with their daughters having

very close female friends—as long as this did not involve any sexual contact, which may

represent the cultural aspect of desexualizing females.

Chen (2006) interviewed one lesbian and five gay men in Taiwan about their experiences

of coming-out to their families, friends, in church, and in the work place. All of them were

Christian affiliated except one gay man. Not every participant had come out to their families. In

his study, Chen was able to interview the mother of the only lesbian participant, who shared her

struggles between her Christian beliefs and her love for her daughter. For that mother, she

became the buffer between her daughter and her husband. She got along with her daughter's

partner pretty well, but she still held some hopes that her daughter might be married someday.

This mother's "acknowledging (her daughter's lesbianism) but not accepting" attitude

also appears in another study of gay sons' coming-out experience to their parents. Bih (2003)

also described Chinese parents in this way in his article addressing 32 gay men's experience of

coming out, "it is the characteristics of Chinese parents: they will never give up the possibility

that their child might change their sexuality and get married someday—even after being told

directly that their son is gay" (p. 141). Kuo (2007) further pointed out the key aspect of this

phenomenon: "Parents with a gay son will be stigmatized if being gay is stigmatized in the

culture. In other words, parents will share the stigmatized position with their son in the society."

(p. 16) As a result, they want to change their son, and it turns out to be a "face" issue. (Kuo,

2007).

Chuang's more recent study (2008) may be more representative of lesbians' coming out

process to their families and how their families reacted afterwards today. She interviewed nine

lesbians, ranging in age from 22 to 33 who had come out to at least one family member. Seven

had disclosed their sexual orientation to mothers, and none of the participants came out to their

fathers.

Among these nine participants, Chuang found that breaking up with girlfriends was the

most mentioned motivation for coming out. Feeling pressure in a heterosexual world and the

need to be understood were also stressed by her participants. In other words, yearning for family

support was one big reason that participants came out to their families. Participants also thought

about whether they were able to support themselves financially, if they had strong self-identity as

a lesbian, and if they started to see someone regularly at the time of coming out. In terms of

whom to come out to, the level of intimacy with family members was the most essential reason.

The pressure that the member might have to deal with after disclosure was also a factor that

participants considered.

Chuang's participants self-reported their family members' reactions as well. The factors that seemed to influence family members' acceptance were: 1) the relationship with the family member before disclosure; 2) the girlfriend met the expectations that the family member(s) held; 3) the development of self-identity; 4) the acknowledgement of positive information about LGBT; 5) the length of time and the physical distance after disclosure; 6) the ability to support the family and themselves financially; and 7) the attitude toward family members after disclosure. In other words, it was very important for the family to know that the lesbian daughter still cared for and took the family's values into consideration. This result resonated with Chou's discourse in 1995 that family or familial values were the core of the culture, both to sexual minority offspring and to their families.

In summary, studies on sexual minority individuals in Taiwan showed that cultural elements and familial values influenced sexual minority and their parents greatly in terms of dealing with related topics. There seemed no concept in the culture that could provide discourse for people to talk about or address homosexuality. Same-sex attraction was either not functional in terms of building up a family or it was hard for people to imagine how homosexuality worked in the society. As a result, sexual minority individuals tended to take a more indirect approach to coming out, like showing no interest in getting married, or living away from home. If sexual minority adults did come out, they were probably the bread earner of the family, their partners fit

the family's expectation, or they had had a good relationship with the family before coming out. Parents would still hold the hope that their LGBT child could be back on the heterosexual track even after their child had come out.

**Perspectives of parents of sexual minority individuals.** Family is usually described as a sanctuary when people need comfort and energy, but family may mean something different for sexual minority adults and their families. Several interesting themes keep coming up from studies focusing on sexual minority offspring's self-reflections in Taiwan (Tseng, 2007). First, family issues played an important role in the development of one's self-identity for sexual minority. Second, no matter whether sexual minority individuals came out to their families or not, they all felt a great deal of pressure in relation to their families. Third, being successful or having some achievements seemed to be crucial in helping parents accept their sexual minority offspring. From the sexual minority offspring's perspectives, these are all vulnerabilities in relationships with their parents. However, parents also have their vulnerable places. When parents tell their stories about their experiences, their stories seem to share some similarities with their children's stories in terms of struggles, pressure, and self-identity.

The book "Dear Dad and Mom, I am gay: Parents of lesbians and gays talk about their experiences" (Taiwan Tongzhi Hotline Association, 2003), published by a LGBT support association in Taiwan, presented struggles and yearning from both sides. In the book, eight

parents (seven mothers and one father) and nine sexual minority adults (five gays and four

lesbians) were interviewed. The parents shared their experiences of having a sexual minority

child and the children shared their experiences of coming out. Among the parents' narratives,

some themes kept coming up: worrying about their children's future, mourning the loss of their

dreams about their beloved child, and having mixed feelings about whether or not to let others

know they have a child who is gay or lesbian. Most of the parents mentioned that they had a

good relationship with their children before he/she came out. Two interviewees in the parent

group were mothers of a lesbian. Both of them believed that they needed to take some kind of

responsibility for their daughters' sexual identity.

On the other hand, the nine interviewees in the child group came out to their parents in

different ways. Some of them told their parents her/his sexual orientation directly, some of them

were outed by their siblings but never talked about it with their parents by themselves, and some

of them used a non-verbal way to tell their parents that they were sexual minority individuals,

like acting and dressing as the opposite sex. They all shared the struggle of not wanting to

disappoint their parents but hoping to be known as who he/she really was. They also had guilt

about not fulfilling their parents' dreams, therefore they would try harder in order to prove to

their parents that they could still live happily as LGBT. Lesbian daughters who brought their

partners home did not really expect their parents to treat their partner as their spouse. As long as

their partner could be seen as a "best friend" and be welcome to visit, they would feel satisfied

(Taiwan Tongzhi Hotline Association, 2003). The lowering of lesbian daughters' hopes and

expectations of their parents is likely to reflect the guilt they feel over failing family expectations

based on the major philosophies of East Asia.

About the same time, Chang (2004) conducted his research and interviewed three parents

(one father and two mothers) of gay sons trying to explore the other side of the story when

coming out happened. The parents were over 45 years old, and their sons had come out to them 5

years, 4 years, and even 20 years ago respectively when they were interviewed. Most of their

initial reactions were similar to parents in the U.S., like feeling shocked, powerless, worried, sad,

and disappointed, etc. However, the father in the study expressed stronger emotions, like feeling

angry and pain as well as seeing himself as a failure. Mothers expressed more feelings related to

powerlessness and did not know what to do, and they also expressed more worries about if their

gay sons got AIDS and how that would impact the child. What made their experiences different

from the experience of American parents was that it was really hard for them to see their sons'

gayness as something separate from them and as a personal development. All of them said that

their sadness would gradually become less and less, but the feeling of regret would always be

present.

Chang's study was conducted with a very small sample, and he also suggested that his

findings may not be comparable to the experience of parents of lesbians since the gender of the

child matters so much in Asian cultures. The responsibility for males to carry on the family name

was extreme for gay sons (Chang, 2004).

Not many researchers in Taiwan were able to recruit parents with sexual minority

offspring and talk about their stories. A few years after Chang's study, Tseng (2007) and Cheng

(2007) conducted their studies respectively on parents' reactions and processes after knowing

their child's sexual orientation. Both Tseng's and Cheng's participants came from the same

parent's support group, but none of their participants was overlapping. Interestingly, to both of

the researchers, their studies represented their journey as a member of the sexual minority

community in Taiwan.

Tseng is a mother of a lesbian daughter. Her study not only revealed how some parents

went through different stages after learning their child's sexual orientation; she also told a

beautiful story about her coming out as a mother of a lesbian daughter when conducting this

study. The whole experience brought her a new understanding of herself as well as her

relationship with her daughter (Tseng, 2007). Tseng did not reveal that her daughter was a

lesbian at the beginning of recruiting her participants. After encountering great difficulties in

finding potential interviewees, she realized that she was protecting herself, just like what other

parents had done. So she decided to go to the parent support group, be a mother of a young

lesbian, and share her experiences with group members. The whole process felt like a snapshot of

what Tseng's participants had gone through or were dealing with at the time of being interviewed:

feeling shocked and confused, struggling and resistant, facing the struggle and starting to

transform, and finding a new balance and adjusting themselves in the relationship (Tseng, 2007).

Tseng interviewed six parents (five mothers and one father). Their ages ranged from 39 to

63. Four of them had lesbian daughters. Four parents told their spouses while two did not and

offspring ranged in age from 15 to 30 years old. All interviewees felt shocked and hurt, but their

outward reactions varied from their inner feelings. They also expressed chaos in their

parent-child relationships, feeling very negative toward their child's sexual orientation, and

losing their hope for both their future and their child's future. Most of them tried very hard to

control the situation, like analyzing the negative effects of being a sexual minority, commenting

on the child's same-sex relationship, or even asking their child to change their sexual orientation.

However, in order to keep their child close to them, those parents also learned that they needed to

change themselves. They integrated into an unfamiliar world through meeting other LGBT

people or addressing related topics in their daily conversations with the gay or lesbian child.

Gradually, these parents developed new values and found new priorities for their lives. While

some parents still had hope that their child might change in the future, they all anticipated having

a better relationship with their LGBT offspring (Tseng, 2007).

Since her participants were recruited from the parent support group, these participants had all taken action to understand their child's life, which may not be easy for other parents of LGBT children in Taiwan. Interestingly, unlike studies in the U.S., religion or some religious beliefs were adopted to help parents to face this unexpected challenge in their lives. Most of these parents would soothe themselves by believing what had happened was a kind of "homework" in this life: they had to learn to let go of their persistence (Tseng, 2007).

Interestingly, Cheng's study (2007) is conducted from a gay son's perspective, and he is also a social activist in the LGBT movement in Taiwan. Cheng has been participating in one of the biggest LGBT organizations in Taiwan for more than a decade, and his study not only reflects his personal journey of realizing his struggle in his relationship with his parents, but also documents how the parent support group was born and then becomes the irreplaceable resource for many LGBT youths and their parents.

In his study, Cheng found that not every LGBT offspring could talk about LGBT issues with their parents even after they had come out. Based on parents' self-reflection, the children could let their parents know that they were gay or lesbians, but it was a totally different thing in terms of addressing LGBT issues in their daily conversations. One reason might be the nature of their parent-child relationships: they were not used to communicating on all sorts of issues, so homosexuality was just another issue with which they did not communicate, which also

resonated with the researcher's personal experience (Cheng, 2007).

Later, Taiwan Tongzhi Hotline Association (2007) published a coming-out guidebook for

LGBT children for reference, and the information and suggestions provided in the book are

based on years of working with parents with LGBT children as well as children themselves. In

this step-by-step guidebook, it urges those who want to come out to their parents to do some

preparation. First, they should evaluate their relationships with parents, for example, if they

communicate a lot with their parents or what kind of relationship they expect after coming-out. It

also reminds those children to assess parents' values on LGBT issues, familial beliefs and their

familiarity about LGBT culture. Second, select time and place to come out carefully. Coming-out

should take place with consideration of parents' feelings and reactions. Third, stay in the

relationship and keep working with parents after the disclosure. Most parents need time to digest

the information and adjust themselves, as the disclosure might be a big shock for them. Also it

encourages LGBT offspring to become more mature to help their parents to go through the

challenging process. Overall all, the author of the book reminds LGBT offspring that disclosure

should be prepared and planned with much consideration for parents and respect for their family

values.

In summary, the findings from studies conducted in Taiwan were both similar and

dissimilar to those conducted in the United States. Sexual minority offspring felt pressure in both

countries to come out to their parents, and experienced guilt in disappointing parents, while not

expecting parents to accept their sexual identity. In terms of parents' reactions, Taiwanese parents

tended to not give up the hope that their child would get married, and it was harder for those

parents to see their child's sexual identity as separate from themselves.

**Conclusion**

Among all the studies conducted in the U.S. on the relationship between lesbian

daughters and their mothers, researchers have gathered data from both mothers and daughters

(references have been stated as above). Also, the studies conducted in Taiwan have shown

findings from both sides. However, there is no research that interviews both sides together,

neither in the U.S. nor in Taiwan. Do mothers' experiences fit with daughters' and vice versa?

How do mothers' reactions toward their daughter's disclosure shape the daughter's thoughts and

feelings, and then the daughter's reaction? This study tried to fill the gap, the gap of relational

dynamics and of different cultural perspectives on the coming-out experience, and then provide

suggestions for clinical work and research in family therapy.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

**Phenomenology**

I adapted a qualitative method of phenomenology to conduct this study. According to

Creswell (1998), a phenomenological study "describes the meaning of the lived experiences for

several individuals about a concept or the phenomenon" (p. 51). This study addressed the

interactive process between a mother and a daughter: how do they work together to maintain

their relationship after the daughter reveals her lesbian sexual identity? This study also explored

how mothers and daughters co-create their narratives together. By sharing their stories at the

same interview, I was able to witness their struggles, conflicts, and connections in detail,

especially the changes in their relational dynamics. Furthermore, this study was held in Taiwan, a

country that is deeply influenced by East Asian culture. It has been stated in the literature review

section that cultural context has a great influence on families and their experiences. Considering

this study focused on a human experience that has not been conducted in such a format of

research in Taiwan and on an experience which we still have not had much knowledge about in

the family therapy field, as a result, a qualitative method of phenomenology met the purpose of

this study to understand this interpersonal phenomenon through individuals' describing the

meaning of their lived experiences (Creswell, 1998).

In the following sections, I briefly introduce basic concepts and assumptions of

phenomenology in general as well as in the family therapy field, state my position and belief in

this study, and explain the data collection procedures.

**Basic Concepts and Assumptions of Phenomenology**

There are two main approaches in phenomenology used in social science: descriptive

(eidetic) phenomenology and interpretive (hermeneutic) phenomenology (Cohen&Omery, 1994).

**Descriptive phenomenology** is introduced by E. Husserl, a German mathematician. He was

interested in epistemological questions, for example, "How is it that we know about man?" The

goal of descriptive phenomenology is to bring out the crucial components of the lived

experiences specific to a group of people (Lopez & Willis, 2004). According to Moustakas

(1994), Husserl emphasized that researchers look for the essential structure or underneath

meanings of the experience, and they focus on their participants' intentionality of consciousness

in which experiences are expressed as "what they look like" and "what they are about". An

important belief of Husserlian phenomenology is that it is essential for the researcher to remove

his/her prior expert knowledge and personal bias to get participants' essential lived experiences

in a study. As a result, some researchers argue that a thorough literature review and specific

research questions are not necessary before approaching participants' lived experience (Streubert

& Carpenter, 1999). Bracketing, for example, is introduced to help the researcher constantly

reduce the effect that his/her personal bias or preconceptions might have on the interpretations of participants' lived experience.

In addition, a descriptive phenomenologist believes that commonalities in the narratives of the participants should be identified and a generalized description of their lived experience can be presented as the true nature of this particular phenomenon being studied. With this perspective, reality is considered objective and independent of history and context (Lopez & Willis, 2004). Moreover, Husserl (1970) also believes the idea of radical autonomy. How the individual's freedom to choose is impacted by culture, society and politics is not the concern in the approach of descriptive phenomenology.

Heidegger, a student of Husserl, then modified and challenged some of Husserl's assumptions. His ideas, which comprised the **interpretive phenomenology**, suggest that the relation of the individual to his *lifeworld* (a term Heidegger used) should be the focus of phenomenological study. He believed that individuals' realities are deeply influenced by the world in which they live (Heidegger, 1962). In other words, while a descriptive phenomenologist is interested in understanding the common concepts or purely descriptive categories of a particular lived experience, an interpretive phenomenologist is more interested in understanding the details about how that particular lived experience is placed in context (Lopez & Willis, 2004). Therefore, rather than radical freedom, Heidegger (1962) insisted that situated freedom is what

individuals have in their everyday life, implying that their freedom to choose is restricted by the specific conditions of their daily lives. People still make choices, but their choices are shaped and organized by the contexts in which they live. So, in interpretive phenomenology, it is the interpretation of the stories provided by participants in relation to various contexts that is essential.

In addition, unlike descriptive phenomenology, the researcher's expert knowledge and presuppositions are valuable and necessary to the study in interpretive phenomenology. The researcher's knowledge base can lead to specific ideas about how the study needs to proceed to produce useful knowledge (Lopez & Willis, 2004). However, bracketing is still expected by explaining the researcher's framework, such as his/her assumptions and personal contexts in relation to the topic. Moreover, interpretive phenomenologists believe that there is no one true meaning produced by any interpretive study. The meanings that are stated in the research findings have to be logical and reasonable within the study framework, and they need to reflect the realities of the participants. It is also necessary for the researcher to interpret the meanings for practice and future research to create informed and culturally sensitive knowledge in the field (Lopez & Willis, 2004).

Since my study topic was shaped and influenced by the contexts greatly, I decided to choose interpretive phenomenology as the approach of my methodology. Boss, Dahl and Kaplan

(1996) further addressed the following the philosophical assumptions of interpretive

phenomenology in the field of family therapy: 1) our knowledge is socially constructed; 2)

researchers are part of the phenomenon they study; 3) knowledge can be gained in every aspect

of our life; 4) bias cannot be avoided in every research regardless of method; 5) researcher and

participant are both considered epistemologists; 6) language and meaning of everyday life are

significant; 7) objects and events can mean different things to different people in a family. Hence,

Boss et al. suggest that it is essential to overtly recognize a researcher's position and possible

bias, have enough family members involved in the study to gain different perspectives in a

natural setting, and respect the family as expert of our research questions.

**Bracketing**

Bracketing refers to the process of making overt one's assumptions about the

phenomenon in order to prevent those assumptions from blocking the researcher's best

understanding and interpretation of participants' experiences (Moustakas, 1994). Therefore, since

this study was on how daughters' disclosure impacts the mother-daughter relationship, as a

lesbian and a Taiwanese woman, I acknowledge that I cannot remain objectively outside this

experience. I will further state what I might bring with me during the research in the next section.

**Researcher's Personal Experience.** My personal experience definitely contributes to my

motivation for conducting this study. As I have mentioned previously, I was very lucky to be able

to come out to my mother before starting to interview my participants. However, since I did not

recognize my attraction to women until I met my first girlfriend at age 29, the development of

my sexual minority identity as well as my coming out process is quite different from that of my

participants.

Compared with the participants, it seems that the development of my sexual minority

identity was somewhat "condensed" in time. As I described in the introduction, I met my first

girlfriend when I was 29 and had never thought of being with a female partner before. Therefore,

my identity was defined by my relationship status. In addition, I met my second girlfriend while

studying in the U.S. With the support of my graduate program and relatively liberal environment

in New York State, I gradually embraced my lesbian identity and came out to several of my best

friends in Taiwan. Studying in the U.S. seemed to create a well-nurtured place to develop my

lesbian identity.

The process of developing my identity definitely had less tension due to being away from

my family. The physical distance from my family saved me from having direct conflicts with my

parents when I sensed any discomfort about my lesbianism from them. I did not have to go

through being confronted with discomfort and shame from them, and then working through those

difficult emotions. However, as my lesbian identity became stronger, being authentic became a

big challenge for me. Moreover, I felt that I had to choose between being a good daughter and a

good lover whenever I flew back to Taiwan. Not feeling able to be both roles at the same time, I

constantly felt the stress of performing in certain ways to please both sides. Unfortunately, I did

not really please anyone, not even myself. After living a split life for couple of years, and losing

my intimate relationship at the end of 2006, I came out to my father. I told him about the struggle

I had and also worried about losing his love. To my surprise, he took the news without any

surprise, as I have described in the introduction.

After coming out to my father, I broke up with my girlfriend a few months later. I felt that

my father gave me the courage to break up because I did not have to be in a same-sex

relationship only to prove that I am lesbian. Moreover, my mother came to ask me about my love

life because my father told her that I was no longer with that girlfriend. Although my father did

not keep his promise about not telling my mother, he helped my coming-out journey to be more

complete. After disclosing my sexual orientation to my parents, not only did my lesbian identity

become more solid, but also I finally felt that I could integrate my spilt selves and felt whole

again.

My parents never show their loss, disappointment, or self-blame, at least not in an

explicit way. My father even accompanied me to the parents' support group once. It was a very

touching moment when I saw him raising his hand and saying that he accepted me totally.

However, after going to that support group, we have not really addressed the issue in depth, like

his perspective on LGBT individuals, his process of acceptance, or how he feels about the experience of coming out as a parent of a lesbian. On the one hand, like many Taiwanese families, sharing emotions or feelings sometimes can be more difficult than disclosure. On the other hand, maybe I have not been ready to take care of my father's emotions, so neither of us have brought up conversations on related topics. One thing my father did say was he had no problem accepting me because I was his daughter, which was the answer when I asked for his advice on how to help other parents to accept their child's same-sex attraction.

As to my mother, she has always been greatly influenced by my father's opinion. Since my father has not blamed her or treated my sexual orientation as something unacceptable, it helped my mother feel relieved and then take my disclosure in a more positive way. After coming out, we had several conversations on whom I used to date with and what my research was about. She also showed me several reports on the newspaper when she felt that might help me in conducting my study. Compared with my father, she has showed more interest and asked more questions, at least for several years after my disclosure.

Both of my parents reacted in a better way than I expected. Now I can tell them directly that I go to gay pride events, lead support groups for lesbians, and go out with friends of the LGBT community. They also stopped asking me questions about getting married. They used to look embarrassed when being asked about my marriage before but not now. They have learned to

let me deal with those questions by myself. The only thing they are concerned about now is my

career and my prospects for the future.

**Self-reflexivity.** From my personal experience, I feel my original relationship with each

parent decided how my disclosure was treated. For instance, I know that I am my father's child,

and he has always wanted me to pursue higher education. So as long as there is no conflict

between my career choice and my love life, he has no problem accepting my sexual orientation.

Also, I know my father's attitude has significantly influenced my mother's willingness to accept

this. Therefore, when I decided to come out, my father was the first parent to come out to.

I feel grateful that I was able to disclose my sexual identity to my parents before the

interviews started. As a result, I was able to understand better the mothers' struggles, sadness, or

disappointment when they revealed these kind of strong emotions during the interviews.

However, I still noticed that I asked more questions whenever I heard mothers discuss their

expectations about their daughters. I followed their sharing and invited mothers to talk more

about their expectations, and then I invited daughters to tell their mothers how they felt and

thought. Interestingly, daughters usually responded to their mother expectations actively without

me asking their thoughts or feelings. Maybe it was because those daughters and I shared a

similar cultural background.

In addition, I also noticed that I showed more interest in couple issues. In my personal

experience, I went through the struggle of choosing sides between my ex-girlfriend and my

parents. My mother even told me once that she disliked my ex-girlfriend. Therefore, I found

myself showing a lot of interest in how mothers or parents treated their daughter's partners.

However, after discussions with my advisor, I realized that I was still influenced by the idea that

I wanted to fulfill my parents' expectations. Then I realized that mothers' or parents' concern for

same-sex partners often came from the worry for their daughters' life after getting old.

Discussions with my advisor helped me to acknowledge that my personal experience may have

impact on data collection as well as analysis.

Reflexive notes were also used to help me bracket personal experiences and assumptions

that might block my objectivity. I wrote down self-observation before and after each interview in

the note, which included what I had observed during the interview and then my assumptions

about the observation to help me develop introspection about what kind of cultural lens I might

bring with me to the interview. In addition, I also paid attention to what my role was during the

interview. For instance, I found out that I seemed to react to a mother's comment as the

daughter's ally rather than a researcher in one particular interview. Then I put down this

experience after interviewing that dyad in the note to remind myself. Also, with the knowledge

about two cultures, I found that some questions might be meaningful in English but harder to

understand in Chinese (e.g. "If children are a gift from God, how do you think about your

daughter?"). As a result, I changed the question to fit into the cultural context in Taiwan. For an

example of a reflexive note see Appendix E.

**Trustworthiness and Verification**

There are different strategies to ensure trustworthiness and verification of data in

qualitative studies, which are equivalent to issues of reliability and validity in quantitative studies.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) provided these strategies as follows: credibility, transferability,

dependability, and confirmability.

Credibility is similar to the idea of internal validity in quantitative research, meaning that

if the researcher accurately portrays his/her participants' experiences, the research is credible.

Several methods are suggested to attain credibility, like persistent observation, triangulation, and

member checking (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Member checking and triangulation are the two

methods that have been utilized the most. Member checking means that the researcher will give

his/her participants copies of transcripts and the summary of the interview to invite those

participants to judge if their experiences have been fully reflected. Triangulation means the

researcher will have multiple and different resources, methods, and theories to establish

corroborating evidence (Creswell, 1998), making sure that the researcher's interpretation reflects

the phenomenon.

In my study, I addressed the credibility issue by applying persistent observation, member

checking, and triangulation. I sent transcripts and my observation during the interview process to my participants to see if they wanted to make any change or to further clarify their words. I also participated in several support groups for parents and LGBT individuals in Taiwan and became more familiar with the culture and the language. In terms of applying the method of triangulation, I had an internal auditor, who is also the advisor of this study, who randomly went through half of my transcripts and checked if we highlighted similar themes. As for the external auditor, she was one of my colleagues who has experience conducting phenomenological research, comes from Taiwan and is also trained with family therapy disciplines. She reviewed one third of the transcribed interviews and analyzed them. We then compared our results. With both auditors I remained in close contact and consulted with them within the process of the study.

Transferability refers to if the researcher provides enough descriptive data so that readers can transform information to other settings and determine whether findings can be transformed due to some similar characteristics (Creswell, 1998). This concept is similar to external validity in quantitative research. Transferability can be attained by providing rich, thick description in the result section. In order to obtain transferability, I put direct quotes and statements from transcripts to include as much information as possible in the document. However, since my interviews were conducted in Chinese, I had to translate all quotes and statements into English. I hired two translators to translate quotes and statements that I put in the findings section to

prevent the possible violation of privacy of translating the whole transcript. I also

double-checked the translation to make sure that the accuracy and the comprehensiveness of the

data was preserved.

Dependability refers to the stability and predictability of data, and it is equivalent to the

concept of reliability in quantitative research. Confirmability refers to the characteristics of data,

similar to the concept of objectivity in quantitative research. Both dependability and

confirmability can be accomplished by using triangulation, reflexive journaling, and bracketing.

Triangulation and bracketing have been described in preceding paragraphs. Reflexive journaling

means the researcher writes down his/her own reflections related to the study, the decisions

regarding changes of the study, and the overall process of the study. I used the reflexive

journaling throughout the entire process of this study.

## Data Collection and Analysis

### Recruitment of Participants

In this study, I interviewed nine mother-daughter dyads in which daughters were over 18

years old and both parties were willing to be interviewed together to share their experiences of

coming out. Considering the challenge that I might not be able to meet with many

mother-daughter dyads who had gone through coming out and were willing to share their stories,

I decided only to set up two criteria regarding participants' contexts to eliminate themes

emerging from the mother-daughter interview becoming too diverse: daughters were between 18

to 40 years old and had no children when they were interviewed. Mothers might become more

supportive and be more accepting if their daughters had children. Therefore, the criterion of

daughters having no children was added.

I received the IRB approval of Syracuse University before the recruitment. Then I started

to recruit participants through a lesbian organization which held monthly lesbian support groups

in Taiwan. By being a facilitator of groups focusing on mother-daughter relationships, I spread

the information and hoped to recruit participants who were willing to be interviewed with their

mothers. But recruitment was challenging at the beginning. Snowballing was also utilized to

recruit possible participants since this population was difficult to identify. Since I was not well

known to the LGBT community in Taiwan and the topic was very personal, I usually introduced

my study by sharing my coming-out story first. It took me about two months before I set up my

first interview. By word of mouth, I gradually recruited more participants who met my criteria.

Nine dyads were recruited and interviewed in about eight months, from October 2007 to May

2008. The interview process stopped after saturation occurred in categories and themes. Based on

Moustakas (1994), this implies that most of the experience (phenomenon) had been explored and

described.

After my participants told me that they were willing to be interviewed, I sent them the

consent form (see Appendix A) and the list of interview questions (see Appendix B) through

emails. By emailing them the questions first, I hoped to minimize the participants' worries and

fear of meeting with a stranger and their mother-daughter relationship might be hurt because of

the interview. I was also aware that their responses might be different or more spontaneous if

they did not know the interview questions beforehand. I then discussed with my participants

about the time and the place that were convenient to them to have the interview. Since I needed

the mother and the daughter to be interviewed together, I asked either mother or daughter to ask

the other's opinion and convenience. In this study, seven dyads were invited or contacted through

daughters and two were invited through mothers.

**Interview Process**

My participants came from four different cities in Taiwan, and half of them lived in the

capital of Taiwan. The interviews were held at the participants' home or in a restaurant,

depending on their requests. Before the interview started, I had them read and sign the consent

form. Then they were given a Chinese copy of the form. I also explained to them that I was going

to record the whole interview, but if they felt uncomfortable during the process or even wanted to

stop recording, they were welcome to do so. The last step was to ask my participants again if

they wanted to ask me any questions even though I had welcomed them to do so in my previous

emails. Many mothers were curious about why I wanted to do this research and my experience of

disclosure. After sharing my story, the interview was able to begin and went smoothly. The

average interview time was two hours, and one dyad was even interviewed for four hours

because they addressed more family dynamics. I interviewed most dyads only once because of

the difficulty of arranging a convenient time for both parties. However, I interviewed one mother

and one daughter a second time, who were from different dyads, since I felt some topics had not

been fully discussed in their previous interviews.

After finishing the transcripts, I emailed them to my participants immediately and invited

them to correct mistakes or change the words if they wanted. I also asked them questions where I

felt confused. Most participants did not have any opinion about the transcript, and only one

participant asked to delete some content to protect her privacy. The analyzed data was the

corrected version. All interviews were done three years ago and I did not write this dissertation

until last year. Considering that it might interfere with my participants' life, I did not send them a

brief summary of their interviews.

**Analyzing Data**

Generally, I analyzed data in Chinese, the language I used when interviewing the

mother-daughter dyads. I believed that I was able to describe the essential elements of their

experiences more accurately because I analyzed the data based on the language used in the

interviews. The four basic analytical steps of the phenomenological research method Giorgi

(1985) described in his article are the steps I followed. First, the researcher reads the whole transcript in order to get the general idea about the experience. Second, the researcher goes back to re-read the text again with the specific goal of finding "meaning units" within the phenomenon being studied. Third, once "meaning units" have been identified, the researcher then goes through all these units and transforms them into the "psychological insight" which is contained in them more directly. Finally, the researcher synthesizes all the transformed meaning units into "a consistent statement of the structure of learning" (p. 19).

After analyzing each interview transcript, I organized concepts mentioned by different dyads. With understanding about the Taiwanese culture as well as the structure of the family, I had a framework in mind to help me identify which elements of their experiences were unique and dissimilar from one another. Regarding which part of the story to be included in the results, if only one dyad addressed that concept or that aspect in their life and it was not directly related to the experience of disclosure, I did not include that part of participants' life in the result. For example, one dyad mentioned the mother's depression and how it influenced their parent-child relationship. However, since it did not influence the mother's process of acceptance, I did not put that part of the data in the result. On the other hand, when one aspect of the participants' experience was mentioned several times by different dyads, I would present it in the results section. I also discussed which sections to keep and which sections to take out with my advisor.

In terms of the wording of the categories and themes, they came up mostly based on the words or

sentences participants used in the interview, or a broad description of the concept they shared.

Then I translated categories and themes into English. The obtained psychological structure then

becomes the finding of this particular phenomenon, which, in my study, was the Taiwanese

mother-daughter dyads' experiences of how coming out impacted their relationships.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS

**Introduction**

This chapter clarifies the crucial structure of parent-child disclosure experiences for both

lesbian daughters and their mothers from their dyadic interviews. Demographic information for

each dyad is introduced first. Then transcripts of each interview were analyzed and areas of

commonality between interviewees determined. These areas of commonality create an

overarching structure that is essential to all the dyads and their stories. "Domains",

"sub-domains" and "categories" emerged after organizing areas of commonality. For instance,

within the Predisclosure Context, there were statements like "We have a great mother-daughter

relationship and we can talk about everything" or "We did not talk much". These statements then

became part of the sub-domain Mother-Daughter Relationships. Each domain and sub-domains

are defined, and the summary of each dyad's story is also introduced below. In order to help the

readers' comprehension, the first names of mothers are typed in a standard script but the first

names of their lesbian daughters are typed in *italics*.

**Participant Demographics**

Nine mother-daughter dyads, or eighteen people, participated in this study. Participants

ranged in age from 19 to 60; the average age of daughters was 28 and the average age of mothers

was 55. Four of the interviews occurred in participants' homes, and the rest occurred in a place

where participants felt comfortable to talk. These nine interviews occurred in different cities and

a rural area in Taiwan, from north to south. Names of participants and other identifying

information have been changed to protect their identities.

For two dyads, the disclosure occurred over 10 years ago. In four dyads disclosure was

5-10 years ago. In three dyads disclosure was 3-5 years ago. For five dyads, mother and daughter

lived in the same house when disclosure occurred. The youngest age of disclosure was 15, and

eight of the daughters came out to their mothers before 24. All the mothers were in a

heterosexual marriage when the disclosure occurred. They were neither divorced nor widowed

when their daughter came out to them.

Four of the daughters are the oldest child in the family, four of the daughters are the

second child of the family (these families have only two children), and one daughter is the

middle child. As to other demographic information, eight mothers have graduated from high

school or above, and one mother has only had six years of school education. Two mothers are

affiliated with Western religions (one is Catholic and one is another type of Christian), three

mothers are affiliated with Eastern religions (one is Buddhist and two follow traditional

Taiwanese folk religion), and four mothers have no particular religious affiliation. For a complete

list of demographic information see Appendix F.

**Domains**

Based on my research questions, I invited participants to talk about their coming-out

stories, how they worked through the process and asked them to talk about their mother-daughter

relationship and its interface with the coming out process. Participants addressed their

interactions and their mother-daughter relationships first, and then told me about the disclosure

event and the impact afterwards. It became clear that the phenomenon of disclosure is best

understood if it can be divided into different stages based on a timeline: before disclosure, the

actual event, and after disclosure.

As a result, four domains emerged from analysis of interview data: Predisclosure Context,

Disclosure Event, Early Experience of Disclosure, and Long Term Experience of Disclosure.

Sub-domains, categories, and themes are used to further delineate the domains and provide more

detail of the phenomenon. A chart of each domain is provided in Appendix D.

**Predisclosure Context.** The Predisclosure Context is defined as any familial relationship

dynamic or other context prior to disclosure that appeared to influence how disclosure was

experienced. The Predisclosure Context includes these sub-domains: the Mother-daughter

Relationship, Mother's or Parents' beliefs, Family Dynamics, and Familiarity with LGBT

Culture. The mother-daughter relationship was the only relationship that was specifically asked

about in the original interview questions. Other sub-domains and associated categories came up

naturally during the interview as the coming-out stories were elaborated gradually.

**Disclosure Event.** The Disclosure Event is defined as a specific moment when a daughter's same sex attraction is acknowledged by her mother, either directly or indirectly. While more than half of the daughters disclosed their same sex attractions to their mothers directly, others were either discovered accidentally or outed by their siblings. Sub-domains of Disclosure Event are as following: Clues before Coming-out, if mothers had speculations before acknowledging daughters' same sex attraction; Reasons for Disclosing, where daughters recalled why they wanted to come out to their mothers even though it might not have been a preplanned event; Actual Events, specific descriptions of the disclosure event; and Immediate Aftermath of the disclosure of both sides, in which participants addressed their emotions and reactions after daughters' same sex attraction were acknowledged or revealed.

**Early Experience of Disclosure.** Early Experience of Disclosure refers to the period right after daughters came out to mothers and then began to process the experience. Sub-domains include Mother's Responses to the Disclosure, Daughter's Responses after the Disclosure, Changes in the Relationships, Other Responses from the Family, and Meaningful Events. This period of time spans the first six months to one year after disclosure. However, some participants whose disclosure event was more than ten years ago had a difficult time remembering the exact time, early disclosure experience is better conceived of as initial reactions to disclosure. For

some dyads, Meaningful Events can be seen as a key transition in the relationship and have a great impact on their long-term experience of disclosure.

**Long-Term Experience of Disclosure.** Long-term experience of disclosure is defined as the process whereby participants learned to digest and embrace their differences with more self-reflection and insights about their mother-daughter relationships. Sub-domains include Mother's Level of Acceptance, Father's Level of Acceptance, Reasons for Acceptance, Challenges for Acceptance, Learning from the Entire Process, and Hopes and Concerns. Rather than showing mothers' level of acceptance and their experiences only, fathers' reactions are also presented since fathers' reactions have an impact on how mothers deal with their experience of disclosure.

## Dyads

### Georgia and *Johnny*

Georgia (52, heterosexual mother) raised *Johnny* (22, butch lesbian daughter) in a big city in northern Taiwan. Georgia raised *Johnny* with a strong belief that she wanted *Johnny* to be independent and happy; therefore she made a great effort to let *Johnny* decide what she wanted to do ever since *Johnny* was a little girl. Georgia also added fun and humor intentionally in her interactions with *Johnny*. Both *Johnny* and Georgia described their relationship being close and like friends.

Georgia had noticed that *Johnny* did not like to dress in girl's clothes and never played

with dolls when she was little, but Georgia only thought that *Johnny* was somewhat gender

neutral. *Johnny* went through relationship issues in junior high school. As a result, she could not

take care of her academic work well and was seen as a troublesome student in school. When

Georgia and her husband questioned *Johnny* about her bad performance in school, *Johnny* wrote

a note, "I am homosexual!" She used that as an excuse to explain why she had performed poorly

in school and then ran away from the house as well as her parents' questioning.

Georgia and her husband were not surprised by *Johnny's* disclosure. They told *Johnny*

that she still needed to take care of her schoolwork even though she was a lesbian, and they

started to do their work to understand the LGBT population. *Johnny* had to deal with more

challenges after she was in senior high school, and Georgia became *Johnny's* best "team

member" fighting prejudice from school authorities and other parents. Georgia also became very

involved in a parents' support group to help other parents adjust to and embrace their LGBT

children better.

*Johnny* and Georgia both agree that the disclosure has brought them closer. Both stated

that they felt proud of each other in terms of the progress they have made, compared with other

LGBT individuals and their family members. Although *Johnny* could not understand why

Georgia devoted so much time to the parents' support group, at the time of the interview, she was

able to see the importance of Georgia's work. Georgia talked about how much she appreciated being able to learn about a different culture by being *Johnny's* mother. She stated that she would keep working in this area and help other LGBT families.

**Wanda and *Jennifer***

Wanda (51, heterosexual mother) raised *Jennifer* (24, lesbian daughter) in a city in northern Taiwan. Wanda stated that she saw taking care of the family and each member's needs as the first priority in her life. *Jennifer* also described Wanda as a super mother with enormous love for her three children. Both of them agreed that they have a close relationship built upon Wanda's unconditional love for *Jennifer* and *Jennifer's* complete trust in Wanda. Basically, they said, in describing their relationship that they talk a lot and share each other's lives.

*Jennifer* has a younger sister who has suffered severe heart problems since she was born. Once she was born, the responsibility of taking care of her 24/7 fell on Wanda's shoulder mostly. Although Wanda and her husband had a good relationship, with the patriarchal beliefs rooted in their family, Wanda believed that she could only depend on *Jennifer* when she needed help. Gradually, *Jennifer* began to have strong reactions to her father's not supporting her mother and to her paternal grandmother's unreasonable demands on Wanda. As a result, she moved out of the house due to the family dynamics and her burgeoning same-sex relationship.

*Jennifer* came out to her mother because she wanted her mother to know her girlfriend

and share her happiness. However, it was not easy for Wanda to accept the disclosure. It was even harder for her husband. Wanda wanted to support *Jennifer* because she knew that traditional heterosexual marriages devalue women, but she also had enormous pressure from her husband to change *Jennifer*. As a result, Wanda constantly felt pulled between her husband and *Jennifer*. Our interview was actually the first time that *Jennifer* and Wanda were able to sit down and sort out each other's thoughts on this topic after *Jennifer* came out to her.

Wanda became more accepting of *Jennifer's* sexual identity over time. Although, at the time of the interview, she had some hope that *Jennifer* would date boys someday, she was learning that it was not something that *Jennifer* was capable of doing. As to *Jennifer*, she stated that she could understand her mother's struggle from the perspective of being a woman in this patriarchal society. She also learned that her mother may need more time to embrace her more fully.

**Sylvia and *Man-Shuan***

Sylvia (53, heterosexual mother) raised *Man-Shuan* (19, butch lesbian) in a city in central Taiwan. Sylvia described *Man-Shuan* as a self-contained person, who rarely talked to her mother about her thoughts. *Man-Shuan* agreed with her mother's comments, adding that she used to do what she liked without asking for her parents' advice first. Both of them reported that they had had a rough relationship until *Man-Shuan's* 12th grade.

The biggest conflict between Sylvia and *Man-Shuan* happened in *Man-Shuan's* 10th grade. *Man-Shuan* decided to transfer to a night school and looked for a daytime job in order to be independent. Sylvia felt shocked and hurt by *Man-Shuan's* decision because she wanted *Man-Shuan* to be a traditional student. They argued constantly about this decision. Moreover, *Man-Shuan* was involved in a financial dispute with a man, and the man started to threaten the family both physically and emotionally. Sylvia and her husband had to sue the man eventually. The whole process lasted for 2-3 years until the lawsuit was settled outside court.

Both Sylvia and *Man-Shuan* agreed that this incident was the biggest event in their relationship. Compared with this incident, *Man-Shuan's* disclosure of her sexual orientation was less shocking to Sylvia. Sylvia had noticed from *Man-Shuan's* behavior that she was not a typical girl. Sylvia also found some clues in *Man-Shuan's* diary that *Man-Shuan* liked girls. Her counseling background made her leave some room for *Man-Shuan* to explore her sexual orientation before *Man-Shuan* really came out to her. Therefore, when *Man-Shuan* did tell her parents that she was a lesbian, Sylvia was more concerned about whom *Man-Shuan* was dating rather than which gender she dated. Sylvia's husband was also open and accepting of *Man-Shuan's* disclosure.

Sylvia and *Man-Shuan* both described being satisfied with each other's progress after *Man-Shuan's* coming out. Although Sylvia had concerns about *Man-Shuan's* short-lived

romances, she learned that it may be necessary for *Man-Shuan* to learn from her own experiences.

*Man-Shuan* stated that she was proud that her mother was able to teach and counsel others about

LGBT issues. What they wanted to work more on in their relationship seemed to be their

communication patterns, rather than their differences in sexual identity.

**Linda and *Joey***

Linda (58, heterosexual mother) and *Joey* (38, lesbian daughter) live in a small town in

northeastern Taiwan. *Joey's* father is a ship's captain and was only home once or twice a year

while *Joey* was growing up, leaving Linda effectively as a single parent. Being the oldest child in

the family, *Joey* was given the responsibility of taking care of her younger sisters. As a result,

Linda and *Joey* built a kind of "partnership": Linda sometimes had to rely on *Joey's* help and

advice to solve her disputes with her husband's family.

*Joey* did not like dresses when she was little. Even *Joey's* father would bring jeans instead

of skirts to her every time he came home from a trip. *Joey* described that her father raised her as

if she had been the son in the family. She started to date girls when she was around 20. With a

belief that there was nothing wrong with same-sex relationships, she took her younger sisters

with her when she went out with her girlfriend.

*Joey* did not know if she became a kind of role model to her sisters, but one of her

younger sisters started to date girls too, and that sister was more upfront about her same-sex

relationship. When *Joey's* sister was confronted by Linda about her being too intimate with a girl, *Joey's* sister outed *Joey*. Linda was very shocked by the news that she had two daughters who were lesbians. She spent a few days digesting the news, and she realized that it was impossible to change who her daughters were. Without the knowledge that her sister had outed her, *Joey* told Linda later that she had broken up with her girlfriend. This was when Linda disclosed to *Joey* that she knew about her sexual orientation.

At the time of our interview, Linda was accepting of her daughters and was treating her daughters' girlfriends like her own daughters. She still, however, wanted to keep her daughters' sexual identity from her husband and other extended family members. She felt great pressure knowing that they would blame her. *Joey* stated that she believed her mother's support was helping her to keep writing lesbian novels. Although *Joey's* father has never been told directly about *Joey's* sexual orientation, both Linda and *Joey* believe that he knows.

**Phoenix and *Jadehare***

Phoenix (55, heterosexual mother) and *Jadehare* (33, lesbian daughter) live in a small town in northeastern Taiwan. *Jadehare* is not only the oldest among the three daughters; she is also the most educated one in the family. Phoenix only finished her elementary school education and therefore believed that she did not have much knowledge and could not make comments or suggestions about *Jadehare's* life. As a result, Phoenix tended to be a silent and passive mother.

*Jadehare* met her first girlfriend when she was a freshman in college, and she told her

younger sisters that she felt confused about her sexual orientation. It caused great familial

turmoil. Her sisters had strong reactions to the news and outed *Jadehare* to Phoenix. When

Phoenix first heard that *Jadehare* had fallen in love with a woman, she cried and asked *Jadehare*

to make a choice between her girlfriend and her family. Shocked by her mother's tears,

*Jadehare's* youngest sister threw a ceramic jar at *Jadehare* during a fight, which was a gift that

J*adehare* had given to her sister. *Jadehare* had not expected that falling in love with a woman

would be such a difficult thing for Phoenix and her sisters to deal with, and this coming out

experience broke her heart and her trust with her sisters. Nevertheless, she decided not to give up

maintaining relationships with her family.

     *Jadehare* established a publishing company which only published lesbian novels a few

years after she graduated from college. It was a very challenging task for her to maintain her

business since her prospective readers were hard to approach. However, her parents and her

youngest sister helped her in several book exhibitions to sell books. They never told her that they

supported her career and her same-sex relationships, but *Jadehare* believed that it was their way

to show their tolerance. Phoenix blamed herself at the beginning that she might have done

something bad or wrong to have a lesbian daughter. But after consulting with her sister-in-law,

Phoenix realized that *Jadehare* could not decide her sexual orientation and might not want to fall

in love with women either. This understanding helped Phoenix to accept *Jadehare's* career and

her relationships with less self-blaming and more tolerance.

*Jadehare's* father died two years prior to the research interview with them. Since both her

sisters were married and moved out of the family home, she decided to move back home and live

with Phoenix. *Jadehare* stated that she tried to share her lesbian life with Phoenix by inviting her

to meet with other parents who have LGBT children, asking her to help with some of *Jadehare*'s

publishing business, and even arranging the interview we had together. She hoped to let Phoenix

see the diversity in the lesbian community. Phoenix said that she felt more comfortable with the

idea of having a lesbian daughter but still worried that no one will take care of *Jadehare* when

*Jadehare* becomes older. She concluded that she believes it is a feeling that every parent will

have.

**Min-Mei and *Joanna***

Min-Mei (57, heterosexual mother) raised *Joanna* (28, lesbian daughter) in a big city of

southern Taiwan. Min-Mei and *Joanna* both reported that they had a great relationship, and each

family member was pretty close to one another. Min-Mei described *Joanna* as a sweet and

considerate daughter, who would help her to prepare dinner before she came home from work.

On the other hand, *Joanna* described Min-Mei as a less talkative mother, who tended to hide

emotions and thoughts without articulating them. *Joanna* moved to northern Taiwan to attend

college, and their relationship became even better—Min-Mei would wait for *Joanna's* company

to shop for clothes sometimes.

*Joanna's* brother was the first family member whom she came out to. He did not show

much emotional support and tried to analyze where her same-sex attraction came from. Min-Mei

was the second family member who found out about *Joanna'*s sexual orientation, but it was an

accident. She read *Joanna's* diary unintentionally and learned that *Joanna* was attracted to

women. Min-Mei asked *Joanna's* brother to try to confirm that it was not true, but he told

Min-Mei that he knew nothing about *Joanna's* same-sex attraction. *Joanna's* brother told *Joanna*

what Min-Mei had found in her diary. Shocked by the news, *Joanna* wrote a note informing her

parents that she had some news to share with them during Chinese New Year. Min-Mei burst into

tears when she got the note from *Joanna*, and then *Joanna's* father learned what had happened

from Min-Mei. To Min-Mei's surprise, her husband had no problems accepting *Joanna's* sexual

orientation. *Joanna's* father's openness was a relief for Min-Mei, and she was able to embrace

*Joanna* without worrying about his attitude.

Although, at the time of the interview, Min-Mei did not feel good about telling others that

she had a lesbian daughter, she had no problem embracing *Joanna's* sexual orientation. It seemed

that *Joanna* was happy about who she was, and Min-Mei was happy as long as *Joanna* was

happy. *Joanna*, on the other hand, appreciated that she grew up in a family in which they shared

a close and loving relationship. She stated that she believes that is why her sexual orientation is

not a great a challenge to her parents.

**May and *Erika***

May (60, heterosexual mother) and *Erika* (30, femme lesbian daughter) live in a big city

in northern Taiwan. *Erika* is the second child in the family. After her sister got married and her

father passed away, *Erika* became the primary caretaker for her mother. *Erika* described May as a

very unique mother because May did not prepare her lunchbox or wake her up every morning

when she was in elementary school. On the other hand, May gave *Erika* a lot of space to make

her own decisions. May would support *Erika* to take a few days off school when the weather was

bad. *Erika* had established strong trust that her mother would support her no matter what.

*Erika's* high school best friend became her girlfriend when she was a freshman in college.

May felt that their friendship seemed to be too close, and she questioned *Erika* about the nature

of their relationship several times. *Erika* joked about it at the beginning. But after May asked her

several times, she told May the truth: they were a couple. May recalled that she felt so shocked

about the news that she asked *Erika* to break up with her girlfriend. It was also very shocking to

*Erika*; she had never seen May cry before.

*Erika* kept her relationship secret from her mother for a few months. One time she spent

Christmas with her girlfriend and lied to May that she went mountain climbing with her high

school friends. Losing contact with *Erika*, May started to call *Erika's* high school friends to find

out where *Erika* was. As a result, May learned that *Erika* went to visit her girlfriend in another

town. May then told *Erika* that *Erika* should not have kept the secret because she knew *Erika*

was still with that girl. *Erika* never lied to her mother about where she went or her relationship

status since then.

Although *Erika* believed that her mother had accepted her sexual orientation a long time

ago, May reported that she became more accepting of *Erika's* same-sex relationship after *Erika*

met her current partner. At the time of the interview, May liked *Erika's* current partner a lot and

believed that *Erika* had met a partner with whom *Erika* could spend the rest of her life. *Erika*

joked that her mother may not want her to be heterosexual because it would mean that she had to

break up with her current partner. *Erika* feels blessed that her mother is able to fully embrace her

sexual orientation and her same-sex relationship. Her sexual orientation was not a problem in her

relationship with May.

**Elaine and *Chih-Chieh***

Elaine (57, heterosexual mother) and *Chih-Chieh* (31, lesbian daughter) live in a big city

in northern Taiwan. Compared with the other dyads, *Chih-Chieh* and Elaine used to have a

relatively distant relationship. *Chih-Chieh* would look for comfort from Elaine when she was in

elementary school, but she started to keep everything to herself in her adolescence. She felt that

no one could understand her feelings and emotions, especially after she found herself to be

attracted to women. Furthermore, she felt that Elaine could not respond to her needs in a way she

expected. Feeling frustrated and disappointed with her mother, *Chih-Chieh* did not communicate

with Elaine for several years.

*Chih-Chieh* broke up with her girlfriend around the time she graduated from university

and, in crisis mode, stayed up too late at night and rarely went home. As a result, Elaine blamed

her for not looking for a job and living her life in a positive way and told her that she should

maintain a harmonious family life. Feeling like she was the black sheep of the family,

*Chih-Chieh* came out to her mother with rage. Not knowing how to deal with the information,

Elaine told *Chih-Chieh* that it was time for dinner immediately after *Chih-Chieh*'s disclosure.

Soon after that conversation, *Chih-Chieh* moved out of her family home without prior

notice. She felt that she needed to run away from the family as well as the pressure of not being

able to openly talk about her sexual orientation. However, Elaine felt very hurt by *Chih-Chieh's*

moving out. *Chih-Chieh* and Elaine used letters to communicate. *Chih-Chieh* had a serious

breakdown due to her depression, and Elaine went to see a psychiatrist with *Chih-Chieh* for

several sessions. It was an icebreaker in their relationship. Participating in a group talking about

mother-daughter relationships and losing a cousin also helped *Chih-Chieh* see Elaine's

vulnerabilities, and to understand why she was the type of mother she was. Elaine tried to be a

mother in the way she was taught to be. On the other hand, Elaine learned that she had to

embrace *Chih-Chieh's* sexual orientation in order to let *Chih-Chieh* live healthily in the family. It

was the most important thing for Elaine—having a healthy daughter who was not estranged from

her.

Looking back on her disclosure, *Chih-Chieh* realized that she should not have behaved so

intensely. She moved out of the house, refused to leave any contact information and was full of

rage for a long time. At the time of the interview, she stated that she might not have come out to

her family at all, but just let the process unfold. She began to appreciate the way that her family

loved and embraced her. Elaine, however, still held hope that *Chih-Chieh* might change her

sexual orientation someday. But she learned that she needed to respect *Chih-Chieh's* choices and

trust her more.

**Yen and *Kerry***

Yen (51, heterosexual mother) and *Kerry* (25, lesbian daughter) live in central Taiwan.

*Kerry* is the oldest child in the family, along with a brother who is one year younger than her and

a baby sister. *Kerry* had severe asthma when she was little. In addition, she was born into a

family which valued males more than females, so *Kerry*'s brother got more attention from their

grandparents. Feeling sorry for *Kerry*, Yen let *Kerry* take piano lessons to provide her with an

opportunity to earn her living as a pianist. However, *Kerry* stopped going to the piano lessons

after graduating from elementary school. Yen noticed that *Kerry* did not like to wear skirts or put

her hair in pigtails when she was young. On the other hand, *Kerry* was very thoughtful and

caring. She would help Yen doing chores and take care of Yen's emotions. Yen thought of this

part of *Kerry*'s personality as feminine.

Both Yen and *Kerry* said at the time of the interview that they had a good relationship

despite the conflicts they had before *Kerry* left home for university. *Kerry* described that it was a

difficult time for her living at home and not being able to share her same-sex relationship with

her family. She became agitated easily and lost her temper whenever Yen tried to poke around

her sexual orientation. She remembered that Yen said to her once, "Don't you dare to be a lesbian!

You'd better not!"

*Kerry* decided to come out to her family during the first Chinese New Year break after

going to university. However, she lost her courage once she saw her parents. Yen started asking

*Kerry* again why she had to wear certain underwear to cover her breasts. *Kerry* responded to her

mother with agitation, and it upset Yen. As a result, Yen asked *Kerry* to tell her everything she

needed to know. And *Kerry* did. Not only did she tell Yen that she liked girls, she also told the

rest of the family. Yen then said to *Kerry*, "You know what? This information carries such a great

heaviness that I feel like I have a big stone in my heart."

After *Kerry* went back to school, her parents also went to see her to make sure that she

was certain about her sexual orientation and was not doing so only because she lived in a big city.

*Kerry* gave them a positive answer, and they began to do their own work too. Yen said that she

did not want to lose her daughter; therefore she had to learn to understand her daughter and

embrace her. Both Yen and her husband shared the same standpoint that they wanted to support

*Kerry*. They even went to a support group for LGBT individuals' parents once.

Yen said that she no longer worried about who *Kerry* likes; she worried more about her

work and her ability to take care of her emotions. *Kerry* said that she hoped others would know

her not only for being a lesbian but also for being a good worker, as well as for other aspects in

her life. *Kerry* also stated that she wanted Yen to recognize that she was a great mother because

she and *Kerry's* father took only three years to give *Kerry* full support and high acceptance for

her sexual orientation.

## Predisclosure Context

In the following sections, I will discuss each domain with quotes from interview data to

articulate and support each domain, sub-domain, and category. In some categories, themes and

sub-themes are also identified due to the abundance of data.

Quotes from each interview are used in the following sections. In order to help readers to

have a better understanding, when "---------" is put between each quote, it means that these

quotes are addressing similar ideas or thoughts but from different families. When quotes are

separated by a space line, it means that similar ideas or the same events are explained more than one time by the same family members.

**Mother-Daughter Relationship Predisclosure**

The nature of the mother-daughter relationship seems to have an impact on the disclosure decision as well as its process. I could only try to analyze and categorize what participants have shared with me, which means the mother-daughter relationship demonstrated in this sub-domain will be restricted to aspects that are related to the coming-out phenomenon in Taiwan. I have named this sub-domain as Mother-daughter Relationship Predisclosure, but participants were not so timing sensitive when they talked about their mother-daughter relationships. They did not always point out the state of their relationship that they were talking about as before disclosure or after disclosure; usually, they did not clarify the time until I asked direct questions. Overall, participants described the current state of their relationship first and then tried to recall what their relationship was like before or the changes in the relationship from time to time.

There are three categories in this sub-domain to be discussed: role(s) in the relationship (including emerging themes of multiple roles and fixed role); patterns of communication (including emerging themes of "We can talk about almost everything" and "I had to ask her" or "We did not talk much"); and elements of the relationship (including emerging themes of "love and support", "respect and trust", "always being reasoning", and "conflicts"). I have

defined these three categories based on the content or the topic of those quotes. This will be demonstrated further in the following paragraphs.

**Role(s) in the relationship.** Some participants mentioned that their relationship was more than a mother-daughter relationship; sometimes they were like friends, playmates, or helpers who provided strong support. On the other hand, some participants said that they were simply mothers and daughters without any other roles. The interesting part is that mothers and daughters did not always share the same opinion about their roles. One member may have believed that the roles were changeable, while the other believed that the roles were more fixed and simple.

*Multiple roles*. There were three dyads who talked about multiple roles in the mother-daughter relationship, including Georgia and *Johnny*, Linda and *Joey,* and May and *Erika*. The birth order of the child appeared to have an impact on the first two dyads and their interactions. *Johnny* and *Joey* are the oldest children of the family. As they grew older, they became important helpers and strong supporters to their mothers. *Erika* is not the oldest child, but she became the main caretaker after May suffered from depression and lost her ability to manage her daily life.

Linda and *Joey* had different opinions about whether multiple roles existed in their relationship. Linda felt that *Joey* was her daughter but they had various ways of interacting. *Joey*

sometimes was like her assistant or even her friend. But *Joey* disagreed; she felt that Linda was

her mother and they also interacted like mother and daughter. I ended up putting their

relationship in this theme because their interactions in the interview showed more equality; for

example, *Joey* could express her different opinions immediately without worrying about Linda's

reactions.

> *Johnny*: My mom will consult me about her difficulties when she needs others' advice.
> That's how we interact, so sometimes our positions are reversed and then change back. I
> often ask her, "Mom, could you help me out about that thing?" Sometimes my mom will
> ask me the same favor.
> I: So it feels like your roles are changeable to fit circumstances, and you two adjust very
> well.
> *Johnny*: Exactly.
> I: It sounds like that. Does Georgia have anything else to say?
> Georgia: Oh, we are very happy when we're acting like children. We are very playful.
> Last night, she went home when I was watching TV in the living room. Usually I find a
> place to hide and scare her, but there was no time yesterday, so I pretended to be asleep.
> She saw my scheme and said, "Don't pretend to be asleep. You wake up so easily.
> There's no chance you're asleep."
> ------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------
> Linda: I started to consult her when she could help me deal with some family problems.
> So she is my daughter, my friend, and also my assistant.
>
> Linda: She is my eldest child and tends to have her own opinions. Since she is not easily
> influenced and has her own viewpoints, I always discuss things with her. Because her
> father is rarely at home, I will tell her things among her grandma, her aunt and me. She is
> like my trash can always. I'll talk to her, and then she'll comfort me.
>
> *Joey*: I think she is a typical mother! For example, she is that kind of mother who keeps
> serving food and says, "Eat this, that, and this." Or she will say, "It is good stuff. Take
> that." For me, she is simply my mother…. She is like a friend to my sisters sometimes, or

I'm like a friend to her, but she is still my mom. Period. She will say, "You stayed up too late. It is unhealthy that you don't sleep well." A very traditional mother.

-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

*Erika*: We were really close before she was sick and when I was in my teenage and early twenties. She used to be insensitive and didn't think too much, and she feels that she did not start thinking until she got older. And my personality is more like my dad's, so she feels I'm precocious. I think a lot. So, when I was in my late teens to twenties, we were very close. I started thinking, and she began to grow in her forties because she felt that she was silly. Then the two of us could grow up together at that time! We watched movies and chatted together. In the year that I moved out to work, I even came back to have dinner out with her. We were like friends, going out for eating and talking. That was the best time for our relationship, and we were really close.

**Fixed role.** More participants described their mother-daughter relationship or their interaction as being simple and traditional, meaning that the roles in the relationship were fixed. They were simply mothers and daughters, and they did not mention any other roles like friends, playmates, or assistants. Therefore, the frequent interactions were that the mother expressed her concerns and shared her advice, and the daughter was expected to fulfill her mother's expectations somehow. There was hierarchy in the relationship.

Similar to Linda and *Joey*, Wanda and *Jennifer* had different perspectives about their interactions. *Jennifer* mentioned that she wanted to treat Wanda as her friend, but Wanda did not agree. She did not feel that she was *Jennifer*'s friend. However, I put this dyad or their relationship in this theme because their interactions were rather hierarchical while being interviewed. In other words, even though *Jennifer* could express her disagreement, she still paid

much attention to her mother's reactions and tried to support Wanda if needed. Wanda had the

power to say the final word.

> *Jennifer*: I used to discuss with my ex-girlfriend about my relationship with my mother.
> When I talked to my mother on the phone, I was very loud and bossy. My ex-girlfriend
> often said to me: "I don't think you're talking to your mother as a daughter," "Mothers
> don't like this," or "A mother doesn't like her daughter to talk in that tone." I told her,
> "But my mom and I are friends!" or, "I think I should be straightforward with her," or
> "How can she understand if I don't speak out?" Sometimes I told my mom, "I am your
> friend!" She replied, "Who is your friend? I am your mother!"

When Sylvia and *Man-Shuan* described their relationship, unlike other dyads, Sylvia

started from a specific example rather than telling me a general description. She told me that

*Man-Shuan* insisted on transferring to a night school and then withdrew from her high school,

and how this event influenced their interactions. Sylvia shared with me her struggles of being

seen as a failed mother, her challenges of holding her anger, and her efforts to be with

*Man-Shuan* to walk through a difficult time in their relationship. Their story shows a typical

process that a mother usually goes through: a mother has to learn to deal with the loss and the

disappointment when her daughter fails to meet the mother's expectations.

> Sylvia: I remember that I felt SO embarrassed when I took her to go through the
> procedure of switching to the night school. Because I was very familiar with the faculty
> and administrators in the school ..., including those counseling directors and directors of
> senior high school! I felt at that time that I had failed as a parent.

Sylvia: I was really mad at her at that time! As mad as I could be, I still let her study at night school. …, I did worry about what if she met bad friends and was affected by them. Frankly speaking, I was really stressed out and pissed off. But I still tried to make deals with her. First, she could not have a bad temper; secondly, she could not have any bad habits. "I will never support you again if you become a bad girl." That was what I told her.

As the other three dyads, Phoenix and *Jadehare*, Elaine and *Chih-Chieh*, Yen and *Kerry*,

the closeness of their mother-daughter relationship was varied, but their roles were relatively

simple and fixed. At least that was how they acted during the interview. Mothers showed their

concerns, wanted to share their advice, and wished daughters to make some changes. On the

other hand, daughters tried their best to explain their stands and explain themselves. As a result,

it was very obvious to tell they held different perspectives in their conversations; they had

different points of focus because their roles had defined their points of view. The line between

the roles of mother and daughter was clear.

Elaine: I was very angry at one thing but I could not remember what it was now. I scolded her, and I demanded that she apologized, but she refused. I believed that she knew she was wrong, but she refused to apologize. She is REALLY stubborn!
I: How did you solve it?
Elaine: I just gave in! What could a mother do? Just gave in!
*Chih-Chieh*: *(Laughing)* I do have a bad temper!
Elaine: It is called frustration. I can only hope one day she'll learn to be malleable and adjust herself after growing up. I can't force her to change. I just can't!
-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------
Yen: *(Mentioned they had two different versions of the conflict)* Maybe she was affected more, because I felt it was not a big deal. Maybe there were some conflicts, but I forgot about them after they were taken care of. No matter what, she is my child. … Most

parents usually don't remember what children have done wrong for too long. Parents don't hold grudges! They just don't!

**Patterns of communication.** When describing their mother-daughter relationships, some participants mentioned that they could talk about everything openly in the relationship, especially for daughters. Some daughters mentioned that they could actively share life events and thoughts with their mothers. I use the term "patterns of communication" to define this category.

***"We can talk about almost everything."*** Several dyads used this sentence or a similar one when asked to describe their relationship, including Georgia and *Johnny*, Linda and *Joey*, Min-Mei and *Joanna,* and May and *Erika*. Although they might not be able to interact in such a way all the time, this impression often came up right away after I asked them to describe their relationship. Most important, both sides agreed on this description of the relationship.

> Georgia: We sent her to a boarding school for seventh grade...so every time she came back from school, we talked a lot and got close. This pattern continued for a long time.
> -------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------
> Linda: Probably it is because her father is seldom at home; we can talk about everything.
> I: Does *Joey* think so too?
> *Joey*: At least we are all girls, so if one daughter has problems that she doesn't know how to discuss it with my mom or she has trouble in communicating, it will be easier for other daughters to help with the negotiation. We'll see what everyone's opinion is about or how she feels, and the problem will be solved after our discussion.
> -------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------
> May: *Erika* shares a lot, even about some trivial things. We always have a lot to say and rarely stop talking. …, Before I was sick, just like what *Erika* mentioned, she told me everything after she went to college. I seldom thought about other problems in life at that time, so we would have meals together and keep talking!

*"I had to ask her." or "We did not talk much."* Some participants described their

relationship as relatively distant or with little understanding, like Sylvia and *Man-Shuan*,

Phoenix and *Jadehare*, and Elaine and *Chih-Chieh*. How they communicated in the interview

was a way to demonstrate that. However, it did not necessarily mean that the nature of the

relationship was less connected or they did not get along, at least for some daughters. For

instance, *Chih-Chieh* felt that it was her sexual orientation, not the relationship itself, which

created distance.

> Sylvia: When she was in elementary school, I felt quite confused about what she was
> thinking. I couldn't understand what was in her mind.
> I: Do you mean that you had that kind of feeling since she was in first grade, or only for
> three to four years?
> Sylvia: I felt that she wasn't cheerful enough probably after her fourth grade, but she was
> not pessimistic, only being not very cheerful. She also seemed to have nothing to say to
> us. She would not initiate the conversation. …she was like that even in junior high school,
> and I felt sad that she did not have much to say.
> ----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------
> Elaine: Basically, a mother certainly hopes to talk to her children about everything. But,
> perhaps *Chih-Chieh* can't accept my way of parenting! I don't think she tells me
> everything. We started getting distant after she went to junior high school.
>
> *Chih-Chieh*: I felt we had a bad and distant relationship since I was thirteen. The most
> fundamental reason was this: I didn't want to talk to anyone about my feeling toward
> girls because I didn't think anybody could understand. I had tried to talk about it, but I
> didn't bother to do so at the end since I felt no one could understand. It was no use.

**Elements of the relationship.** One question I asked the dyads was: "please give me an

example to describe your relationship." This category then emerges from many interactional

details that my participants shared with me. Most shared elements were rather positive.

Regardless of whether these dyads are characterized as close or not so close, they all addressed

some positive elements in their relationship.

Since my main research topics or questions focus on the process of disclosure and how the

mother-daughter relationship deals with disclosure, my participants talked about their

coming-out stories and used those stories as examples to explain the shifts in the relationship. As

a result, the structure of the research limited the aspects or elements presented for these

mother-daughter relationships. The transition and the shifts in these mother-daughter

relationships will be introduced with further details in the following domains.

*Love and support.* These participants told stories about how they accompanied each other

going through difficult times. Challenges related to the daughter's sexual orientation, and how

the mother-daughter relationship was able to sustain those challenges, will be discussed in the

next domain. In this theme, the quotes presented here will focus on the relationship's

predisclosure.

Love and support was showed through expressing their emotions and feelings, and

sometimes it was showed through the care-giving activities in daily life. Love and support was

mentioned from both sides. Moreover, if a mother treated her daughter more like her friend or

her work partner, it was more likely for her to address love and support gained from her daughter

too. No matter what, love and support were expressed in various ways.

> Wanda: I love her very much! I feel love can conquer all, in spite of her bad attitude. (*Jennifer*: "I don't yell at you now.") Sometimes you still do that, OK? It seems that she is more likely to yell at me. But anyway, no matter what she has done, I don't blame her or get angry.
> ----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------
> Linda: She told me one time, "Mom, you're not the only person who lives in the house. Whenever we come back from school and see there's no smile on your face, it is hard for us to enjoy our dinner." I became cheerful since then. I thought I had enough pressure, and I didn't want to pass it on to my children.
> ----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------
> *Erika*: The way they support me was to let me know that I would be fine if I decided to fight for injustice. They would back me up. When I felt teachers were unfair and what they taught was wrong, I had the confidence to challenge them and knew they could not hurt me. I knew my parents would support me.

> **Respect and trust.** Respect was pointed out frequently when talking about elements of the

relationship. For example, respecting daughters' opinions or not intervening in daughters'

decisions was heard in several interviews. This was the consequence for some mothers because

their daughters could not be influenced. Not asking or no intervention became those mothers' last

choice, and it was named as "respect" in the relationship. Interestingly, respect and trust tended

be found side by side in the relationship. It might be easier for a mother to let go when she

respected her daughter. On the other hand, a mother could respect her daughter more when she

was able to trust her daughter at a certain level.

*Johnny*: My mom never forced us to study when I was a child. She believed studying should be spontaneous. We had tons of books at home, and she never asked us to read them. We chose books by ourselves. … When I was a child, my mom allowed me to play ball and go home just before dinner. At that time parents usually didn't allow their children to go out and forced their children to study various things, but she didn't.

Georgia: Her father and I really trust her, including her younger sister, we all do. You know, generally parents don't really trust their children, and they're always nagging because of worries. I don't worry about her at all.

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Wanda: I was not able to comment on anything about her; if I did, she would have strong reactions. I gradually gave up sharing my opinions with her. Although she didn't like others to make comments, she showed good judgments most of the time. She always did the right things, so I didn't interfere with her life, right? (*Jennifer*: "No, you didn't.") Yes.

Wanda: In fact, I found that she had high expectations about herself since tenth grade, even higher than my expectations about her. So I stopped worrying about her. …Since I know her very well, like she was clear what she was doing as well as her goal, I didn't try to change her. Even about her sexual orientation, I respected her and never blamed her! (*Jennifer*: "No, you didn't!") I never blamed her, not even once.

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I: It seems that Min-Mei does believe in *Joanna* and trusts her.

Min-Mei: I don't know how to explain it, but I really trust her and her brother. Although they're not very outstanding, they're very positive. They don't talk radically but with reasons. In fact, I usually agree with what they say.

***Always being reasoning.*** Three dyads mentioned that there was a lot of reasoning in the relationship. For one dyad it was the mother who always reasoned with the daughter, and for the other two dyads it was the daughter to do so. In other words, these participants tended to persuade the other with reason; they seldom expressed their emotions. But being reasoning or

less expression of emotions seemed to influence their intimacy of the relationship differently. For

Wanda and *Jennifer*, and Phoenix and *Jadehare*, it was the daughter who tried to be reasonable

with the mother. Both daughters, *Jennifer* and *Jadehare*, said that they had a close relationship

with their mothers. But for Elaine and *Chih-Chieh*, Elaine was a mother who always addressed

reason with *Chih-Chieh*, and she felt that she had a distant relationship with *Chih-Chieh* prior to

disclosure.

> I: Do you remember what *Jennifer* said to you when you disciplined her?
> Wanda: She usually said loudly, "Leave me alone!"
> *Jennifer*: Later I reasoned with her. She felt that she couldn't argue against me.
> Wanda: As a result, I didn't bother to argue because I never won. Haha. I still can't win debates with her even now.
> --------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------
> Phoenix: I seldom asked about her life. Even if I might know something, I didn't bother to ask her. She wouldn't listen to me no matter what I said! She liked to argue with me if I commented on anything.
> *Jadehare*: Then my mom would tell me a classic saying, "You! I can't win even if I went to college!" I say, "Mom! It is not a question about winning. I'm trying to reason with you! "
> --------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------
> *Chih-Chieh*: She reasons with me about everything! *(Elaine laughed.)* Nothing else! No consolation at all.
> I: Only analysis.
> *Chih-Chieh*: She analyzes and reasons with me all the time. Very rational.

 

**Conflicts.** Many dyads mentioned conflicts in the relationship. Conflicts represented a

wide range of arguments, from power disagreements to fights. They talked about how their

relationship piled up conflicts and how they dealt with intense interactions in the relationship.

Conflicts were used here only to describe some distinct events, however. These dyads did not see their relationship as conflictual.

> *Jennifer*: I have always spoken out whenever I was unhappy ever since I was little. … Perhaps it was because I didn't know how to express myself and I was also bad-tempered. I hated the hierarchical relationship between children and adults. I feel I should speak whenever I had something to say, and vice versa. Don't tell me what to do only because you are my mother or father *(laughing)*. But, not everyone could accept this manner from a child. I used to have little tolerance of hierarchy.
> Wanda: She was very rebellious in junior high school! That was the stage of which children needed most discipline, but she was totally out of control *(laughing)*! (*Jennifer*: "Exactly!") She didn't take my orders. It was very challenging to be her mother at that time!
> -------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------
> Sylvia: After studying in senior high school for two months, in fact, less than two months, she quit. I forced her to listen to me and went to school. …I had to deal with many things and her at the same time, so we had a lot of conflicts. Later her teacher called to tell me that she kept asking the teacher to let her quit, but her teacher refused to sign the consent form. Finally, I conceded and asked her to attend the night school. … After a semester, she said, "I don't want to shift back," and then she dropped out. Our relationship became chaotic. I thought of giving up. In other words, I just let her do whatever she wished. I did not care. I had to seek individual counseling at that time, dealing with my anxiety, frustration, and even sadness.
> -------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------
> I: How about your relationship before going to the four-year university?
> *Kerry*: It was really bad at one point!!
> Yen: Maybe when she was in college! *(Asked Kerry)* In college, right?
> *Kerry*: Yeah.
> Yen: She came home late because of student club activities in school sometimes. We asked our children to be home by certain time, and *Kerry* and I used to have argument because of it. But that is really nothing.

**Mother's or Parents' Beliefs**

Mothers tended to address some of her beliefs in terms of rearing children during the interview. When the mother talked about these concepts, sometimes she said, "We parents think", and sometimes she said, "I think". Mothers usually did not emphasize what her beliefs were and what her husband's beliefs were. Similarly, when daughters talked about what influenced them or in which beliefs they were brought up, they treated those beliefs as parents' beliefs. Therefore, I have named this sub-domain as "Mother's or Parents' Beliefs".

There are three categories in this sub-domain: beliefs about child-rearing (including emerging themes of "It is important to be happy and mentally healthy", and "I want to respect this child's independence as well as her decisions."); beliefs about motherhood (including emerging themes of "Family is my first priority", "Love is expressed through daily life", "As a mother, I have my responsibilities", "Children's needs come first", and "I need to adjust myself for the family or the relationship.") and other beliefs (including emerging themes of "valuing equality" and "valuing multiple perspectives"). The first two categories are not easy to be divided since the beliefs about child-rearing are somehow related to beliefs about motherhood; the way a woman raises a child is essential for her to define herself as a mother. As a result, here is how I have divided the categories: if mothers talked about how they took care of children and what they did to influence children intentionally, I put these quotes into the category of "beliefs about child-rearing". If mothers talked about what their expectations about themselves were, how

they arranged their family, and what a mother should do, I put those quotes into the category of

"beliefs about the motherhood."

**Beliefs about child-rearing.** Several mothers mentioned their beliefs or values about

child-rearing. They talked about what personality they wanted their children to have and how

they raised the child. Georgia, for instance, addressed the child's mental health especially. As to

May, she focused on respecting children's willingness.

> ***"It is important to be happy and mentally healthy."***
> Georgia: I was very aware of my child's happiness since I suffered from sadness during and after my pregnancy. I have felt strongly that her happiness is very important. I believe it really matters. Parents' mindsets will affect how you raise this child as well as the formation of the child's personality greatly. She has been really happier and more playful than others. …, I have been very concerned about whether she is happy. I have been trying to make her laugh since she was little. It is my goal to make her laugh and to make her happy.

> ***"I want to respect this child's independence as well as her decisions."***
> May: I think we respect our children's choices more than other parents.
>
> *Erika*: I feel very grateful about how she teaches us. She has been very open since I was little, and we can choose what we want to do most of the times.
> I: Does it mean that your mother doesn't manage your daily life too much, but she also gives you more space so you can grow up freely?
> *Erika*: Yes, yes. She doesn't protect us too much, like take care of our food or clothing. She doesn't take care of those things *(laughing)*, but she provides many opportunities for us to learn whatever we want and to choose what we wish for. This is what makes her different from other parents.
> -----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

Yen: Her dad often tells me that we give birth to our children, but they are all individuals. Our responsibility is to give birth to them, to raise them, and then respect their willingness and see how they explore their lives. We can't be with them always.

**Beliefs about motherhood.** Mothers also talked about what they should do for their families. In other words, they had some assumptions about how to be a mother. These assumptions or principles were varied; from addressing "family is my first priority", to describing "the responsibility of being a mother", or even detailing how to meet "children's needs" and to "adjust herself". They were all the definitions of their motherhood. The quotes are organized by several sub-themes and listed below:

*"Family is my first priority."*
Phoenix: *(Mentioned her personality)* Although I am a businesswoman, I don't like going out and am also family-oriented. …, And I have ethics. I don't do or say things thoughtlessly. I don't. I really take my responsibility for my family seriously and consider others a lot.
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*Joanna*: *(Mentioned Min-Mei's personality)* My mother isn't good at socializing, and she is a housewife with no doubts. She probably has nothing else besides taking care of our family.
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Elaine: I don't want any person in this family to have any problems. In order to maintain harmonious relationships in a family, sometimes we Chinese don't say everything when facing problems
I: Leaving one another some space.
Elaine: Yes, and I won't express them when certain words may hurt one another. That's it.

*"Love is expressed through daily life."*

Elaine: Basically, the love in families is practiced through daily life since they are part of my life. It is shown spontaneously, not just through talking or acting. Since they are part of my life, taking care of each other is the way to love. This is Chinese people's family life, so we don't say, "I love you." We won't! But we show our care at some crucial moments, which people might not see in everyday life.

***"As a mother, I have my responsibilities."***
*Jennifer*: After she got married, her expectations toward herself were always to come home earlier than her husband and her children. She felt it was her responsibility to do so. She is a very good mother.

Wanda: *(Further explained her role of being a mother)* I had no complaints. It was my choice to take care of them, meaning *Jennifer* and her brother at that time. I hoped to give them all my love and take care of them until they were old enough. So I had no complaints.

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Linda: My husband always asks me not to work, and I only need to take care of children's health, studies, and morality. But these three requests became such a source of pressure that I could barely breathe.

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Elaine: In a Chinese family, a mother's responsibility is to cook and feed everyone. This job is not easy but still has to be done, since it can bring the family together.

***"Children's needs come first."***
Wanda: A lot of mothers are eager to send their children to kindergarten as soon as children are old enough (*Jennifer*: "She didn't. We just stayed home!"), so that they can be free to do whatever they want. In fact, you can hear many similar stories. But I am not like them. Since I got married, no, since my first child was born, I have promised to take the best care of them. I try. Of course, I can't be perfect, but I do my best. Sadly, I have paid a high price for this self-expectation.

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Yen: Her Dad and I handle the finances for the family, so I often tell *Kerry* and her brother, "You should take your time and make the best use of it while we are still

responsible for your costs or other payments. Do whatever you want to do!" Of course, the premise is to do right things, not bad things.

### *"I need to adjust myself for the family or the relationship."*

Sylvia: *(Mentioned the conflict with Man-Shuan and its impact on the eldest child)* Her sister majored in "Child and Family Studies." I learned from her sister's viewpoint after reading her report about *Man-Shuan*. It was very different from how I saw *Man-Shuan* and how her Dad saw her. This experience reminded me that I should control my anxiety, overcome my anger, and then deal with her and those matters in her school. …I had to solve the problem between *Man-Shuan* and me and not to affect her older sister.

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Elaine: We learn to adjust ourselves to the environment, not asking others to accommodate themselves. We learn to adjust ourselves to others, not asking others to get used to us. This is our survival rule.

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Yen: *Kerry* and I are rather stubborn, so we fight sometimes. However, I have learned from experience that it doesn't work. Since the situation needs someone to ease the tension, well, only the older person will have such a consideration.

I: So it is up to you to do such a thing, right?

Yen: Exactly! It's always me. Being a mother means always needing to accommodate and accept.

**Other beliefs.** Beliefs in this theme are conveyed unintentionally. Parents or mothers did not educate their daughters with particular goals or preference. They just acted on what they believed, and daughters learned from the interactions with parents or were deeply influenced from parents' words. That was how daughters learned the values of equality and multiple perspectives.

### *Valuing equality.*

*Erika*: I have learned from them ever since I was a child. I didn't know what class meant at that time, but it was a similar idea. My dad was an architect when he was young, but he didn't work for a long time because he got sick at an early age. When I was a child, I remembered he always treated foremen and workers very well in the construction site. My mother also treated my babysitter very well. She always told me that I should treat my babysitter as an elder and could not ask her to do everything for me. I should call her Auntie.

### *Valuing multiple perspectives.*

*Johnny*: Mom is very avant-garde and open. Most people feel that Mom should have found out about my sexuality a long time ago; for example, I keep my hair short and wear only pants, no skirts. Most mothers would have already said something because people in general thought girls should wear skirts and have long hair. But my mother gave me a lot of freedom since my childhood, and she did not intervene. I was able to decide what I liked. She has been okay with what I want most of the time. So I have short hair, and she feels fine.

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*Erika*: She is so funny. She used to be a teacher, but she often told me that schooling was very boring! Do you know that I could quit school only because of cold weather when I was a child? I didn't have to go when it was too hot or too cold. As a matter of fact, I didn't need to go to school if I didn't want to *(laughing)*! But I was a good student in elementary school, and I always went to school. I was afraid of my elementary school teachers, so I went to school on schedule. But she said to me that it didn't matter if I stayed home in such cold weather! It was okay that I skipped one day. Or what they taught was not important *(laughing)*!

## Family Dynamics

Family dynamics was one of the most challenging sub-domains to organize. Although it was the mother-daughter relationship that I wanted to focus on, almost every mother-daughter dyad talked about other family members, what the daughter's sibling relationship was like, the daughter's relationship with her father, parent's couple relationship, and even the mothers'

relationship with the grandmother, if they lived together. These details did not feel related to the

research question at the beginning. Although I wanted to present most interactions among family

members in this section to help readers to have a better understanding about the Taiwanese

families, I came to realize that I would have failed at focusing on the main topic of this research.

Only two categories were discussed in the section: parents' relationship (including emerging

themes of "father has more power", "mother has more power", and "father and mother share

power"), and grandma-mother relationship. These relationships influenced directly the

experience of disclosure, especially for mothers. Each is discussed in greater detail below.

**Parents' relationship.** These mother-daughter dyads all came from families "almost no

defects" in terms of the formation of the family. In other words, they were not from families

whose parents were remarried, had been divorced, or were immigrants. The parents did not have

to deal with pressure or prejudice regarding the couple relationships in terms of social norms.

When mothers were most likely the first parent to be come out to, the parents' couple

relationship had an impact on how mothers dealt with the experience of disclosure because

fathers' attitude and beliefs would become either a support or source of stress to mothers.

Therefore, parents' relationships were analyzed and discussed in the findings. Although sibling

relationships and father-daughter relationships were shared and discussed in many interviews,

they were not addressed and presented in this section because their influences on the

mother-daughter relationships and the experience of disclosure were not clearly pointed out by participants.

Parents' relationship was not what I initially expected to learn about from these interviews. However, how parents saw their roles in the family often came up as conversations flowed. In some families, it was obvious that the father had more power and he influenced the mother's thoughts and beliefs tremendously. Whenever the dyad mentioned the father, the mother tended to show her powerlessness or great concerns for the father's opinion.

In some families, parents divided their jobs clearly, or they had definite roles in terms of taking care of the family. In other words, the father's job was to earn money and provide financial support. The mother's jobs were to rear children and provide the emotional support. Compared with the mother in the family of which the father rules, the mother in this kind of relationship seemed to have more power in the parents' relationship of the area she is in charge of.

Finally, there were still some families in which parents share power more equally. The father and the mother tended to discuss child-rearing issues together and made sure that they stood on the same side.

***Father has more power.*** In Wanda and *Jennifer's* family, the father, Wanda's husband, has great impact on Wanda's reactions and Wanda's feelings. Both Wanda and *Jennifer*

mentioned that the father could easily change Wanda's attitude toward *Jennifer*. In another

example, Phoenix and *Jadehare's* family, *Jadehare* pointed out in a more direct way that her

father used to be her mother's god.

> Wanda: Yeah! In fact, my attitude has remained the same from the beginning to the end.
> *Jennifer*: Sometimes it seems you accepted it. But sometimes you said, "Well, I don't think it is okay."
> Wanda: Because your father always talks to me. He has been trying to change this situation, but he seldom talks to you, right? He never mentions anything to you. He keeps asking me, "You tell her. You tell her." He doesn't want to tell you, and then asks me to do it. I once said to him, "Why don't you tell her? You know her, and she is your daughter."
> *Jennifer*: He asks her to tell me everything, like "Do you want to move back?" "Do you want to go out with boys?"
> ---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------
> *Jadehare*: The traditional part I mentioned is, for example, she feels that, no matter good or bad her husband is, he is still her husband. So I think whoever marries my mother is the same. She would not divorce, no matter how bad he was! Fortunately, my dad is not too bad. He is just a little chauvinistic. But my mother thinks she can accept whoever she marries as long as she knows his personality. If the guy were stingy, my mother would think it doesn't matter, and stinginess is thriftiness. She regards her husband as her god.

    ***Mother has more power.*** When Sylvia and *Man-Shuan*, Linda and *Joey* talked about how

the parents divided their jobs in the family during the interview, it was very clear that the parents

had their focus and they worked as a team. While the father is busy at work, the mother looks

after the children and the family. As a result, the mother becomes the parent with more power in

the family through the eyes of the daughter. For example, Sylvia will ask herself to take more

responsibility to take good care of children in order to let her husband be careless. But, since

they usually have discussions privately, *Man-Shuan* then believes that it is Sylvia who is in

charge in most of familial business.

> *Man-Shuan*: I pity my dad, because at home my dad doesn't have much power to decide things for children. I am not very sure, but that's what I saw since I was a child *(Sylvia laughed)*. Mother has the final decision on most things.
> I: So you know if you manage your mother well, then your father will be okay about it. Is this what you mean?
> *Man-Shuan*: Yeah! Even if my dad is not okay, my mom will take care of that part.
> Sylvia: I want to share my husband's burden, because he has a lot of pressure from work. I will try my best to manage children's things, and then tell him for his reference. He trusts me, so I just need to tell him what's going on, and then it's OK. And we talk at night before we go to bed, so he can comment. If I deprived him of opportunities to participate in the parent-child relationship, he would have already protested.

As to Linda, her husband is away from home periodically because of his work. Linda has

to make most decisions by herself without a doubt. Therefore, *Joey* learned from Linda that a

woman has to depend on herself rather than her husband, which is not usually seen in other

families.

> Linda: My family is just like a single-parent family because of her father's occupation. e is a captain of a merchant ship, so he is seldom at home. I make most of the decisions at home.
> *Joey*: I know many women are like this. Their husbands handle things at home, so they don't know things. But because in my family my mother does everything herself, she is comparatively more independent, and she can do anything.

*Father and mother share power.* In their families, Georgia and *Johnny*, as well as Yen

and *Kerry,* the parents tend to have a similar attitude toward raising children: neither the father

nor the mother holds the decisive power. Although the participants did not point out the exact

communication style the parents had, they seemed to share equal authority in terms of family

business. For example, how Georgia and her husband dealt with *Johnny's* disclosure is a great

example, which will be manifested by the quoted interview in the section of "Mother's

Immediate Aftermath" in the next domain. As to Yen and *Kerry's* family, Yen said that her

husband and her are a compatible couple, which means they never have conflicts over the

child-rearing issues. *Kerry* totally agreed with her mother, Yen.

> Yen: We can communicate about how to raise three children well. We are consistent. We
> have never had conflicts in front of them, like her father says how to teach children, and
> then I say something differently. We don't have such kind of conflicts.

> *Kerry*: Although she has some different personal values with my Dad, they have
> consensus on parenting.
> I: Do you mean that the way they care about you?
> *Kerry*: Yes, like the way they care about their children, or they hope their children are
> doing well and developing their interests fully. They have a great consensus about how to
> take care of children.

**Grandmother-mother relationship.** There were two dyads mentioning the intensity of

the grandmother-mother relationship and its impact on the family dynamics. These two families

consist of three generations, and the mother has to face the pressure of earning her

mother-in-law's approval in addition to taking good care of the whole family. One of the ways

for the mother-in-law to evaluate the mother's performance will be the daughter's behavior. In

other words, if the daughter does not behave, the mother will face the paternal grandmother's

questioning her ability to educate her child. Therefore, in these two families, not only does the

grandmother-mother relationship influence the family dynamics a great deal, it also becomes a

big contributor to the mother's stress when dealing with the coming-out issue. For example, in

*Jennifer* and Wanda's family, the pressure from her mother-in-law has always been a challenge to

Wanda:

> Wanda: My mother-in-law used to say to me: "How have you taught these children?"
> Anyway, she put all the blame on me…. When I still lived with her, she never blamed her
> son but me instead. Always! She believes her son is the most outstanding, the best!... My
> mother-in-law gives me pressure you can't imagine…. If I didn't move out three years
> ago *(meaning moved away from the house and no longer living with her mother-in-law)*,
> I'm not sure if I would be able to live today.
> *Jennifer*: She really suffered from a lot of pressure at that time.

And for *Jadehare* and Phoenix's family, Phoenix's husband was the oldest son of the

family. Based on the tradition of Taiwanese culture, Phoenix still has to be the main caretaker to

her mother-in-law, even though her husband passed away a few years ago. *Jadehare* pointed out

her behavior used to cause some intensity in her mother's relationship with her grandma:

> *Jadehare*: I think my mom doesn't have a very good relationship with my Grandma.
> Although she is a good daughter-in-law, my Grandma is biased and always treats her

other daughters-in-law better. Sometimes, the closer people get and the more my mother does, the more difficult the relationship is. For example, when I dated my first girlfriend, my grandmother told my mother that I cried when talking on the phone all night, right? I think my mother got a lot of pressure because my grandmother told her that she couldn't sleep due to my crying! Another example: my cats still lived inside the house a while ago and were very noisy. They woke Grandma at night, and she complained about it to my mother. In short, my mom had to face the consequences. Even though those cats were mine, she got blame from Grandma. Although Grandma is quiet open on some points, she does give her daughter-in-law pressure when she mentions those small things.

**Familiarity with LGBT Culture**

This sub-domain discusses if mothers were familiar with LGBT culture before their daughters' coming-out. I did not ask a specific question about mothers' familiarity with LGBT culture; therefore, the quotes presented in this section came from mothers' free responses. Their answers could be divided into two simple categories: "had some contact" and "no contact".

**Had some contact.** For those mothers who had had some contact before their daughters' came out, they might have had lesbian friends, or had met LGBT individuals in school, or learned about LGBT issues from their jobs. They had some understanding about LGBT issues, but their familiarity varied.

> *Johnny*: I knew my mom had a lesbian friend when I was about ten. I thought it was so cool!
> ----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------
> Wanda: I believe that I have known some of your gay people when I was a student. I knew gay people before and learned something from them, so in fact I have some knowledge about this population.
> I: So this is not completely new.

Wanda: Yes, yes. It's not really new for me. I have learned about the existence of this population and who they are.

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Sylvia: I worked as a counselor at that time and had contact with some LGBT clients. … My knowledge of LGBT was from the old school, which suggested that sexual orientation was not determined until people's twenties.

**No contact.** Some participants also mentioned that they did not have any contact before

their daughters' disclosure. Although a few mothers knew this population through the media,

they did not have any personal contact with LGBT individuals.

Min-Mei: *(On when her daughter came out to her)* I believe it was three or four years ago, probably? I never knew! Although I had seen gay people before, I never thought of our daughter as one of them.

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May: She told me that one of her classmates was a lesbian. At that time I knew nothing about this issue, and I thought her classmate had to suffer for the rest of her life! Life was going to be too hard for her. I even told *Erika* that I felt sorry for her parents to have a lesbian daughter. At that time I thought this same-sex relationship was wrong because I didn't understand at all.

## Disclosure Event

In this domain, participants described how the disclosure event took place. It was not

uncommon that the dyad shared two different stories with me. Mothers and daughters shared

different details, different timeframe, or different reactions because of their different perspectives

or positions.

**Clues Before Coming Out**

Participants talked about if mothers had any clue before their daughters' disclosure in this sub-domain. Therefore, there are two simple and straightforward categories in this sub-domain to be discussed: "some speculation before coming out" and "no speculation before coming out." More than half of the mothers had observed some atypical gender performance before their daughters really came out to them.

**Some speculation before coming out.** Six mothers mentioned that they had observed some atypical gender performance or behaviors about their daughters before disclosure, including Georgia, Sylvia, Linda, Yen, Wanda and Elaine. The daughters of the first four mothers used to dress in a more androgynous way. These daughters stated that they did not wear skirts and did not play with dolls. Mothers then responded feeling curious and had some suspicions before daughters' disclosure, but they also emphasized they did not really realize what it meant until their daughters came out to them. It was fascinating to see those mothers and daughters to be able to reconfirm what had been going on years ago through some interview questions. Interestingly, daughters tended to feel that their outfits explained almost everything, while mothers felt that outfits only provided some explanation.

Sylvia: I had doubts, only doubts. … I used to take her to shop, and she wasn't interested. "Which one do you want?" "Do you want this? You look good in this clothes." She just

looked at me like that *(imitating Man-Shuan who watched from a distance).* Don't even mention underwear.

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I: So *Joey* obviously dressed more like a boy?

Linda: For example, do you remember that I made a red suit for you once?

*Joey*: I remember.

Linda: Yes. She had a suit, and her sisters had dresses. She has worn like this since she was little. She was also stronger.

*Joey*: No, I don't wear skirts!

Linda: Exactly!

I: Oh. I see.

Linda: She took off her skirt immediately after she got home from school. It was such a torture for her.

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*Kerry*: In fact, my mom had doubts before I came out to her. She is very smart. Actually, they were afraid that I was lesbian, and I could understand their concern. She pried sometimes, "Why do you wear sports underwear?"

Yen: I wanted to pry!

*Kerry*: Exactly! "Try skirts!" "You look cuter with long hair!" She kept suggesting that I change my outfit. Maybe I was really stressed out during that time, so I wanted to run away from home. Later she felt I was a totally different person. I used to be so caring, but I started ignoring family matters then.

Unlike those mothers mentioned above, Wanda and Elaine were suspicious because of their daughters' behavior. Wanda felt strange about *Jennifer* taking classes focusing on LGBT issues, as well as reading about them, and Elaine had found out that *Chih-Chieh* was closer to one specific female friend since they spent much time together. Amusingly, when *Jennifer* pointed out that Wanda already had had some speculations about this, Wanda tried to deny that *Jennifer's* observation was true. But later she admitted it.

*Jennifer*: I felt that she had been prying! She wanted to ask me questions!

Wanda: I did not think that much. I just asked casually.

*Jennifer*: No way! I was reading a novel, and she asked, "So, you are homosexual?" "Why are you reading this gay novel? Are you homosexual too?"

Wanda: Because she had been reading a series of those books, so she must be interested. How would ordinary people read them?

*Jennifer*: I also read feminist books!

Wanda: And the class she took.

*Jennifer*: "Studies on LGBT Culture."

Wanda: She took the class of "Studies on LGBT Culture." I thought there must be something wrong! Otherwise, how would she have interests in this topic?

I: So you told your mom the classes you took?

*Jennifer*: It was on the transcript! *(Laughing)*

Wanda: Exactly, on the transcript! And she got a high score! She didn't study hard on other subjects but this!

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Elaine: When you attended the graduation ceremony, K was still with you. (*Chih-Chieh*: "K?") Yeah! I already found out.

*Chih-Chieh*: But I didn't tell you.

Elaine: You didn't, but I already knew.

I: By knowing they had special feelings and interactions toward each other?

Elaine: They stayed in the house and inside the room every day!


**No speculation before coming out.** As to the other three mothers, Phoenix, Min-Mei, and May, they did not know that their daughters' sexual orientation was different from the mainstream until their daughters came out to them.


I: How did you find out your daughter's sexual orientation? Did you feel it?

Phoenix: No. I had no idea. I had been busy in business, and she didn't live at home. At that time she didn't live at home, so I didn't know.

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I: So it didn't occur to you that *Erika* might be a lesbian before she told you?

May: No, I never thought of it.

**Reasons for Disclosing**

In this sub-domain, daughters recalled the reasons or motivations that made them want to come out to their mothers. Those reasons or motivations are divided into five categories, including "It was hard to hide", "I had been waiting for an appropriate opportunity to come out", "I wanted my mom to know more about me", "We used to have a close relationship", and "I believe that my mother could handle the news".

**"It was hard to hide."** This reason was addressed among many daughters. It was very challenging to them to hide an important part of their life, especially to those who were living with parents, or to those who were used to sharing everything with their parents. *Johnny*, *Jennifer*, *Joey*, *Chih-Chieh* and *Kerry* all addressed that "it was hard to hide", or "I did not want to hide anymore" as one of their motivations.

> *Johnny*: I was quite sure about my sexuality at that time, and I needed a reason to go out, so I just told them. Anyway, I didn't intend to hide anything from them. After I was sure about myself, I would tell them sooner or later.
> -----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------
> *Joey*: I had been like that for so long and I just wanted to tell them! Concealing one thing was very tiresome and painful, so I told them once I felt the urge to talk. … I had been hiding for so long, and I didn't want to hide anymore. That was it.
> -----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------
> *Chih-Chieh*: I had the feeling that I had to tell them in my last year in college, because I had kept this secret for so long. In fact, since I started to take classes in social work for three years, I always felt a need to disclose to make myself feel better. I didn't like to lie.

However, I had to lie. I didn't like to hide things from them, but I couldn't tell them what I was doing and whom I was going out with. It became very annoying to me.

**"I had been waiting for an appropriate opportunity to come out."** Some daughters

also mentioned that disclosure was something they wanted to do and had been waiting for an

appropriate opportunity to disclose. Therefore, they went through a process to prepare

themselves to come out. For instance, *Joanna* shared her process with many details, including

her initiative and her thoughts about parents' possible reactions. Her disclosure was a good

example of a well-planned and well-conducted disclosure.

> *Joey*: I didn't intend to hide forever. No, I was just thinking when to tell you.
> Linda: She was looking for an appropriate time.
> *Joey*: The right time. Yes.
> ------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------
> *Joanna*: Since I accepted that I was lesbian, I knew one day I would come out to my family. It was something I had to do. As a freshman, I felt it was good timing when I had a girlfriend, and we were very much in love with each other. If I was single, liked someone or someone liked me, I would not feel the urge to come out. You asked me the reason that I wanted to come out. Well, I wanted my girlfriend to be able to participate in family gatherings or whatever, just like my brother's girlfriend. My family was quite close, so I couldn't tolerate the fact that when I took my girlfriend home, I had to say, "This is a very good friend of mine." I couldn't accept that she was not recognized as my girlfriend! Therefore, I had an important reason to come out and to face this. Only because she was my girlfriend and I loved her so much, I would fight for my family's approval to let her be recognized.

**"I wanted my mom to know more about me."** *Man-Shuan* and *Chih-Chieh* said that

they just wanted their mothers to know more about them. It was that simple. *Chih-Chieh* further

explained that it was not something she really believed after years later, but it was how she felt at

that time when she disclosed to her mother.

> *Man-Shuan*: Of course I hope my mom can understand, recognize, and care about me. That's how I feel!
>
> -----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------
>
> I: Just wanted her to know?
>
> *Chih-Chieh*: About who I am! I didn't want that they had no clue at all even after they die. It was a simple belief! (But) The training for social work sucks *(Laughing)*, and that's where I got that belief. But I feel it is very Westernized and I have doubts about it. I used to accept that belief taught in the training of social work. Therefore I believed wholeheartedly that we had to know one another through being totally honest.

   **"We used to have a close relationship."** Some daughters said that they had a great

relationship with their mother, so they felt sorry if they were not able to share an important part

of life with them. Therefore, those daughters were motivated to come out to mothers to get the

closeness back.

> *Jennifer*: My mom and I always had a good relationship. I told her almost everything, but I could not tell her about my love life. I wasn't happy about this. I could not tell her about my happiness, unhappiness, or where I was going. My love life was very important to me at that time, and as a result, our interactions became less and less. We could not chat normally, and I was so afraid that she would blame me if she found out. So later I thought I had to tell her anyway.
>
> -----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------
>
> *Joanna*: In fact, we are a very close family. The four of us have always been close since my childhood, so coming-out was a top priority to me. We didn't talk about it in the year in which my mother read my diary until I wrote her the letter at Christmas. We didn't talk about it, and we avoided eye contact and shunned each other when we went to the market. It was very subtle. … I felt we shunned each other, including body contact. It was very

uncomfortable for me, because it had never happened before and I could not tolerate the awkwardness. …At the end, it felt like good timing to come out.

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*Kerry*: My family members were close, so I didn't want to conceal my sexual orientation from them. I also felt angry that I could not tell them about my life. (I: "Why did I need to hide?") Exactly! I was angry at myself about lying: why did I need to lie? Besides, they were very smart. I believed they knew *(laughing)*, but they just didn't want to talk about it! I would rather confess. I didn't want to be found out, because it would be a disaster.

**"I believed that my mother could handle this."** Some daughters believed that their

mothers were able to deal with the disclosure. The confidence came from their belief in love;

they knew that their mothers loved them, so their mothers should be able to find a way to accept

them. From a relational perspective, it seemed to show their trust in the mother-daughter

relationship. They just disclosed that they were lesbians without thinking too much about the

consequences.

*Man-Shuan*: My parents were very open, so my intuition told me that they could accept it if they knew I was a lesbian. They were so open, and my mom majored in psychology. There was no way that she could not accept it! No way. They must accept who I am!

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*Joey*: Many people say that they have to think a lot before coming out, but *Jadehare* and I didn't. We just left it to our parents to deal with.

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*Erika*: She really respected people's differences, so I thought she would accept it. That was why I told her my friends were lesbians when she asked. Later, I was with one of them. Of course I could not tell her immediately, but I also believed that maybe she wouldn't oppose it that much.

**Actual Event**

In this sub-domain, mothers and daughters described the actual event of disclosure

respectively. Interestingly, almost every dyad presented two different stories with discrepancies.

Other family members might also get involved when the disclosure happened. From speculating

about their daughter's sexual orientation to being told about it directly, mothers had to go

through a process lasting from one year to several years. Based on the manner of disclosure,

there are three categories in this sub-domain: "disclosed by herself", "found out accidentally",

and "outed by siblings".

**Disclosed by herself.** Five participants disclosed their sexual orientation by themselves.

However, most disclosures happened very suddenly or even with intense emotions. For example,

*Erika* and *Chih-Chieh* came out to their mothers after breaking up with their girlfriends because

the emotions were too strong to hide. As to *Johnny*, *Jennifer* and *Kerry*, they also came out to

their mothers or parents abruptly. Although some daughters had plans or thought about how to

come out beforehand, most disclosures occurred in an unexpected situation.

> *Chih-Chieh:* I was breaking-up at that time, and I also did not have a job after graduation, so the atmosphere at home was not good *(laughing)*. I really had a lot of pressure. I often didn't go home at night and fought a lot with my girlfriend because of breaking up. I was in a mess without a daily routine. Of course, my parents worried that their college-graduated daughter was messing around and not looking for a job. I remember that my mother told me that she thought our family was harmonious and we should keep it that way. Suddenly I was outraged because of what she said! *(Laughing)*… She

mentioned that the importance of having harmony all of a sudden, and that made me outraged. I had suppressed my emotions for three years because of this nonsense, so I said, "What is a harmonious family? We have never been harmonious! I can't do it anymore." *(Laughing)* I couldn't say anything, and I had to lie all the time. It was superficial to say that we had a harmonious family. We were not close at all. …For me, the "disharmony of our family" had never been resolved. We just didn't talk. I couldn't stand that they pretended like nothing happened. How come they were able to do so? I couldn't stand it at that time. I understand completely now, but at that time I couldn't.

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Georgia: Let me tell you the context of her coming-out event. She was in a girls' school in which she could go straight to high school without taking an entrance exam. She lived on campus, but she was often late for or absent from school. She was really naughty and had these behavioral problems. When she came back from school on that Saturday, her dad and I grabbed the chance and talked to her about these problems. *(Johnny had a facial expression showing that she suddenly remembered what had happened.)* You see. She totally forgot. We were not talking about coming out at that time, but she took it as an excuse. Maybe it was not an excuse, but a statement? (*Johnny*: "Definitely an excuse. Ha!"). … So, when we asked her why she had been absent and were giving her a lecture, she wrote that particular note. In fact, I remember she kept talking. We wouldn't let her go if she only wrote a note. So, she wrote the note, and then she told us, "Open it after I leave," with a heavy look. She was acting: "I behave like this because of this." She put two things together. Like a child who doesn't want to take the blame by saying "that is why I got bad scores," she wrote the note and took it as sufficient reason.

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Yen: On the New Year's Eve, or the day before it? She suddenly told me. I kind of knew what she wanted to say when she told me. …She hung out with me in the living room as if she had something to say. I asked, "Do you have something to tell me?" "Yes, I have something to tell you." In fact, I was thinking about if she wanted to tell me that. I had felt weird for some time. I remember I told her, "OK, you can say it now." *Kerry* asked me, "Are you ready?" Right? You seemed to ask me that. (*Kerry*: "Yes!"), "Are you ready?" I thought, "What's so serious?" I replied, "Yeah! I am ready!" Then she told me.

*Kerry: (Kerry shared her version of the story.)* When I was on the computer, she asked me again about my wearing sports underwear. I used to be easily irritated, really. *(Laughing)*

Yen: *(Laughing)* I asked her that because I was afraid the shape of her breast wouldn't look good if she did not take good care of it!

*Kerry*: I know, but those were harsh words for me. I used to be easily irritated. People always say that coming-out was the turning point. I can't agree more. Later she asked me again about my sports underwear, so I was pissed and replied, "I just like wearing it!" or something like that. My mom was sad and said, "Do you have anything else to tell me? Let's put everything on the table!" It was she who asked the key question *(Laughing)! (Yen also laughing.)* ...I really planned to disclose it in that year, but I couldn't when I faced my parents! In the end, she came to ask me!

I: Actually, you backed out, but after your mom asked?

*Kerry*: Exactly. Her question helped me bring up everything! Later we came downstairs to talk because my dad and my sister were downstairs! My brother was upstairs, and I had told my brother when being with my first girlfriend. I remember I came out to my dad and my younger sister with carefully chosen words because I had thought about the conversation ahead of time.

**Found out accidentally.** Two mothers learned that their daughters are lesbians by reading their daughters' diary unintentionally. Therefore, these two mothers went through a phase of speculation, feeling confused or even torn before their daughters' "official" disclosures. For example, *Man-Shuan* was found out by her neighbor when she brought someone home when her parents went on a trip. *Man-Shuan* then came out to her parents after they rushed home. As to *Joanna*, after she knew that Min-Mei had read her diary, it took her a year to prepare her coming-out plan and gain her family's support. These two dyads not only shared their stories, they also exchanged some residual feelings and thoughts to gain further clarification about the event in the interviews.

Sylvia: I remember she officially came out when our relationship was intense. Her father and I went traveling, so she came back to look after the house. You lived outside at that time, didn't you?

*Man-Shuan*: Nope.

Sylvia: You didn't?

*Man-Shuan*: Not yet.

Sylvia: Not in your 10th grade?

I : 10th grade?

Sylvia: Yes, and she had attended the night school. Oh, she hadn't moved out at that time. Yes, we went to a trip, and she brought a girl back that night. Our next-door neighbor saw and called us because that girl dyed her hair a strange color.

*Man-Shuan*: Next-door neighbor? Wasn't it the one downstairs?

Sylvia: Well, yes. She thought that girl was a bad girl because of her hair. …When my husband and I were on the way back, I remember we were thinking, "My God! If it is what we think, it's way earlier than we expected for her to explore sex and intimacy!" We were really shocked! So we were nervous, heart-broken, confused, and stunned on the way back. …Part of us was still traditional, and we felt that it was too young for her to have such intimate behavior. After we got back, the whole thing was brought to light.

*Man-Shuan*: I'm sure that my mom knew my sexual orientation in junior high. I remember my mother told me one thing, but I did not know that she had read my diary at that time. It was in eighth grade; I got a bad score on a monthly exam, and my mom tried to talk to me about this. She said one particular sentence, and then I realized that she had known everything! And I also found out that she had peeked into my diary! I was really angry about it, but I just sulked. Ha!

I: Do you remember what she said?

*Man-Shuan*: Of course! Mom said, "No matter whom you like, the most important thing is your schoolwork." (I: "I see, she wanted you to study hard.") Exactly. After hearing the first part of the sentence, I just knew it! Yeah!

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Min-Mei: I accidentally read her diary! I found it strange because she wrote "she." The more I read, the stranger I felt. How could it be? I also thought that I might be taking it the wrong way. I read it again but still wasn't sure. Later, what she wrote was getting stranger. *(Joanna smiled with a little bit embarrassment.)* I didn't read too much but

wondered, "How could this be?" … I didn't dare to ask her! I knew but didn't say anything. ….She did not tell us anything until a year later. …She wrote a letter… *(Min-Mei was choking with tears) (Min-Mei could not speak for 40 seconds. Joanna gave her tissue to wipe the tears).* That Christmas, she wrote a card to me, *(paused)* and her father took it from the mailbox. I read that she had something to tell us *(with a shaking voice)*, and then I knew what she was going to write. I started to cry when reading the card. *(Min-Mei was choking again and could not speak for 10 seconds.)* I didn't tell her father for the whole year, and her father began to ask me after seeing me crying *(still tearing)*. I read the letter, I cried, and then I told her father what had happened *(choking)*. Not until that moment did her father know everything. *(Joanna listened quietly in the whole process, embracing her mother's shoulder with one hand.)*

*Joanna*: *(Explaining further)* I usually went home during the Chinese New Year holiday, so I wrote a letter at Christmas to notify them that I wanted to tell them something. So the time interval was about from Christmas to Chinese New Year.

I: I see. It seems that Min-Mei knew what *Joanna* was going to say when receiving the card. (Min-Mei: "I knew what she was going to say!") So you told her father?

Min-Mei: I broke down with the suppressed emotion for the whole year. I finally had to face the music. Maybe it was because I didn't know how to tell her father, and I was about to know the truth. She was also going to tell me what was going on. With all of the above, I cried. Her father asked me why I cried and what this letter was about: "Why are you crying?" I couldn't hide the secret anymore! I then told her father that if I had gotten this letter by myself, I would have never let him know and would have hidden the letter.

I: Did you send the letter to your father?

*Joanna*: I sent it to my mom. But I knew if only my mom received that letter, I definitely couldn't make the thing right.

I: So you knew your mom pretty well.

*Joanna*: Yes, so I emphasized, "You have to show this letter to Dad." I requested, "You can't hide it." Because I knew if she received it by herself, she would definitely hide it!

*Joanna*: *(Continuing to explain her preparations in that year)* I wrote a letter so they could have time to prepare. I didn't want to talk emotionally. I knew her feelings would be intense the moment she knew about it, so I hoped she could digest it as much as possible. When my parents saw me, I hoped they could be calm and we could really focus on the topic. That was why I sent the letter. I knew my parents' personalities very well. I

always knew that I only had to take care of my mom. Have I mentioned that she is quiet and tends to keep a lot of things to herself? You can see that part of her personality from this example. In fact, she always worries too much. But I was never worried about my dad. I already knew that he would be okay. …That was why I emphasized in the letter that she had to let my dad read it, so that she couldn't tear it or put it away. I knew everything would be fine if my dad knew. As long as he knew, he would help me to take care of my mom *(laughing)*. And then, when I came home, it would be easier for me to handle the situation. So, everything was under control *(laughing)*! It was in my plan! Yeah, I felt my coming out went pretty smooth!

**Outed by siblings.** Another two interviewees were outed by their younger sisters in

different situations. The actual event also caused different responses in their families, which

might relate to their family dynamics. *Joey* and her sisters were pretty close and supportive of

one anther. When her younger sisters outed *Joey* to their mother, Linda, they actually wanted

Linda to endorse *Joey's* younger sister's same-sex relationship. By outing *Joey*, they hoped it

could help Linda to accept the younger daughter better because *Joey* was the daughter that Linda

trusted the most. However, *Jadehare* had a rather competitive relationship with her sisters. When

her sister learned that she was dating a woman, she outed *Jadehare* with enormous anger.

*Jadehare's* mother, Phoenix, also reacted in rage. Although homophobia might also contribute to

the turmoil in the family, the different family dynamics seemed to play a role in the whole event.

>Linda: It was my third child. I found out first that she is a lesbian.
>I: You found out?
>Linda: *(Nodding)* She brought her girlfriend to home openly. She said that girl was only a friend. At first I thought it was nothing. Later, that girl didn't go to work and even came to our house to take a nap. Furthermore, they hug together! I felt it was a bit strange, but

it didn't occur to me that they might be a couple. As a ship's captain, her father was allowed to take me on board with him. One time I found something strange after I got back, and she told me.

I: Something strange? Could I ask what it was?

Linda: They were fighting, and what they said was strange. But she didn't tell me by herself. It was my second child telling me the truth. I was lecturing my third daughter, saying, "I have taken care of you since you were little. Now you are grown-up and your dad is getting old. I want to look after my husband and have some fun with him. Look what you have done. Which one should I take care of, my daughter or my husband?" They didn't reply. But my second daughter said, "Is it so strange? *Joey* is the same!" "Also a lesbian!" You can't imagine the shock I have experienced!

*Joey*: *(Speaking about the process of coming out)* It was about eight years ago, or a decade ago? It should be a decade ago at least. (Linda: "About that.") I didn't know my mom already knew, and my sisters didn't tell me that they outed me. …I just ended a relationship. I used to bring the girl home and tell my mom that she was a friend (Linda: "A colleague."). Right. I was not sure if my mom had known everything when she asked me the question. Well, she probably had since my sisters had outed me. Anyway, one day my mom asked causally, "How come your friend hasn't visited us recently?" I thought she probably asked the question deliberately, but I was not sure. I was really in a bad mood because of breaking up at that time. …So, my mother asked the question, and I felt annoyed. Being in a bad mood, I replied, "She used to be my girlfriend, but we broke up now. Of course she won't show up!" I was very surprised that my mom was so calm. She said, "I guessed so" or something like that. Now I know it was because my sisters had told her! I thought that my mom got it when I was with her for the first time. We were together two times. That was our second break-up.

Linda: Of course I had to say so. I couldn't tell you that your sisters betrayed you. If I did, you would definitely have fought!

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I: When did you know?

Phoenix: Her sister told me accidentally.

I: Her sister told you?

Phoenix: Yes, her sister! …I didn't know how come her sister found out, but she told me by accident. Then I started to wonder how come *Jadehare* would become like this.

I: Did you remember what her sister said? For example, how did she describe *Jadehare*'s situation? *(Jadehare was crying.)*

Phoenix: I can't remember exactly what her sister said. It was a long time ago!

I: How many years ago?

*Jadehare*: More than ten years.

Phoenix: At least a decade

*Jadehare*: I started dating when I was a freshman in college.

Phoenix: After her sister told me, I could not believe it and didn't understand at all! I had no clues! Her sister had a bad temper, so they fought a lot because of this. I gradually understood why after a period of time.

*Jadehare*: *(Further explained)* My little sister did have a bad temper. I didn't handle it well either. I knew nothing about bisexuality at that time and felt pretty confused. So I thought, "I used to like boys when I was young! But I like girls now. What does it mean? Am I bisexual?" Then I told my sister. Our relationship was not bad, so I shared with her that some girls liked me. Yes, it was me who told my sister first.

**Immediate Aftermath for Mothers**

Mothers' immediate responses, thoughts, and feelings after the disclosure are presented in this sub-domain. Immediate aftermath refers to those reactions or emotions mothers experienced within six months of learning their daughters' sexual orientation. The six-month timeframe is roughly estimated based on the interview data since it was hard for these participants to clearly recall an exact timeframe of which they had specific reactions or emotions. Mothers had to take at least few months, even one year to one of the participants, to digest the news and organize themselves.

According to their various responses, thoughts and emotions, I have divided the abundant

data into three categories: positive (including emerging themes of "accepted immediately" and

"concerned about other challenges in life"); negative (including emerging themes

of "self-blaming", "shocked", "crying", "denial", "worried or afraid"), and neutral (including

emerging themes of "looked for family's support" and "not reacting much"). Mothers' emotions

or reactions were full of complexity and variety. Therefore, it is not uncommon for a participant

to describe several emotions or reactions in her process of adjustment.

**Positive.** Not surprisingly, most mothers described negative reactions or emotions.

Positive reactions or emotions were shared mostly by two mothers, Georgia and Sylvia. They

were also the only two mothers who I contacted first rather than their daughters. Their daughters

were also the youngest among all the daughters. Therefore, their age or generation might be one

of the important factors that influenced their responses.

*Accepted immediately.* Both Georgia and Sylvia said that they accepted their daughters'

sexual orientation almost immediately when the daughters came out to their mothers. *Johnny* and

*Man-Shuan* also confirmed their mothers' stories.

> Georgia: When she ran away for one or two hours, we were talking about how we should deal with it. … We were concerned that she might be afraid. We guessed she didn't know our reaction since she ran away. Most children would be afraid because it was not the topic people would address in daily life. We had to let her know that we didn't mind that she likes girls, and the most important thing was her schoolwork and do what a student should do. We also discussed when we should call her, and we shouldn't wait till night. I said, "Maybe she was worried about our reaction. Let's call her." And we decided to let

her father call her because she would know his call was more official. Her father wasn't like me. I used to joke around with her. Her father agreed, "Okay. Let me call her." You can say that we accepted right away, and we decided to handle other issues by ourselves. We thought she was still immature, and we wanted her to know that we wouldn't punish her because of this. As a result, we told her on the same day that she should come home for dinner, meaning that there was no need for her to be afraid.

Georgia: Her father and I thought she looked androgynous, and she just liked to dress that way. … I used to believe that her look didn't mean she also liked girls. Later we found out: "Oh, she does like girls." We were not really surprised, maybe not as surprised as those femme lesbians' parents. But we still had a feeling: "OK, so it turns out she is!"
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I: It sounds like you have known her sexual orientation since her eighth grade before her official coming out.
Sylvia: I just doubted. I had doubts.
I: Do you remember if you had any emotional reaction?
Sylvia: No. I mentioned that I was exhausted because of dealing with her schooling, including transferring to night school and quitting. I didn't care anymore. Well, I did care. I should say, compared with other stuff, her coming out was no big deal to me.

*Concerned about other challenges in life.* These mothers also recognized other

challenges in their daughters' life, like schoolwork and peer relationships. In other words, their

daughters' disclosure did not overwhelm these mothers, and they still cared about what they felt

was important to the daughter's development. Therefore, "concerned about other challenges in

life" is categorized as a positive response. For example, Georgia told *Johnny* that her

performance in school was her priority to focus on. And Sylvia was more concerned about whom

*Man-Shuan* was dating rather than which gender *Man-Shuan* was interested in.

Georgia: I kept telling her that we accepted her, but at the same time, she should attend school on schedule. (I: "These are two different things.') Yes, I wanted to emphasize that.

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Sylvia: I remember that I wanted to meet *Man-Shuan*'s girlfriend. I had to meet her personally, and others' opinions were only for reference. Of course I didn't want to break them apart, but I wanted to know more about her in a reasonable sense. Basically I hoped to transform the whole experience from a negative one to a positive one. So she brought her to meet me later.

**Negative.** Many mothers stressed that they experienced strong emotions during or after the disclosure. They also had reactions like resistance, incomprehension, or self-blame. To most mothers, feeling unsettled or confused was unavoidable. As a result, the mother-daughter relationship was affected and became awkward to some participants. The disclosure sometimes even turned out to be chaotic for some families, which I will discuss more in the next domain "Early Experience of Disclosure".

*Self-blaming.* More than half of mothers mentioned that they blamed themselves after their daughters came out. They wondered how much they were responsible for their daughter's sexual orientation, if they had not taken care of their daughter enough, or if their married life had influenced their daughter. Although they blamed themselves for different reasons, their reactions reflected mothers' anxiety in child rearing and their confusion about the cause of their daughter's sexual orientation. Some mothers even asked daughters several times during the interview to make sure that they did not need to feel responsible for their daughters' attraction to same-sex

partners.

Wanda: I believe it is because of me!

*Jennifer*: She feels everything is about her anyway!

Wanda: Maybe she doesn't want to marry a man after witnessing my unhappiness. That's what I think.

I: That comes from a mother's viewpoint.

Wanda: Yes. It is really hard for me to be in a marriage. So I do feel it is good not to marry a man. What for? Hahaha!

--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

Phoenix: "How come?" I thought, "How could this be?" Maybe I was the problem because I gave birth to her. *(Jadehare was crying.)* Didn't I take good care of her, so that she was abnormal? … I wondered what went wrong; how come your sister and you were both abnormal? I blamed myself hard. Her sister condemned her, and I also scolded. I said, "If you want to be with her, I'm no longer your mother. Just leave this house with her!" We couldn't communicate and fought a lot. … That was what happened. Later when she had a fight with her sister, I told her sister *(choking)*, "Maybe it is my fault that she is born this way."

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Yen: After she came out to us, we kept asking ourselves questions. Her dad and I were wondering if we did something wrong, so that she developed this personality or sexual orientation. We kept asking ourselves if we made mistakes in parenting to let her feel unjust and become the way she was. We could not stop examining ourselves! And those were the questions her father and I were thinking. … I even thought if there was something wrong with our blood types! Oh yes, you know, since she was our progeny! We also considered the possibility of having medical problems. For example, why are these three children allergic? Anyway, we kept examining ourselves during the process.

***Shocked.*** Several mothers talked about their shock. One of the mothers even said that she was more than shocked when learning that two of her daughters are lesbians. Not only those who had never thought about their daughters being lesbians were very shocked, those who found their

daughters acted like tomboys since they were little also felt shocked. In other words, mothers did

not make connections between being like tomboys and being attracted to the same sex, but their

daughters usually believed that being like tomboys had explained a great deal about their

same-sex attraction.

> Linda: You can't imagine how shocked I was. … I found out two of four daughters were lesbians on the same day! … You said you only have one in your family? I believe that I can say that the way I felt shocked was doubled than your parents did, right?
> --------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------
> May: I really forget when I first knew her sexual orientation. But I was shocked by the news. I was really shocked. … Of course a mother would hope that her daughter was... (I: "Doing well?") Exactly, so I was really shocked and worried.
> --------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------
> Yen: I want to confess. I could not sleep that night; the more I thought, the sadder I was. *(Paused)* It was a challenge to accept it immediately. I couldn't say that I accepted it happily to make you feel okay. It would be a lie if I said I could.

*Crying.* Crying was another reaction that was mentioned several times. Mothers' tears

then impacted daughters greatly, causing emotional reactions like not knowing what to do,

feeling sorry, or feeling shocked. However, mothers' after-the-disclosure tears were mostly

mentioned by their daughters. Mothers tended not to speak of their tears specifically. Some of the

tears might be because of discomposure, loss, or worries. Although participants could share their

stories and how the disclosure felt like after few years, the impact was still unforgettable.

> *Jadehare*: Of course I was very sad when seeing her crying. I had never seen her crying until I went to college. My mom was such a strong woman, but she cried that day!

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May: I seldom cried. Hardly ever. I cried when my dad died because of a heart attack. I had dinner with him the night before, and he died the next day. So I burst into loud sobs on the sofa. When I knew she was a lesbian, I cried without really knowing I was crying. I remember I was washing dishes and then found myself crying.

*Erika*: I felt embarrassed and didn't know what to say. Then I saw her crying. I never saw her crying before *(in a trembling voice)*, so it was a shock for me when she cried.

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*Kerry*: That Chinese New Year was a tough one. They looked miserable everyday. I knew they couldn't sleep well and had swollen eyes.

I: You knew they had cried?

*Kerry*: I knew.

I: Both of them?

*Kerry*: Yes, including my dad.

**Denial.** Besides strong emotional reactions and other internal struggles, some mothers

asked their daughters to "change back" or end the same-sex relationship, like Phoenix and May.

As to Min-Mei, she found out that *Joanna* liked girls by reading her diary accidentally. Before

*Joanna* came out to her officially, Min-Mei also went through a stage of "denial".

Min-Mei: Maybe I was afraid that I got a positive answer if I asked *Joanna*. I didn't want to accept it if it was the fact. When I asked her brother, I hoped that her brother would tell me that I misunderstood. I really hoped so.

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Phoenix: I scolded her, "If you love her, just move out! If you love her, it means you choose her over your parents. Say no more!" I threw those words at her. I wanted her to move out *(Jadehare was crying when listening to Phoenix)*. I thought it was abnormal to be in this kind of same-sex relationship, and the one she loved was far from our expectations. She didn't have to be with girls.

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*Erika*: Mom wanted to persuade me, saying, "I've always let you decide what you wanted since you were young. Listen to me this time, OK?" I remember it very clearly, "Listen to me this time." *(Looking at May)* Yes, you asked me to promise to break up with her.

***Worried or afraid.*** Another reaction that mothers had was fear or worry that their daughters might be confronted with various challenges because of their sexual orientation. Some worried about their daughters' health, and some worried about discrimination. The reasons behind their fear or worry will be further discussed in the following domain.

*Erika*: You said that being a minority was difficult. You emphasized it.
May: Yes. Being a minority was difficult in this society. That was my reaction. … People tend to be afraid of what they don't understand. So I hoped you were not lesbian. Yes, that's what I thought at that time.
------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------
*Kerry*: Later, as she mentioned, they started to worry about many things. For example, she worried that I would be sick, so she immediately asked me if my girlfriend and I had our periods regularly.

**Neutral.** Some of the mothers' reactions were able to be categorized as neutral ones. One of them was "looked for family's support" and the other was "not reacting much." These two reactions were hard to be seen as negative or positive, especially the later one. Those mothers just kept on living without intense responses after the disclosure. However, although mothers did not react strongly when the disclosure occurred, the non-reaction" seemed to influence the family dynamics later based on daughters' viewpoint.

***Looked for family's support.*** Some daughters came out to their mothers and fathers at the

same time, like *Johnny*, *Man-Shuan*, and *Kerry*. I did not include these three families because

both parents dealt with the disclosure together. There were three mothers asking for family's

support after their daughter's disclosure or finding out daughter's sexual orientation. Phoenix,

Min-Mei, and May looked for sister-in-law's, son's, and husband's support or assistance

respectively. However, looking for family's support sometimes did not mean that the other

family member could help to reduce the mother's pressure, like Phoenix's husband.

> Phoenix: Her father had a bad temper, so I didn't dare tell him. But I asked her father
> privately, "What's gay?" He replied, "That's psychologically perverted!"
> "Psychologically perverted!" Then I didn't dare to ask anymore. Oh, he didn't use the
> words "psychologically perverted" but "they're hopeless!" I pretended and said, "I knew
> what gay is today." Then he told me, "They're hopeless!" I didn't tell him who the person
> was. I just asked, "I often heard people talking about gay. What does it mean?" He only
> replied, "They're hopeless!"
> ------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------
> Min-Mei: I wanted to confirm if what I read in the diary was true, but I didn't dare to ask
> her, so I called her brother. I asked if he knew. He said that he didn't know! I asked him
> to pry into it, and her brother told me okay. We never addressed this topic again, but I
> had had doubts in my mind already. Her brother didn't tell me if it was true eventually.
> Neither did she.

***Not reacting much.*** Some mothers did not react much when the disclosure happened.

Elaine had had some suspicion before the actual disclosure; Linda had been told *Joey*'s sexual

orientation before *Joey* really came out to her; Wanda wanted to give her daughter more time to

make sure. Therefore, they all dealt with the disclosure with a rather calm attitude or even little

reaction.

> Linda: I found my third child was lesbian first, and the second child said, "Actually, *Joey* is like this!"
>
> I: Since the most trusted child of Mom is also lesbian, they felt that it was the trump card they could play.
>
> Linda: Yes. Maybe they thought there was a higher chance for me to accept it if they mentioned you. (*Joey*: "Yes! That's right!") But I didn't tell *Joey* immediately that I had found out. Neither did I scold her after I knew. After feeling struggled for a few days, I was fine with it. When *Joey* told me later, I was able to tell her calmly that I had already knew!
>
> -----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------
>
> I: Did you remember how you felt when *Chih-Chieh* disclosed this?
>
> *Chih-Chieh*: *(Whispered)* Not surprised.
>
> I: Don't give your mom the hint.
>
> Elaine & *Chih-Chieh*: I/She wasn't! Really! *(Laughing)*
>
> Elaine: I had doubts. In fact, I was prepared to learn the truth. *Chih-Chieh* said I am rational. I think I tend to face the music. Just face it!
>
> *Chih-Chieh*: My mom pretended nothing happened after I came out to her. You know that the most important thing is to have a harmonious family, so we pretended nothing happened and had dinner as usual. We didn't discuss it afterwards. That's it.

**Immediate Aftermath for Daughters'**

In this sub-domain, daughters' immediate aftermath was discussed, including their

emotions, thoughts, and feelings. Compared with their mothers, most daughters were able to

recall more details because many of them had planned or imagined what the disclosure would be

like beforehand. Also, because most of them had gone through struggles and plenty of thinking

before the disclosure, their immediate aftermath was more straightforward than their mothers'.

According to their stories, I have divided their reactions into four categories: "relief", "no guilt", "shock, sadness, or disappointment", and "calm".

**Relief.** Both *Johnny* and *Kerry* said that it was such a relief after coming out to their parents. Furthermore, *Johnny* said that she could not remember many details about the coming-out event because her parents were very accepting. As to *Kerry*, she became calmer and had a better temper after the disclosure.

> *Johnny*: I thought, "Wow. No big deal." I heard that other students in our girl's school were found out by their parents, and they were miserable. I had had the feeling that my family could accept it if I came out. After disclosure, I really felt relieved, "That's true. Nothing happened!" … In fact, I don't remember the whole experience clearly.
> -------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------
> *Kerry*: I told them I liked girls. I felt those words, like gay or homosexual, were negative. They are still very negative now. So I said I liked girls. I remember clearly that the first sentence my mom said was "Don't you know that you put pressure on me?"
> I: Okay.
> *Kerry*: I felt sorry when I heard that. But it was so true! The pressure on me disappeared!
> Yen: The pressure was on me then!
> *Kerry*: *(Laughing)* Exactly! The people I was afraid of knowing the most were my parents. Since they knew, I had nothing to fear. You should have found out that I am less irritated than I used to be. I don't need to be anymore.

**No guilt.** Some daughters mentioned that they had no guilt for their same-sex attraction. They might feel sorry for their mothers' being emotional after the disclosure, like *Jadehare* and *Kerry*, but they did not feel that they were wrong because of falling in love with their same-sex partners. As to *Joey*, she stressed that she never struggled about her coming-out or felt sorry for

her mother since it was not about doing anything wrong.

> *Jadehare*: I felt I was not filial and let her cry. But I also felt it was not my fault to love a person.
> ----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------
> Linda: I believed that she struggled to tell me and felt sorry about it! Did you? Tell me!
> *Joey*: Not really! I was in a bad mood indeed.
> Linda: When you came out to me, you should feel "Mom, I'm sorry." Of course you didn't really say it, but did you feel it?
> *Joey*: No I didn't!
> Linda: I've always wanted to know for years!
> *Joey*: I didn't feel sorry, because I didn't think I was wrong.
> ----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------
> Yen: It felt like being caught if parents found out first.
> *Kerry*: Yes. But I don't agree with the word "caught." It's not a matter of right or wrong.

**Shock, sadness, or disappointment.** As to *Jadehare*, *Erika*, and *Chih-Chieh*, their experiences were different from *Johnny* and *Kerry*. *Jahehare* and *Erika* were shocked and sad by their mothers' intense reactions, and *Chih-Chieh* felt disappointed that her mother took the disclosure too coolly. They all took a period of time or even years to work on their unsettled emotions and their relationships with their mothers.

> *Jadehare*: After my sister knew, she told my mom. I was a freshman at that time. When I came back home, my girlfriend visited me. After she left, my mom and sister came upstairs to tell me, "If you choose her, don't ever come home! Leave the house, and never come back!" I thought, "My god! I never thought it would be so serious! I didn't realize before! How come?" I was really naïve, or even stupid. … I also saw that my mom cried. My first thought was, "What? My family can't accept it! I have never known the same-sex relationship is not blessed." I felt a little bit depressed. The second thought was, "Mom is asking me to move out? No way! She's just upset. Although I feel sad, I

must know that she didn't mean what she said. I will disregard her words and insist on coming back."

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*Erika*: I was sad because I never saw her like that! I promised her to end the relationship even though I felt sad. Since the relationship just started, I said, "Okay. I'll handle it and break up with her gradually." But of course, I didn't! *(Laughing)* I lied for some while.

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*Chih-Chieh*: I could only remember one thing after I came out: she didn't hug me! *(Laughing)*

I: You felt that was huge, and?

*Chih-Chieh*: She didn't hug me after I disclosed. And then she pretended nothing happened and went downstairs to dine! *(Paused)* I was thinking, "What is that? *(Laughing)* I just told you such an important thing in my life!"

**Calm.** Some daughters were calm. Based on their understanding about their mothers, they acted accordingly after they found out that their mothers might have known their sexual orientation from reading their diary. *Man-Shuan* and *Joanna* knew clearly what their mothers concerned about and what their emotional reactions might be. Therefore, they planned their actual disclosure in a way of managing a crisis, and *Joanna* even used a year to adjust herself and plan every step to come out.

> *Man-Shuan*: I did care about letting my mom have a good impression on my girlfriend. I wanted her not to worry, and it was okay that I was with that girl. I remember Mom requested to meet my girlfriend when I came out. So we planned for so long, like what to wear and so on. … I remember I told my girlfriend to wear glasses even if she wasn't really nearsighted *(Sylvia laughing)*. She wasn't used to dressing like that, but I said, "Wear this. My mom likes the official style." We planned and even rehearsed the way she should sit and talk.
> I: Step by step.

*Man-Shuan*: Exactly. We planned everything, including "My mom will ask you this. Let me think how you should reply." *(Laughing while talking)*

I: You know your mom pretty well.
*Man-Shuan*: Yes, I know what she cares about. For example, the way a good girl should behave.
I: So, the real challenge was not to disclose but to let your mom accept your girlfriend?
*Man-Shuan*: Yes, like who that girl was, what kind of person she was, and how she might influence me. She cared about all these. She was afraid that I would become a bad person.
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*Joanna*: My mom's reaction was within my expectations, and that was why I wrote what I wrote in a letter. Anyway we knew what happened during that year, but we didn't talk about it.

## Early Experience of Disclosure

In this domain, participants described their stories after the actual disclosure, and those experiences occurred approximately six months to one year later. Sub-domains were mother's responses, daughter's responses, changes of the mother-daughter relationship, other family members' responses, and meaningful events that influenced the relationship.

### Mother's Responses to the Disclosure

After the daughter's disclosure, the mother felt shocked, accepted immediately, or did not react much. But how did those mothers digest or dealt with this information later on? After all, they were not familiar with this part of the life experience that their daughters had. Without much knowledge about the life of being a lesbian in society, some mothers tried to understand and

explore that area actively, and some mothers just left it for a while. For most mothers, not

addressing the topic for a while in their mother-daughter relationship was pretty common for

them in dealing with the information in their daily life. There are two categories in this

sub-domain to be discussed: "actively explored" and "not addressed for a while".

**Actively explored.** Two mothers mentioned that they took action to understand how

being a lesbian influenced their daughters' life. Georgia dealt with *Johnny's* disclosure with a

pretty positive attitude and did some studies on LGBT issues on her own. Yen also started to

understand *Kerry's* life by having further conversations with her soon after the disclosure. Their

husbands joined further study sessions and conversations as well. Although my research only

focused on the mothers' process, fathers in these two families also participated in the same

process and explored LGBT issues with their wives at the same time.

> Georgia: After she came out, we slowly learned to accept it and looked for information.
> We didn't directly ask her.
> ------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------
> Yen: When *Kerry* told us, I wanted her to think clearly: "Don't just follow a trend and
> believe that you are one of them. You must be sure. If it's true that you're lesbian, just be
> who you are. If you're just following a trend only because you meet those people in the
> big city and because it is trendy, it's blind of you to do so." We told her, "You should
> think clearly before you make decisions." That was our suggestion. … Soon after she
> came out, we went to the city where she studied because we hoped she could make sure
> that it was not just being trendy. We told her, "If you're sure, we will definitely support
> you. We will accept you. Don't think of running away. That's the last thing you have to
> worry about." That was what we said.

**Not addressed for a while.** Many participants reported that mothers often went through a

stage of "no discussion, no questions, and no interest." Although they could talk about what had

happened before during the interview, daughters remembered that their mothers used to avoid

this topic for quiet a while.

> *Joey*: At first, she wasn't against it, but she didn't bring up this topic either. Neither did
> we.
> ----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------
> *Joanna*: My mom took some time to digest it. Before coming out, I brought a booklet on
> LGBT issues and put it in an obvious place on the bookshelf. Taiwan Tongzhi Hotline
> published a book called "Dear Dad and Mom, I'm Gay." I also brought it home after
> coming out. I told my mom that my best friend's story was in the book. But I could tell
> that she still resisted reading those books. She put the book upside down and then put one
> tissue box on top of it. She was just not ready to face it. She had to avoid it in some
> indirect manner even though she had already learned I was lesbian. Anyway, that was
> what I expected, so I wasn't surprised.
> ----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------
> I: So later you didn't talk about it? Waited until the chance came?
> *Chih-Chieh*: We didn't talk about it anymore. Right? Occasionally maybe. And then I
> moved out! For me, it felt unsolved.

**Daughter's Responses after the Disclosure**

In this sub-domain, daughters talked about how they responded to their mothers'

reactions and the possible awkwardness in the relationship about keeping the conversation going.

I had the assumption that daughters had to make certain efforts in their mother-daughter

relationship to help mothers to accept their sexual orientation better. In my imagination, it must

be a challenging task and pretty time-consuming. However, since every mother-daughter dyad

possessed different relational dynamics, not every daughter had to strive a certain amount of time

to get her mother's acceptance.

Based on the answers that those daughters replied, I have divided their responses into two

categories: taking care of mother (including emerging themes of "respected her acceptance

process", "offered emotional support", "set her mind at ease", and "enhanced her life"), and

taking care of the relationship (including emerging themes of "compromised", "kept trying",

and "interacted as usual").

**Taking care of mother.** With great empathy in mind, daughters tried to treat the

disclosure from their mothers' perspective to lead their conversation or interactions.

***Respected her acceptance process.*** For example, daughters shared their lesbian life with

their mothers or addressed related knowledge about LGBT when mothers were ready to hear.

They respected their mothers' adjustment process. *Joey*, *Jennifer*, and *Jadehare* all expressed

how they paid attention to mothers' readiness and then brought up related topics in their

conversations with their mothers. *Jadehare* even invited Phoenix to some activities when she felt

the time was right.

> *Joey*: We shared. At the beginning we didn't dare to mention any related topic, because
> she didn't want to. Later she would ask about what "T" and "P" stood for in the lesbian

community. After she showed her interest, we realized that it was not a forbidden topic. Gradually, we would shared with her about what we did or what kind events we joined.

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*Jennifer*: Sometimes I took the chance when she was willing to talk. For example, I remember one time we dined, she asked, "Do you go out with someone?" I wonder if she still remembers. It was a long time ago. … Anyway, when she was willing to talk, I would take the chance. The more she asked, the more I shared. I didn't have the courage to mention those topics actively. But if she mentioned, I would grab the chance and talk.

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*Jadehare*: I took her to a parents' support group after I worked hard and observed for two years. I had a plan in mind and let it happen step by step. … I'm a dominant daughter.
I: To let her accept slowly.
*Jadehare*: Yes. Maybe I learned from doing business. Can't rush things. My mom is my main customer!

***Offered emotional support.*** Many mothers had strong emotional reactions after

disclosure, and self-blaming was mentioned by most mothers. Therefore, some daughters

focused on providing emotional support to let mothers release their emotions.

Min-Mei: She told us later that it was not our problem, so we felt less guilty. That's her problem, not ours! *(Joanna and I laughed)*

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*Kerry*: I wanted to help them *(laughing)*, because I was afraid that I put too much of a burden on them.
Yen: She was afraid that we didn't know anything, and she was worried.
*Kerry*: Yes. See if there was anything I could do.

***Set her mind at ease.*** Daughters also worked on setting mothers' mind at ease. In other

words, mothers had different kinds of worries or fears after disclosure. Hence, daughters tried to

assure their mothers of a positive future. For example, *Jadehare* and *Joey* hoped their mothers

would understand that they did not do anything bad in terms of participating in some LGBT

activities.

> *Jadehare*: I have always wanted her to know that I'm not doing bad things. Hopefully set her mind at ease. I want her to know that I have many good friends, and they're all good people.
> -------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------
> *Joey*: My sisters and I are in the community, join some events or give speeches. For example, I take calls for the Hotline. The more we get involved in the community and share with my mom, the more she understands. Sometimes I discussed things with her, and she would agree with us, "Yes. This is the right thing to do!" Like, she agreed that taking calls in the Hotline is the right thing to do.

**Enhanced her life.** Some daughters hoped to enhance mothers' world by sharing her

lesbian life. They took disclosure as a way to open a door to invite mothers to know and

experience the differences in the world.

> *Jadehare*: I acted naughtily sometimes. For example, I often complained to my mom, "Mom, how come you never take me to the theater and watch movies? I'm your child! My sister takes her child to see movies!" My mom usually replied, "You have grown up! Go by yourself!" What is the point? … I want her to have different kinds of activities.
> I: You want her to experience.
> Phoenix: I know!
> *Jadehare*: Yes. I want to take her to the movie theater. But I said, "Mom, you have to. You don't love me if you don't take me." I said it deliberately. *(Phoenix mumbled)* But she's too busy, and it's not her hobby. She would rather dine at home with families or go out. Actually I make fun of my grandma and my mom. I want them to experience more.

> *Jadehare*: My mom is a good mother. I hope that my friends can come home to appreciate her cooking skills. I feel we get closer. Maybe she doesn't. It is I who want her to join my life and experience more. Although it wasn't her choice, I pushed her to join

my activities, like being interviewed and participating in events. Maybe she would like playing piano and embroidery, but maybe she would like one of my activities. I feel we can get closer through it. Really. I think we become more intimate!

**Taking care of the relationship.** Daughters also took actions to take care of their relationship with different approaches.

*Compromised.* Some daughters mentioned that they compromised at some moments in the relationship to create more space and possibilities in the future. In order to keep the conversation going, they swallowed their struggles. Both *Jennifer* and *Jadehare* had such experiences. As to *Kerry*, she knew what her parents wanted to hear, so she responded ambiguously to satisfy her parents.

> *Jennifer*: Some people don't care for their family, or they have other ways to keep in contact. It's not the case in my family because we're very close. I can't hide my work from my parents. … Because of my family, I had to tell the Hotline, "I can't take new jobs. This is what I can do now." I also wanted to share my work with her more, but I don't know if it's appropriate. …We were often mad at each other after talking. I used to wonder if I should say less and promise to whatever she said. But then I thought, "No! I have to let you know my opinion! I have to!" And we would have arguments. Or should I promise to whatever she says to avoid the argument? Which one should I choose? Sometimes I really didn't know.
> ---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------
> *Jadehare*: If I had been rebellious, I would have moved out and never come back as her wished. I could make that choice. But then I thought, "No! She's mad and doesn't mean what she said. I have to be rational and not to do as she said." I was still hurt, so I came home less during my college years. I would have come home more often if it hadn't happened, because I like my family very much.
> ---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

*Kerry*: *(Mentioned her parents going to school to talk to her after she came out)* They wanted me not to decide my sexual orientation too early! I told them okay. Maybe one day I would like boys. Maybe. I could tell that they felt better after that conversation.

**Kept trying.** Some daughter kept trying. They gave examples, explained, and persuaded their mothers again and again. After numerous discussions, they were able to generate a non-stop coming-out process in the relationship.

*Jadehare*: Although my parents love me, I can't force them to know what LGBT is. They don't have resources. After joining the Hotline, I realized that I am the best resource. … For example, my mom cooks for my friends, my sister's friends, and my Dad's friends. That is her way of treating friends. You're pursuing a doctoral degree, and you are a great example to let her know lesbians can be successful. I introduced my friends to my mom one by one. She saw these couples, and maybe she would think, "Are they lesbians?" …, I think I have made some progress and learned to make our relationship better. Maybe my mom was forced into the interview, for example. I don't know if she is happy to be interviewed. But that's okay. I have to try and observe. If she is really unwilling, I won't ask her again. However, I have seen her showing up in different gay campaigns again and again, so I think she can accept it without being uncomfortable.
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*Jennifer*: She puts great effort into her relationships and parenting, so it is hard for me to say, "I don't care" or "whatever." But I can't pretend that I am not lesbian either. The only way to maintain our relationship is to keep trying. … Sometimes I will feel discouraged, but I am optimistic and forget unhappy things easily. (Wanda: "She doesn't hold grudges.") Yes. (Wanda: "Me neither!") Yes. I seldom feel depressed. … I am mostly happy everyday. Some people are unhappy by nature, but I feel satisfied about most things. I will try to make good things better. If I fail this time, I will make another attempt next time. I get encouragement by one successful experience of communication. I will keep that in mind and try it again if I fail one time. There will always be another chance.
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*Chih-Chieh*: I wrote emails to her because I moved out! I still kept those emails *(Laughing). (To Elaine)* I still have them! So, we communicated through email several times.

I: Is it easier for you to communicate by email? (*Chih-Chieh*: "Yes.") Writing mail is more efficient. It's more intense when talking in person.

*Chih-Chieh*: Yes, indeed. So we wrote! Did we communicate later? We also chatted for some while I was in the United States. She visited me there, and we had some talks then.

***Interacted as usual.*** To those who had had a good mother-daughter relationship before

disclosure, daughters just tried to sustain their relationship by interacting as usual. They wanted

to let their mothers know that being a lesbian did not affect their closeness or change their

original mother-daughter relationship. Like what *Kerry* said, "I was the same person and had

never changed."

*Joanna*: We have always been close, so we don't want our relationship to be ruined (Min-Mei: "Yes."). When we face a big problem, we will try everything to solve it. (Min-Mei: "That's right!") The point is that we have been close and we want to keep it this way. If we had a bad relationship, we might give up because of unwillingness or other obstacles. Luckily, we have had a good relationship from the very beginning.
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*Erika*: We have been pretty close, and that's our foundation. Despite her depression, we have a good relationship. I liked to talk to her when I was little. Similarly, I love to tell her know what's important in my life now, which is my same-sex relationship. I think it is the key; we have had a good relationship, and it helps me keep sharing.
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*Kerry*: Actually in that year, after I came out, I wrote a note to them before leaving. I wanted them to know I was still their daughter no matter what. I was the same person and had never changed.

**Changes in the Relationship**

I invited my participants to share their viewpoints on the change of the mother-daughter relationship before and after the disclosure. Interestingly, mothers tended to state that the relationship did not change much after the disclosure, but daughters tended to feel differently after the disclosure. Therefore, the same dyad usually had different answers to the same question. Based on participants' answers, there are three categories in this sub-domain: no change, a big shift (including emerging themes of "less stressed", "feeling supported", and "more sharing or asking"), and mixed feelings.

**No change.** Most mothers reported that they did not experience any change in the mother-daughter relationship after the disclosure. In other words, they did not feel that knowing their daughters were lesbians had any impact on their mother-daughter relationships. Mothers usually stressed that they treated daughters as usual, and their love for daughters had never been changed. Furthermore, they still had to deal with certain issues in the relationship. For example, Elaine said it felt like she put down a burden and then carried another one after knowing *Chih-Chieh's* sexual orientation. She had to face it no matter what.

Only one daughter, *Joanna*, reported that coming-out did not influence the closeness she had with her mother in their relationship. Compared with the year in which her mother had read the diary but had not confirmed with *Joanna* about the content, *Joanna* said that there was

awkwardness in the relationship. However, after she really came out to her mother, their

interaction went back to how they used to interact before. Therefore, she did not feel that the

disclosure made changes.

> I: Have you felt that your relationship has changed after you knew she was lesbian?
> Phoenix: Nothing has changed! I don't change the way I treat her because of this. She is still my child. What will change a mother's feeling toward her child? No! I don't feel any change!
> I: You still interact in similar ways?
> Phoenix: I am still worried about her as usual. (I: "The same worries?") Yes. The same! … Parents will always love their children. I don't look down on her because she's lesbian. After all, she is my child! Anyway, of course I hope she would be normal and could get married, but there is nothing she can do about it. She didn't ask to be lesbian!
> -----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------
> Elaine: After she came out, I wasn't confused anymore. But did it get easier? That was another problem. I have another burden. One problem was solved, but another problem comes along. That's it. It doesn't mean the problem has been solved. You just know what kind of problem you are dealing with. (I: "Or what the real problem is.") Yes, and how you should face it. When we didn't know her sexual orientation, we avoided the problem and refused to talk about it. Now we know where the problem is, and we have to face the music. The problem still exists, but at least we can face it in reality. It feels better that we can face it practically, not emotionally, and try to think and solve problems. … But sometimes we still talk (*Chih-Chieh*: "Still in the same way, right?") indirectly as we're Chinese. After all, it doesn't mean that we accept it completely when we start facing it (*Chih-Chieh*: "Yes!") As I have mentioned, that's another issue. (*Chih-Chieh*: "Yes!") I need to sugar it up in order to improve atmosphere at home and avoid conflicts. It doesn't mean that we could say and do whatever we want after she came out. No! Actually we couldn't.
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> I: Do you feel your interaction changed after you come out?
> *Joanna*: Not really.
> I: Not really?

*Joanna*: We are doing okay. Since I came out, we have been doing fine. We become intimate and close again.

I: Again?

*Joanna*: We don't avoid eye contact anymore like we did that year.

I: And feeling awkward.

*Joanna*: Yes.

I: Can I say that you were intimate in the beginning, got distant in the process, and become intimate again now?

Min-Mei: No. I always felt that we are close. … Always the same! Only I felt uncomfortable that year.

*Joanna*: *(Saying adorably)* I felt that!

Min-Mei: You felt that?

*Joanna*: Yes!

Min-Mei: You felt I treated you badly?

*Joanna*: Not badly! I felt you were distant.

**A big shift.** To most daughters, the mother-daughter relationship changed after the disclosure. Because most daughters felt relieved after the disclosure, they were able to interact with their mothers with ease and felt the relationship changed afterward. It was a big shift to most of them.

*Less stressed.* Six daughters reported that after the disclosure, they did not need to keep a secret from their mothers; they did not need to lie; they could talk about who they were. Therefore, they felt less stressed in the relationship.

*Johnny*: Yes. Our relationship became better. Well, we have always been good. Only when she didn't know, I had to lie to her, and I felt annoyed and tired of it. After I came out, I had nothing to hide and to worry about. It's convenient for me.

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*Erika*: Of course I felt relaxed after coming out. I didn't have to lie anymore. I was relieved. Since we didn't address this topic that much at that time, there was no big difference but feeling relieved.

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*Man-Shuan*: I don't have secrets anymore. When I was young, I had worried about what I could do, like "God! What can I do? How can I tell my family?" After I did come out, it turned out to be no big deal. Definitely I felt less stressed. For example, when I was little, I heard my sister and my mom talking about her boyfriend, and I was worried about what to say if it was my turn to share. I felt pressured talking about the topic, but I don't anymore! I can say it out loud, just like any child sharing her relationship issues with her mother.

**Feeling supported.** One change in the relationship was that mothers started to be concerned what it was like to live in the society as a lesbian, for instance, the possible hardness or discrimination that their daughters might go through. As mothers became more involved in their daughters' life, daughters were able to feel supported and understood. Georgia was one of the active mothers. She had witnessed how *Johnny* was treated with prejudice because of her sexual orientation; therefore, she was determined to protect her daughter. As to Min-Mei, she became more interested in *Joanna's* love life and showed that she cared.

*Johnny*: The advantage of coming out is that at least my mom is on my side and I have a buddy. I don't have to face those difficult challenges all by myself. My girlfriend didn't have to deal with my challenge, because her appearance was like ordinary girls. I would have been alone without my mom's support. I was surprised that my mom did help me out when my teacher called! I didn't know how to answer my teacher's questions.
I: Do you remember their conversation? Did you hear that?
*Johnny*: No. I heard it from my teacher, but I can't remember the details now. My teacher seemed to ask why I did that, or "Why did she run away?" "Did she say where she stayed?"

I: Did your teacher tell you your mother's reply?

*Johnny*: I forgot. I only remember that I felt Mom was so cool!

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Min-Mei: What's the difference? I will love her more! *(Joanna shouted with joy)*

I: Love her more? Could you give me an example, or explain more about your thought? What is the difference between the past and the present?

Min-Mei: If she was with a boy, I would not be worried. Now she is with a girl, I will care about her more *(smiling shyly)*.

I: Care more?

Min-Mei: Hmm…I will ask more about her love life. I feel it is harder to be in a same-sex relationship. So I'm worried and will ask more.

***More sharing or asking.*** This change was mentioned several times by daughters. They were able to share more of their love life with their mothers or help mothers to understand how to make LGBT friends. Some mothers also felt that they could talk more and ask more about what daughters were thinking. That was definitely a change.

Sylvia: I'm more relaxed because I know the whole picture now. I don't have to guess what is going on anymore. I was able to ask about her love life, because it was important to her at puberty. For instance, I would ask questions about her girlfriends, like, "How was her exam?" And I listened. After college entrance exam, I also asked, "Which major will she choose?" Or, "what are her parents like?" "What's her school?" Of course I tried to find the topics and to know more. Then I got to know more about her girlfriends. She would answer my questions, and I could understand her life better.

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Linda: I'm a person full of curiosity. I will ask my daughters about issues related to LGBT. "What do you call it?" For example, I asked her, "What's 'Les'?" Then she explained to me. Two of my four daughters are lesbians, so I have to know more about it. The only thing I haven't done is to ask them to take me to lesbian bars. … After she came out, we talked more.

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*Joanna*: She will ask me that if I have a boyfriend or a girlfriend. Boyfriend is still an option *(laughing)*, she will mention casually. She did not ask such kind of question before since I had not been in a relationship. Now she will take initiatives to ask my relationship status. I can feel that she's not suppressed her curiosity, and she cares about if I have a partner. She didn't ask this kind of question before I came out. Whenever I come home after a long period, she would ask, "How are you? Are you with someone, a boyfriend, or alone?" She then asks if I am doing well and if I feel lonely when I'm not with someone. These questions were something she didn't address before.

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*Erika*: She likes my partner very much, so I can tell her everything, like where we go or what we do. Since I spend a lot of time with my partner, I figure that I can have more topics to share with my mom if I can tell her things happening between my partner and I. So, when watching TV in the living room, I will let my mom know what we did during the day.

I: And you become closer.

*Erika*: Definitely! That is for sure.

**Mixed feelings.** However, some daughters also reported that their mother-daughter

relationships became complicated. They expected their mothers to accept them, but their mothers

did not show acceptance in the way they wanted. Both *Jennifer* and *Chih-Chieh* had mixed

feelings when asked if the mother-daughter relationship had any change after the disclosure.

*Jennifer* could understand Wanda had tried her best, but she also felt disappointed about not

getting enough support from Wanda. *Chih-Chieh* felt that disclosure only meant that Elaine knew

her sexual orientation, but she still was not able to talk about her love life or discuss her

viewpoint about partnership with Elaine. As a result, the mother-daughter relationship seemed to

be different, but the difference was not satisfactory.

*Jennifer*: She works hard to accept it, but you know, usually it takes time. She keeps going forward and backward. That's how she deals with it. … It has been five years after I came out at nineteen. I am twenty-four now, but I still feel that way. … When I just came out, I felt intense in our relationship, and I had thought about giving up several times. I didn't want to address the topic again because it was useless anyway. I thought, "Whatever."

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*Chih-Chieh*: I don't understand whether my mom doesn't accept who I am or just my viewpoint on love. You know those are two different things. But I just don't know why she is so picky. Although I know sometimes these things are hard to divide, I still feel confused what I should fight for. So I learn that it is better not to share more since sharing is not helpful. Disclosure only means that my mom knows I am lesbian. That's it. I still won't tell her about my love life. At the end, it means that we don't address any issue openly. For example, I know she doesn't like the fact that I keep changing partners. What can I do? I can't tell her that is my viewpoint about love. I don't know how to explain it to her. … She would think, "I have no idea what you are doing!" But she doesn't dare to ask, and I don't want to talk. That's why I feel troubled and annoyed!

## Other Responses from the Family

Besides mothers, other family members also participated in the disclosure event. Although I did not design specific questions to ask about their responses, how other family members' responses influenced the mother and the mother-daughter relationship was reported in their stories. In other words, the disclosure event not only influenced the mother-daughter relationship, other family members' opinions seemed also to influence how the mother thought about this event and her process of acceptance. Fathers' responses were particularly essential to mothers' response. Fathers' process of acceptance will be further discussed in the next domain. In this sub-domain, responses of fathers, siblings, and other relatives will be addressed first. There

are two categories in this sub-domain: "supportive" and "against".

**Supportive.** Some family members were supportive; they told the daughter that they accepted her sexual orientation, or they did not say anything but treated it as something not unusual. *Johnny*'s father accepted her immediately when she came out. So did *Joanna*'s father. Although *Kerry's* father did not show his acceptance at the moment, like *Kerry's* mother Yen, he dealt with the disclosure with caring and did not show any negativity. *Joey'*s younger sisters went out with *Joey* and her girlfriend but had never felt their relationship was wrong.

> *Johnny*: I was not surprised that my mom accepted me. I was surprised about my dad's reaction. Dad was masculine and serious. I thought he would think "How come?" Surprisingly, he accepted who I am with no doubts.
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> Min-Mei: *(Mentioning the night when she got Joanna's letter)* I cried that night and told her father what happened. I stopped crying when I saw his reaction.
> I: Wow! How come? What did he say?
> Min-Mei: I hadn't told her father because I had been afraid that he couldn't accept it. In the end, he accepted it well.
> I: Do you remember what he said?
> Min-Mei: I forgot the exact words. He said something like, "She is our daughter. No matter what she does, she is our daughter. We have to embrace her." *(Paused for ten seconds)* Knowing her father had no problem with it, I wasn't worried anymore. I also felt relieved about my relationship with *Joanna*. … Young people can accept homosexuality easily, but I was afraid that her father couldn't. He really surprised me, and I was relieved because of his reaction. …He always tells Joanna, "No matter what you have done, we will open the door for you. No matter what you have encountered, we will welcome you home!" He just accepts her unconditionally. Nothing else matters.
>
> *Joanna*: *(Further explaining her father's reaction when she got home later)* When I was home, without hesitation, he said, "You can tell us directly. Why did you have to do

this?" Then he told me the whole story about receiving the letter, my mom's reaction and his reaction. That was it.

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*Joey*: Sometimes I went out with my girlfriend and my sisters. My sisters asked, "How should we call her, sister or sister-in-law?"

*Joey*: *(Responding to Linda's question about her sisters' attitude)* I took them out when they were little, so they didn't think that was wrong. It was your reaction, Mom, to make they wonder, "What? Is it wrong?" That was why they outed me! *(Linda laughed.)* They felt what I did would not be wrong, and you would be okay about it, so they highlighted, "She is the same!"

**Against.** Not surprisingly, some family members could not accept the daughter's sexual

orientation. It made the mother felt worse and even caused other family members turmoil. For

example, the reactions of *Jennifer*'s parental relatives made Wanda become the person who

seemed not to have educated her daughter well.

*Jadehare*: I was shocked when my mother cried. My sister didn't help but added intensity. She had never seen my mom crying either, so she blamed my girlfriend and me. I thought, "How can you say it's her fault? Relationships are about two people. It was not her fault!" My mom never blamed the other person, but my sister did. I really felt she was immature. … Then my sister took the ceramic piggy bank and threw it at me! It looked like a cute dinosaur and I had bought it for her. (I: Oh!) It went by my ear and crashed on the wall. My heart was broken. I used to cry when talking about this. Now I'm better, because I talk about it so often.
I: It's still shocking.
*Jadehare*: It's a pity. My sisters respected me basically. Though they thought I was lame, they respected me as their big sister. But she thought I was not filial at that time. I thought, "Gosh! What did I do? I only fell in love with a wonderful girl!" She was the most responsible person I had ever met. She was filial to her parents, and she took care of her family as much as she could. I believed I would be happy if I could be with her. Stupid as I was, I casually put the love letters she wrote on the desk. And my sister saw it,

so she called and threatened her, "Don't go out with my sister anymore! If you break my mother's heart, I'll let your parents feel the same. I'll let them know you're homosexual!"

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Wanda: *(Mentioning Jennifer's article on LGBT issues in the newspaper)* Her aunt saw it (*Jennifer*: "She's a Christian.") and called, "Did you educate her? How come she became like this?" … Her Grandma also asked her father about it, blaming him, "How did you educate her?" Anyway, they said that we didn't educate her well, so that is why she became lesbian.

## Meaningful Events

Some dyads shared their powerful stories about their early experiences after disclosure. Those stories were encouraging, touching, emotional, or even hilarious. No matter what, the experiences they went through together nurtured their mother-daughter relationships, and a big shift in dealing with such an issue emerged because of those events. Mothers and daughters were able to understand each other more, and they learned to make adjustments to sustain their relationships. There are three categories in this sub-domain: "fighting against oppression", "feeling supported or being seen", and "moving out".

**Fighting against oppression.** This story came from *Johnny* and Georgia. After *Johnny* came out to her parents, she also had to face oppression due to her gender performance and sexual orientation in school. On the one hand, Georgia felt lucky that *Johnny* and she were able to fight against oppression together since *Johnny* came out to her early. On the other hand, she also experienced how the system worked to oppress sexual minority individuals, which made her

feel it was hard to change the system. However, it was still a meaningful experience to both of

them because they were closer and trusted each other more.

> Georgia: I mentioned that she went straight to senior high school. It happened in her first year of senior high school. She was naughty in junior high, and we didn't interfere with her choices and gave her little pressure. …But she didn't perform well in senior high because of heavy schoolwork and girlfriend problems. All these issues happened at the same time: her sexuality; not wearing her uniform properly; using mobile phones in school; etc. Moreover, she was often late or absent to take care of her girlfriend! She couldn't explain that she had to leave the class because her girlfriend was crying. I really sympathized with her. I knew she wasn't good at taking care of these things, but how could I help her? That year was awful, really awful.
> I: How come?
> Georgia: She was…. *(Asking Johnny)* Can I say it?
> *Johnny*: Sure. I was expelled from school.
> Georgia: Because of her conduct.
> I: She got poor grades.
> Georgia: And issues related to her sexuality. People didn't like seeing her and her girlfriend together. A lot of people! Luckily, she had come out to us at that time.
> *Johnny*: You see. It was good that I had told you already. Otherwise, you would be frightened to death. Really!
> Georgia: If she hadn't come out, we would have not known how to support her. I knew, so we supported her without any doubt. I supported her being lesbian. Of course a lesbian will face problems when making friends. She was caught when they got too intimate, or when she didn't dress properly. I supported her, but I couldn't persuade those people in the system!

> Georgia: I don't know how to fight against the system if it happens again, because the system is prejudiced. So many people told me that I had to educate my child. How could I tell them that she is fine and she doesn't have to change? What for? It is hard to communicate with those people. For example, I went to school, and her teacher told me as a favor, "I told you because you're one of us." "Do you know WHAT THEY DID? Gosh!" How should I think? Should I debate with her? I was sad and pretended nothing

happened. It's really hard to change what others think. She thought that way for decades. As only an acquaintance, there seemed no need for us to debate for hours. I felt helpless.

Georgia: *(On another incident)* She was with a girl, who was one year older than her. They had been warned several times in the school. Her girlfriend's parents went abroad for the summer vacation, so she spent nights with her girlfriend. I don't remember whether I warned her, or she just neglected my advice. But it was hard to make a judgment on what she should do. One day, the girl's father called me. He was mad, and he held *Johnny* as a hostage. I was terrified! He asked my husband or I to have a talk. I was afraid that two men would fight, so I went alone. I kept thinking how to communicate with him on my way there. After I got there, the girl's father thought his daughter was a victim, and my daughter should take the blame. … He was really mad. He even slapped her. *(Asked Johnny)* Right? He slapped both of them. (*Johnny*: "Yes.") I was frightened because he held her as a hostage. If I didn't handle it well, he might kill her and we would be in the newspapers. The two girls stayed in the room and eavesdropped. I forget the details. It was a long time ago.
*Johnny*: That's okay. Now I remember it.
Georgia: I said elusively that we shouldn't label our children by admitting them were lesbian. "Don't do it. It's not good for your child either." I pretended to agree that I would manage my child and she would never go to their house again.
*Johnny*: Yes. Saying that we could be good friends and study together!
Georgia: And schoolwork was the most important thing to focus on. I said those things parents liked to hear. The point was that we shouldn't label our children. Why do that? It was not good for her. Just like that.

**Feeling support or being seen.** These stories came from *Jennifer* and Wanda, and *Erika* and May. After disclosure, *Jennifer*'s comment piece on sexual minority individuals was accepted by a newspaper, which caused turmoil in the family. Wanda had to deal with fury from her husband and her mother-in-law, but she still tried to support *Jennifer* through words, which was mentioned as the most touching experience by *Jennifer*.

As to *Erika*, May found out that she lied to her with help from *Erika*'s friends in order to

go out with her girlfriend. It was a hilarious story. May then accepted *Erika's* same-sex

relationship completely after that particular event.

> *Jennifer*: The article in the newspaper was actually an assignment in our class. I was
> asked to write an editorial. My teacher then encouraged me to contribute. I didn't know it
> would be printed in a newspaper.
> Wanda: It was big coverage. Other contributors were doctors who graduated from
> America. It got a lot of coverage in the middle of the newspaper, so everybody saw it.
> *Jennifer*: It was a lot of coverage, so the title was obvious. (Wanda: "Girls' Kiss.") (I: "It
> was your title?") Yes, and my name was on it. It became a storm in the family. My father
> was angry and stressed. I was angry, too. She questioned me, "Why did you tell the
> whole world?" I replied, "Not everyone writing it is gay. I didn't tell the world!" In my
> generation, not just me, talking about it doesn't mean that we're gay. But they think
> differently. She thought I have told the world who I am. (Wanda: "Declared.") Yes, so
> my family fired at me because of this. (Wanda: "Not me. It was your father. He gave me
> a lot of pressure.") Later other relatives told my Grandma, she called to blame my father,
> and then they called to blame me. I felt guilty because I made my parents sad. I didn't
> think I did something wrong, but they lived a miserable life because I tried to fight
> against the society. I felt guilty, crying and apologizing on the phone. …The next day my
> mom called and said, "I have thought about it. If anyone asks about you, I would ask him
> if it is really good to be straight. People get divorced, cheat on each other, or have affairs.
> Is it any better? My daughter doesn't do anything wrong." I cried and cried *(chokingly)*.
> (I: "Because of what she said?") Yes. She told me that.
> -------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------
> *Erika*: Nobody supported me because no friends knew I was with a girl in the first six
> months when it started. My good friends didn't know, so I couldn't tell them whom I was
> with. I tried not to spend much time with her, and I was very careful. Lying to parents
> was hard *(laughing)*. …But I broke up with her after that half year. I was sad, and nobody
> knew what happened! I felt we were close, but she suddenly broke up with me. Simply
> put, she cheated. Yes! Although she still wanted to be with me, I couldn't accept it. The
> situation was awful. Because I was with a girl, I couldn't tell anyone about it. Plus, I
> couldn't take it anymore! There were times that I couldn't hide my pain at home and I

even cried once or twice when they were around. My mom then asked me directly, or was it that I cried and confessed? I forget. Anyway, I felt embarrassed, so I confessed. After that, she didn't blame me anymore! …I remember she said, "Actually I know everything, even though you don't want to tell me and I don't want to ask you. I know." *(Laughing)* I lied to her for about half year. But when I was in pain, she was still the person who comforted me in the end! I was touched and felt I was finally accepted.

I: You felt she was supportive.

*Erika*: Yes. It was like "come home and cry whenever you feel sad." I felt her support from this experience. I was touched on the one hand. On the other hand, it was a complicated feeling, like "Gosh! I still need a home to cry to in the end."

*Erika*: Later we got back together! Maybe after few months we got back together. I didn't dare to tell her. It was complicated. I found she was not against it, because she had told me to come home whenever I needed. But I still didn't dare to tell her because parents would dislike the person who harmed their child. *(To May)* I felt that you would dislike her.

I: She might not like your girlfriend.

*Erika*: Even if my mom accepted lesbians, she would think my girlfriend was not a good person. I thought she wouldn't like her. So I couldn't tell her after we got back together. …In the following one or two years, my close friends had known and also supported me, and they started to lie for me. They knew I had to lie, so they helped. One time I told Mom I was going out with classmates. We were going hiking or something like that, so Mom wouldn't be able to contact me. No. It was Christmas. I used to call her to let her know where I was, and then I called more often because I did not want her to call me! At that time, *(To May)* What happened was, you wanted to contact me, and I hadn't called you. On Christmas Eve, I thought I would call my mom when I got to the place where I lived. I didn't realize the telephone line would be extremely busy that day. She couldn't reach me at midnight. *(Paused to laugh)* Well, my friends had learned what to do when receiving my mom's call, so I didn't inform them this time. Anyway, my mom called one of my good friends at that night. My friend told my mom, "Oh, I didn't go with them this time! But they went there!" *(Laughing)* My mom then called another friend of mine, who replied, "I didn't go! Maybe she went with others!" I finally found out what had happened by a friend's call, telling me, "*Erika*! You're doomed! Call home now!" *(Laughing to tears)* I was so embarrassed that I wanted to dig a hole and hide in it. I had been lying for so long, so it was shameful to be caught! *(To May)* I didn't know

whether you would be angry. I thought she would be pissed off not because I went out with a girl, but because I lied. I remember that I was beaten once because of not telling her the truth when I was a child! *(To May)* I always felt that you would be mad because I lied, so I was very afraid. Then I called back, and my mom was hilarious. She said in a calm voice, "Your friends covered you very well!" *(Erika and I burst into laughter.)* I remember my mom called six people! It went too far. Everyone told her that she didn't go, but others did. … I remember I was so nervous, and I felt I was doomed. But it turned to be a good conversation. My mom told me that she had guessed I might go out with my girlfriend. She wasn't really against it. Why did I have to lie to her? After that event, she totally accepted it. Maybe she wasn't happy and didn't encourage me, but I didn't lie afterward. I didn't have to!

**Moving out.** The last story came from *Chih-Chieh* and Elaine. After *Chih-Chieh* came

out to Elaine, she decided to move out of the family without notice because she did not want to

put Elaine in a difficult position. But it was such an unexpected decision to the family that the

whole family felt sad and couldn't accept it. Furthermore, *Chih-Chieh* was in a bad condition

physically at that time, which made the impact harder to endure for Elaine. After that particular

event, however, Elaine was able to understand more about *Chih-Chieh*'s feelings and struggle.

She then adjusted herself to help the family to work on accepting *Chih-Chieh* better.

I: What was your point when deciding to move out?
*Chih-Chieh*: My friend and I thought if I didn't do something, others wouldn't know. Other family members didn't dare to take it out on me, but they took it out on my mom. They just did not have the courage to confront me. So everyone told me that I should move, including my doctor, because the situation would not have become better if I stayed at home. My psychiatrist told me that if I couldn't take care of myself well, then I should stop considering my family. The only concern I had was if they could handle the situation if I did something extreme. I felt I should stay, but at the same time I felt it was useless because I wanted to avoid the burden. The truth was that I was not brave enough

to come out to my dad. I couldn't face him directly, so my mom became the person who had to face other family members. Moving out turned out to be the only choice. I just didn't dare to go home!

I: Did you know that *Chih-Chieh* wanted to protect you to a certain degree (when she decided to move out)?
Elaine: I knew. We thought *Chih-Chieh* wasn't happy at home! We fought all the time, so she wanted to move. But we didn't really understand why. We also felt that it was more comfortable living at home. So we didn't agree with her decision. When she suddenly moved out, everybody in the family was hurt. We were very sad. …Being her mom, it was painful because of what I heard and saw. I had tried to let others accept her. I didn't want a broken family and lose a daughter. Anyway, she was one of us for better or for worse. We should try to accept her.

## Long-term Experience of Disclosure

In this domain, the present mother-daughter relationship, mothers' level of acceptance, the factors that influenced acceptance, and their worries and expectations were discussed. In addition, fathers' level of acceptance was also discussed. The father's attitude was found to influence the mother's acceptance greatly. Therefore, I decided to include this part of the interview data.

### Mothers' Level of Acceptance

Compared with other parents, these participants, who were willing to be interviewed with their daughters by a researcher on this topic, had shown a relatively high level of acceptance. Several mothers told me that hoping to help me with my "school project" was part of the reason to be interviewed, but it was still not easy for these Taiwanese mothers to risk arguing with

daughters during the interview and even shared their thoughts and feelings with a person they did

not know. In addition, all of my participants had met their daughters' LGBT friends and partners

even though they might not talk about daughters' love life freely. Some participants knew terms

related to the LGBT community very well, and some might not be comfortable using those terms.

Although their acceptance level was varied, they could be seen as a group of mothers who had a

much higher than average acceptance level in the Taiwanese society. Therefore, in order to

emphasize the magnitude of the acceptance, I have focused on responses that are rarer than usual

amongst mothers.

**Supporting other parents.** Some mothers reported that they had either attended parents'

support groups or helped other parents to gradually accept their LGBT children. One mother

even became the leader of the support group for several years. By sharing similar experiences

and knowledge about the LGBT community, they hoped to be the mediator of other parents and

their LGBT children to bring about more understanding for the two parties. For example,

Georgia and Linda were some of those mothers.

> Georgia: It's been many years since she came out of the closet. We did what we can to understand her, and I think that we did our best. This didn't mean that we needed other assistance. It was just that since there were support group for parents, we could benefit ourselves by joining it. So when I first joined it, I was very surprised to learn that there were a lot to be done in this area. That was my first thought. I did volunteer work to help those in need of my effort instead of my need to do volunteer work.... I found there was a

great need for manpower and resources. That's what I found. After I have stepped into this field, the more insufficiencies I find, the more I can contribute.

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Linda: *Jadehare*'s mother was very much influenced by me. When she talked about her daughter, I could still see tears in her eyes. Then I would say, "You have only one lesbian daughter but I have two. If I can accept them, why can't you accept her? You're stubborn!"...What's more, I would say to her, "I beat you! You have only one lesbian out of three children, but I have two out of four. I win over you. You see, I already accept it, why can't you?" That's what I told her.

I: You are encouraging and supporting her.

Linda: She then has been influenced by me gradually. When it comes to this issue now, she will say, "Be the way it is supposed to be."

**Including the daughter's partner in the family.** Another example of great acceptance was to treat the daughter's partner as a family member or a significant other and invite her to the family event. Linda took care of the daughter's partner like another daughter; Yen was more comfortable with having the daughter's partner visiting than the partner herself felt; and May even introduced the daughter's partner actively to other relatives because she liked the partner too much to treat it as a secret. To these mothers, it was natural to have the daughter's partner join the family activities since they had accepted their daughters' sexual orientation.

Linda: I am totally OK with it now. For example, my youngest daughter's girlfriend lives with us in our house near Taipei. Because she studies in a school there and the housing there is inconvenient, we provide her with free accommodation and meals. To stop her feeling embarrassed, I even asked her to be my goddaughter.

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May: Over the last two or three years, I think they make a perfect couple. L (*Erika*'s partner) is very outstanding. I mean (I have realized it) during last two or three years. I don't want them to break up and find another. No one is better than L!

*Erika*: During these last two or three years, I felt that my mom has grown to trust my girlfriend. That is why I start to tell her almost everything except our quarrels. *(Laughing)* Yes, if I tell her about our quarrels, it will make my mom worry about our relationship. Otherwise, I tell her almost everything... My uncle and aunt live upstairs and my aunt also knows about my thing, which was told to her by my mother. My mother answers anyone who asks her about my thing.

May: I suppose your uncle knows too. He doesn't ask anything but I think he already knew.

*Erika*: So you see, I am very relieved that they accept me. I am really lucky. Mom's closest relatives who live upstairs also know and accept it. They have no comment on this issue. However, I don't take my girlfriend to family gatherings. Even so, my family members know my condition and they no longer ask if I have a boyfriend.

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I: Do you actively ask *Kerry* about her partner?

Yen: Yes, we chatted with Kerry's partner sometimes, right?

*Kerry*: Sometimes you did ask me some questions!

Yen: Yes, we sometimes chatted with her friend. Her friend visited our house quite frequently.

*Kerry*: Not very frequently. Just once every month or two.

Yen: It's OK. She didn't seem at ease.

*Kerry*: She was in fact very fearful! Every time she visited us, she hesitated for a long time before she rang the bell.

Yen: Why was she fearful?

I: What was she afraid of?

*Kerry*: Every time she said to me, "I am afraid that your parents are sad seeing me."

Yen: Sad? No! Tell her that we will not.

*Kerry*: Yes, I did tell her, "No, you don't have to worry about that."

**Participating in public activities.** Some mothers participated in LGBT activities as

LGBT individuals' parents, which was also an example of great acceptance. To other mothers,

however, it was a rather difficult choice to come out of the closet as a parent of LGBT

individuals. The further discussion will be presented in the sub-domain of "Challenges of

Acceptance". However, even for those mothers who were able to present themselves as parents

of LGBT individuals, they did not do it in a high-profile way. They either helped their daughters

to sell books or went to the parents' support group. Being interviewed by media or going to the

gay pride events was less mentioned by these mothers.

> Linda: I also invited many lesbians to visit your book signings (*Joey*: "Yes!") and also
> many other people to the event. If you're just into this community, it is strongly
> recommended to buy and read this book. It provides a lot of information that you don't
> know. *Jadehare*'s mother and I even went to help sell the book… I know they had a
> parade. Then I told them to see the news replayed on the TV. I always give them useful
> information if I happen to know them. Yes, that's what I am doing. If it is meant to be so,
> I choose to accept it. Acceptance means participation. I do not want to be a mother, who
> is ignorant of gay issues. If so, I won't be able to fit in when it comes to this issue.
> Gradually, I might be outcast from the society.
> ------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------
> *Jadehare*: When my publisher was celebrating its third anniversary, I asked my mom for
> help. I pretended and said to her with a sigh, "No one can come to help the event. Mom,
> can you help me out?" My mom agreed, but I didn't want to "surprise" her by
> discovering that most participants were lesbians when she was there. So I explained to
> her, "Mom, I would be really happy if you can come. Because it would be a lot of work
> to organize it since there will be a hundred participants." By then, I had in mind the rough
> number of participants so I continued telling her, "And among them, 90 participants may
> be lesbians!" Hearing this, my mom was a bit surprised. At that time, I was living in
> Taipei. My mom told me that she had bought her tickets from my hometown to Taipei,
> and she would like to help me out. SARS happened to break out then, but there were still
> more than a hundred people attending the event. Due to SARS, my mom and my sister
> came to the event wearing masks. My hot-tempered sister and her boyfriend, later
> husband, accompanied my mom to the event.

Phoenix: Our interview allows me to know other parents' thoughts. It's just that I am poor at expressing myself. For example, last time I went to the parents' support group and heard that it was difficult for some parents to accept their gay sons at the beginning. Later when they talked to other parents in the same boat, they learned more from them. So they are like me, getting more and more open-minded to this issue. In the end, we can let go and let our children make their own choices.

**Fathers' Level of Acceptance**

Although the father's attitude and perspectives were not the focus in this research, most dyads addressed the father's reactions in some detail. Gradually, the father's thoughts, his interactions with interviewees and his beliefs became a huge part of the sharing. Besides, the father's opinions had strong impact on the mother's attitude as well as the dynamics in the mother-daughter relationship. Therefore, the father's acceptance level was included in this domain.

**Little acceptance.** Among all the families or dyads participating in the interview, *Jennifer*'s father was the only father who had a hard time accepting *Jennifer*'s sexual orientation. Although Wanda had tried to talk to him, it seemed to have little effect. As a result, Wanda became the buffer between *Jennifer* and her husband constantly and had to bear emotions from both sides. Feeling torn between *Jennifer* and her husband, it was natural that Wanda wanted to embrace *Jennifer* more but then she felt hesitated to do so. Nevertheless, Wanda also expressed that her husband's attitude had softened a bit after years of conflicts and arguments.

Wanda: I've told her father more or less about this but he is still having a hard time accepting it. He insists that it is against nature if a woman does not mate with a man. How could she act against the natural law? It is not right to go against it. That's what he believes, (*Jennifer*: "My father is pretty stubborn.") so it will take some time for him to change. Moreover, he is the kind of person who is reluctant to face this issue. I somehow feel that he is an ostrich since he is unwilling to acknowledge that. (*Jennifer*: "He always pretends to be ignorant of it.) Yes, he pretends to be ignorant despite the truth that he indeed knows it… That is, he just ignores this issue. So even if you invited him for an interview, he would not agree to it.

Wanda: *(On an event that Jennifer wrote an article and it was published in the newspaper)* One day he was using the bathroom while reading the newspaper. He happened to see XXX (*Jennifer*'s name) and the article that *Jennifer* wrote in the newspaper. He rushed out of the bathroom and asked me, "Do you know what *Jennifer* did?" I said, "What, about what?" He asked again, "Do you know what your daughter did??" I said, "What did she do? Is it very serious?" Because he rarely gets angry, her father is a mild-tempered person. He is persistent on what he intends to do but never clashes against others. Never! So you can imagine that it has been more two decades, or twenty-five years that he is with this job but never has a quarrel with other people. This is not easy. But he was so pissed off that day that he rushed out of the bathroom and shouted at me.

*Jennifer*: *(Then on her father's reaction after he read the newspaper)* Later he was calmer but he was so angry at me that he refused to talk to me. So I apologized, "Sorry! I am really sorry!" My father said, "So you can not change this?" I told him that I could not do anything about it. Then he said, "You are still my daughter. I cannot do anything about it either."

**Much acceptance.** Most fathers had accepted their daughters' sexual orientation. Some

of the fathers were described as the parent who had no problem accepting the daughter's

same-sex attractions. For example, both *Johnny* and *Man-Shuan* pointed out respectively in their

interviews that their parents dealt with the disclosure together and their fathers held the same

attitude like their mothers did, which meant that they were quite supportive. Even though these

two dyads did not really address their fathers' attitude in detail, they were seen as very supportive

fathers.

Some of the father had their own process, and they became more and more supportive

and accepted their daughters' same-sex attraction. Like *Kerry* and *Joanna*, their parents also

faced the disclosure together. I had learned from previous interviews that the fathers' attitude

seemed to have a great impact on the mothers, so I asked some questions about their fathers'

thoughts and feelings specifically when interviewing these two dyads. Both fathers were very

passionate about the happiness of their daughters. As to *Erika*, her father was told later by the

mother that she is lesbian and then learned to accept her lesbianism gradually. After getting along

with *Erika*'s partner, her father had fully accepted her same-sex relationship before he passed

away.

> I: Did May know why this was more acceptable to *Erika*'s father later? Or did you both
> was OK around the same time?
> May: I guess around the same time. She is not used to talking to her father so he gets all
> information from me. So it was around the same time!
> *Erika*: But I remembered you tried to persuade him? That's what you told me since I
> didn't see it.
> May: Yes, I did. I tried to talk to him for several times. As time went, this seemed more
> acceptable to him… About her being lesbian, I was the first to consent to it. Then I talked
> to her father about it. He tended to show his respect about her decision at first, so

gradually he accepted it…Until her partner L showed up, L participated in some political activities by that time. Such as?

*Erika*: Pro-referendum for Fourth Nuclear Power Plant. My father was very concerned about the Thousand-Mile Walk to protest against the building of plant but he was too weak to participate in the event.

I: I see, so L joined the event.

May: Yes and he read news about the event from the computer. *Erika* and L joined the pro-referendum walk and later L showed him photos from the computer. They three watched the news together in the living room. I was sitting there on the sofa seeing them chatting happily *(Erika laughed)* and I was happy too.

*Erika*: *(Added)* Actually, I was very surprised that my father accepted my condition when he first knew it. I mean, he refused to talk when I had my first girlfriend. Later when I was "caught", he remained silent and pretended not to know it. But later when L was with me and both my parents knew my thing, my mom asked me to show my father L's photo *(Laughing)* because he hadn't met her yet. So I showed him a photo taken when L and I went out for fun. My father was quiet and could not hear well so we rarely had a quality chat. What impressed me was that he grimaced when seeing that photo and said, "We are very much the same." I didn't get it but was relived to hear him saying so, meaning he accepted L. Before that, he just accepted the reality that I am gay. After seeing the photo, he gave me the feeling that he recognized L as a person. Since then, I brought L to my house more frequently.

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Min-Mei: Her father said I wasted a year making myself suffer. Her father used to say that, "If I had told him earlier, I would not have had to suffer for a whole year." He would have shared my worries.

I: So her father's reaction was unexpected to you?

Min-Mei: Yes!

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I: If the interview today was for three people, including your father, do you think that he would be likely to join?

Yen: Yes.

*Kerry*: Yes, I think so.

I: Do you remember your father's reaction during that time?

*Kerry*: He kept silent. Actually he doesn't talk much at home. Sometimes he doesn't know how to express himself but he discusses with my mom.

Yen: We talk frequently if anything comes up with our children.

*Kerry*: Yes, it's true.

*Kerry*: Later I gave them books to read. They read them. My father even read about studies on Buddhists and gays. He's really great. I was surprised that he had sources to find these books. Yes, and those books are very positive.

**No comment.** Some of the fathers' attitudes were not really clear because they did not talk about this issue with their daughters directly. They simply did not show their rejection or kept silent about the topic. *Jadehare*, *Joey*, and *Chih-Chieh* all came out to their mothers first and left their mothers to deal with disclosure alone. Therefore, it was within the parents' couple relationship that the issue was dealt with. How the nature of the couple relationship influenced the fathers' attitude was unclear since that was not the topic of the study.

However, how did these daughters judge their father's attitude or know their thoughts? *Jadehare* observed her father by seeing him being willing to deliver lesbian novels to the book exhibition. *Joey* noticed that her father never asked about boyfriends or her lesbian novel he had read accidentally. *Chih-Chieh* said that her father used to invite her partner to join some familial activities even though he called her partner as "your friend." The attitude of no comment was seen as a way that fathers showed his acceptance, or tolerance, in these families.

Phoenix: *(Explaining why she didn't tell her husband the news when she first learned it)* When I knew she likes women, I could only beat about the bush asking him, "Do you

have any opinion about the gays which were reported in the newspaper? He always replied, "They are hopeless!" He didn't know that his child was one of them. I was not good at persuasion but I always thought that I should bring up this issue to him gradually. He was short-tempered so I worried about conflict if I told him the news directly. (I: Things might get worse.) I thought about telling her father, "What if you go and tell *Jadehare* this?" but I dared not. Men were careless about such kind of things. They were always busy making money and had no time for this. I did have the idea that they should have a talk about it though.

*Jadehare*: I want to talk about my father's ideas about being gay. My first girlfriend used to go to my house with me but my parents didn't know the nature of our relationship at that time. My father gave me the feeling that he knew about it to a certain extent. He got along well with my girlfriend. Because my parents are well-mannered, they never embarrassed her. I felt that my father more or less knew it. …What's more, one time when my father was still alive, my parents and I went to a book exhibition together. In front of a booth, there was a poster showing two girls hugging together. My father was there and he must have seen it. Moreover, I was a publisher on lesbian issues. I always believe that my father knew it but I never told him personally, which was to respect my mother. I mean, my mother got worries if he knew it. So I didn't tell my father because of her. …Although he said to my mom "Gays are hopeless," but in his heart, if I assume he knew I am gay, he would just give a few negative comments and this is his habitual response. "Hopeless" is just a typical idea that most people have towards gays but I don't think he is totally against it.

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Linda: Now her sexuality is known to everyone in my family.

*Joey*: I think that my father knows it.

Linda: Her father knows but he dared not face it. He didn't mention that he has known this. But he did read her books.

I: OK.

Linda: Then he probably knew because what she wrote are about lesbians…. One time, he went into her room for some reason and I went with him as well. Her room was full of her books. I was behind him. Beside her computer was a paper, on which she wrote: "Since I wrote the book about a lesbian"…and so on. It was on the top of a pile of papers. He peeped and saw it. I said to him, "Do not touch her things. She hates it." …Then he went out of the room. I knew that he sort of looked at her stuffs so I told him, "Put them

back to keep the way they were. Otherwise, she will be unhappy knowing you touched her things." He loves his daughter and does not want her to feel unhappy. So he left her room but I knew that he indeed saw it. He didn't ask me anything about it and I was happy that I don't have to say anything about it. That was it! He hadn't read any of *Joey*'s novels at that time. One day, she was not at home and he said, "I am going to Taipei. It's boring during the ride. I'll need a book to kill time." Then he took one of her books; which one I don't know, but I think that book is sort of erotic.

*Joey*: *(Further on her father's attitude)* I think that he is open-minded about some things but conservative about others. I don't know what he thinks about lesbians, whether he is liberal or conservative. Given that he was not told directly that I am lesbian, he never asked me, "Why didn't you have a boyfriend?" He never asked me and of course he cannot now. But, I mean, he never asked me this question. …If it was his son who came out as a gay, I think this would be more shocking to him. From a father's perspective, he would love to have his daughter staying home rather than getting married. Therefore, this issue is of different acceptance level for my father from different perspectives.
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*Chih-Chieh*: *(Interviewed alone to further talk about her father's attitude)* Actually my father tried to accept some things. I mean, he never directly says his objections and never talks about this issue but I feel that he's been acting in a way to express his acceptance…. He has never talked about it and it's the same even now. But what he did tell me something through his actions. For example, he used to get angry or neglectful when my friends visited. It was very obvious after he knew that I am lesbian. He was basically unhappy when he saw my butch lesbian friends visit. But it is different now. When my friends visit, he will greet them. He does not check their background anymore. You know, these days I had to interview various kinds of people at my house, but he didn't check on them. He was just polite to my friends no matter how eccentric or butch they were. This is the same when it comes to my girlfriend. He is nice and polite to her as well. My family likes to take family photos. When there is a birthday event, we will take family photos, all members or two members at a time. If my girlfriend happened to be upstairs in my house, he would ask me, "Ask your friend to join us. You and her can be in a photo together."

**Reasons for Acceptance**

In this sub-domain, reasons that influenced mothers to accept were analyzed. There were many reasons for acceptance. Some mothers said that they just loved their child; some mothers said that they were more concerned about the child's future and prosperity; some mothers said that the child's happiness was the most important thing; and some mothers said that heterosexual marriage was not always a good choice. Maybe they really embraced the daughter's sexual orientation because of these reasons, and maybe they just persuaded themselves with these reasons after they found out that they had to accept their child's sexual orientation. Anyway, they made decisions to create more space in their mother-daughter relationship to sustain the relationship. I have summarized their reasons and divided them into three categories in this sub-domain: reasons related to the mother (including emerging themes of "I am willing to accept", "I love my child", "It is easier for me to embrace differences", "I am more concerned about her prospects," and "The more I understand, the less I am worried"); reasons related to the daughter (including emerging themes of "She does not do anything bad", "I have always trusted my child and respected her decision", "I want her to be happy", "I like or know her partner", "Since I cannot change my child…", "I want my child to be nearby", and "I do not want our relationship to be hurt"); and reasons related to the family or culture (including emerging themes of "Heterosexual marriage is not a better choice", "Her father supports her too", "She can take care of us after we get old," and "We are not alone").

**Reasons related to the mother.** When mothers addressed their personalities, their affection for their children, or their unique beliefs in childrearing as the reason of acceptance, I categorized the reason as the one related to the mother.

*"I am willing to accept."* Some mothers just said it directly, "I am willing to accept." Maybe there were other factors contributed to the mother's willingness, but when those mothers expressed their strong willingness to accept, it sounded like this reason had explained a great deal of.

> Georgia: By that time, I was highly willing to accept it. If my willingness is strong, nothing is conflicting or unacceptable.
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> Yen: *Kerry* often says that you're great parents. Maybe we really don't think this is a serious issue now, so we don't feel that we are great parents or how come we can accept this in such a short time. We subconsciously think that we have to accept her because she is our child. That's it.
> I: Simply accept who she is without thinking too much?
> Yen: Yes, we try to understand and accept her. Unless we want to give her up, then we don't have to do all these work.

*"I love my child."* Some mothers said it out loud, "Because I love my child." Therefore, they had to learn to accept. They adjusted themselves because of love, and that was their direct and powerful response.

> Wanda: My stance is simple and clear! (*Jennifer*: "Love of a mother! It's the greatest.") Yes, I love her very much so I can tolerate anything she does. I won't stop loving her,

forcing her to leave home, or cutting off our blood because she is lesbian. Never…. This is simple. I just love her and I will forgive anything she does.

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I: What kind of reason allows you to keep communicating and trying to know and care each other more?

*(Min-Mei was contemplating.)*

*Joanna*: L-O-V-E! Ha, am I right?

Min-Mei: L-O-V-E?

*Joanna*: Yes!

Min-Mei: Love! *(Everyone laughed out loud.)* I was just thinking what that is! Yes. It's just that we don't want to destroy our love.

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Yen: For me, the point is I really love this child. I don't want to lose her. I guess this is the point. Therefore, we find some reasons to make this acceptable to us. Then we feel better. For example, her father tried to seek comfort from Buddhism books or books related to gay and gender issues.

***"It is easier for me to embrace differences."*** There were also other mothers expressed

that their personality or their jobs helped them to embrace differences easier than other parents.

That was why they could accept their daughters' sexual orientation.

Wanda: It also has to do with my personality. It's easier for me to accept and respect new and different things *(Jennifer nodded in agreement.)* Some people find it difficult to accept.

*Jennifer*: Yes! In our childhood, we had difficulty getting along with classmates. My mom always told us to learn to respect differences and we should be more tolerant. These were the core concepts she wanted to convey although she probably didn't express her with precise words. The point is to respect others for being different.

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Linda: You will find positive and negative sides when looking at one thing. It's the same with everything. Depending on our perspectives.

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Sylvia: I am adjusting myself because life is all about being flexible. I am not sure if I would change so much if counseling was not my profession. It's true. This is the benefit. Otherwise, I might be still stuck somewhere and couldn't open up myself so easily, including accepting a lesbian daughter.

I: It's easier to let go now.

Sylvia: Yes, I think my job itself provides me with this energy.

***"I am more concerned about her prospects."*** One mother reported that her daughter's

prospects were the most important thing to her. After going through the challenge of her

daughter's dropping out of the school, knowing the daughter was a lesbian was less of an impact

on her.

Sylvia: Events like dropping-out of school and switching to the night school already used up all my energy, and I was too exhausted to be against her *(with an involuntary smile)*. I didn't mean that I was OK with everything, which, compared to the shocking school events, (being a lesbian) was trivial. I am more concerned about the future prospects of my children. Moreover, I did have some knowledge about this aspect regarding diversity and gender issues…. Anyways, no matter what you like or no matter how worried you are in your love life, school is my first concern.

***"The more I understand, the less I am worried."*** Last, mothers mentioned that the more

knowledge they had about LGBT issues, the less they felt worried. The less they worried, the

more they accepted their daughters as lesbians. In other words, the more they knew about LGBT

population, the less their objections related to the unknown were. One mother even said that she

became very proud of her daughter after she had much understanding about her daughter's life

and the LGBT community!

Sylvia: We used to have a lot of misunderstanding; but things are better now since I try to engage with her. Now I understand why she does certain things and what situation she is in at the moment. Because I tend to worry a lot, doing this really reduces my worries.

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*Joey*: The Internet network in our hometown was underdeveloped before. So we just had a couple of lesbian friends. "Well, they're a couple." "They are another couple too." Then we expanded our lesbian community and shared a lot of things with each other. That was the beginning. Later I started my writing, the Internet was more available, and we got to know more and more people. And we are gradually involved in some LGBT activities and my mom got to see more as well. So she also understood that this is a community with quite a lot of people. She started to feel curious about what T and P is. Because when I talked to my sister, we would address les, T-bar, or some terms which she did not know. Out of curiosity, she would ask us what they meant to have the sense of participation. She always asked, "Well, what is it? What is the thing you're talking about?" Therefore, she got to know more about us. Moreover, because the books I wrote have received positive feedback, so she has that pride in being my mother. I believe that she is proud to have a daughter like me. So it is natural that she is supportive of what I am doing now.

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Yen: We try to understand more because we really don't know much about it, to be honest. Really not so much! Because my child is like this, we try to know more about it. With better understanding, we are more likely to accept. This is the point. If you know little about something, you have more opposition against it.

I: Yes, that is true.

Yen: Let me put it this way. If you try to understand more, you will have a higher level of acceptance. I think this may be the point.

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Min-Mei: At first I thought homosexuality is linked to that…AIDS?

*Joanna*: Yes. A lot of disgraceful stigmas are associated with homosexuality.

I: Coverage in the media is horrifying.

*Joanna*: Yes!

Min-Mei: Yes, things about AIDS, drugs, home parties and so on.

*Joanna*: I wished for good opportunities to show her healthy and normal people who happen to be homosexual. I want her to know many homosexual people actually live a healthy and normal life.

Min-Mei: Yes, I will be more relieved if I am able to know those people!

**Reasons related to the daughter.** When mothers addressed the reasons that were related

to their daughters' feelings, daughters' situation, or trust toward their daughters, I categorized

those reasons as reasons related to the daughter. Those mothers tried their best to think or feel

from their daughters' viewpoints to maintain or protect the mother-daughter relationship.

*"She does not do anything bad."* Two mothers reported that they did not have a strong

standpoint to object their daughters' sexual orientation since their daughters did not do anything

bad. As a result, acceptance seemed to be nothing but a result that appeared naturally.

Linda: I was rejecting the idea that she was a lesbian at the very beginning. But in less
than three days, I let go of my negative feelings.
I: Less than three days? So quickly!
*Joey*: I guess she thought that we were not doing anything bad. *(Laughing)*
Linda: Yes, because they didn't take illegal drugs or get a tattoo. They didn't do anything
bad or harmful of these. That's why I thought: being a lesbian is not a big deal.
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Phoenix: Later I thought: She didn't do anything bad. She was just bringing her friend
home. I would also treat her friend like my daughter… Anyway, after her disclosure, I
know what I didn't know. Now I have learned to let go, since it is nothing illegal.

*"I have always trusted my child and respected her decision."* Some mothers emphasized

that they had learned to trust their daughters and respected daughters' decisions in their

mother-daughter relationship before disclosure. Therefore, even though they might still need

some time to take in the fact that the daughter is a lesbian, the trust and the respect that had

existed in the relationship helped them a great deal to accept their daughters at the end.

> *Joey*: I feel that there is a certain level of trust and sense of interdependence between us… Like my mom said, she discussed a lot of things with me when I was little. We have cultivated a common sense and trust. Thus, it's easier for her to accept when I make any decision.
>
> Linda: Because I always believe that she will do the right thing! I cultivated this sense of trust on her when she was 17 or 18 years old, by the time she was already my listener. We all regard her as the most mature child in our family. That's why I discuss a lot of things with her and I usually take her advises. For example, if there was anything between me and my mother-in-law or my sister-in-law, I would take her advices in a short while because I believed she would give me the correct opinion. I am able to accept her so quickly because I believe her; she will not do bad things. So I trust her and she can do whatever she likes… About being a lesbian, I believe that she doesn't think it's something bad so she does it. This shows how much I trust her. In other words, I trust her that she won't do anything bad.
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> May: I respect her choices, including her love life. I don't understand why this has become more and more acceptable to me. Being a lesbian is not so scary. *(Laughing out loud)*.
>
> I: From what you said, I think the point is you respect *Erika'*s choice when *Erika* was a child. Therefore, under this principle, even after you know that *Erika* is lesbian, you still stick to this principle. This principle seems to help you to adjust yourself better?
>
> May: *(In a affirming tone)* Yes, I think so. It is exactly so!

**"I want her to be happy."** Two mothers mentioned that seeing the daughter being happy

and joyful was particularly important to them. Min-Mei said that she used to be worried about

how *Joanna* thought about herself and how the world saw *Joanna*. However, after she

understood that *Joanna* was very positive about her sexual orientation, she was able to let go off

her worries. As to May, *Erika*'s happiness was essential, and she just had to learn to adjust

herself and accept *Erika*.

> Min-Mei: I was sort of worried at first. My worries were the major issue. Later when I
> talked to her, she reassured me that it was not so serious. Besides, she was happy and
> positive that she didn't think that this would affect her love life in a gloomy or negative
> way. With her positive response, I felt somewhat comforted. Since she was so positive,
> my worries were reduced. Taking away the worries, I feel that I can accept it well.
> Otherwise, if she were sad or melancholy about her sexual orientation, I would have
> negative feelings towards homosexuality. If she feels good about herself, then I am OK
> with this. She likes herself and cares less than me about how others look at her. If she
> doesn't care, that's OK with me. I would be worried if she cared too much about how
> others look at her or had no confident. I am more afraid of such reactions. Now she seems
> fine and positive about herself, so I feel relieved and am able to accept her more. … *(To
> Joanna)* As long as you like, why not? *(Laughing)*
> ----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------
> May: *(Talking about her daughter's first girlfriend)* At that time, I told myself to learn
> how to let my daughter do what she likes and walks the path she wants to. Therefore, I
> rarely talked to her and she didn't talk to me, either. … What's more, I had this idea that I
> am fine with whatever she likes. This allowed me to accept her naturally.

**"I like or know her partner."** Several mothers said that the daughter's partner also

influenced their willingness to accept. May hoped *Erika* to be with her current partner forever

because she felt they were perfectly matched. She even introduced her to some closest relatives.

Elaine said that the family welcomed the partner to join the family activity as long as they liked

the person. As to Wanda, she admitted that she was less objective after she knew *Jennifer*'s

partner more.

*Jennifer*: My ex-girlfriend used to write blog articles and my mother would read them. She sort of knew this person better, right?

Wanda: She is a nice person.

*Jennifer*: Yes, she is. So you got to know her better.

Wanda: Knowing more about her helped me become less opposing.

*Jennifer*: You became friendlier.

Wanda: Yes, I was less opposing because we tend to reject the unfamiliar stuff and the unknown idea, right? We are more likely to express our friendliness when seeing someone face to face. Although I don't mean seeing each other in this case, but after reading her articles and feeling to understand her better, I started to like her and thought she's a nice person.

*Jennifer*: Yes, I agree. After a while, I found that her attitude changed. She became friendlier and more amicable to my ex.

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May: It became more acceptable to me after *Erika* met her present partner. I think it's good! Being lesbian doesn't mean a bad thing. They are like other heterosexual couples. And the girl she's seeing now is nice. I like her. …I think she, L, is very agreeable so I am relieved. I think *Erika* is seeing someone whom I can trust. If she was seeing someone that I don't like or someone that is not compatible with her in terms of her personality and attitude towards life, I might be very worried and even so after I die. It is good to see them treating each other in a very nice way. That's nice. They have similar interests, living attitude and ideas about life. They match in many ways! Therefore I feel great and have no objection at all.

May: I told her to cherish and not to give up this relationship because she is the one whom can spend the rest of life with *(Erika is laughing)*. I feel at ease if you are with her for the rest of your life *(Erika*: "This is giving me a lot of pressure!"). Don't give up her *(Laughing)*! …For almost three years, I have seen them getting along in a very compatible way. L is outstanding. I mean these two or three years! So there is no need to see someone else. No one is better than L! *(Laughing out loud)* … When it comes to my son-in-law, I was just feeling sort of relieved but not the kind of really satisfied. Because I had no idea how he interacted with my elder daughter. They moved out after they got married and my elder daughter seldom mentioned their marriage. However, I get to have more opportunities seeing L and *Erika*'s interaction. My observations allow me to reach the conclusion that L is the person for my daughter to spend the rest of her life with *(Both*

*Erika and May are laughing).* It's better not to change *(laughing).*
*Erika*: *(Laughing)* What a change! First she didn't want me to see someone who is female, but now she just wants me to stay with my partner and I am not allowed to change!

I: I think you mentioned a key point that parents always worry if their children live a happy life in the future. Once they know their children have found a trustworthy partner, their worries are much reduced. Because many parents are opposed to something that they don't understand or they fear, and they worry that their children will be alone when getting old. Therefore, their opposition will be reduced when parents see their children are seeing someone worthy of trust.
May: Exactly!

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Elaine: *(Talking about Chih-Chieh's first girlfriend)* We were not against her first girlfriend because there was nothing dissatisfactory about her. However, after they broke up, *Chih-Chieh* kept changing her partners and did not go steady with anyone. This is why we started to think this is unacceptable.

***"Since I cannot change my child…"*** One passive reason for acceptance was that

mothers had to accept it since they were unable to change their daughters. Several mothers said

that learning to accept the daughter's sexual orientation became a task for them after they

understood that they could not change their daughters' sexual orientation. Maybe some of them

felt that they had no choice, but they all worked very hard for the mother-daughter relationship.

Linda: If it's fate, I cannot but accept it, right? I can control a lot of things but I cannot control or intervene in her ideas. …*(Talking to Joey)* Because I think you are very sure about your sexual identity. I don't think you will change. Even if you changed, that would be because you took the initiative.

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Phoenix: When her sister was blaming her, I told her sister, "If she's meant to be so, we cannot do anything but accept. There is nothing we can do about it. Don't blame her." …
My sister-in-law told me, "in fact she's really struggling. She didn't choose to be like

this!" This is not what she wishes for but she was born to be so. We cannot change her. Although I didn't talk to *Jadehare* about this but I talked to her aunt since she has more knowledge about it. I asked her, "What can I do in *Jadehare's* situation?" Her aunt told me, "To be honest, she didn't choose to be like this. It's unlike things we can decide the way we want it be like." She continued, "Just let her be herself." … Later I asked *Jadehare* if this could never be changed. Being like me was good, wasn't it? Why did she have to date with females? But if she's born to be so, I cannot do anything. Later my sister-in-law said, "While you're struggling, she's struggling too." *(Paused for a while)* So I said, "Just let it be." Then I tried to let go and let her be who she is.

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Yen: If she's positive about her sexual orientation, there is nothing wrong about it, right? If she's lesbian, we must try our best to accept. Besides, she does have a lot of pressure from being so and we must share her pressure, right? She is innocent! *(Kerry's laughing.)* She can't help it, and this is not her intension to be like this way. I think this is the part that we show our understanding.

**"I want my child to be nearby."** Two mothers emphasized that they wanted their

daughter to be nearby as one of the reasons they accepted. There was a tragic case where two

high school girls took their own lives because they felt that their same-sex relationship could not

be accepted by their families. Linda did not want this happened to her daughters if she refused to

accept her daughters' sexual orientation. As to Elaine, she wanted the family to stay together, so

she would do anything to keep the family as the whole. For her, that was the most important

thing.

Linda: Several decades ago, two girls who were students from Taipei First Girls High School, committed suicide in a hotel in Su-ao. At that time we didn't understand and we had never heard about being gay. Later when my daughter told me about her sexual identity, I was able to recall and associate that incident with a possible cause. Because they didn't want to disclose their relationship to their families, and there was little

information about LGBT by the time when the Internet was not so prevalent. They might have this idea that only killing themselves would allow them to stay together forever. After contemplation, I told myself not to give my daughter such pressure. I do not want to force her because what matters is that I have her living happily in this world. Do you understand? I don't want to push her to the corner and make death the only solution. I just want my daughter healthy and alive. So I choose to accept her.

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Elaine: I always remember my mom-in-law's words, "If you wish your children to reach the goals you set for them, but eventually they lose their health or lose their way home to reach your goals, you in fact lose them. So always ask yourself if you want to keep or lose them." My mom-in-law told me these, and this is an important reminder to me. So when I am dealing with some critical issues with them, her brother and her, I always keep this principal idea: I want my children to live in a healthy and happy way. I want them to stay with me rather than lose them. Therefore, I will take anything that I need to take to be with them.

Elaine: I wish her good health and happiness. So for what she wants and does, I try to understand, accept and help. And reduce the obstacles. That is it.

I: So to summarize from your words, you don't want a broken family? It sounds like a rather important factor.

Elaine: Yes! She is part of a family. Basically, she is meant to stay with us and our family cannot lose her. … For the bonding among all family members, we don't wish any family member to leave this family... So back to my principal idea: I want my daughter to live a healthy and happy life. I will feel relieved when she is around. This is my core value or the most critical belief.

***"I do not want our relationship to be hurt."*** Last, one mother said that she decided to

understand more and learn to accept because she did not want anyone got hurt in the experience.

Yen: I think there are a lot of cases like this. If you didn't react or handle it in a calm and rational way, it's easy for anyone involved getting hurt.

I: Yes, this is so true. I agree.

Yen: Yes, my husband and I agree to this and we do not want any harm like these. So we learn to accept and understand her, and it helps us to walk down the path with her.

**Reasons related to the family or culture.** Other reasons were related to cultural values and beliefs that are rather patriarchal and the current situation that there is no legislation allowing same-sex couple to get married.

***"Heterosexual marriage is not a better choice."*** Some mothers learned from her friends' or her marriage that marrying a man did not guarantee happiness. Getting married did not work for everyone; their daughter might lose self-identity in the marriage, or even experience domestic violence and get divorced at the end. When regarding "not getting married" from this perspective, mothers seemed to be able to take in the consequence that the lesbian daughter will not get married and accept the daughter's sexual orientation more.

> Wanda: I respected her choice from the beginning. Besides, heterosexual marriage may not as good as everyone expects. I am close to her father. We have a very intimate relationship. Taking away the influence from other people, we are indeed very close to each other and that is a kind of pure love. We have known each other since I was 17 years old, so our love is simple and pure. But for the 27 years we have been together, there are more than just painful efforts to manage a family. There is big pressure. Sometimes I think marriage is unfair to women. I am not less outstanding than him *(Laughing out loud)*! …. Up to date, I still feel that marriage treats women unfairly. So when I knew she is lesbian, on the one hand, I was fearful that other people rather than I would not accept her or would give her a lot of pressure. On the other, I was somehow relieved because *Jennifer* will not have to walk the same path as I did and suffer so much.
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> Linda: The first thing I do after I wake up every morning is watching TV. When it comes to report on domestic violence or homicide due to breakup, I will start to think that staying unmarried is nothing bad at all. At least, you will not be beaten by a bad husband and you will lead a life much better than that…. Among my friends, some are married

with men with bad habits. For example, many friends of her father's are addicted to gambling and alcohol, use violence and refuse to work. I just don't think that marrying a man has more merits than disadvantages.

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*Joanna*: *(in an adorable voice)* It's not any better if I am married to a bad guy?

Min-Mei: This was my later conclusion! *(Laughing) (Joanna is also laughing.)*

*Joanna*: And then?

Min-Mei: Then I thought that the divorce rate is so high today. It is not any better if you're married to a bad guy, right?

*Joanna*: Exactly!


***"Her father supports her too."*** Among those participants, both Linda and Min-Mei

mentioned how the husband influenced their acceptance level. As to Linda, her husband was

rarely at home because of his job, she felt that she had to take the most responsibility of rearing

the daughters. Therefore, when her husband did not ask anything about their daughters' love life

or comment about homosexuality, it reduced Linda's self-blaming and then helped her to accept

her daughters' same-sex relationship in her way.

As to Min-Mei, her husband strongly supported the daughter's disclosure, and that

became the strength for Min-Mei to work in her process of acceptance. He not only talked to

Min-Mei to think positively but also took away Min-Mei's worry that she might need to be the

mediator between the father and the daughter. After knowing her husband had no problem

accepting the daughter's lesbianism, Min-Mei then was able to accept the daughter with an open

mind.

*Joey*: My dad is rarely at home. If any of them knew my secret first, the person with the knowledge would suffer a lot of pressure. And he or she might choose to conceal and not to let the other know my situation.

I: Yes.

*Joey*: That is huge pressure. Many conflicts and rejection result from this. She wants to put away the fire quickly. "You'd better not be lesbian. Just be as normal as others so I don't have to disclose this to your father. Otherwise, I don't think he is able to accept this." Or, "I think your mom may not be able to take this." So, we don't have such kind of conflict in our family. ... In the beginning, my mom would ask me not to tell my dad.

Linda: She told me she wanted to tell her dad about it when there was a good timing. (*Joey*: "Because I was just thinking why not telling him?") I said you would put me into an unfavorable situation.

*Joey*: My mom thought that she is responsible for nurturing and educating us. Therefore, if my dad knew this, he would blame her. Anyway, unlike most families where one parent knows but the other doesn't, that kind of struggle doesn't exist in my family.

Linda: Because he is usually not at home, I don't have to cover this up on purpose.

I: The pressure is reduced a lot.

*Joey*: Actually we don't have this in my family.

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Min-Mei: Since this is acceptable to her father, I am OK with it too. … I was just afraid that her father was against this. If so, I would be sandwiched between them. In that kind of situation, wouldn't it be very difficult for me?

I: Yes, that's stressful.

Min-Mei: It turned out that her father didn't blame her. Since then, everything she told us seemed agreeable and acceptable.


***"She can take care of us after we get old."*** Some mothers considered the future with a

practical mind. Linda addressed that she could stop worrying that no one will take care of her

when she gets old. Since her lesbian daughters will not get married, they can take care of her.

Besides, there is a face issue. Having a lesbian daughter was not something very terrible; "It is

better than having a gay son or a single pregnant daughter!" Linda said.

> Linda: Since I don't have a son and you don't want to get married, it's good that you can take care of me and your father. Isn't it nice?... If she doesn't want to get married, then forget it. Later when we are older, she can escort me to the hospital and help with the registration and seeing the doctor. These are the benefits. My sister said that I was too selfish to keep her at home. Actually, I don't think that way. We have our own house so we don't have to worry about being homeless. When we are sick and need to take medicine, our daughters can help us with that. This is good. I think this is a nice way out.

> Linda: Traditionally, men are heirs in a family. Therefore, it is not acceptable that gays don't have children. However, this is a different case for lesbians. That's why I could accept it in three days. …Some girls get pregnant accidentally or mistakenly and have to raise the children without fatherhood. This is not going to happen for lesbians. Think about it! How embarrassing it is to parent your child without a father? At least, lesbians don't need to worry about this. This is not an issue for them *(Laughing)*.

***"We are not alone."*** Knowing that they were not the only LGBT family also could help

some mothers let go some concerns. Then she could learn to accept gradually. It was Phoenix's

case.

> Phoenix: Reading the newspaper, I am always attentive to news about LGBT because that's something related to my child. There is also a lot of coverage about the fact that there are a lot of gays in foreign countries such as America and so on. There are so many gays in Taiwan and my daughter is just one of them (*Jadehare*: "There are a total of 1.3 million LGBT individuals in Taiwan."), so why bothering nitpicking her? …Sometimes I see reports in the magazines that the LGBT Pride takes place all around the world. My sister-in-law also told me, "Some doctors are also gays! They are just born to be so."

**Challenges for Acceptance**

These mothers, who could be interviewed by a researcher, had shown a relatively high

acceptance level compared to other parents' of LGBT individuals in Taiwan, but they still

experienced certain challenges in the process of acceptance. After all, this issue is rather a taboo

in many families and in the culture. Needless to say, those who could immediately accept their

lesbian daughters after disclosure were few. Several mothers had struggles and described them

during the interview. Some mothers said that they hoped their daughters could change back to

heterosexuals; some mother worried a lot about the societal pressure or others' reactions; and

some mothers had to deal with other family members' judgment or hostility.

I have summarized their challenges and divided them into four categories in this

sub-domain: "need more time to process", "concern for the daughter's partnership", "pressure

from other family members", and "against social norms".

**Need more time to process.** Wanda gave us a good example. At the end of the interview,

Wanda admitted that she still needed more time to show her support in the way that *Jennifer*

expected. For example, *Jennifer* wished that Wanda could meet with other parents or could

attend the fundraising event that she hosted for a LGBT organization. However, meeting with

other parents was not an option for Wanda at this moment, and she needed to take her time to be

a mother of a lesbian in public.

*Jennifer*: Don't you want to meet other parents?
Wanda: The time is not right now. I am a person who does something when I am ready. I
do not wish to do anything in a hasty manner because the result is usually not

satisfactory.

*Jennifer*: From the start, I felt mom's reluctance. Later I talked to a lot of mothers when giving lectures, I started to understand that this is in fact a process. It is really a process. I have to take time to know even myself. So I can't force mom to take it in such a short time.

Wanda: Yes! Since you haven't fully accepted yourself, how can you ask me to?

*Jennifer*: No, no! I accept myself already. What I mean is I am still thinking of ways to let you know this part of me. So at this moment I can't expect you to say "Yes" or "OK" for whatever I ask you.

Wanda: Yes, it takes time. This is the same for everything, not just this issue. It takes time for everything to evolve with a good solution. Let time have the answer for all these! …Time is the best elixir. You can't ask your parents to accept this in such a short time. This is unconventional. They need time.

**Concern for the daughter's partnership.** Some mothers were worried or used to be worried that their daughters were not happy in their love life, which strongly influenced those mothers' willingness to support their daughters' same-sex relationships. Phoenix and May had witnessed their daughters' being miserable and depressed in their intimate relationship, which led them to question if the same-sex relationship was bad for their daughters. As a result, it was not surprising that these two mothers could not accept their daughters' lesbianism for a period of time.

Phoenix: Whenever she was talking on the phone, she cried badly and it usually went on the whole night. She took a lot of things to heart. I didn't know whom she was on the phone with, crying. Later she brought her girlfriend home, but the way they interacted seemed to indicate they didn't like the way they were. Actually I saw all this but I didn't say anything about it. I didn't understand and I didn't want to talk about it. …I mean, if they were not going to work out, they should end it. Since it was not normal, and the person you loved was not whom we wished for. Being heterosexual is simply different

from being homosexual. Why would you want to have a girlfriend and fall into such a (I: "Miserable?") situation? ... I asked why she put herself in such an undesirable situation. If it didn't work out, no matter whether one was with a male or a female, just break up. Why made yourself suffer? ... I could not bear to see her so skinny, crying all the time and refusing to eat. Sometimes her friend came to visit but they were so unhappy when they stayed together. I didn't say anything but I knew what was going on between them. To be honest, I'd rather she didn't come to our home.

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May: Things were not really going well with her first girlfriend because of their different personalities. I really didn't know what they were like when they hit it off *(Erika is laughing)*, but she often cried over the phone! Crying over the phone was frustrating, and it made me feel that being lesbian meant suffering. But we did not address it openly. So even though I knew her situation, I took a neutral stance. I didn't show my support or my opposition.

**Pressure from other family members.** Not every family member shared a similar acceptance level. Therefore, mothers tended to speculate about other family members' feelings and thoughts that were important to them, especially the fathers' attitude and responses. Wanda's story was a great example. As to Linda, although her husband's attitude did not matter much since he was not around all the time, she did not want to take the risk to let other relatives know because she was not sure how they were going to take in the truth.

Wanda: I respect her choices. Most of the pressure comes from the relatives and friends. In fact, I am not really against this or judging if this is right or wrong. (*Jennifer*: "But you're still worried.") Yes, I worry about her because this is still unacceptable in our society. And there has been especially big pressure from our family. This is what I worry about. Moreover, her father is more conservative in this regard.

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Linda: Now this is known to our family but not the relatives and friends.
I: So this is not known to your relatives?

Linda: No, no! It's just something among our family members. I don't know how my friends' and relatives' viewpoints. They don't come to dig up my secrets, and I won't tell them actively. Just let everything follow its natural course.

**Against social norms.** Elaine mentioned the conflict she had by admitting that the

same-sex relationship or *Chih-Chieh*'s same-sex affection was not something easy to accept

because it was against social norms. She even expressed her deepest hope that she still wanted to

see *Chih-Chieh* could "change back" someday.

Elaine: I won't say that there are no conflicts. I would say this issue is more unacceptable to a traditional family like mine. Therefore, it would be a lie if I said there are no conflicts or internal struggles for me.

Elaine: *(Asking about what Elaine's internal conflict is)* My internal conflicts? Simple. I always hope that there will be a miracle that she changes someday. Perhaps this is unreal, but what I need to do at this moment is to accept her condition…No matter how hopeless it is, I wish for a miracle. (*Chih-Chieh*: "Really? After you've heard a lot about it?") This is always something to expect for. …I respect her choice, but I can't deny that I still keep little hope in my heart.

I: So, where you are at this stage is to respect her choice, but it is undeniable that you still keep the hope. You also hope that *Chih-Chieh* can take into consideration parents' feelings. That is, considering the embarrassment that parents may need to deal with, especially her dad.
Elaine: Yes. After all, we are talking about social norms here; what we believe is more acceptable.

## Learning from the Entire Process

In this sub-domain, participants shared what they learned from the experience of

acceptance and of disclosure. Some participants shared the learning about herself or the other

person, seeing some differences in the person and feeling surprised. Some participants shared

what they learned about the mother-daughter relationship, being able to trust the relationship

more and feeling grateful for the other's growth. Furthermore, some participants shared the

learning about the LGBT community, having more understanding about oppression and

discrimination.

Based on those lessons learned and shared by my participants, I have summarized the

abundant data and divided them into five categories in this sub-domain: learning about the

coming-out experience (including emerging themes of "gaining new perspectives" and "feeling

grateful"), learning about the relationship (including emerging themes of "bond strengthened",

"providing endless support", "able to retain differences", and "being a lesbian is not an issue"),

learning about each other (including emerging themes of "discovering similarity", "surprised by

her resilience", "admiring her strength", "appreciating her progress"), learning about LGBT

(including emerging themes of "becoming more familiar with LGBT culture" and "becoming

more gender sensitive"), and learning about oppression (including emerging themes of

"experiencing the feeling of being oppressed", "fear of being rejected", and "fighting in the

family").

**Learning about the coming-out experience.** In this category, participants talked about

their thoughts and feelings related to the coming-out experience. For example, they gained new

perspectives about their relationship with the family or about life. Or they felt grateful to be

accepted without many struggles or fights with their parents or mothers.

*Gaining new perspectives.* When participants went through their stories about disclosure

and the process afterward, many of them emphasized that they gained new perspectives through

the experience. For instance, *Chih-Chieh* said, she would not have come out in the way she did

before; *Kerry* said that she used to care very much about her lesbian identity and always paid

attention to how that identity was treated in the society and in the family. After coming out, she

felt it was also very important to let people know her, not only her being a lesbian but also other

parts of her life. Those introspections would not have been found if they did not come out.

> I: If you could return to the past, perhaps you wouldn't choose the same way as you
> chose to come out?
> *Chih-Chieh*: I would not, definitely.
> I: "You would not," means that you wouldn't tell your mom you are lesbian?
> *Chih-Chieh*: Maybe not. Or maybe I would choose other ways that are less aggressive….
> Had I not believed the intimacy of a family is partly built on disclosure of secrets, I
> wouldn't have so much pressure. The education we receive is that disclosure and
> confession are the basis to build a good relationship with family members. Without this, I
> would not have doubted my family's harmony…. Actually that's a concept from the
> Western world! ...By that time, I was upholding that idea and believed it was really what
> care and harmony were about. It's what intimacy and love were about! However, if I had
> a second chance to redo it, I would probably tell you that I would choose to do it
> alternatively. So it would not cause such a great conflict in my family and even lead to
> my inevitable moving out.
> I: So if you could go back to the past, many things might have turned out differently
> because of alternative ways of handling them?
> Chih-Chieh: Yes, and I wouldn't have had such huge emotional conflicts. I would choose

alternative methods. I am more agreeable to the core concepts in our family now.

I: What are the core concepts in your family?

*Chih-Chieh*: *(in a gentle tone)* A good interpersonal relationship is based on mutual care, in a way that does not attract everyone's attention.

I: What does "care" mean?

*Chih-Chieh*: In terms of everything in our daily life! For example, when my cousin passed away, we showed up altogether at her house. We didn't talk much because the way we comforted each other was beyond language. Despite this silent way, I could feel the togetherness of our family, where one supported another. Unlike the Western culture, it's a very different way that we Chinese show how we care for someone.

I: *(in a later interview with Chih-Chieh only)* I'm curious about something: when you said you would handle it differently, do you mean you would "not disclose" or "disclose in an alternative way"?

*Chih-Chieh*: I thought they'd already found out long ago!

I: And they just chose to be silent?

*Chih-Chieh*: Yes! …If I had been with that girl throughout my undergraduate years, then I didn't really have to "come out." They liked her. Do you know what I mean? They liked her very much. Words were unnecessary. And they had been trying to ensure her role in their own way. For instance, my parents invited her to my grandma's eightieth birthday party. They personally invited her. There were three tables and all of the participants were our relatives except her. She was the only one who has no kinship. That was the way they accepted her.

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*Kerry*: Before coming out, I treated being a lesbian as something really big, or even the only thing that I had to deal with. I used to do something on purpose to prove that I was outstanding even with this identity…. Later I found that was really exhausting! And gradually I found that when others try to know me, I want them not just limit their scope in knowing me as a lesbian. I hope they see me more than that even if I thought the identity is important to me. It was just like the memos I wrote to my parents: "I am still your daughter. I am just what I am." This is what I learned afterwards.

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*Joey*: At the beginning, since I never interacted with other parents whose children are gays, I had no idea how their families reacted to this issue. Knowing them allowed me to understand that this was not easy for most families. Sometimes it could be a really

interesting experience. For instance, when I joined some groups, we were invited to share our experiences of coming out or talk about our self-identity. Compared with others, my experience was not really special; I did not ever feel struggled that I could not love women. Many people described their process of self-acceptance was full of struggles and pain. But not to me. Coming out also seemed a suffering process to them. Again, I just didn't suffer as much as others did.

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*Jadehare*: I think growth is all about learning from the moment that a person was born to the last moment he/she dies. So I didn't feel that my relationship between my mom and I changed after I came out. To put it this way, I don't think that coming out made me grow. It's just that coming out is an unusual experience that most people don't have. I think what makes me grow are all the things that happen in my life… This is actually a series of learning experiences. Coming out is just taking away my pressure; however, this perhaps made my mom stressful.

***Feeling grateful.*** Several daughters expressed their gratitude after going through this experience. *Jadehare* and *Erika* both expressed that they felt lucky that their mothers accepted better than other parents.

*Jadehare*: Throughout the process of coming out, I was really lucky. And maybe the luckiest part was, I was born in a family with open-minded and positive parents. I think this positivism was passed down from my parents to me.

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*Erika*: Indeed, I am really lucky *(Laughing)*! I made my efforts, but I was also very lucky at the same time. So it didn't take a long for my parents to accept. From the time of my disclosure to her gradual acceptance, I made some efforts and was really lucky that she was so supportive. Because of my good luck, I was thinking to have my mom to share her experience in the parent's support group *(Laughing)*.

**Learning about the relationship.** When participants talked about learning related to the strength, the characteristics, and the change of their mother-daughter relationship, I categorize

them as "learning about the relationship".

*Bond strengthened.* Two participants mentioned that their mother-daughter relationship

was superior to others' judgments, or they felt their mother-daughter relationship was much more

important than what people thought. It seemed that the strength or the importance of the

relationship was identified after disclosure and their following experiences.

> Georgia: We are less vulnerable and won't be upset by this. But from other parents, I
> found that they couldn't take negative opinions so lightly…. Those who can't accept us
> do not influence us at all. We are not depressed simply because others don't accept us. We
> react like what she usually says, "Oh, just let it be!" with her habitual shrug-offs. They
> are less harmful to us! Seeing rejections, we react reasonably, "Oh, I understand! Many
> people have this kind of reaction. It's no big deal!" This is the response we have now. …
> When helping other parents to walk out their dilemma, I realize that most of it came from
> their own values. Many people would say something like these: "This is not acceptable in
> this society." "This is not acceptable to relatives and friends." In fact, the rejection is her
> belief; that is, she feels others' rejection because it is her inner rejection. She just hasn't
> realized that. So when she sensitively feels there is objection from everyone, it is in fact
> the projection of her inner rejection towards others.
> ------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------
> *Jadehare*: As for my position, I've told him *(a boy who liked Jadehare)* that I am lesbian
> so I did not wish him to come after me. I must tell him directly because I didn't want to
> waste his time. However, I wondered if he would disclose this to his mother. But it's no
> big deal even if he discloses it. In any ways, he doesn't come to my house often; I don't
> think that the disclosure is going to impact much. If he can't let go, that's his issue. What
> matters is my relationship with my mom…If the son of my mother's friend happened to
> be gay, or anything that was strange to the social norm, I would respect him. Think about
> this: I am not the one who leads his life, right? To be in my shoes, my mother's friend has
> to respect me, doesn't she? She can't live my life for me either.

*Providing endless support.* Some participants reported that they were more certain about

the love and caring generated in their mother-daughter relationship, like *Joey*, *Jennifer* and

*Joanna*. Wanda even told *Jennifer* that she supported her always!

> Wanda: My attitude is that she's a grown-up and she has her own life. I will support her forever. If she needs to be on her own and leave home for development, I am happy to give my best wishes. When she needs me, I am always home for her. That's my way! *Jennifer*: She was born to be a mother. I always believe so! (I: "Have you told your mom this?") I didn't but I always feel so. Some moms don't like to take care of children, and some even feel relieved when their children are grown up and they can finally live the life they want. However, she's just perfect for being a mom. I feel that she is just a good mom and that's all. *(Still emotional)*
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> *Joey*: I've always stuck to my own principles. For what I decide to do, for example, not getting married or something else, my mother always shows great support. Therefore, no matter it was my coming out, or the decision of quitting to start writing, my mom just trusted me and let me do what I wanted. …My mom has been very supportive! Since I write lesbian novels, I cannot continue without my mom's strong support.
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> *Joanna*: I am more convinced that their love is unconditional, and I am loved without a doubt. Their love has been a definite and sure thing. It is just reaffirmed again!

**Able to retain differences.** Several participants mentioned that they realized that their

relationship was able to retain differences and provide space to have dialogues. They did not

need to agree with the other, but their differences could be discussed fully.

> Sylvia: I was surprised that she wanted to join me in the Gay Pride because I was just informing her of the news instead of inviting her. She also brought her friends to the Pride parade. Moreover, she also proposed to go to my thesis presentation with her friends after I told her about it. So we are heading towards the direction of better understanding of each other…. Of course, there are still differences. We don't have the life experience they have, such as how to overcome the future obstacles, how to make a

commitment as a couple, and how to face others' inquires, and so on. One time I asked if she wanted children in the future. She said no. I was shocked by her answer. Why wouldn't she want a child? This is one difference between us. We think it's important to have offspring or children so as to create a family. Anyway, whenever there is difference, I will raise my doubts to understand her more.

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*Chih-Chieh*: As an activist of social movement, I must have my own political stance, such as what I want, for which I am very insistent on. However, when I return home, I wonder if I have to be so insistent on certain things? .... I have my political concerns and I must reach my goals because that's my job. However, when it comes to my life, I choose to lay back a little bit. …I know that I have to face certain issues at home, but that doesn't mean that I have to make changes in my family. But I will start thinking why I feel uncomfortable about something? Where's the problem? What hidden mechanism has made me so uncomfortable at home? Of course, some emotions will come up. Then I get to discover what depresses me. Yes, I get depressed! But it usually won't last for three days…Then I learned that this is something unpleasant and I have to let out this feeling by developing the discourse or giving a speech.

Elaine: Dealing with the field I am unfamiliar with is like living in different worlds. However, with mutual respect, we will have a chance to know each other. It's called diversity. In a diverse society, we get to learn more, and this is beneficial to us…. Basically, if we have accepted this, despite the little hope we have, we will show respect to what have already existed out there.

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*Kerry*: After this, I learned how to understand them from their points of view. I mean after I came out. For example, recently my brother had several quarrels with my parents and I felt that I was sandwiched between them. I understand my brother's ideas whereas I also understand my parent's…. In fact, I feel that each one of us, both parents and children, has a lot to learn. For some experiences, parents just have to learn by themselves. I can't do anything about this *(Laughing)*.

**Being a lesbian is not an issue.** Participants also mentioned that being a lesbian or her sexual orientation was no longer an issue in the relationship after going through the process of

acceptance. In other words, daughters felt that they were highly accepted by their mothers, so

they concerned more about their future, their job, their education, etc.. Being a lesbian became

the least issue that was needed to be worried in the relationship.

> *Man-Shuan*: I think I am more self-assured because my mom is liberal about me being
> lesbian. I am positive about myself without feeling myself awkward. Compared with
> other LGBT individuals, I am not as provocative as them. I am quite positive about
> everything. At this moment, I think I am no different from other children. As long as I
> make my decision for my study and future, and achieve my goals, I don't think there is
> any problem.
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> *Erika*: Of all aspects in my life, I am more relieved with this part!
> I: So compared with other LGBT individuals, you're less worried about this but other
> aspects, such as your mom's health and future plan?
> *Erika*: Yes, my worries are like those of people at my age and those who are choosing a
> career path now, similar to those worried by most people. However, my sexual identity is
> the least thing to worry about because my mom totally accepts it.

**Learning about each other.** In this category, mother-daughter dyads shared their

feelings on if they saw each other differently after the experience of disclosure and the process of

acceptance.

*Discovering similarity. Jennifer* responded immediately after being asked if she had new

insights about their mother-daughter relationship. *Jennifer* found out that she was similar to her

mother in the way of taking care of her partner in the relationship. With that discovery, *Jennifer*

seemed to have further understanding about her mother.

*Jennifer*: I wasn't willing to admit that children resemble their parents by blood. But as I grow older, I tend to find that I am very much like my dad when I interact with other people. In a relationship, I am like my mother in terms of the ways and concepts of dealing with a relationship. I share this similarity with her. But in terms of dealing with conflicts, I am not like her. That's why I suffered. She is submissive, so submissive in her relationship with my father. … I used to think she was so submissive that she put herself in a miserable situation. Then I was so shocked to find that I am just like her! And I didn't want to be like her. Why wasn't I born with better ways to handle relationships? I used to think this way; however, I start to recognize that this is me. If I don't accept it, then I will have to change.

**Surprised by her resilience.** Several daughters said that they felt surprised by their

mothers' resilience because they thought their mothers might need more time and space to deal

with the shock. However, their mothers had their own way to find balance in life. *Chih-Chieh*,

for example, expressed her big surprise in this way:

*Chih-Chieh*: My mom gives me a lot of surprises! I always tell my friends that she's amazing because she is running a magic device in her mind *(Laughing)*! Usually when we talk, she rarely responds to me when it is about something serious. She tends to choose not to discuss it or not to listen to something unpleasant to her ears. Like what I told you last time, she chose to ignore me when she heard something unpleasant at first.
I: No immediate response?
*Chih-Chieh*: No, she didn't respond, and it made me angry at first. Now I understand why. What impressed me is that even if she refused to talk and discuss it, she was actually digesting her feelings in her own way *(Laughing out loud)*. I really didn't know how she managed herself, but she managed better than I thought. I really don't get it, but I always find that she does some self-work in the end.
I: And it usually surprises you? Maybe more than shocked? There must be some surprises.
*Chih-Chieh*: *(Laughing)* Very surprised! I have no idea how she does it…I just learn that I can trust her more and more no matter what I have done *(Laughing)*, or what kind of stimulus I gave her *(Laughing)*. She just needs time to digest, and she will be fine… All I

need to know is that she will be OK. Her process is less important to me.

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*Joey*: It never came to me that I should take my mom's reaction into consideration. I just wanted to tell her about it and didn't care about the impact. Later when I was working as a volunteer and talked to many parents about their struggles in accepting their gay child ... I came to realize that my mother was open-minded *(turning to see Linda)*; she found her balance easily and then she knew what she should do to make herself and us be better.

**Admiring her strength.** Also, a few mothers said that they discovered the daughter's

strength, like self-confidence, determination, and openness, through this experience. They felt

that their daughters had achieved something that they could not do, which made them feel proud.

Georgia: Honestly, she doesn't think that she is from different worlds and is a minority. *(Asking Johnny)* Do you ever think that way?
*Johnny*: I really don't think so! I am no different from other people. I am just like everyone, Haha!
Georgia: Even though there is something different, she accepts. She fully accepts that she differs from others. … Since she came out in the junior high school, I have been feeling that the most difficult part comes from opinions and judgments from other people. However, I have confidence in her. I think I know her very well. I also think I know people's psychology well. I have been taking classes, and I just don't find that she has any difficulty in adjusting herself or inflicts herself with worries. I thought that she already accepts herself. That was my interpretation at that time. I felt that we were together to fight back the pressure from the world outside.

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Wanda: I'm proud of her. She is insistent on being who she is in love life. This is somewhat like me! (*Jennifer*: "Of course, I was born by you!") No matter how stressful she is, she is still able to consult others! That is not easy. From a certain aspect, I take pride in her because she can deal with her emotional troubles well while offering counseling to others and delivering speeches *(Laughing)*. That is not easy! For most people with this issue, they are terrified and do not know what to do. They might be stuck in the whirlpool and don't know how to get out of it. Or they might swing between self-denial and acceptance. However, she knows exactly what she wants, which is not

always so for many people.

Wanda: I am happy to have her fighting for women's rights. She voices out our needs. I am pretty happy that she could volunteer herself to speak for us. However, I am afraid of the pressure from the society. So I have mixed feelings about this. I might not be able to do what she has done.

*Appreciating her progress.* Many daughters reported that they appreciated their mothers' progress that they could not ask for. They felt they had given their mothers a tough task that influenced their mothers' life greatly. Therefore they could only respect the time needed by mothers or parents to take in the impact of the disclosure. However, their mothers or parents accepted them in an unexpected way.

*Jadehare*: As for my mom's growth, I don't know if she feels that she has grown. I just know that I sort of force her to get close to me. I don't have a definite answer about her growth, but if participation in my activities is regarded as growth, then she indeed has grown a lot, if that also counts. … From my point of view, she participated in many activities and got in touch with this issue from more aspects than other moms… To a certain level, my parents are forced to grow with me because I think this is the life that I decide to have. This decision might cause inconvenience to some people because it is always difficult for people to change their ideas.
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*Chih-Chieh*: From the Hotline, some LGBT's parents seem to be very powerful or eloquent. For those mothers, I can understand why they finally feel better: because there are a lot of them who can talk and share with one another. You know, they are like us, who get to understand things through sharing their experiences. I am one of them. Talking is a way to release my feelings. Then I will sort out my ideas and then write them down. I also talk to my friends and read books. I just feel that I have a lot of resources. There is no doubt that I become better and better.
I: So you wonder how your mom goes through her struggle *(Laughing).*
*Chih-Chieh: (Laughing)* I really don't know how she becomes better because she does

none of my ways.

**Learning about LGBT.** Mothers also shared what they learned about LGBT individuals, and how related knowledge influenced their thoughts and beliefs. For example, some mothers could use some "professional terms", knew where LGBT individuals held gatherings, and even develop a more multicultural perspective about gender.

*Becoming more familiar with LGBT culture.* No matter whether mothers took action to understand LGBT culture or were informed passively about it, they became more familiar with the culture and the community. Some mothers cared about how the same-sex partners interacted; some mothers learned more about the related terms and the places LGBT individuals went; some mothers learned how sexual orientation influenced LGBT individuals' networks and life style. Mothers reported that they were still learning as time went by and as their relationships with their daughters deepened.

> Georgia: Compared with heterosexuals like us, I think there is a lot to learn about her identity and the same-sex relationship. For example, there are legal issues, social problems, how people look at her, and their same-sex relationship that I'm mostly interested in. ... For instance, I don't understand how two gay men interact with each other in a relationship because it usually takes a man and a woman to interact in a heterosexual relationship. In addition, people spend a lot of time getting to know the opposite sex and then their partners in a heterosexual relationship. I mean, men are very different from women, so women spend a lot of time understanding men and then her man. But for LGBT individuals, butch and femme lesbians are kind of different.

> Georgia: For heterosexuals, there is huge difference between single and married life, let

alone living styles. Her future is all influenced by her sexual orientation. So I support the idea of "Second coming-out." Usually a mother feels that nothing has changed after her daughter comes out. This is because the mother doesn't get to know LGBT's life further. She feels that she knows her child just like before, the way she looks and dresses herself. She doesn't acknowledge the difference. When I get in touch with many LGBT individuals and their life, I start to recognize the huge difference between heterosexuals and LGBT individuals.

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Sylvia: At that time I just brought up *Man-Shuan* in the way people nurture a daughter. For example, I would ask her to eat something nutritious and good for breast enhancement.

I: I know many butch lesbians care about their breast size.

Sylvia: I didn't know this until later... Now I understand them pretty better than other heterosexual counselors. Actually I have some lesbian friends who are very outstanding. Now I know lesbians better since there is one at my house.

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I: Does Min-Mei ask *Joanna* anything related to LGBT?

Min-Mei: Yes, I do now. Before she came out, we didn't talk about it. Since she has come out, we will chat about it sometimes.

*Joanna*: Wow, you just use the word "come out." Such a professional term!

I: Yes, you are awesome!

Min-Mei: Come on, I learned it from you!


***Becoming more gender sensitive.*** Two mothers pointed out specifically that their

"gaydar" become more sensitive! In addition, Sylvia stopped asking dichotomized questions and

tried to include more possibilities in her language.

Sylvia: Now I have become more sensitive! Haha! Dichotomy is no longer my worldview. For instance, I do not ask directly if someone has a boyfriend or girlfriend. Instead, I ask, "Do you have a partner? Are you seeing someone?" This is more neutral. Otherwise, this is going to be difficult to answer for some people.

I: They are ignored.

Sylvia: Yes, that's how I ask questions like these, which the gender sensitivity is included. This is something nice to learn about.

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Linda: I think I am very sensitive now *(meaning gaydar)*, almost as sensitive as LGBT individuals themselves. One time, when I was on the train, they were just sitting behind my seat.

*Joey*: My mom is friendlier towards LGBT. That's my feeling.

Linda: Well, I simply had this feeling that they are lesbians! ... I can tell that. The way they interacted was so intimate, which is similar to what's between my third daughter and her girlfriend.

**Learning about oppression.** Some participants addressed their experience of oppression. Some mentioned the fear they used to have, some went through vivid terrible experiences of being threatened, and some shared the turmoil happened in the family. Some of the participants were still experiencing the conflicts in the family even though they could sit down and talk about those experiences with me during the interview.

*Experiencing the feeling of being oppressed.* Experiencing this threat was profound to one specific mother-daughter dyad, Georgia and *Johnny*. That specific experience not only strengthened the trust between the mother and the daughter, Georgia also learned from the experience that LGBT was minority in the society and suffered from prejudice. As a result, Georgia decided to involve in the gay right movement to help other parents who had LGBT offspring.

Georgia: This experience *(referring to the event that she brought her daughter back from the house of her daughter's girlfriend)* was very positive for both of us. (*Johnny*: "I

always said that my mom came to save me! Save me from my situation!") She was really scared, and that experience let me realize LGBT individuals are minority and very vulnerable in society. They have to face the cruel oppression from the society, in which some people may be really harmful. It's not just about my child. Actually all the children are very vulnerable.

Georgia: *(Talking about her experience after joining the advocacy group for LGBT individuals' rights)* I have learned a lot. In fact, I am very shocked. For many, they have suffered a lot to accept themselves... There are distortions, sufferings, negativism, rejection, worries, oppressed feelings, loneliness or alienation. ... The more I understand them, the more I realize how limited their lives are. It turns out that there are many prejudices and misunderstanding, all of which are known to me after I tried to understand them. I think these are also big impacts for parents. For heterosexual parents, even if their child has come out to them, parents will not feel the impact if they don't go out to be exposed to the community. They are unlikely to know how biased the society's view is of LGBT individuals. Most LGBT's parents do not have the courage to disclose that their children are gay because they feel it's unnecessary to tell others. They may cover up the whole thing so they don't feel the impact. ...Thus, if parents can step further to learn how their gay child's life is like, it will help narrow the gap (between heterosexual parents and their gay child).

**Fear of being rejected.** Some mothers worried that their daughters might get rejected by

the society or judged by other people. Although their worries were reduced after years of

observation and with understanding, mothers still had concerns.

Min-Mei: For homosexuals, they are still rejected in our society. Rejection is rejection. That's why we worry about her. We worry that people will look at her in a negative way. After all, this is not easy. When you are with a partner of your same sex, people will talk behind you. Before she came out, I didn't discriminate against people of the same sex being together, but I didn't approve, either. Now our daughter has come out and we definitely accept her, but this is not necessarily acceptable to other people. This is much harder than a heterosexual relationship.

***Fighting in the family.*** To many daughters, experiencing oppression in the family was the hardest thing to deal with. However, some participants transformed this experience of oppression into the discourse of oppression, and their personal experience became a powerful story in the gay rights movement to challenge the heterosexual and patriarchal system.

> *Jadehare*: *(On her feelings about her first girlfriend)* Why did I bring her home? That was because she was a nice person. Although I didn't think that it was wrong to be with her, being gay was very discriminated against in the society. It was nice that someone loved you and you returned with your love. But why was it not accepted by the society only because the person you love is the same-sex? That was the first time that I was aware of this... I cried a lot when I was with my first girlfriend because there was so much pressure. The truth is that no one wants to cry over a relationship, right? .... I know I was so immature at that time, and the pressure from the society was big. We did get along and got along very well but the society was unfriendly to LGBT individuals. I didn't think there was future for us. However, it's not the same now. I believe LGBT individuals have a great future and I am very confident. By then I was too young to cherish such as a nice person. I regretted being young and immature. I didn't do anything but cried, and crying could not help anything.
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> *Chih-Chieh*: I am a discourse producer, so I must identify where those uncomfortable, suppressed, unequal or unfair experiences come from and how the mechanism works. If I couldn't discover those experiences in my family life, it would be difficult for me to write about it and tell people how this mechanism is operated and makes LGBT individuals suffer in their lives.
>
> *Chih-Chieh*: *(Mentioning more ideas on family relationship when being interviewed separately)* My mom asked me why I couldn't simply love my nephew just because he is cute or why I couldn't simply give my best wishes to my brother when he got married. My mom didn't understand that what she said didn't make any sense to me. I could not tell my mom that from a very political point of view, I simply didn't want to give him my best wishes. Of course they can co-exist; I could give him my best wishes while being very political. But I don't want to follow those mores to show that I fit in your life, such

as following the traditions to give red envelopes or do other things. I simply don't want to! .... After all, they don't respect my life style, which is not to get married and have babies. I don't want any of these, and I haven't asked them to cater to me. So why do I have to cater to them? Simply giving best wishes? Did they ever simply give me their best wishes? This doesn't make any sense *(Laughing)*! But I really don't like to argue with my mom about this because these kinds of quarrels will be really harmful to our relationship.

**Hopes and Concerns**

In this sub-domain, mothers talked about their hopes and concerns about the future. Some participants talked about the hope of social change, and some participants mentioned the hope of the daughter changed. As to their concerns, they cared about the daughter's life in old age, disclosure to the extended family, and the daughter's partnership. Several daughters also responded to mothers' concerns during the interview. Hence, I will present their responses here as well.

Here are two categories in this sub-domain: hopes (including emerging themes of "change in contexts", "change in parents", and "change in individuals") and concerns (including emerging themes of "daughter's life in old age", "disclosure to relatives or others", and "relationship issues").

**Hopes.** In this category, participants shared their thoughts and expectations about related issues. Some hoped the society could change to be a friendlier one to LGBT individuals; some hoped parents of LGBT individuals could change to understand what kind of challenges their

children were going to confront from their children's perspective; and one of the participants

even hoped that her daughter could change to be a heterosexual someday.

*Change in contexts.* It was still a pretty challenging environment to LGBT individuals in

Taiwan. The neglect of LGBT individuals' rights as well as discrimination was not uncommon in

legislation, in welfare, or in media. Therefore, both Sylvia and May hoped that the society could

be more open and embracing to this population.

> Sylvia: I do hope that the situation will be friendlier and beneficial to them. For example, some laws with regards to partnership or even marriage can be set up so that they will have some basic guarantees in their relationship.
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> May: I think the media should take a more positive approach. There shouldn't be always negative coverage in TV programs. For example, they only show people wearing make-up in the gay pride parade, and this will give people the wrong impression that LGBT individuals are just weird!
> *Erika*: She was so confused and has asked me about it.

*Change in parents.* Coming from their personal experience, *Joey* and Georgia suggested

that parents of LGBT individuals could take more initiative to understand their children's life

rather than just knowing their children's sexual orientation passively. Furthermore, they hoped

parents would not give up on communicating with their children and be "successful parents of

LGBT individuals".

*Joey*: Now when we're talking to parents on the phone, we will tell them not to stop conversations or deny their children's words habitually because that would close the window of communication with their gay child.

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Georgia: As heterosexuals, we are always confused and not confident that we can understand our gay children. We will wonder how they make friends and how they tell if people are gay. In fact, I think parents should be encouraged to know more about their children after they come out. ... Or parents should try to understand what social opinions towards them are, their dilemmas, or potential problems in the future, such as employment and family formation. There are a lot of obstacles for them to overcome. Then parents will know what challenges their children will face in the future and what kind of help their children need. With supports from parents, the Gay rights movement will be very different. ... I really believe that those who feel alienated from their parents can become closer through this issue because for the first time parents can learn a lot from their children. Parents usually know little about this issue unless they join this kind of activities. This is a great opportunity for parents and children to adjust their distance and roles.

***Change in daughter.*** However, some mothers cared more about their daughters than changes of the societal environment or of cultural values. They hoped their daughters could be braver or more compromising.

Wanda: I do wish to see her getting married and having children, just like most people do. That saves her a lot of effort. However, she chooses an alternative way, which I have never said anything against, and I know this is going to be a long road for her because of pressure from society and also herself. Although she said that she doesn't care about how others look at her, there is still pressure. I just hope that she learns to let go some customary ideas since she has chosen this path. (I: "To be braver?") Yes, that way, she can work out her own way without too much struggle and pain. Otherwise, it is really stressful.

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I: Do you still wish that one day she would change back?

Elaine: To be like us.

*Chih-Chieh*: Really? You still keep the hope? *(Elaine is nodding her head.)*

Elaine: If you want to push something to happen in the family, like doing work in the frontiers, you will have very little power to push forward this and it may bring forth more problems. But if you can leave the real situation of the family alone and put efforts to improve the social institutions in a systematic way, I believe you can influence the whole group greatly. That way is more effective. It is not necessary to have your needs met in both areas. …. Certain things can be sacrificed, but other things can be requested strongly.

I: Is this reconciliation or adjustment to a certain level?

Elaine: Adjustment! I think it is adjustment or tolerance? (*Chih-Chieh*: "Well?") This is actually tolerance.

I: Like having more consideration for your family members?

Elaine: Exactly.

**Concerns.** In this category, mothers talked about their concerns about the future. Like concerns about the daughter's life in old age, concerns about the same-sex partnership, or concerns disclosure to the extended family. Some concerns were specifically related to LGBT individuals and their life experiences, but other concerns were simply shared by the whole population. Daughters also responded to mothers' concerns no matter mothers if addressed them or not during the interview. Therefore, I have categorized mothers' concerns and present daughters' responses accordingly.

*Daughter's life in old age.* Three mothers mentioned this concern. They worried that no one would take care of their daughters when their daughters got old. Daughters also responded to that concern.

Phoenix: I am getting older and weaker! As parents, I always worry if you don't get married, how can you take good care of yourself after I pass away?

I: So you worry about her old age?

Phoenix: Yes, parents always worry things like these. LGBT individuals' parents are no exception. If you have the chance to listen to what parents talked about in the seminar for parents' support group, parents all worry about the similar things.

*Jadehare*: In fact, I think what my mom said is similar to what other moms said in your interviews. They all worry about the future of their children. But this is difficult to say in a logical way. First, for my two younger sisters, they both have children now. But think this way, can we really rely on our children to take care of us when we get old? What if something happen to them, in the worse case scenario? Definitely no! ... My mom worries that I will not have children because my partner is female, but I don't think it's something to worry about! As long as we have money, we can take care of ourselves. It is commonly believed that we take care of our children and they will take care of us when we get old, but this is not exactly so nowadays! So I feel that they worry too much about this. Even with healthy and grown-up daughters, such as in my sister's case, how can her daughters take care of her after getting married if our tradition remains? For sons, it won't work out if the sons do not want to be responsible for the caring for their parents. You can imagine all kinds of possibilities if you're not too naive about human nature. I think that all parents, including my mom, worry out of a habit. The difficulty is to break those habitual ways of thinking. It's not easy but I am trying. At least, I will be responsible for myself and live a good life.

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Elaine: *(In a serious tone)* Mom will leave this world one day, and you will be alone in this world.

*Chih-Chieh*: I know! I know that's what you worry about. I totally understand. I want to tell you that I understand that parents worry all the time about their children. …But I want to tell you not to worry because some friends of mine have promised to take care of one another when we get old. This is the common situation in our society. We are trying to establish a new relationship other than love or traditional family relationships. We are creating a diversified life style. This promise shared among my friends is important to me. I take this seriously. We have agreed to live in the neighborhood so as to care for each other. It's more than just words. Now we have some savings and are able to buy our own house. When we are looking at houses, we do go together and try to buy the houses in the

same community. ... I have no doubt about this promise among my friends. I don't think that I will live and die in loneliness when I get old.

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Yen: When she came out, I worried about things such as her life in old age and the issues she's going to face in the future. That came from my traditional thinking. Three years later, now I can look at these in a different way. .... I don't think it's necessary to have a family because it is acceptable in our society that you alone can do whatever you want to do. Having a family no longer plays the crucial role in one's life. ... In the past, people were teased if they were old and not getting married. But we don't worry about this nowadays. If you don't get married, it's not a big deal. ...It's just that we parents have a tendency to worry about them because they were born by me, right? I think we are connected and intimate so I worry about her. That's natural for parents to worry about their children until I die. Then I will leave her to take care of herself one day.

*Kerry*: That's still many years!

Yen: Yes! Because I see them and they are still around. But I do try to let go off some things because it's unlikely to carry so much on my shoulder! So I am learning to let go, little by little.

*Disclosure to relatives or others.* Every family member in the participants' families knew

that the daughter is a lesbian. The disclosure had been processed and accepted in their own

families. But coming out to their extended family members or other networks became a bigger

issue to discuss. Some mothers and daughters shared similar thoughts that the disclosure did not

need to happen until they were sure that relatives or friends were friendly and open about this

issue. Some mothers and daughters, however, had different viewpoints about what to do.

Basically, most daughters took the position of respecting their mothers' way of doing although

they might challenge their mothers' thoughts a little bit.

*Jennifer*: We have some conflicts. For example, my mom said to me, "It's OK to be lesbian, but you shouldn't disclose this to everyone." But why shouldn't I?

Wanda: I still think that you shouldn't tell this to everyone.

*Jennifer*: I know!

Wanda: Because not everyone can accept this.

*Jennifer*: But all my acquaintances accepted it! …. And she is afraid that this may affect my dad's prospects because he is a man of some fame. She told me her fear. She is also worried that this is something unacceptable in this society. She is afraid that I will be hurt, but so far I haven't felt that way.

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*Joey*: My mom would say that she's fine with everything I do but nothing extreme. For instance, when I go to gay pride events, she doesn't want me to wear anything strange or weird. She said, "It's OK that you go to the parade, but you'd better not grab all attention so everyone knows you're my daughter." That's unacceptable to her.

Linda: Like my sisters or friends of my age, they are not so open-minded, so I choose not to let them know this. It may scare them! If they happen to know accidentally, I will just let it be. If not, I will not disclose it on purpose.

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Elaine: I talked about this with *Chih-Chieh.* I told her that I am not against her decision, but I remember that she's in the broadcasting sector? I just wish that she would consider our situation so we don't have to deal with something embarrassing. After all, we have been at work for years and known a lot of people, so we don't want to be put in an embarrassing situation. *(Talking to Chih-Chieh)* I told you this, right?

*Chih-Cheih*: Yes, I remember and have done as you said!

Elaine: Basically, I am more concerned about her dad's situation. I can handle this well.

***Relationship issues.*** Many mothers are concerned about daughters' relationship issues. A

short relationship, too many partners being dated, and the acceptance level of the partner's

family were all mentioned. Daughters then explained their viewpoints about how they saw

intimate relationships in their generation with their mothers.

Wanda: I think she changes her partner too frequently (*Jennifer*: "Yes, she thinks I am unstable."). Well, I don't like this. I don't want to see her unsteady in her relationship because this unstable situation is going to affect a lot of things. Being emotional prevents you from resting your heart to concentrate on doing your things. No matter it's between men and women or women and women. We are all influenced in the same way. But I really wish *(Hesitating)*…I think… *(Laughing in embarrassment)*. .... (*Jennifer*: "Mom, just say what you want to say. I am not going to be hurt.") that she fell into too quickly and impulsively, without any deliberation. After a while, she thought they were not compatible and she wanted to change her partner. I just wish that she could think more before she builds a relationship. It's better not to go into a relationship on an impulse... I just feel that she's not really confident in a relationship.

*Jennifer*: I would like to let her know that this is not just me but a common situation of our generation. I mean, my heterosexual classmates are trying to work out their relationships. Some last for a few months but mine always last for two years! I think it's already stable. Moreover, our society is different now. People of my age do not want to go steady. I don't even know where my future is, so being in a long-term relationship is difficult. However, for my parents, they started seeing each other when they were in high schools and continued through undergraduate schools. They got married after graduation and then had us. It seemed that this was such a clear and obvious path for them. As for me, I am not clear about my future in the following five or ten years. I am still finding my way. But my mom thinks that I should have a steady relationship rather than changing all the time.

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Elaine: *(On Chih-Chieh's constant changing partners)* I talked with *Chih-Chieh* about this and said, "Be it a homosexual or heterosexual relationship, if you're going to find the partner in your life, you should stick to one instead of changing all the time *(Chih-Chieh was trying to hold back her smile)*. I don't like you change partners all the time. I'm not comfortable with this." I think this attitude applies to both sexualities because it's about a relationship. As for her love life, we can only worry privately and don't know how to communicate with her.

*Chih-Chieh*: This is more acceptable to me now *(laughing)* and I think that it's common to change partners nowadays! This is a challenge faced by modern people rather than just LGBT individuals. It has less to do with being gay but the modern life as a whole. People are facing a lot of challenges and have more choices, so people change. These choices

allow people to explore and understand themselves. This is a test for all the people, and I'm not particularly uncomfortable about it. I do feel hesitating but not to the level of anxiety. As for having a stable partner and a long-term relationship, I don't think it's very important. In other words, it does not matter for a person in this modern world to have a stable and long-term relationship.... I don't have a long-term partner agreeable to them, which is troublesome since I know they always worry about me. Let me put it this way. We live in a society that is very challenging to the traditional concept of keeping a long-term relationship. This is a common test for all the people. I really don't know how to convince her. In fact, this is our reality and a phenomenon, a common and global phenomenon. This is more than a personal issue. This is a common issue faced by human beings and our whole generation.

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Sylvia: So far I can accept that she is a lesbian. I will wish her to find a compatible girlfriend. But I think that she's still in the stage of trying to. If she wants to know how to communicate and creating a balanced relationship, I will teach her what I know. I think she's still struggling in her relationship, right? Because it is not an ideal relationship; they always have quarrels. The sweet feeling may vanish if they argue all the time. I am confused why they choose this way, and maybe they are still finding their way to get along. But they want to give up after quarrels. I really don't think this is a good way! From this, I know that she still has a lot to learn. I don't know what else I can do. I simply listen to her since she is still very young.

*Man-Shuan*: Mom said, "Your relationship is not ideal!" and she continued to suggest what's better for me. She won't reject a person by judging her, and I appreciate that.... Thinking that I am still young, I find it natural to fall in love out of instinct. Even if it seems childish, that's the kind of relationship for my age. I haven't reached the age to find a partner of my life. So I don't really mind if they criticize my relationship or have opinions *(Laughing)*!
Sylvia: *(Laughing)* So it means that we don't need to take this too seriously!
*Man-Shuan*: Yes! *(Laughing)*... Since I haven't really thought of who can be that important in my life, I don't think that it's necessary for them to worry now.

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Yen: Her girlfriend's parents don't know about their relationship yet. She comes to our house frequently, and we all know about it and we are OK with it now. However, what if her girlfriend's parents came to us angrily and asked why we put up with this, how would

we handle the situation? Communication may become difficult if her girlfriend's parents have different ideas about this. This is what we worry about now! We don't want them to feel that they are somehow cheated by us.... Her parents still know nothing about this! They are fine now only because they simply think they're just two girls together. If one day her parents find out about this, or she comes out, but her parents cannot accept and understand and then come to us, what are we supposed to deal with it? We don't want to cause any harm. We'd like to minimize the impact. That's what we're thinking about.

*Kerry*: There are a lot of future challenges ahead of me to deal with, but they are my things. … For example, if I have been with a person for a long time and we want to live under the same roof, I will have to face any legal issues or other aspects by myself. They don't need to know much.

Yen: That is what they have to handle by themselves.

*Kerry*: I hope they learn to go with the flow *(laughing)* and not to worry too much. They can learn more if they want to, or they can remain the same if they think there is too much to learn. My point is that they take good care of themselves first.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION

## Summary of the Study

The goal of this study was to understand the experience of disclosure of lesbian identity between Taiwanese daughters and their mothers and to learn about the important features of this relational experience. Results of this study support and expand on previous research and address the gap from the relational aspect in the mother-daughter relationship. This chapter will describe and discuss research findings related to the three research questions, and will review the findings of previous literature to have a dialogue on what the cultural differences might be. The discussions of the limitations of the study, implications of family therapy and implications for future studies will be also included at the end of this chapter.

## Summary of the Results

The results related to two of the research questions, "How do mother-daughter dyads in Taiwan experience and make meaning of the coming-out process?" and "What are the essential structures of those mother-daughter dyads' experiences of disclosure?" created a stage model which helped the researcher as well as readers to understand how the experience of disclosure influenced the dyads and their relationships. Also, the findings related to the third research question, "What are the similarities and differences between those Taiwanese mother-daughter

dyads' experiences and findings from studies in the United States?" also provided a glimpse of

cultural differences in terms of the experience of disclosure, which will be discussed in more

details below.

This stage model was created based on the stories that these mother-daughter dyads

shared during the interview. Since their experiences were developed within time, a stage model

seemed to be a meaningful way to present their experiences (Harvey, 2007). The *Predisclosure*

*Contex*t included pre-existing family dynamics, mother-daughter relationship, mother's/parent's

beliefs, and familiarity with LGBT culture that set the stage for disclosure. Not every family

relationship was discussed here. Only parents' relationships and other elders' relationships with

the mother were mentioned because they had an impact on mothers' acceptance. The *Disclosure*

*Event* included clues before coming out, reasons to disclosure, actual event, mother's immediate

aftermath, and daughter's immediate aftermath that provided details before and afterward about

how the actual disclosure event really happened and how the immediate effect was on mothers

and daughters. Basically, disclosure seemed to cause less shock and emotions to those mothers

who had more familiarity with LGBT culture, valued more about the child's individualism and

prospects, and already had had some speculations before disclosure. It was common and rational

to find out that most mothers still had variety of emotions with different magnitudes. On the

other hand, daughters did not always feel great or have a sense of relief after disclosure. Those

who tended to have high expectations about their mothers' reactions usually felt disappointed or even hurt after disclosure, which influenced their relationship with their mothers later.

The *Early Experience of Disclosure* included responses from mothers and daughters respectively, changes in the relationship, other family members' reactions, and meaningful events happened between some mothers and daughters which shifted dynamics in the mother-daughter relationship. Needlessly to say, only a few mothers could take active means to explore related issues or gather information by themselves. Most mothers needed time and space to deal with the impact of disclosure. As a result, several dyads went through a period time of no discussion and interacted as usual. However, daughters tended to report that this period of time was awkward and distant, while mothers tended to report that disclosure did not influence their relationship or interactions with daughters. It was not uncommon that one dyad shared two different perceptions.

Finally, *the Long-term Experience of Disclosure* concluded their experiences at least one year after the event, including how short-term experience developed, changed, and formed their perspectives nowadays. Participants talked about their acceptance level, reasons and challenges to acceptance, learning in the process, and hopes and concerns about the future. Overall, mothers and daughters could appreciate each other more as individuals while still feeling connected in the relationship. Changes in beliefs, interactions, and worldviews were discussed in detail.

**Mother-Daughter Relationship and the Event of Disclosure**

Many researchers have pointed out that a good parent-child relationship before disclosure

impacts the experience of disclosure (e.g. Rafkin, 1996; Savin-Williams & Debé, 1998;

D'Augelli, 2003; Savin-Williams, 2001; Chuang, 2008; Pearlman, 2005). Since mothers were

usually the first parent to come out to (Savin-Williams, 2001; D'Augelli, 2003), it was important

to explore mother-daughter relationships to understand what a "good" mother-daughter

relationship stood for. However, only few researchers described what a "good" relationship was.

Savin-Williams (2001), for instance, mentioned that the mother-daughter relationship was better

after disclosure when there was trust in the relationship before coming out. What other elements

of a relationship could possibly contribute to a better after-disclosure experience besides trust? I

became very curious about this question, which brought me to take a look at the nature of the

mother-daughter relationship in this study.

In addition, some researchers (Jordan et al., 1991) stated that a good mother-daughter

relationship is one in which both mother and daughter can share whatever they want and get

respected and understood by the other. This is a mutual relationship which is protected because

of mutual empathy and engagement. If my participants' mother-daughter relationship was similar

to this description of mutual relationship pre-disclosure, could it predict a better result of

disclosure? The answer seems to be "yes". Moreover, if some dyads did not have such a mutual

relationship pre-disclosure, would the quality of their relationship become better by learning

through the experience of disclosure? Although I wonder that some dyads' mother-daughter

relationship might be "improved" after learning through the experience of disclosure, it needs

other studies to explore this question further.

**The nature of the mother-daughter relationship.** *Roles.* In each interview, after initial

procedures had been taken care of, I invited each of my participants to describe their relationship

with the other, including a description of each other's personality. I was interested in their

insights, as I felt that their experience of disclosure could be seen as a "good" one since these

mothers and daughters were able to be interviewed together. Interestingly, many of them

responded to the question by telling me how they interacted in daily life in terms of their roles in

the relationship:    "She acts like a friend," "She is a traditional mother," or "She is my helper,"

etc. They used roles to define their interactions. This resonates with Chuang's (2005) findings

that roles rather than personal needs were the predominant influence in people's behavior in

family interactions.

In my study, it was only when mothers accepted multiple roles in the relationship that it

became possible for the dyad to practice various interactions in the relationship, for example,

interacting like peers, friends, co-workers, etc.. Then the daughter of the dyad usually showed

more satisfaction about the relationship because she could have more space to express whom she

was as her stage of life proceeded. Some dyads expressed different expectations about roles, like

when the daughter wished the mother could be her friend but the mother wanted no change of the

role of traditional mother. When the mother insisted on her perspective, the manner of their

interactions would be according to the mother's preference. Filial piety is an important feature in

the Asian culture (Chin, 2000; Lee and Mock 2005). For those dyads, or mothers, who could

accept multiple roles in the relationship, filial piety became less of a constraint for their

daughters to express their voices.

*Elements of the relationship.* Sharing some specific moments in their mother-daughter

relationship was also a way to explain what their relationship was like. They told me what the

other had done in the relationship was the most memorable, or how she made meaning of the

other one's certain behaviors. Support, love, respect, and trust were elements emerging in their

stories. Without a doubt, they could be counted as positive elements. However, always trying to

influence the other through reasons and argument was also mentioned several times in different

dyads but with different effects. When daughters tried to reason with their mothers, it seemed not

to have much impact on the intimacy between the mother and the daughter. But when the mother

was the person always using reason to try and influence the daughter, it had a negative effect on

bonding in the relationship.

Several dyads also said there were conflicts in their relationships sometimes. But when

they addressed conflicts in the relationship, they also talked about how they dealt with them,

which made conflicts become just momentary events in the relationship. In other words, these

dyads had the ability to solve disagreements or face differences in their relationships. So rather

than hurting the relationship, the conflicts seemed to strengthen the relationship and generate

more connections for both parties, which was similar to the process after having "difficult

dialogues" among family members (Stone Fish & Harvey, 2005).

*Communication.* My participants also described their relationship in terms of how much

they talked. But regardless of whether they described their patterns of communication as "talking

a lot" or "not talking much", it seemed that their connection or closeness was not defined by

talking only. Asian or Taiwanese families are known for not talking much about emotions among

family members (Hom, 1994; Chan, 1997; Cheng, 1997). These results help us to affirm that

inviting Asian or Taiwanese families to address what they **do** or what they **think** about the

relationship can let us have a better understanding of their family dynamics.

**The complexity of family dynamics.** It was a big struggle to decide which part of family

dynamics should be presented in the findings. Considering the flow of the article, I supposedly

should have presented only findings directly related to the mother-daughter relationship and the

experience of disclosure within it. Nevertheless, a phenomenological study is a study that

"describes the meaning of the lived experiences for several individuals about a concept or the

phenomenon" (Creswell, 1998, p. 51). Since my participants mentioned other relationships and

interactions during the interview without being asked, these relationships and interactions should

be considered as part of this phenomenon and be included in the findings. Interestingly, it also

implies that it is impossible to neglect the experience of disclosure of other family members

when talking about the experience of disclosure in a mother-daughter relationship. In other

words, the experience was addressed in the context of the whole family rather than between

individuals, which resonates to the findings of other researchers that family is the priority in

Asian families and Taiwanese culture (e.g. Cheng, 1997; Gonzales, Hiraga & Cauce, 1998; Chin,

2000; Chuang, 2008).

When I asked my participants about the experience of disclosure in their mother-daughter

relationship, they responded accordingly. But, since their relationship was not independent of

other family relationships, the more intense the family dynamics were, the more other family

members were involved. As a result, the fathers and participants' relationships with him were

usually addressed first. Then it was the paternal grandmother who was seen as an authority figure.

Because patriarchy and filial piety are a well-established part of Asian culture (Cheng, 1997;

Chin, 2000; Chou, 2001; Lee& Monk, 2005), the father tended to have a lot of power in the

family. As to the paternal grandmother, her power is granted by coming from the paternal family

and for being an elder. Therefore, if the father and the paternal grandmother have negative

opinions about the mother's attitudes or actions, this will put a lot of stress on the mother, who

may pass this pressure onto her child.

**Beliefs about motherhood and rearing the child.** This part of the findings was also

brought up spontaneously by participants. Mothers would address their beliefs about motherhood

and childrearing when describing the mother-daughter relationship. Therefore, I started paying

more attention to this as I conducted more interviews. I did not find much discourse on how

beliefs about motherhood and how childrearing influenced the experience of disclosure in the

U.S. studies. However, these beliefs were taken seriously by these Taiwanese mothers. A possible

explanation may be how these Taiwanese mothers were influenced culturally. As an East Asian

culture, Taiwanese culture is also much influenced by Confucianism and Taoism (Liu & Chan,

1996). Confucianism talks a lot about how the role decides how a person behaves in a family, in

a society, and in a country (Wang, 1983). As a mother, she will hold certain expectations about

what she should do in the relationship. Even though those expectations are shaped by her

education, family of origin, class, age, and other contexts, she will develop those expectations

and then behave accordingly. As a result, these mothers would describe these "codes of

behaviors" to help me understand why they interacted with their daughters in certain way.

Among those beliefs mentioned, the three beliefs addressed the most by the mothers were

the priority of the family, the importance of the child's growth, and her responsibility as a mother.

Only a few talked about their beliefs about other issues than that of being mothers. While some

readers might consider these responses more as obligations or ethics than emotions or love, in

Asian culture in general and among Taiwanese mothers in particular, obligations are often both

the source and the effect of love.

**Reasons for disclosing.** The daughters in this study mentioned several reasons for

disclosure. Many of them stated that they did not want to lie to their parents or felt it was hard to

lie, and wanted their mothers to understand them better. This is similar to the findings of several

researchers (e.g. Kleinberg, 1986; Cramer & Roach, 1988; Ben-Ari, 1995; Savin-Williams, 2001;

Coolhart, 2006). According to prior research, it was also found that LGBT individuals consider

parents' reactions before disclosure (Cramer & Roach, 1988; Savin-Williams, 1998a, 1998b;

Green, 2000; Cheng, 1997; Coolhart, 2006; Chuang, 2008). Interestingly, some lesbian daughters

in this study emphasized that reason as well but only in an optimistic way: they just believed that

their mothers could handle the disclosure. It might reflect the fact that these participants had

considerable trust in their mothers and their mother-daughter relationship very well, which was

discussed in the previous section. Moreover, several participants said that they had been waiting

for the opportunity to come out, and they really valued the closeness in the relationship. Again,

these two reasons echoed the nature of their mother-daughter relationship; these lesbian

daughters somehow felt confident to come out in the relationship because they felt their

relationship with their mothers could withstand such a big "crisis".

Several researchers found that the support outside of the family and the practical support

from the parent were some factors that LGBT individuals considered when coming out

(Savin-Williams, 1998a; Green, 2000). However, no lesbian daughter in this study addressed

such a concern. One possibility might be that most of them did not come out in adolescence.

*Johnny* and *Man-Shuan* were the only two participants who came out at the ages of 15 and 16

respectively. But both of them had had a trusting relationship with their mothers before

disclosure. As a result, it seemed less important for them to consider if they had the support

outside of the family or not. What might explain more was these daughters' relationship with

their mothers. Since these lesbian daughters could be interviewed with their mothers together in

this study, they had had a relatively strong connection with their mothers. So whether they got

the support from the family or the parent before disclosure was not the issue. Chuang's study

(2008) showed that some lesbians or other sexual minority individuals in Taiwan would think

about whether they could support themselves financially before they came out to the family,

which meant that factor was still important. Hence, the relationship of those LGBT individuals

and their family members might be the key to understand their disclosure.

Savin-Williams (1998b) argued that when the parents were more liberal or the child was

more sex atypical, the child would feel less need to be closeted. Although some of my

participants fit the description above, they did not really address whether it was the parent's

attitude or their own gender performance which helped them to come out. Their relationship with

their mothers or parents was more the focus, which resonated again with the Asian cultural

feature that family matters the most.

**Actual events.** In a pioneering research study on lesbians and their coming out

experience with their families in Taiwan, it was found that the experience of disclosure of her

participants was usually an accidental one. If they did plan to come out, it was when they had a

steady relationship and would like their parents to accept the partner (Cheng, 1997). But this

factor may well have changed since Cheng's study. Many of my participants had thought about

coming out before it happened, and one participant said that she had developed a script to make

the process happen smoothly. However, most of their experiences of disclosure did not happen as

they expected. Some have suggested that the experience of disclosure could have been better if it

had taken place with consideration of family members' feelings and possible reactions (Taiwan

Tongzhi Hotline Association, 2007; Harvey, 2007). But for my participants, no matter how

prepared they were, disclosure usually did not occur as they planned. Disregarding those who

were found out or outed by siblings or parents, those who disclosed themselves tended to come

out when they experienced strong emotions, like after breaking up with girlfriends or having

arguments with mothers. Although these lesbian daughters had had the idea of revealing their

sexual orientation to the parents beforehand, they found themselves reacting in the moment

because their mothers' reactions were not easy to predict. It is not implied that preparation is

unnecessary, however. Based on these participants' experience, what might be more important is

to create resiliency in the relationship afterward. Mothers might have had various reactions and

responses when they were told about their daughter's same-sex attractions, but they all

underwent a process of learning and accepting, which will be discussed further in the following

sections.

**Responses to Disclosure**

**Mother's initial response.** Mothers reported various initial responses, including positive,

negative, and neutral ones. Many researchers have pointed out that mothers or parents

experienced self-blaming, shock, denial, and worrying after their child came out to them (e.g.

Hom, 1994; Rafkin, 1996; Taiwan Tongzhi Hotline Association, 2003), and so did my

participants. They were the reactions among many parents or mothers across the world. However,

my participants did not mention the reactions feeling angry, disappointed, being punished, or of

having dreams be unfulfilled, in contrast to the findings of other researchers (e.g. Allen, 1999;

Borhek, 1993; Liu & Chan, 1996; Herdt & Koff, 2000). A possible explanation might be that

those reactions are more like the surface level of response, and my participants had worked

through those emotions and only shared with me the deeper emotions underneath. Or perhaps

mothers were very sensitive to daughters' reaction because they were interviewed together, so they did not want to address any emotion that might cause guilt.

There were several mothers who said that they cried after disclosure, and every daughter who had witnessed her mother's tears also addressed that they knew their mothers had a tough time adjusting to the disclosure. This experience might be rarer in Taiwan than in the U.S. To mothers or parents in Taiwanese culture, showing strong emotions is not appropriate in front of one's child. To daughters, making her mother cry implies that she has not followed the ethic of filial piety. As a result, mothers' tears might impart certain heaviness to the relationship and it became a profound event to bring up during the interview.

Only two mothers could accept their daughters' sexual orientation with little emotion, and they happened to be the mothers who later got deeply involved in the parents' support group in Taiwan. They were also two mothers who were younger, had received higher education, and whose daughters came out to them at a younger age. However, they also had another response that was different from other participants: both of them responded with concerns about other issues in the daughter's life when disclosure occurred. Although it was hard to tell if it was the quick acceptance that let mothers to see things differently or if concern for other factors facilitated their quick acceptance, being able to normalize their daughters' sexual orientation as being just one challenge in their life rather than seeing it as the main challenge in their lives

seemed to reduce these two mothers' anxiety and helped them go through the acceptance process

with a more positive attitude.

**Daughter's initial response.** Daughters' initial responses were less complicated than the

mothers'. Half of them talked about their own feelings after their disclosure, like feeling relived

and having no guilt. Half of them talked about their feelings regarding their mothers' responses.

Regardless, they all reported in much less detail than I expected. A possible reason might be the

format of the interview. Since the mother and the daughter were interviewed together, the

daughters became more attentive to what their mothers were saying rather than to themselves.

Two daughters told me that they could not remember the experience very well and these were the

daughters whose mothers showed high acceptance in a short time. Without experiencing intense

emotions at the disclosure event, it became a rather ordinary life incident for them. As to those

daughters who reported feeling sad, disappointed, and shocked, their memories seemed much

better and even "corrected" their mothers' stories several times.

The other surprising finding was that "feeling no guilt" was expressed by three daughters.

Obedience to one's parents' expectations is seen as an important characteristic in Asian culture

(Chin, 2000; Lee & Mock, 2005), and being a sexual minority individual is acting against the

cultural norm. So some researchers feel pessimistic about LGBT individuals being accepted in

Asian families (Liu & Chan, 1996). Cheng's Taiwanese participants also reported that they felt

bad about letting their mothers down (Cheng, 1997). However, these three participants all said

straightforwardly that they did not think they were doing anything wrong and therefore had no

guilt. It may be, based on the responses of these three individuals, that the cultural norm is

loosening.

**Other family members' response.** Both supportive and negative responses by other

members of the family were mentioned by participants. These reactions had certain impacts on

mothers' acceptance. There was no doubt that supportive ones helped mothers go through the

process of acceptance a great deal, and that negative ones made it harder for the mothers' to

accept the disclosure, especially if the reactions came from the father and the grandmother.

Furthermore, if there was tension in the mother's relationship with the father or the grandmother,

it was more a challenge for the mother. But if the mother had a relationship in which she could

communicate differences easily with other family members, it was easier for her to persuade

others to be on her side and to learn to accept the daughter.

## Changes in the Relationship

**Stages of the mothers' reactions**. Staged models of parents accepting their children's

same-sex attractions have been established by many researchers, and their process is similar to

their LGBT offspring (e.g. Pearlman, 1992; Henderson, 1998; Herdt and Koff, 2000; Wells-Lurie,

1996; Savin-Williams, 2001). The stages described in Pearlman's study included "confusion,

devastation and loss, struggle to come to terms with their daughters' lesbianism, increasing tolerance, and finally an acceptance accompanied by residual regret" (1992, p.7). On the other hand, Savin-Williams named these stages as denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance (2001). As to Tseng's study in 2007, it showed that her Taiwanese participants went through these stages: feeling shocked and confused, feeling conflicted and resistant, facing the struggle and starting to transform, and finding a new balance and adjusting oneself in the relationship.

Compared with those stages mentioned above, my participants seemed to have similar staged reactions. They experienced confusion, struggle, and increasing tolerance. Some of them also experienced denial and bargaining. In addition, regaining balance and learning to adjust in the relationship were mentioned by several mothers as well. However, these stages did not fit for every participant. Furthermore, many of my participants went back and forth through certain stages rather than a simple linear development. It is important to know that the stage theory or the staged process does not apply to everyone. After all, each parent has his or her own type of emotional process and different level of acceptance, and it is crucial to respect this process (Esterberg, 1997; Harvey, 2007).

After going through an initial emotional stage, like denial and self-blaming, some of my participants started to understand LGBT issues better soon after the disclosure. For example, two

mothers looked for further information about the formation of LGBT and how the society

thought about this population. But most mothers had the attitude of "not talking, not asking", and

it lasted for a while. The length of time varied accordingly. Savin-Williams (2001) stated that

mothers had to overcome their own self-blame in order to proceed to the next stage. The

mothers' experience in my study seems to confirm his finding. In addition, daughters'

explanations helped their mothers deal with their emotions. Two daughters told their mothers that

their sexual orientation was not their mother's fault, and this explanation helped both their

mothers. Daughters' effort or responses will be discussed further in the next section, but it is

important to recognize that the interactions in a relationship impact both parties equally,

especially for those mothers and daughters who had shared an intimate relationship before

disclosure. It never goes only one-way.

**Daughter's efforts and strategies.** After coming out to their mothers, the daughters in

this study made great efforts in the relationship. Although it was hard to tell if one strategy was

more influential than another due to the different characteristics of each mother-daughter

relationship, it was clear that passively waiting for mothers' acceptance would not encourage

much change in mothers' behaviors and beliefs. Therefore, those daughters tried to provide

emotional support, ease their mother's mind, respect their mothers' emotional processes, and

invite the mothers to participate in their lives. Moreover, they also kept trying to make the

relationship work better, made certain adjustments, and maintained normal interactions.

Pearlman (1992) has pointed out that it is critical for lesbian daughters to take an active role to

maintain the relationship and help their mothers to understand lesbianism better. Other studies

and books also suggested that the assistance of LGBT individuals and their attitude is the key

element to assist their parents to go through the acceptance process (Henderson, 1998; Taiwan

Tongzhi Hotline Association, 2007; Chuang, 2008). These findings as well as the stories shared

by my participants all highlight a concept: disclosure is only an event, and what is more

important is the follow-up attitude and the way mothers and daughters interacted in the

relationship. Mothers' feelings will influence their daughters, but daughters' insistence will also

have an impact on mothers. The more trust and respect created in the mother-daughter

relationship, the more acceptance emerges in the interaction.

**Different perspectives about change.** How did the disclosure event influence the

mother-daughter relationship? They usually had different experiences in terms of this question.

Most mothers said that their relationship did not change after the disclosure event, and they did

not treat their daughters differently after knowing they were lesbians. On the other hand, many

daughters expressed that they felt their relationship did change because they felt relieved after

coming out and were able to act more like themselves. But some daughters also said that the

relationship or the interactions did not change much: there were still certain topics which were

rarely talked about.

In Zitter's (1987) and Rosen's (1997) articles, they both stressed that the daughter's

lesbianism influenced the mother-daughter relationship greatly because it was not easy for the

heterosexual mother to understand her lesbian daughter. Although Rosen (1991) believed that

disclosure created a possibility for mutual understanding in the relationship, there were still some

relational disadvantages for generating a real bonding. However¸ it seemed that my participants

had different experiences. To those dyads who had no problems in communication before the

disclosure event, the daughter's sexual orientation did not have an impact on their closeness. As

for some dyads who were still in the process of addressing certain relational issues in the

relationship, the daughter's sexual orientation sometimes encouraged the dyad to keep

communicating by focusing on relevant LGBT issues.

## Long-Term Experience: Moving Toward Acceptance

**The content of acceptance: mother's and father's.** As they were willing to be

interviewed together with their daughter in this study, these mothers have shown greater

acceptance compared with other parents in Taiwan. Therefore, I focused on some specific

behaviors or reactions to present their ways of acceptance: supporting other parents, including

the daughter's partner in the family, and participating in public activities. The significance of

these behaviors or reactions is that they challenge certain rules in the culture. Mothers come out

in public to show their support for their daughters without considering saving face. They also try to include their daughter's same-sex partner in the family in which the partner has no defined role to interact with culturally. These mothers make people rethink what appropriate parenting means and also provide a possibility to create a family with diversity. Several studies have stated that it was more of a challenge for Asian parents to accept their sexual minority offspring or their same-sex relationships (Liu &Chan, 1996; Hom, 1994; Herdt & Koff, 2000; Cheng, 1997). However, the stories that these mothers shared offer a very difference viewpoint and also the possibility to change.

As to the father's attitude toward sexual minorities, it was talked about spontaneously during most mother-daughter interviews. Interestingly, only one father was strongly against homosexuality. Other fathers either held the same attitude like mothers did, or they did not address their attitude toward accepting their lesbian daughter explicitly. Most mothers' attitude correlated with those of their spouses'. The father with a strong attitude against homosexuality, for example, exerted such pressure on his wife that her process of acceptance was described by her daughter as "two-steps forward and then one-step backward". When the father showed a more ambiguous attitude toward this issue, the mother had more space to respond in the way she wanted. When the father's attitude was more tolerant, so was the mother's.

Similarly, the mothers' positions or attitudes may have influenced their spouses. When a

mother was very supportive to her daughter, the father was often the same. When a mother talked

about her in-progress adjustment or acceptance, the father usually held an attitude of tolerance or

"no-comment". When a mother showed her obvious struggle, the father's strong opposition was

basically predictable. It could reasonably be concluded that the dynamics of the parents' couple

relationship had an impact on how disclosure was treated and digested among these participants.

During the time searching for possible participants, I had several contacts with some

daughters who were willing to be interviewed on this topic but did not want to be interviewed

with their mothers. I asked them why. One of them did not want to deal with her mother's

emotions; another did not want to add extra pressure on the relationship since she had just come

out; and another felt pressured in her seemingly close relationship with her mother. I invited the

daughter to explain more about why she felt pressured in a close mother-daughter relationship.

Her guess was that her mother had a tense relationship with her father; as a result, her mother

had extremely high expectations for her to compensate for these problems in the couple

relationship, which made it hard for her mother to fully accept her lesbianism.

After listening to their responses, it helped me to further realize that the relationships

themselves were truly what this study focused on even though participants were invited to share

their coming out stories. The experience of disclosure, or how people respond to this event, is

really the epitome of family dynamics.

**Supporting factors toward acceptance.** It has been indicated that the mother's

personality and her extraordinary experience could facilitate the mother to embrace her

daughter's non-heterosexual sexual orientation better (Herdt & Koff, 2000; Pearlman, 2005;

Coolhart, 2006). Similar findings were also found in this study. Among those supporting factors,

some mothers' acceptance was related to their personalities. Some stated that they prioritized

their willingness to be positive, their ability to embrace differences, and their values about their

child's development more than their own initial reactions. Interestingly, research in Taiwan found

that the parents with a sexual minority child often regarded the child's accomplishments as being

very important (Tseng, 2007). This might be a form of compensation for the loss of not being

able to see their child building a family, or it might be associated with the parents' need for face.

Since parents can still feel that they are successful if their child has a great achievement, it may

help parents alleviate doubts about their own parenting or help them feel less concerned about

the child's sexual orientation.

As to the second section of the supporting factors toward acceptance, they were all

"daughter-related" factors: the daughter did not do anything wrong, the daughter was happy, the

daughter's decision needed to be respected, the daughter's partner was great, the daughter's

sexual orientation was not changeable, and it was important to have the daughter nearby. In short,

they decided to accept their daughter's lesbianism because how the daughter felt was important

to them. Compared with other two kinds of supporting factors, the "daughter-related" factors

were mentioned the most, which explained that mothers worked on accepting primarily because

they wanted to maintain their relationship with their daughters.

These findings also resonate with previous research. For example, Pearlman (2005) found

that it helped the mother to decide to accept it when the daughter was happier after disclosure.

Chuang (2008) also found that liking the daughter's partner was one reason that helped the

family member to accept the daughter's lesbianism. Herdt and Koff (2000) stated that upholding

family loyalty was one big reason that Asian parents decided to acknowledge or accept their

children's non-heterosexual sexual orientation, which was comparable to the response that

having the daughter around was crucial. However, there are still some differences among these

factors in terms of willingness. For instance, "the daughter did not do anything wrong" seemed

to imply that the mother could not find any reason to reject her. On the other hand, "the daughter

was happy" seemed to be a more positive supporting factor. Nevertheless, no mother said that the

daughter's motivation of disclosure had an impact on her willingness to accept and acknowledge,

which was different from Ben-Ari's finding (1995) that the mother was more likely to accept if

the daughter came out to be honest with the mother. .

The last section of the supporting factors was the familial and cultural factors. Several

mothers said that it was not bad that the daughter did not get married since heterosexual marriage

did not always have a happy ending. In addition, other factors that helped these mothers to accept their daughter's lesbianism were if the father also supporting the daughter, knowing other parents with LGBT offspring, and being able to receive care from the daughter when they got old.

Several studies have indicated that having other support was important for the parents (Freedman, 2003; Coolhart, 2006). Although it meant having other support outside the family in their studies, for my participants, having support from other family members was essential to them, especially from the spouse. Some participants pointed it out specifically while others expressed this need through describing their process of acceptance.

Other supporting factors in this section felt more like the comforting factors, however. In others words, after the mother decided to accept or to tolerate the fact, they came to prevail upon the mother that having a lesbian daughter was not too bad. I believe these factors came from the similar finding from Tseng's study (2007): parents learned that they needed to change themselves in order to keep their child close to them. But I am also convinced that it represents the efforts of these mothers in their progress of embracing differences.

When associating these supporting factors toward acceptance with the different acceptance level of these mothers, the more a mother accepted her daughter's lesbianism, the more she addressed factors related to her personality and her beliefs. When a mother was still in the process of adjustment and acknowledgement, it was more likely that she addressed factors

related to the daughter and the culture. No mother said that being a sexual minority individual

does not matter or having a lesbian daughter was a good thing. After all, sexual minority

individuals are oppressed and neglected in Taiwanese culture. Even those mothers who were

proud of having a lesbian daughter and did not feel ashamed to share, still feel that "LGBT

individuals need to be helped" or "it is not easy to be a sexual minority individual". It is difficult

for most parents to believe from the bottom of their hearts that "being a sexual minority is a gift"

or "having a unique child really expands their worldview" in the current Taiwanese society.

**Challenges for acceptance.** Mothers mentioned several crucial challenges related to

these following issues: time, the partnership, pressure from other family members, and social

norms. Some researchers have addressed the importance of time (Greenfield, 1992; Henderson,

1998; Chuang, 2008). Greenfield even stressed that the earlier the disclosure occurred, the

greater the possibility that the parents could accept it. However, it seemed that time was not the

definite influence of parents' acceptance. It was the family dynamics and the preliminary

relationship that impacted the mother's process of accepting more.

As to the daughter's partnership, mothers were concerned whether the daughter felt

happy in her couple relationship, and this often directly influenced the mother's willingness to

accept her daughter's lesbianism. Eventually, the mother hoped her daughter could have a partner

to be taken care of (which will further discuss in the following section), and she was concerned

about the daughter's partnership no matter whether her partner was male or female. But when the

daughter felt unhappy or mistreated in a same-sex relationship, it would be harder for the mother

to accept such a relationship if she was not supportive at the beginning.

Not surprisingly, pressure from other family members and restrictions from the norms

became the challenging factors toward acceptance. Those challenging factors were not easy to

overcome, and some mothers even held the hope that their lesbian daughters could change their

sexual orientation back to heterosexual. Although these mothers did not connect these factors

with specific beliefs, wanting to save face (Hom, 1994; Gonzales, Hiraga, & Cauce, 1998; Cheng,

1997) or valuing the family more than the individual's need (Hom, 1994; Rafkin, 1996) might

explain some of their struggles. Despite their struggles in the process, these mothers still tried to

adjust themselves to understand their daughters and embrace differences toward greater

acceptance. This seemed to further demonstrate their love for their daughters even though they

were under the stress of fulfilling cultural expectations.

**Learning from the entire process.** This section of findings included the learning about

the experience of disclosure, learning about the strength of the relationship, learning about each

other, learning about LGBT issues, and learning about oppression. The descriptions of what they

learned have been presented in chapter four. I would like to further discuss their learning in the

following two sectors: expanding the vision of life and discovering resilience in the relationship.

***Expanding the vision of life.*** The experience of disclosure was a process of better getting

to know and learn from each other. Hom (1994) and Wells-Lurie (1996) have suggested that

parents could learn from their gay child and see how diverse the world is. The participants of this

study also shared similar learning experiences. Many mothers mentioned that they became more

familiar with the LGBT community and its culture. For instance, they learned not to ask people

dichotomous questions about their partners' gender, and they also learned to be more sensitive

about gender issues. In addition, they had more understanding about their daughters' tough

challenges in society, like discrimination and other difficulties they might have faced in their

daily life. A few mothers even got involved in the gay rights movement. Although every mother

had different learning experiences about LGBT individuals or involvement in the movement,

depending on her progress towards acceptance, the gate of mutual understanding had opened and

progress would not be stopped.

On the other hand, daughters realized that they were fortunate and felt gratitude to her

family through the experience of disclosure. They also gained new perspectives about themselves

and their families. They learned that their lesbian identity only represented one aspect in their life,

for instance, and they learned their family showed love and caring in the way they had not

understood before. Furthermore, their personal experiences became resources to develop

discourses to promote gay rights. Hardy has pointed out that helping sexual minority individuals

to have their voice (1997) and transforming the beliefs and values that may bring separateness

and misunderstanding (2001) should be the goal in family therapy. From what participants had

shared, such therapeutic processes seemed to have happened both in the interview and in their

lives.

*Discovering the resilience of the relationship.* Many participants pointed out that they

understood each other better, respected each other's emotional process, could discuss more

differences in the relationship, and realized the importance of the relationship during the years

after disclosure. Kleinberg (1986) and Zitter (1987) both stated that disclosure created a chance

for family members to work through the differences and bring growth and strength. Not only

individuals, but also the growth and the strengthened resilience of the relationship were found

after disclosure in my study. It was not an easy task in any relationship for the disclosure event

and related issues to be processed and discussed. It needed willingness, adjustment, and efforts

on both sides. Each dyad took the time and followed the process they required, and they were

able to find that the uniqueness and greatness of each other and what the other had done for the

relationship. The relationship became a great support to the lesbian daughter, and the different

sexual orientation of both parties was no longer the barrier to intimacy in the relationship.

Stone Fish and Harvey (2005) stated that difficult dialogue in the relationship is a

challenging process that could dissolve misunderstanding, lies, and unspoken opinions which

caused distrust in the relationship. By having the difficult dialogue, the relationship could be transformed and improved, and become a great support to sexual minority individuals. The stories of these participants shared are the exact manifestation of difficult dialogue and what it has created for the relationship.

**Prospects for the future.** In the last part of the interview, mothers talked about their prospects for the future. Several mothers addressed their hopes about having a more gay-friendly society and more parents standing up to support their sexual minority children. However, some mothers' hope was the daughter could become heterosexual someday.

Several researchers have pointed out that most Taiwanese parents never give up the hope that their child would become a heterosexual one day even after they were told that their child is gay (Chen, 2006; Bih, 2003; Kuo, 2007; Tseng, 2007). Bih (2003) further addressed that this finding is very common for culturally Chinese parents and is the biggest difference compared with research findings from the U.S. One possible reason might be that it is hard for Taiwanese parents to see their child as an individual whose being is independent from the family. What the child does or acts has a meaning to the parents and the family. Besides, it is stressed in Confucianism that giving birth makes the parents have the right to own the child and decide what the best is for the child (Wang, 1983). With prejudice about LGBT individuals and discrimination against them still in the society, it just felt easier to live as a heterosexual. So the parents' best

judgment is their child would be better off as heterosexual in an anti-gay society.

Mothers were also concerned about how their daughter could take care of herself after

getting old, how her partner's family treats her, and how to disclose her lesbianism to other

relatives. They worried that no one could take care of the daughter, her partner's family could not

accept the same-sex relationship, and other relatives could not accept the daughter's lesbianism.

These issues seemed hard to resolve in a society build upon heterosexism. Although daughters

had comforted their mothers and explained to their mothers during the interview, both mothers

and daughters knew they were still in the process of experiencing and expecting the unknown

future. Even though they did not have the exact answers to every question at the moment, their

relationships seemed to be able to withstand uncertainty and an ongoing process of discussion.

**Reflections on the Findings of the Study**

**Family dynamics.** Only a few studies have addressed family dynamics regarding the

experience of disclosure (e.g. Savin-Williams, 1998a; Stone Fish & Harvey, 2005; Coolhart,

2006; Harvey, 2007), and most studies focused on personal experiences or a single relationship.

Through this study on the experience of disclosure in Taiwan, I was able to learn how family

dynamics influenced the experience of disclosure even though it was supposed to focus on the

mother-daughter relationship only. Moreover, since Taiwanese culture ranks family values prior

higher than individual needs, it becomes more obvious in this study how the various

relationships in the family impacted the mother-daughter dyad to deal with the initial experience

of disclosure and its aftermath.

D'Augelli, Hershberger, and Pilkington (1998) said that the mother was the key person to

help the daughter come out to the rest of the family. But if we consider patriarchy and how it

influences the power structure between parents, we may realize that the mother is not necessarily

the key person, especially in Taiwan. Sometimes it is the father who really has the impact. If the

father has more power in the family, or if the mother feels that she needs to be responsible for

other elders' feelings in the family, she may not help the daughter but ask her not to come out or

not to challenge the family too much. According to the stories these participants shared, it was

really the preliminary family dynamics that decided how the experience of disclosure was going

to be treated.

**Coming out or not?** So, is it necessary to come out? The answer may depend on the

purpose of disclosure. For example, although these lesbian daughters disclosed their sexual

orientation with different approaches in this study, they all held a positive attitude that they

wanted to let their mothers know they were lesbians even for those who were outed by others or

were found out accidentally. The reasons for wanting disclosure were mostly that the daughter

hoped the mother could know about her lesbian life and to create a closer relationship with the

mother. Some daughters even showed their tremendous trust for her mother and the relationship

by saying out loud that she believed her mother would have no problem handling her disclosure.

Their responses implied that the nature of their mother-daughter relationships, or the expectation

of a better relationship, was the motivation or the main reason to make these daughters want to

come out. Furthermore, their expectations kept motivating them to make efforts in the

relationship after disclosure. Gradually, they were able to share all aspects of their life

comfortably with their mothers.

When I interviewed these mother-daughter dyads, their relationships have developed to

encompass this issue in their own ways. To these participants, I could say that the daughter's

lesbian identity did not hurt or break off their mother-daughter relationships. In addition,

disclosure has deepened their relationships or created a different feature of their relationships.

Therefore, for those sexual minority individuals who hold certain expectations about the

relationship or have trust in their parents, they are encouraged to disclose to experience further

closeness in the relationship. However, it is not implied that disclosure is the golden rule for

everyone. The decision should be made based on one's relationship with his or her parents as

well as his or her motivation to do so.

When the decision to come out is made, what kind of suggestions could this study

provide? Parents' reactions are usually considered before sexual minority individuals take action

to disclose (Cramer & Roach, 1988; Savin-Williams, 1998b). However, from the experience

these participants shared, no matter how much these daughters had thought about it, most times

the actual disclosure event happened unexpectedly. At the end, they could only respond based on

the circumstances. But it is not suggested that an unplanned disclosure is okay for the

relationship. Researchers have pointed out that a surprise disclosure might cause awkward

interactions or uneasy feelings in the relationship for a while (Harvey, 2007). Based on the

findings in this study, thinking before disclosing is still recommended. To act according to

circumstances will help more because mothers may not act how daughters expect them to. These

daughters in my study often commented during the interview: "My mother really surprised me!"

What should be evaluated or considered before disclosure? Some researchers have said

sexual minority individuals could consider if they have resources to support themselves in the

event of a big argument with their parents over their disclosure (Green, 2002). They could also

consider how close their relationships with their parents was before coming out (Savin-Williams,

1998b; Taiwan Tongzhi Hotline Association, 2007), since the closer they were with their parents,

the more they would be influenced by the parents' response to disclosure (Savin-Williams,

1998b). Also, the sexual minority child might need to evaluate if her/his relationship with her/his

parents could handle the stress of disclosure (Taiwan Tongzhi Hotline Association, 2007). The

importance of one's relationship with one's parents has been explained well enough. The

findings of this study further suggest that the parents' couple relationship as well as the family

dynamics should be evaluated and taken into consideration. When parents share similar values

and their couple relationship is not tense, the coming out issue is less likely to add stress in the

relationship. So they can support each other during the challenge of acceptance, rather than fight

each other. Similarly, if there are elders living in the family, when elders have a tense relationship

with parents, disclosing to parents may need to be thought about more thoroughly. Coming out to

family members other than parents to get their support first may be more practical.

Disclosure does not end when the actual event happens. From preliminary findings and

findings from this study, disclosure means a continuously evolving process. Like other issues in a

parent-child relationship, it needs communication and adjustment on both sides to make the

relationship progress. Laird said "It wasn't about being gay; it was about how the mother

connected with her children" (1996, p. 113). In other words, the point is not to discuss how to

treat the child's sexual orientation in the relationship but to explore what kind of relationship

both sides want. Hence, sexual minority individuals should focus on what they can do to

maintain a long-term relationship with their parents or family members in a way they expect

without caring too much about the first reaction parents or other family members have

(Savin-Williams & Dubé, 1998; Harvey, 2007).

In addition, the pattern of communication in the relationship is not going to change

immediately after disclosure. If the family was not used to communicating on all sorts of issues,

homosexuality was just another issue about which they did not communicate (Cheng, 2007).

Again, the possibility of change in the relationship really depends on what the relationship has

been like before the disclosure. Overall, the suggested preparation for disclosure is to understand

family dynamics as much as possible and have a general plan before disclosure, let go of any

expectations after disclosure, and keep working in the relationship in good faith.

**Differentiated while feeling connected.** Participants of this study not only shared stories

of disclosure but also relationships in which mothers and daughters felt connected while

experiencing differentiation. Rosen (1997) has indicated that lesbian daughters learned to be

more differentiated in their mother-daughter relationship to have a more integrated self, but she

was not very positive whether these mothers and daughters could have mutual empathy and

relationship authenticity. However, Rosen might have forgotten that mothers and daughters could

influence each other. The daughter's disclosure might stir up the mother's awareness of her

gender in a heterosexual society. Through their stories, we can see that mothers' process of

acceptance and also their process of opening up to the diverse world. Their lesbian daughters'

experiences seemed to generate different visions of life, for example, finding the similarities

among differences, realizing they had similar needs of intimacy even in a non-heterosexual

relationship. Mothers and daughters then created a new form of connection. Rather than passing

and projecting the traditional cultural values (Chodorow, 1978), they connected through similar

experiences of subjugation in heterosexism and patriarchy (Pearlman, 1992). So, mothers found

reasons to support their daughters not getting married because of their distrust in heterosexual

marriages. Different sexual orientations may cause barriers for mothers to understand their

lesbian daughters' experiences, but it can also create possibilities to discuss differences in the

relationship. So is the new form of connection.

**Meaningful Interactions during the Interview**

With both parties hearing each other's thoughts and feelings during the interview, they

created another precious moment in their mother-daughter relationship. One dyad chose this

interview to sit down and talk about this issue for the first time after the daughter came out five

years ago. I heard the mother share her struggles, and the daughter tried hard to understand her

mother's difficulties and also address her thoughts and feelings. In the end, the mother was eager

to know if there was any possibility for the daughter to change, and the daughter said no gently

but firmly. The mother then said, "OK. I know." It sounded like, "OK. I will keep adjusting

myself."

I interviewed another dyad while the mother was doing chemotherapy for her breast

cancer. The daughter told me that it was one of few times that her mother was willing to see

others after she got sick. During the interview, they chatted, laughed, and happily reviewed what

had happened in their coming out story. Moreover, the mother stated several times that she liked

the daughter's partner very much and insisted that they were the perfect match. The mother then

could leave the world peacefully. One year later, I was told that the mother had passed away, and

the recording of the interview became a very precious memory for the daughter and her

mother-daughter relationship.

There was another dyad interviewed in a coffee shop. I remembered they kept looking

each other, and the bond between them was obviously unbreakable. The mother cried a little

when describing how she felt when she learned that her daughter was going to disclose. The

daughter put her arm around her mother's shoulder, sat there silently, and just listened to her.

That was one of the most healing moments I have ever seen. The mother held my hands and

thanked me after the interview was over, and her face was full of joy. I was more than honored to

have this chance to witness the tenderness in their relationship.

Of course, the experiences of the interviews were not always packed with strong

emotions. Some dyads were exploring each other's limits during the interview. Although there

was a little tension, they tried hard to let each other understand their concerns and beliefs.

Mothers might not get many satisfying answers, but it was clear that they were willing to do

anything to keep daughters around. For other dyads, it was apparent that mothers and daughters

interacted like friends. They teased each other and also squabbled a little, and sometimes they

disagreed what the other just said. By watching them interact in the interview, I could imagine

they must have interacted like this in their daily life: full of fun and happiness. No wonder they

could treat the experience of disclosure and lesbian identity as something new, unique, and

fulfilling to their life.

It was such a privilege to see these mothers and daughters having another difficult

dialogue by interviewing them. Their relationships were strong enough to handle and embrace

their differences, and the growth of the relationship is anticipated. They really showed me

various combinations of ways to love, to get close, and to create a connection.

**Some Cultural Discussions: Differences in the U.S. and in Taiwan**

**Religion vs. roles.** Religious groups, or conservative Christianity, have formed a

powerful campaign against the gay rights movement in the U.S. for years (Afshare, 2006).

However, in Taiwan, religious groups are not a very powerful force against equal rights for

LGBT individuals. There is a "True Love Alliance" in Taiwan (whose participants are mostly

Christian affiliated) claiming that they are a group of people against adding materials of gender

diversity to be taught in the elementary and junior high schools recently (Tulvlie, 2011), but this

group has shown up only since last year. Overall, the influence of Christianity has not been really

prevalent. Furthermore, religion (mainly Buddhism) was named by parents as one of their

resources to help them accept their child's same-sex attraction (Tseng, 2007).

I did interview two mothers telling me that their Western religious background when

being asked the question about her religious affiliation. Both of them were Christian. I was

curious if they were influenced by their religion and had certain perspectives about their

daughters' sexual orientation. Both of them said that their religion had no influence on their

process of accepting. Moreover, one of them has been the leader of the parents' support group

and has participated in the gay rights movement for years. In Taiwan, it is roles and the family

system that make it hard for the gay rights movement or same-sex relationships to find their

space in the culture and the society, not religion.

Roles, similar to religious beliefs, have an important function in maintaining order in a

society: they create the necessary system to regulate people's behaviors to let everyone live in

harmony (Wang, 1983). This is constructed in Confucianism and has been a crucial feature in

Asian culture (Liu & Chan, 1996; Lee & Mock, 2005). With the concept of yin and yang coming

from Taoism, how people should play their roles is further strengthened and emphasized (Liu &

Chan, 1996; Wang, 1983; Cheng, 1997). As a result, the same-sex relationship, which is

composed by yin and yin or yang and yang, not only challenges the belief that the harmonious

balance can only created by yin and yang but also the roles people should play in the family. For

example, how should the family members treat the daughter's partner, as a son-in-law or as

another daughter? How does the daughter's partner interact with other family members? What

are the responsibilities and the rights that the daughter's partner and other family members can

expect from each other? What kind of pressure will it add on the shoulders of the daughter? In addition to the concern of passing on the blood of the family, they all become the heaviness that the same-sex relationship will bring to the family and the value system it represents. To find a place in a system, which lacks relevant concepts to include the same-sex partner, turns out to be a big problem for many LGBT individuals and their families (Chou, 2001; Cheng, 1997).

However, the participants in this study seemed to find a way to treat this culturally undefined relationship creatively. Some mothers treated the daughter's girlfriend as her goddaughter. Some mothers, on the other hand, had seen the daughter's partner as "the other half" to the daughter and introduced the daughter's partner to other relatives. As to those mothers whose daughters were still young or single, they then hoped to approve the rights and the status of the daughter's same-sex partner through legislation. When the daughter's relationship with her same-sex partner progressed, those mothers appeared to find their own ways to embrace these important relationships.

In other words, preliminary studies held a rather pessimistic view that the same-sex relationship would not be easy for Asian families or Taiwanese parents to accept, because there were no cultural concepts allowing the same-sex relationships to exist. But it may still be possible for a happy ending: when parents are willing to accept the child's sexual orientation, they will develop their own ways to include the child's same-sex partner in the family gradually.

**Progressive vs. conservative.** Is Asian culture more conservative regarding LGBT

related issues and acceptance of the child's sexual orientation than other cultures? Similar

conclusions were seen in preliminary studies or discourses (e.g. Chan, 1997; Hom, 1994; Liu &

Chan, 1996), like the strong sense of family values confines individuals' ability to express

personal needs (Chin, 2000; Ritter & Temdrup, 2002; Savin-Williams, 1998b; Shrier, et al, 2004;

Gonzales, Hiraga, & Cauce, 1998; Lee & Mock, 2005), or that it was difficult for Asian parents

to address topics related to sexual orientation, so they tended to "not talk, not ask" (Hom, 1994;

Chan, 1997; Cheng, 1997).

But I am able to see another side of Asian culture, or more precisely, another side of

Taiwanese society as part of Asian culture. Although these participants and what they have

shared only represent a small section of Taiwanese parents and their experiences, acceptance is

not impossible or even highly unlikely. According to my findings, the nature of their

relationships with their daughters was more influential in predicting how mothers dealt with

disclosure. If the dyad could talk about almost everything before disclosure, they were most

likely to find a way to discuss this issue in their relationship and enrich the relationship. The

findings also reflected the influence of Western culture: the voice of the individual was treated

with a certain degree of respect even though the culture still valued groups or families more than

individuals. The society has also changed gradually, and these daughters did not need to suppress

their own needs in order to fulfill parents' or cultural expectations. Likewise, these mothers learned to balance the family's expectations and the daughter's personal voice, which also affected the mother's relationships with other family members.

What was more challenging to these mothers was coming out to those outside their families and participating in the gay rights movement to fight for their children. Except a few mothers who had gone to the parents' support group, other mothers still resisted coming out in public. Compared with the well-organized parents' support system in the U.S., it is relatively rare for parents to stand up and participate in the public affairs and support their LGBT child.

**Gender differences.** Another interesting finding is how parents accepted their gay son and lesbian daughters. Studies in the U.S. have pointed out that it is easier for gay sons to be accepted by parents (Ben-Ari, 1995) In addition, findings of several studies (e.g. D'Augelli, Hershberger, and Pilkington 1998; Herdt & Boxer, 1993; Herdt & Koff, 2000; Ritter & Temdrup, 2002) found that lesbian daughters tended to have more negative experience than gay sons after disclosure.

Herdt and Koff (2000) proposed an assumption to explain this phenomenon that gay sons could still fulfill familial expectations while lesbian daughters could not after disclosure, which does not seem like a very persuasive argument to me. However, no matter what the explanation may be for the cause of such a phenomenon in the U.S., gay sons and lesbian daughters face a

different situation in Taiwan. To many Taiwanese parents, it is harder to accept their gay sons.

Like one participant mentioned in the interview, it would be more difficult for her to accept a gay

son because the son was supposed to carry on the family name. Another participant also told me

that it could be extremely challenging to find participants if I wanted to interview fathers and

sons. Their words reflect the reality in Taiwan that gay sons and their parents may face much

more pressure when talking about acceptance.

Besides the pressure that males are expected to carry on the family name (Chang, 2004),

gay men really challenge the image about what a man should be in patriarchy. Their gender

performance is closer to women who are believed to be inferior to men in the culture, which

might embarrass other men and the culture. As a result, it is harder for gay men to get

acceptance.

Compared with gay men, the challenge for lesbians is that they are less visible in

Taiwanese society (Chiang, 2007; Kuo, 2007; Lin, 2003; Yang, 2003). Unless they are willing to

come out, it is easier for lesbian daughters or sexual minority females to become voiceless and

unnoticeable. Although it is hard to define if it is a disadvantage for sexual minority females to

explore their identity, somehow it might be related to the violence sexual minority males and

sexual minority females face when they grow up in Taiwan. It seems more common for sexual

minority males to get bullied and for sexual minority females to hurt themselves. However,

future studies will be needed to explore the association between gender and the form of violence they experience.

**Acceptance or acknowledgement?** Lastly, it is interesting to discuss if parents really accept or they just acknowledge. Ben-Ari (1995) concluded in his study that few parents accept, more parents acknowledge. Other researchers then indicated that "acceptance" might have different meanings in different cultures (e.g. Hom, 1994; Rosen, 1997; Rafkin, 1996). While these researchers have described the truth from different angles, based on the findings in this study, I would like to agree with this perspective which has been addressed by others (e.g. Pearlman, 1992; Hom, 1994; Chen, 2006) as well: acceptance is more like a progress rather a definite result.

It may be hard to ask my participants to describe what acceptance meant, but they all moved toward more understanding and more acceptance. Some mothers used the word "acceptance" and some mothers did not; some mothers felt happy about where they were and some mothers wanted to see what would happen in the future. They were just in the different stages of acceptance. Furthermore, daughters also thought about acceptance differently. Some daughters hoped their mothers could go to the wedding and send blessings to them, and some daughters hoped that parents could let go of their worries and trust them to live a good life. These daughters not only shared what kind of acceptance they expected, they also addressed what kind

of relationship they wanted to have with their mothers or parents in general: participating more

in the daughter's love life or believing more in them.

How much these mothers could accept really reflected the progress of their

mother-daughter relationships. Therefore, it is a progress that flows and changes overtime, and it

depends on how these mothers and daughters negotiate with each other. Rather than defining

what acceptance means, it is encouraged that mothers and daughters, or parents and children, put

their focus on whether their interactions and the development of their relationship fit the

expectations of both sides. When the parent-child relationship reshapes and transforms,

acceptance and other solutions associated with challenges of being a sexual minority will be

generated naturally.

## Limitations and Implications of the Study

### Limitations

The major limitation comes from participants. This study required mothers and daughters

to be interviewed together and share their perspectives on the experience of disclosure and

related stories. As a result, the dyads interviewed in this study usually had a relatively close and

positive relationship, and there was also no serious conflict in their relationship. Hence, the

interview could go smoothly. In other words, the design of this study made only a certain type of

mother-daughter relationship present their experiences of disclosure. For those whose

relationships may have been more chaotic and intense, their experiences of disclosure and the

aftermath could not be learned through this study.

In addition, the contexts of the participants were not diverse enough, so their experiences

of disclosure could not fully describe the whole phenomenon of disclosure in Taiwan. The

participants shared some characteristics: mothers and daughters have each received at least 12

years of education (except one mother); daughters have come out to their mothers for three years

at least; daughters mostly came out between 15 and 24 years of age and were either the oldest or

the second oldest child in the family; mothers were at the age between 45 and 50 and were in the

marriage when their daughters came out to them; and their children were either all girls or one

boy among other girls. Hence, the findings derived from their experiences of disclosure could

only be used as inference that other lesbians and their families in similar contexts might have

similar experiences.

Having two people interviewed together may also limit what the researcher can get from

the interview. The concern of saving face in Asian culture (Gonzales, Hiraga, & Cauce, 1998)

and the concern of the possibility of ruining the relationship may make these participants want to

share only parts of their stories and their feelings. For instance, I had a second interview with one

daughter individually after feeling that she might not have expressed all she had in her mind. She

then told me some thoughts and beliefs that she did not say in the first interview because she did

not want to hurt her mother's feeling. Therefore, the design of the interview does limit the

understanding about the whole experience of disclosure.

Furthermore, the transition of the usage of languages will also cause some loss in

authenticity of the research data. The Chinese and English languages are structurally quite

different and originate from very different cultures, and with different styles of communication.

Based on my own experience, expression in Chinese is more abstract and implicit, and

expression of English is more direct and explicit. Therefore, as a native Chinese speaking

Taiwanese person, I did not need to have these mothers and daughters explain what every word

meant exactly; we all knew what was meant and the interviews proceeded smoothly. However,

when translating the excerpts from transcripts into English, researcher and translators had to add

some notes about the implied meanings within the statements that comprised the research data,

or even add a few words to the participants' statements to make them easier to understand. In

addition, I only provided excerpts rather than entire transcripts to translators to protect the

privacy of the participants, but this made some of the verb tenses harder to clarify in translation,

as Chinese languages do not have the same verb tense structure as English. The change of

languages is really one of the biggest challenges in this research. However, the transition of two

cultures as well as two languages is also strength of this study. As a result, I was able to identify

similarities and dissimilarities between two cultures and further discuss the implications in the

future. There was also an interval of three years between the interview and the time of analysis. As a result, it became inappropriate to have participants read the analyzed data and approve authenticity of the research data.

The limitation of the research subjects' memories also creates the possibility that they might not able to fully describe their experiences of disclosure. It was obvious that mothers and daughters usually shared somewhat inconsistent stories, and daughters usually remembered a more detailed version of events than the mothers did. As a result, daughters would guide their mothers' expression and even correct what they had said. But if mothers had experienced strong emotions during the experience of disclosure, they were more likely to share stories with a clear timeline and many details.

Lastly, since this study was conducted in Taiwan, it would be less relevant to use these findings to refer to other families with Taiwanese heritage or Asian cultural heritage in general outside of Taiwan. These findings could only be used as comparisons for helping those families to see how their cultural heritage might have influenced their perspectives or experiences of disclosure.

**Clinical Implications**

I will divide the discussion of clinical implications into two parts: working with families in Taiwan and working with families with Asian cultural heritages in the U.S. As a lesbian

therapist, my stance is to advocate gay rights by helping sexual minorities and their families to

work together to find a way to embrace sexual minorities' wholeness of being in a way in which

the voiceless will be heard. Based on this belief, clinical implications are suggested as below.

**Working with families in Taiwan.** When a therapist works with sexual minority

individuals on a disclosure plan, it is encouraged that they can discuss how the sexual minority

client sees disclosure: what is the purpose and what are their expectations? Are there any plans or

preparations? After help the client evaluates herself/himself, getting lots of background

information is strongly recommended. The therapist could help the client explore his/her parents'

personality and the environment in which they grew up. This could include inquiring into his/her

parents' familiarity with diversity, especially with LGBT issues, or any extraordinary life

experiences which might contribute to his/her parents' embrace of differences. Second, the

therapist could explore the client's relationship with her/his parents, like what parents think

important in terms of their children's development or what parents expect from their children.

Third, the therapist could help the client to observe her/his family dynamics, with special focus

on how the **role** of each family member influences the member's values, behaviors, and his/her

relationships with others. In addition, the therapist should help the client consider what kind of

pressure anticipates his/her parents might be under, and what the possible resources they might

have to help them in acceptance.

The sexual minority client is not an appropriate resource for his/her parents to deal with the stress of disclosure at the early stage, so helping the client to map possible resources is actually to assist the client to think from the parents' perspectives and form a more thorough plan for disclosure. The best resource for the parents is each other. Therefore, if the parents have similar attitudes and values toward sexual minority individuals or diversity, they can support each other and process their struggle and concerns together. Even if the client chooses to come out to one parent first, that parent will be less likely to suffer the pressure of being a buffer between the other parent and the client, if they have similar attitudes. Without the pressure from the spouse, that parent can make better progress in acceptance and also have a better relationship with the client after disclosure. On the other hand, if the parents hold different perspectives or attitudes toward sexual minorities or diversity, the therapist may encourage the client to consider forming an alliance with the parent he/she wants to come out to by discussing how they can work together to let the disclosure not become a source of stress to that parent, within the context of family dynamics.

In addition, it is good to help the client understand that the parents' progress of acceptance is more likely to be back and forth, and there are no universally defined stages or certainty of forward development. If the client and the parents have a relationship in which they are used to sharing and talking about many things, it will be easier for them to open up and bring

up discussions about LGBT issues gradually. No matter what, it is the relationship or interactions

that the client has with his/her family that determine how disclosure is going to be treated. Thus,

to the client who may want to disclose her/his sexual orientation but worries her/his relationship

with parents may not be able to nurture a positive experience of disclosure, the therapist can

assist the client to start to work on the relationship first as a form of the preparation for coming

out.

Usually, the therapist will not have the chance to address the topic about disclosure with

parents unless their child has disclosed his/her sexual minority identity to them. If the disclosure

just happened, the therapist can focus on parents' self-blaming, and their struggles and worries in

therapy. Besides, the goal of therapy at this stage is to educate parents to have greater

understanding about sexual minorities to eliminate their self-blaming. But it is not recommended

to have family sessions when the parents are still processing emotions. It may cause the client

guilt, and the parents may not be able to fully express their reactions after disclosure.

After processing the emerging emotions because of disclosure, the therapist can lead the

parents to further explore their relationship with their sexual minority child and how they see

themselves in terms of being the father and the mother. During this stage, the therapist can invite

both the sexual minority client and the parents to join the therapy together. The therapist can

encourage the sexual minority client to listen to the parents' thoughts and feelings without

expecting any immediate change of parents' beliefs and interactions. Sometimes the family

sessions can even stop for a while or address other topics rather than LGBT related issues

because it takes time for both parties to feel integrated again (Harvey, 2007). To have more

empathy about the parents' process does not mean to agree with them. The therapist can help the

client to respect her/his parents' progress and give them time as they need.

During the therapy, the therapist can keep reminding the sexual minority client and

his/her parents what kind of parent-child relationship they hope to create. The disclosure often

stimulates the transformation of the relationship for sexual minorities and their families and the

reassessment of the expectations toward each other. This process may assist both sides to take a

deep look at how cultural values and their roles in the family shape their interactions and

influence their behaviors. When the discussion is led to focus on more personal hopes and

desires, the therapist can help the family focus on their uniqueness and bonding. In addition, as

the family becomes more open in addressing different aspects of each other's life, what

acceptance means to each other and what kind of acceptance they expect can also be attended to.

Fundamentally, the therapist can facilitate the family to see that their relationships and

connections will not be restricted but expand and grow because of having a sexual minority child

or member in the family.

**Working with families with Asian cultural heritage in the U.S.** The cultural values

derived from Confucianism and Taoism have influenced Taiwanese families greatly, and they

also have great impact on other Asian cultures and families. Therefore, the findings of this study

can be referred to help therapists understand some of struggles that families with Asian cultural

heritage in the U.S. might experience. In addition, the implications which have been suggested in

the last section, how family heritage and the mainstream culture in the U.S. influence the

family's perspectives on sexual minority issues, can be also discussed. Furthermore, the therapist

may facilitate the parents to empathize with their sexual minority child's experience by

reminding them about their experience of immigration, and how it felt to gain acceptance in a

society as someone from outside the society. The therapist may further encourage them to share

how different minority identities shape their life and shape their parent-child relationship, and

what they can do to become each other's support.

**Implications for Future Study**

The limitations for the inference of this study mainly come from the lack of variety of

participants. Hence, to recruit more diverse participants is strongly recommended for future study.

First, the study can recruit participants who come from different compositions of the family. For

instance, the lesbian daughter growing up in a single parent family, if her siblings are most

brothers, or if she is the youngest in the family. Second, since participants of this study came out

around 15 to 24, future studies can focus on the experience of disclosure of people who disclose

before 15 or after 25 and discuss how the age difference influenced their experiences of disclosure. Third, future study could explore the experience of disclosure of different gender combinations, like gay sons and mothers, gay sons and fathers, and lesbian daughters and fathers. Preliminary research has pointed out the different genders will experience disclosure differently. Thus, future studies can explore other sexual minorities and their experiences of disclosure.

The purpose of disclosure and how it influences the experience of disclosure can be explored in the future. The design of this study limited the content participants were willing to share, and it also attracted those mothers and daughters whose relationships carried certain characteristics. As a result, the findings show that the nature of the relationship influences the experience of disclosure tremendously. However, if the purpose of coming out is not for restoring their relationship or for showing trust in the relationship, what will be the experience of disclosure for those sexual minorities and their families? To interview mothers who rejected daughters and daughters who were rejected separately, for example, may help the researcher to further understand other aspects in terms of coming out.

Lastly, it is suggested that there will be further study on the experience of disclosure within families with Asian heritage in the U.S. and of non-Asian families in the U.S. to help researchers have a better understanding of how different cultures influence people's experiences of disclosure as well as their parent-child relationships. For example, it is found in this study that

multiple roles or interactions could be practiced in a mother-daughter relationship only when

mothers were willing to adjust themselves and explore different possibilities. For daughters in

this kind of relationship, it seemed to help them express their personal needs, including their

disclosure. But it needs future study to find out if this phenomenon also exists outside of Taiwan

and to what extent.

## Conclusion

Overall, this was a very profound experience for me. I felt very privileged to hear every

dyad's touching story throughout this study and was able to share memorable moments with

them. I asked every dyad their feedback and why they wanted to participate in the study during

the interview. Many said that they were able to learn something new about each other and the

relationship through the interview, which brought new understanding about the relationship. As

to their expectation about participating in the study, some daughters told me that they wanted to

learn about their mothers' progress through the interview. Some daughters hoped their mothers

could meet other sexual minority individuals through the study. Some daughters said that they

hoped to contribute their stories to assist the development of the gay rights movement in Taiwan.

I believe this interview experience has met their expectations.

As a lesbian therapist, I also feel lucky to be able to conduct research that resonated with

my personal experience. I still remembered the struggle I had when considering disclosure to my

parents. I hoped to be open with them but was also worried about their reactions. Luckily, I was

able to come out to them before the study started. Hence, I could completely devote myself to

listening to participants' stories, especially mothers' struggles, without feeling odd that I had not

actually come out myself. This self-reflection helped me to realize again why self-work is crucial

to a therapist and even to a researcher.

However, what I learned the most is from the long process of writing this dissertation.

The interval between the interviews and the writing took three to four years. Except the two

years of internship, I had to really push myself hard to write this dissertation. In addition to the

fact that my ability to write in English has declined since I moved back to Taiwan, it was hard for

me at the beginning to analyze and organize those unique and warmhearted stories. I just wanted

to present the beauty of these stories individually. After finishing those nine interviews, I thought

I had understood the whole experience of disclosure and then put the topic aside because I lacked

new insights. Struggling for a few years, I had a new realization about my relationship with my

parents last year, which helped me to see those disclosure stories differently. I find the

experiences that these participants have shared with me are not just about disclosure, differences,

acceptance, and interactions. They are really talking about different aspects of love and

connection. Their experiences of disclosure only demonstrate how love and connection are

manifested through this issue in their life. Thinking from a spiritual perspective, I do not know

why my participants and I choose this experience to see love and feel love in our life.

Nevertheless, their stories and my experience reveal the magnitude of love, and together we

show there is always possibility to get beyond differences and create connections.

Since it is my personal experience that brought me to explore this topic, I would like to

share a conversation with my mother as the end of this dissertation. My relationship with my

mother is close but not intimate, which means that she takes care of me in many ways but I will

not share many thoughts and feelings with her since we value different things. Although we did

have few conversations about the issue right after disclosure, like when she asked me why I

broke up with my ex-girlfriend, we have not addressed this topic for years.

Hence, after coming out to her five years ago, I wonder how she thinks about my lesbian

identity. She said that she has always held an attitude that she accepts but dislikes it. She still

hopes that I might change back, but it really depends on me. Most important of all, no matter if I

am lesbian or not, I need to be able to take care of myself without depending on them financially

(I do not have a job right now). Taking the responsibility that I should have is what concerns her

the most. Interestingly, after telling me her true thoughts, she seems to put more gentleness into

our interactions. So, I do not give up on the possibility that she will become more accepting

gradually. Hopefully our relationship will carry on in more conversations in the years to come.

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## Appendix A
## Consent form

My name is Meng-Ning Wang, and I am a doctoral candidate in Syracuse University's Department of Marriage and Family Therapy. I am inviting you and your mother to participate in a research study entitled: Sameness and differences—the relationship between lesbians and their mothers. Involvement in the study is voluntary, so you may choose to participate or not. This sheet will explain the study to you and please feel free to ask questions about the research if you have any. I will be happy to explain anything in greater detail if you wish. You will be given a copy of this consent form.

I am interested in learning more about how the coming out process impacts your relationship with your mother. You and your mother will be interviewed together by me and the interview will take approximately 90 minutes of your time. This interview will be held either in your house or in a place which is comfortable and convenient for both you and your mother. The interview will be audiotaped. All identfying information will be kept confidential. The audio tapes and written transcripts used in the interviews will be kept in a locked cabinet with codes. Only the researcher will have access to the participants' names and the corresponding codes. The written transcripts of the interview will be identified using a number so that there is no direct correspandence between the data and the participants. The audiotapes and written transscripts will be destroyed (by shredding and erasing) after the study is completed.

The benefit of this research is that you may be helping the researcher  understand how the coming out process influences your interactions as well as your intimacy with each other. This information may help mental health professionals to better understand how the struggles as well as appreciation emerges in the relationship. It may also help you and your mother keep working on your relationship. There is no physical risk to you as a result of participating in this research. However, you might experience some anxiety and distress when you are sharing your struggles over the coming out process. These risks will be minimized by contacting the researcher at (02) 2924-1697 or by e-mailing me at mengning.wang@gmail.com for referrals to mental health professionals for therapy. If you no longer wish to continue to be a part of this study, you have the right to withdraw from the study, without penalty, at any time.

You can call Meng-Ning Wang at (02) 2924-1697 or by e-mailing her at mengning.wang@gmail.com if you have any questions or concerns about participating in this study. You also can reach to the faculty advisor of this research, Linda Stone Fish, by

1-315-443-3024. She is a professor in the Department of Marriage and Family Therapy at Syracuse University. Lastly, you can contact the Institutional Review Board of Syracuse University 1-315-443-3013 for any concerns related to this study.

All of my questions have been answered and I am eighteen years old or older. I wish to participate in this research study.

_____        _____

       Signature of the mother                                            Date

_____        _____

       Signature of the daughter                                          Date

_____        _____

       Print name of the mother                                           Date

_____        _____

       Print name of the daughter                                        Date

_____        _____

       Name of the investigator                                           Date

## Appendix B
## Interview Questions

<u>Background</u>

Age: Mother _____ Daughter _____

Education Level: Mother _____ Daughter _____

Occupation: Mother _____ Daughter _____

Religion: Mother _____ Daughter _____

How many children do you have? Mother _____ (birth order and gender)

Daughter_____ (birth order)

Relationship status: Mother _____ Daughter _____

Where do you live: Mother_____ Daughter_____

<u>Dynamics in the relationship</u>

1.  Please tell me your thoughts or ideas when you heard about this research.

➢   How do you describe yourself and your daughter (mother)?

➢   How do you describe your relationship with each other in general?

<u>The coming out process</u>

2.  Please tell me the story of the process of coming out.

➢   (Daughter) When did you decide that you wanted to tell your mother that you are a lesbian? Why? And how?

➢   (Mother) Before your daughter come out to you, what thing had you noticed about her sexual orientation?

➢   (Daughter) What was the experience like for you when you came out to your mother?

➢   (Mother) What was the experience like for you when you heard your daughter's disclosure?

<u>The impact on the relationship</u>

3.  Please tell me how the disclosure has impacted your relationship.

➢   (Daughter and mother) What has helped you to keep communicating with each other?

➢   (Daughter and mother) What have you learned the most from this coming-out experience? What you have learned from your mother/daughter? And what have you learned from your relationship?

➢   (Daughter) What do you appreciate about your relationship during this coming-out process?

➢   (Mother) What do you appreciate about your relationship during your daughter's coming-out process?

4. How was it for you to participate in the interview together?

Appendix C

Flyer

Share your experience about the coming-out process and its impact on your mother-daughter relationship......and get a deeper understanding of each other!

This month's agenda: our mother-daughter relationship

Participants: lesbians and their mothers

Group facilitator: Meng-Ning Wang, a doctoral candidate in

Syracuse University's Department of

Marriage and Family Therapy

Meng-Ning is conducting her study on the relationship between lesbians and their mothers. She will lead a discussion on how the coming-out impacts this unique mother-daughter relationship. Meng-Ning will also explain her study in the meeting. Whoever is interested in her study and having a further interview with Meng-Ning can contact her after this group meeting. The consent form with information related to the study will be provided in the meeting.

(Original Image: http://www.adobe.com/education/digkids/showcases/amyel_images/mother-and-daughter.jpg)

# Appendix D
## Domains, Categories, and Themes

### I. Predisclosure Context

A. Mother-daughter relationship predisclosure

    I.   Role(s) in the relationship

        1. Multiple roles

        2. Fixed role

    II.  Patterns of communication

        1. "We can talk about almost everything."

        2. "I had to ask her." Or "We did not talk much."

    III. Elements of the relationship

        1. Love and support.

        2. Respect and trust

        3. Always being reasoning

        4. Conflicts

B. Mother's or parents' beliefs

    I. Beliefs about child-rearing

        a. It is important to be happy and mentally healthy.

        b. I want to respect this child's independence as well as her decisions.

    II. Beliefs about motherhood

        a. Family is my first priority.

        b. Love is expressed through daily life.

        c. As a mother, I have my responsibilities.

        d. Children's needs come first.

        e. I need to adjust myself for the family or the relationship.

    III. Other beliefs

        a. Valuing equality

        b. Valuing multiple perspectives

C. Family Dynamics

    I. Parents' relationship

      a. Father has more power

      b. Mother has more power

c. Father and mother share power

II. Grandmother-mother's relationship

D. Familiarity with LGBT culture

I. Had some contact

II. No contact

## II. Disclosure Event

A. Clues before coming out
   I.   Some speculation before coming out
   II.  No speculation before coming out

B. Reasons for disclosing
   I.    "It was hard to hide."
   II.   "I had been waiting for an appropriate opportunity to come out."
   III.  "I wanted my mom to know more about me."
   IV.   "We used to have a close relationship."
   V.    "I believed that my mother could handle this."

C. Actual event
   I.    Disclosed by herself
   II.   Found out accidentally
   III.  Outed by siblings

D. Mother's immediate aftermath
   I.    Positive
         a.  Accepted immediately
         b.  Concerned about other challenges in life
   II.   Negative
         a.  Self-blaming
         b.  Shocked
         c.  Crying
         d.  Denial
         e.  Worried or afraid
   III.  Neutral
         a.  Looked for family's support
         b.  Not reacting much

E. Daughter's immediate aftermath
   I.    Relief
   II.   No guilt

III. Shock, sadness or disappointment
IV. Calm

III. Early experience of disclosure

A.  Mother's responses to the disclosure
    I.    Actively explored
    II.   Not addressed for a while

B. Daughter's responses after the disclosure
  I. Taking care of mother
    a. Respected her process
    b. Offered emotional support
    c. Set her mind at ease
    d. Enhanced her life
  II. Taking care of the relationship
    a. Compromised
    b. Kept trying
    c. Interacted as usual

C. Changes in the relationship
    I. No change
    II. A big shift
      a. Less stressed
      b. Feeling supported
      c. More sharing or asking
    III. Mixed feelings

D. Other responses from the family
    I. Supportive
    II. Against

E. Meaningful events
    I. Fighting against oppression
    II. Feeling supported or being seen
    III. Moving Out

V.      Long-term experience of disclosure

A. Mother's acceptance level
  - I.   Supporting other parents
  - II.  Including the daughter's partner in the family
  - III. Participating in public activities

B. Father's acceptance level
  - I.   a. Little acceptance
  - II.  b. Much acceptance
  - III. c. No comment

C. Reasons for acceptance
  - I.   Reasons related to the mother
    - a. I am willing to accept.
    - b. I love my child.
    - c. It is easier for me to embrace differences.
    - d. I am more concerned about her prospects.
    - e. The more I understand, the less I am worried.
  - II.  Reasons related to the daughter
    - a. She does not do anything bad.
    - b. I have always trusted my child and respected her decision.
    - c. I want her to be happy.
    - d. I like or know her partner.
    - e. Since I cannot change my child…
    - f. I want my child to be nearby.
    - g. I do not want our relationship to be hurt.
  - III.  Reasons related to the family or culture
    - a. Heterosexual marriage is not a better choice.
    - b. Her father supports her too.
    - c. She can take care of us after we get old.
    - d. We are not alone.

D. Challenges for acceptance
  - I.   Need more time to process

II. Concern for the daughter's partnership

III. Pressure from other family members

IV. Against social norms

E. Learning from the entire process

   I. Learning about the coming-out experience

     a. Gaining new perspectives

     b. Feeling grateful

   II. Learning about the relationship

     a. Bond strengthened

     b. Providing endless support

     c. Able to retain differences

     d. Being a lesbian is not an issue

   III. Learning about each other

     a. Discovering similarity

     b. Surprised by her resilience

     c. Admiring her strength

     d. Appreciating her progress

   IV. Learning about LGBT

     a. Becoming more familiar with LGBT culture

     b. Becoming more gender sensitive

   V. Learning about oppression

     a. Experiencing the feeling of being oppressed

     b. Fear of being rejected

     c. Fighting in the family

F. Hopes and Concerns

   I. Hopes

     a. Change in contexts

     b. Change in parents

     c. Change in daughter

   II. Concerns

     a. Daughter's life in old age

     b. Disclosure to relatives or others

     c. Relationship issues

# Appendix E
## Example of a Reflexive Note

Pair X    dd/mm/yy         In a restaurant

1. Daughter contacted me through an informant.

2. Daughter and mother seemed to differentiate pretty well; she was able to describe something that mom used to do to poke her privacy and mom did not get upset or try to explain her behaviors.

3. Mother talked very fast and usually did not take much time to come up an answer. It seemed that she had thought about my questions before the interview.

4. The interview happened in a busy restaurant. Therefore it was hard for me to concentrate on their words sometimes. I also felt that Mother did not want to go deeper about her emotions. I could not sense much of her emotion in the interview. She might be cautious about sharing that part of her in front of her daughter.

5. Daughter seemed to be more open about her feelings, compared with her mother. However, in general, this dyad did not show much strong emotion during the interview.

6. They seemed to be kind and considerate but a little polite.

7. Mother suggested that maybe I should conduct a research to focus on why parents did not support their child's sexual orientation. Although I expressed my opinions immediately, I should wait and hear her standpoints. Maybe she was surprised about why parents did not support their children.

8. Both of them listened to each other's words attentively and had reactions spontaneously. They laughed, made faces, or disagreed with the other immediately.

9. Mother and father went to the meeting of the parents' support group. Mother even thought of going to the meeting again.

10. We talked about father later after I turned off the recorder. Mother mentioned that father would feel concerned about daughter's emotional reactions. He seemed to be an atypical father in a Taiwanese society.

11. Daughter mentioned that she first came out to her brother in high school. Her brother told her that he was not okay with LGBT, but since she was his sister, he would try to be okay. He became more accepting after he had girlfriends. He then told his sister that he realized love did not need a reason.

# Appendix F
# Demographic Chart

|  | Current Age | Age at Disclosure | # of Children in the Family | Birth Order | Relationship Status | Years of Education |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Johnny* | 22 | 15 | 2 daughters | First | In a relationship | 14 |
| Georgia | 52 | 45 |  |  | Married | 16 |
| *Jennifer* | 24 | 19 | 3(1 son and 2 daughters) | Second | Single | 16 |
| Wanda | 51 | 46 |  |  | Married | 16 |
| *Man-Shuan* | 19 | 15 | 2 daughters | Second | In a relationship | 13 |
| Sylvia | 53 | 49 |  |  | Married | 20 |
| *Joey* | 38 | 28(approx) | 4 daughters | First | Single | 12 |
| Linda | 58 | 48(approx) |  |  | Married | 12 |
| *Jadehare* | 33 | 18(approx) | 3 daughters | First | Single | 16 |
| Phoenix | 55 | 40(approx) |  |  | Widowed | 6 |
| *Joanna* | 28 | 24 | 2 (1 son and 1 daughter) | Second | Single | 16 |
| Min-Mei | 57 | 53 |  |  | Married | 12 |
| *Erika* | 30 | 20(approx) | 2 daughters | Second | In a relationship | 16 |
| May | 60 | 50(approx) |  |  | Widowed | 16 |
| *Chih-Chieh* | 31 | 24 | 2 (1 son and 1 daughter) | Second | Single | 20 |
| Eileen | 57 | 50 |  |  | Married | 16 |
| *Kerry* | 25 | 22 | 3 (2 daughters and 1 son) | First | In a relationship | 16 |
| Yen | 51 | 48 |  |  | Married | 14 |

(Continued)

|  | Occupation | Religious Affiliation | Living Together When Disclosed | Length of Time Since Disclosure |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Johnny* | College Student | Catholic | Yes | 5-10 years |
| Georgia | Insurance agent | Catholic | | |
| *Jennifer* | Research Assistant | Folk Religion | No | 5-10 years |
| Wanda | Housewife | Folk Religion | | |
| *Man-Shuan* | College Student | None | Yes | 3-5 years |
| Sylvia | Teacher/Counselor | None | | |
| *Joey* | Writer | None | Yes | Over 10 years |
| Linda | Housewife | None | | |
| *Jadehare* | Publisher | Buddhism | No | Over 10 years |
| Phoenix | Owner of a Shop of Paper Money | Folk Religion | | |
| *Joanna* | Education Counselor | None | No | 3-5 years |
| Min-Mei | Housewife | Buddhism | | |
| *Erika* | Volunteer in NGO | None | Yes | 5-10 years |
| May | Retired Teacher | None | | |
| *Chih-Chieh* | Graduate Student | None | Yes | 5-10 years |
| Eileen | Manager | Christianity | | |
| *Kerry* | Social Worker | None | No | 3-5 years |
| Yen | Tutor for elementary school students | None | | |

VITA

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