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**Practices of Intimacy:
Mother-Daughter Relationships
in Hong Kong and Japan¹**

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Abstract

As the first stage in a larger project comparing mother-daughter relationships in Japan and Hong Kong, we conducted focus group discussions with mothers and adult daughters. Our sample included heterosexually-identified and lesbian-identified adult daughters, and mothers of heterosexually-identified daughters and those of lesbian-identified daughters. In this paper, we focus on the daughters, analyzing their practices of intimacy through monetary gifts, emotional closeness, and gendered labor. In each of these, we pay attention to the impact of the sexual orientation of the daughters and the role of the partner on the relationship between mothers and daughters and on gendered familial expectations. In the conclusion, we reflect critically on the implications of the current analysis on extant and future research, particularly with respect to the concepts and framework of analysis.

Keywords: LGBT family, intersectionality, gender, sexuality, queer studies

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Introduction

The integration of sexual minorities into family research in the social sciences has been making much progress in the past few decades (Goldberg and Allen 2013). The authors and their research associates have explored, for example, the definition and formation of lesbian partnerships in Japan (Kamano and Khor 2008; 2011); domestic arrangements of same-sex couples in Japan (Kamano 2004; 2009), Sweden (Khor 2007), and Hong Kong (Wong 2012b); personal networks of lesbian couples in Japan (Sugiura, Kamano and Yanagihara 2008; Kamano and Khor 2008); the construction of families by lesbian couples in Hong Kong (Wong, 2012a); integration of same-sex relations and blood relations (Wong 2006; 2010a); and conflicts of family and marriage in China (Kam 2006). These studies revealed that “gendering” and “de-gendering” are significant processes in couple relationship and also in women’s engagement with their families of origin.

By definition, refraining from marrying heterosexually means the violation of entrenched gender norms, strongly enforced especially in Asian societies. We also discovered that the pressure towards marriage, at times extended to the daughter’s (female) partner, is frequently exerted by the mother who can be utterly disappointed at the daughter for failing to marry, and yet at the same time, appreciative of an additional “daughter” who can make up for what the biological daughter fails to do, particularly in such gendered activities as shopping, swapping make-up tips and so on (Kamano and Khor 2008; Kam 2006). On a more symbolic level, we have observed how lesbian partners invoke the rhetoric of mothering in constructing their division of housework and couple relation (Wong 2012a). All these observations point to the significance of mothers in these women’s lives, whether the relationship is conflictual, supportive or both, and mothers feature significantly in how gender norms are enforced or their violations tolerated.

Continuing with previous research on the family relationships of lesbian women in Japan, we embarked on a project exploring the relationship between mothers and lesbian as well as heterosexual daughters in Japan and Hong Kong. This paper would situate the research project in the larger context of familial intimacy research, present the results from preliminary focus group interviews with lesbian and heterosexual daughters on relationship with their mothers, and conclude with questions for the next stage of research.

Extant Research

In the field of family research, concepts like “alternative families,” “families we choose”, and “intimate circles” have been used to describe “new” family forms (see, for example, Stacey 1990; Giddens 1992; Weston 1987; Muta 2009). These concepts, while valuable in capturing changes, might also have inadvertently exaggerated the difference between conventional and unconventional forms of intimate connections to the neglect of shared issues of integration and conflict (for an exception, see Sambe 2014). We’d like to situate our research more generally in studies of inter-generational relationships, especially the relationship between mother and daughter.

The concept of “intimacy” has been used in anthropological and sociological analyses of familial relationship. In a critical review of extant literature on and exploration of the concept of “intimacy”, Lynn Jamieson (2011) defined “intimacy” as “the quality of close connection between people and the process of building this quality” (1.1), which could be physical, emotional or cognitive. “Practices of intimacy”, traced to the concept of “family practices” (Morgan, 1996; 2011), “refer to practices which enable, generate and sustain a subjective sense of closeness and being attuned and special to each other” (1.2). Jamieson further argued that one can find “practices of intimacy” across cultural contexts, even if neither the term “intimacy” nor the “cultural celebration” of intimacy is universal. Anthropological and sociological studies of familial intimacy generally use a concept of intimacy similar to that of Jamieson’s.

Particularly relevant to the present analysis is Harriet Evans’s study of mother-daughter relationship in today’s China, and Stevi Jackson and Petula Ho’s comparative research on Hong Kong and British mothers and daughters. Evans (2008; 2010) found that Chinese daughters held “communication” to be ideal in their relationship with their mothers, more than their mothers did. This ideal was constitutive of the ideology of modern personhood and independent womanhood. The analysis still begs the question as to whether there were other practices of intimacy besides communicative intimacy that could provide a more textured understanding of mother-daughter relationship, particularly given Evans’s critique of the Western bias in the research on intimacy (see for example, Giddens 1992; Bauman 2003). Indeed, Jackson, Ho and Jin (2013) argued that mothers and

daughters in Hong Kong reworked traditions such that modernity and tradition are not mutually exclusive and that the former does not replace the latter. Further, while the “friendship ideal” was found in both Hong Kong and Britain, the practice of intimacy revolved around emotional closeness and disclosure in Britain and practical and companionate closeness in Hong Kong. This flexible and comprehensive understanding of intimacy is one that we use in our research. At the same time, we would not want to assume the presence of intimacy in the mother-daughter relationship, and would be attentive to practices of distancing and conflicts as well.

Practices of intimacy between mothers and daughters are bound by gender norms and the reproduction of gender inequality. Research has shown that gender norms underlie women’s experiences in kin work: women are expected to be responsible for and to enjoy caregiving for the reason that it allows them to connect with other family members (Willson, Shuey and Elder 2003). Lynn Jamieson (2011) noted that practices of intimacy could contribute to the maintenance of gender, race, and intergenerational inequalities. Similarly, Evans (2012) argued that intimacy is a “problematic practice” and gendered “ideology discourse”. She noted that the daughters tended to see the mother as oppressed and were empowered through dis-identification with the mothers, but at the same time, they were not much critical of the ideology of gender difference in modern China. More broadly, Jackson, Ho and Jin (2013) showed how traditional gendered expectations were “reworked” and therefore maintained in mothers and daughters’ sense of obligations and expectations of each other.

In the East Asian context in which filial piety is a dominant ideology, sons and daughters are given different familial tasks – the former being charged with financial support and the latter everyday practical care (Lin et al. 2003). However, in the context of Hong Kong, Jackson, Ho and Jin (2013) have shown that with more economic opportunities given to women, daughters also take on the task of financially supporting the parents. At the same time, this does not necessarily mean that taking on a more masculine familial duty would exempt the daughters from feminine tasks. Rindfuss, Liao and Tsuya (1992) found that daughters were the preferred caregivers for elderly parents. All these findings suggested that gender as well as family ideology is significant in parent-child

relationships. To explore gender thoroughly, we also need to investigate the heterosexual norms that constitute gender ideology.

The focus on mother-daughter identification as a mechanism explaining intimacy between mothers and daughters (see Evans 2010; Kasugai 1996) also suggests a heterosexual bias in extant studies on mothers and daughters (Davis 2009). The very focus on motherhood and mothering as a point of identification – and how it facilitates intimacy at the same time as it reinforces gender ideology—clearly raises the question of whether non-conformity to heterosexual gender norms could undermine mother-daughter identification, and how the experiential gap between mother and daughter might threaten connectedness or, in contrast, facilitate alternative practices of intimacy. In an earlier paper, we outlined the following questions for further investigation:

If a shared experience of motherhood contributes to the bond between mothers and daughters, what if the daughters were lesbians and do not think of themselves as prospective wives or mothers but as “women”? How is “gender” implicated beyond the heterosexual norms of motherhood? On what “common” basis, if any, can heterosexual mothers and lesbian daughters relate to each other? Do lesbian daughters create a new mother-daughter relationship or is it more about maintaining conventional expectations? Would their way of coping inadvertently lead to the reinforcement of heteronormativity? Can the mother discover the joys of the daughter’s having a female partner (emotional and practical)? Can woman identification be established despite heteronormativity? Could lesbian daughters and heterosexual mothers chart a new way of connecting that can subvert gender inequality? (Khor and Kamano 2013: 127).

To answer these questions, we included both lesbian and heterosexual daughters in our study, which allows us to reveal and explore the intersectionality of gender, heterosexual and family norms and ideologies embedded in the relationship and how they are reproduced or challenged. We expect the current research to contribute not only to research on intergenerational relationships and gender and family ideology, but also to the growing research on lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender families. As noted above, the

emphasis in the latter on “alternative” families might have inadvertently drawn a boundary between these families and conventional heterosexual families, neglecting that the actors straddle different worlds. Heterosexually-identified and lesbian-identified daughters position themselves—and are positioned differently—with respect to gender and heterosexual norms. However, research so far has not shown lesbian identified adult daughters to shy away from connecting with their mothers, and on the contrary, the (female) partner might even play an important role in connecting the mother and the daughter. Discovering similarities and differences in dissimilar cultural contexts would enable us to formulate theories that do justice to the complexity and diversity of familial relationships.

Besides the issue of gender and the approach to mother-daughter relationships, there is also the issue of ethnocentrism of extant analytical frameworks and concepts. While the measures of mother-daughter relationships so far have been developed in the Euro-American context, they have been abstracted from a specific cultural context and universalized to all cultures. In an analysis of daughters’ perception of relationships with their mothers, Mizuno-Shimatani (2002) observed that types of exchanges are differently connected to one another in the United States and Japan. For example, “reciprocity” in Japan was not related to level of conflict, while in the United States the daughters achieved a reciprocal relationship with mothers through individuation and conflict. Lin et al. (2003), reflecting on their research on parent-child relationships in Taiwan, claimed that studying single parent-child dyads, quite common in the Euro-American context, is not adequate, and that one needs to be cautious about adopting theories developed in Western societies to understand Asian societies. In our opinion, merely considering if extant theories or concepts developed in the Euro-American context can be *applied* or not to the Asian context is still inadequate, as we can yield results that show Asia to be *different from* the West without challenging the use of “the West” as a standard for comparison. The point is to recognize the differences as well as similarities, as Mohanty (2003) has argued: “in knowing difference and particularities, we can better see the connections and commonalities...specifying difference allows us to theorize universal concerns more fully” (p. 203). We endeavor to conduct a study that is data-sensitive and which conceptualizes intimacy broadly and allows for complexity in the Asian context. Such a project promises

to have wider implications beyond empirical observations to raise questions about concepts and theories.

Methodology

In this paper, we present results from a total of eight focus group interviews with lesbian and heterosexual daughters, conducted respectively in Hong Kong and Tokyo, Japan. The ages of the daughters varied between 28 and 57. Each group consisted of four to seven participants similar in age and sexual orientation. The participants were recruited through personal acquaintances and activist organizations.

The questions focused on their relationships with their mothers, specifically on the actual and ideal relationships, the basis of intimacy or connectedness with their mothers, and the partner's role in mediating the relationship with their mothers. The discussion was conducted in Japanese in Tokyo and Cantonese in Hong Kong by members of the research team, taped and transcribed, and then translated into English.

The sample is small, and a large number of the participants have advanced degrees and/or have professional occupations. Obviously, we cannot generalize from this small group of participants; the intention is to highlight some patterns that might vary by sexual orientation of the daughters and/or by culture (Hong Kong vs Japan) and to identify areas for further questions for the next stage of in-depth interviews.

The Mother-Daughter Relationship

The daughters' practices of intimacy include providing practical help as well as forging emotional ties.

Filial Piety through Monetary Gifts

Many daughters in Hong Kong and Japan report providing practical help, from changing light bulbs, accompanying the mother for hospital visits, to setting up a Facebook or WhatsApp account. Monetary contribution – whether the mother or parents need it or not – seems to mark the relationship between adult daughters and their mothers in Hong Kong, regardless of sexual orientation. This is consistent with extant studies on familial relationships in the Chinese society of Hong Kong (Jackson, Ho and Jin 2013; Koo and

Wong 2009). The daughters talked about the monetary gift, given monthly and/or for special occasions such as the lunar new year, as a filial obligation, a proxy of appreciation of the mother or as a sign of intimacy in the relationship, but rarely as practical financial support for the mother or parents.

My mom has never worked outside the home. Ever since I graduated from university, I have been giving her pocket money. My daddy is still working, and I think he is financially okay, so I have a separate stack of money for him, may be for treating him for a meal in the weekends. I'm using this sort of approach. So, I think it is necessary. It's an expression of filial piety, an expression of love. (HKHD1)

In much the same way, the giving of money is also one way in which one's partner enters the pictures for heterosexual daughters in Hong Kong, whether the money is actually from the partner or the daughter. The other side of all this is that quite a few heterosexual and non-heterosexual daughters in Hong Kong, have remarked that the mother tends towards being too thrifty, too sacrificing of herself for the family.

When we take her out to eat well, she keeps saying that she's full even though she just eats a few mouthfuls of noodles, as we notice. Actually, she would cook rice or noodles when she returns home. She just worries that you spend too much money. But sometimes, it annoys us, because if we take you out to eat, it means that we can afford it. So, we would tell her, "Don't pretend to have a small appetite, you haven't eaten enough; and you would cook noodles when you go home. What's the meaning of that? It's good that we can eat out together, you should eat happily." Not many mothers do such kind of thing. (HKHD2)

Jackson, Ho and Jin (2013) argue that the practice of giving monetary gifts is a reworked traditional norm of filial piety as traditionally, only the sons would be obliged to give. They also connect it to the mother's/parents' investment in their female children as another instance of reworked tradition. However, given their sample of university educated daughters, it is possible that the interpretation is true mostly of middle class daughters. The

significant economic contribution of working class unmarried daughters as shown in Janet Salaff's (1981) work on working class daughters in Hong Kong would suggest that if a tradition had been reworked, then it had been reworked in the context of Hong Kong for quite some time such that it could be considered "traditionally normative" for women to express their filial piety through monetary contributions. Further, importantly, rather than being associated with investment, it was quite the reverse as Salaff's working daughters quit school early to work for the family. Such differences raise the possibility of normative differences by social class. The higher rate of employment of women in Hong Kong and relatively unambiguous support for daughters' socioeconomic achievements, which might in turn be related to investment in daughters as a familial strategy as well as a way to realize the mother's unrealized aspirations, would prompt us to look into the Japanese situation a little more deeply than simply dismissing the lack of talks about monetary gifts as cultural differences in familial norms. The status of women in society, the mother's aspirations for herself and also for the daughter in the context of the gender gap in society, not to mention the preference for girls (Moriizumi 2008), should matter as well.

Emotional Closeness

With respect to emotional closeness or how much the mother and daughter confides in each other, we see some differences among the daughters. Some characterize the relationship with the mother as close, but the very conception of closeness might vary. However, even among heterosexual daughters who characterize their relationship as close, most would not share about relationship issues. They either say that they feel embarrassed about talking about romantic intimacy with their mothers, or that they would not want their mothers to worry about them.

The other day, I cried in spite of myself when I was talking with my mother about my husband and my husband's parents over the phone. My mother showed me sympathy and said that it was mortifying that there was something that made me cry. Later on I regretted telling her such a thing. I really feel that I still depend on her and recently think that I shouldn't make her worry. (JPHD1)

I can't talk too deeply. She is nosy about my life with my husband. I'd only touch on it, or tell her about the happy stuff, and won't tell her about the not so happy because if she knows, I'm afraid that she would worry. And, there are things I do not want her to know. I'm also afraid to learn about things in her life too deeply. Right, that's how it is. (HKHD3)

Non-heterosexual daughters in Hong Kong, on the other hand, seem to have a more intense relationship with their mothers. For those who have come out, the mother even offers advice on their relationships.

I would, when I am very down. I would talk. But usually it's about emotional stuff. Falling out of love. Quarrels. I used to break up with my girlfriends a lot. She'd say, "you wait for her, and don't mind the rumors. You can trust me." I do, she'd say this to me when I feel helpless. At times, I worry her. (HKNHD3)

I told my mom on the phone that I separated with her, and she chided me, "You are wrong." Then, I started crying. I felt that I have hurt mom. I couldn't stand being reproached, and I just cried. Mom apologized to me afterwards, and asked me not to mind her scolding me that day. (HKNHD1)

Non-heterosexual daughters who have not disclosed their sexual orientation to their mothers do express a certain yearning to be closer, to be authentically themselves to their mothers. The closeness achieved through sharing about their sexual orientation and relationships seems to facilitate the construction of an overall closer relationship with the mother.

When we were out walking in the street, I held her hand, oh, she pulled away! Then, after many years; it's already twenty-odd years since I started working, during this period of time, I had been trying to hold her hand, to hug her, to embrace her, those things. Then, now, I can do it! Ever since I was willing to tell her about my private life, our relationship gradually began to be close. (HKNHD4)

Overall, the non-heterosexual daughters in Hong Kong stand out as being exceptional as most daughters do not seem to share much “emotional stuff”, as they put it, and they also do not take this as a problem in the relationship. The distance they maintain is part and parcel of constructing a “good”, intimate relationship with the mother. The rhetoric of “I don’t want to worry my mother” is expressed as consideration for the mother, and hence a conscious practice of care and intimacy. The finding with respect to the non-heterosexual daughters in Hong Kong notwithstanding, extant literature on coming out in the Asian setting has shown the practice of indirect disclosure of one’s sexual orientation as a way to be honest as well as considerate towards the parents (see, for example, Kam 2006). This serves as a reminder that universalized concepts generated in Euro-American contexts, such as “coming out” and “closeness” or “intimacy”, are culturally and socio-historically specific.

The “friendship ideal” mentioned by some daughters seems consistent with Jackson and Ho’s observation (Jackson and Ho 2012), but the reference to the goodness of “dependence” by some might suggest a different understanding of friends and families in the Asian context.

...[The mother] should not put on that "mother airs". The daughter also should not regard her as mother, but for a friend. Friends won't be too intense, won't have too much heartfelt words, or won't give faithful advice. So, yeah, I think so; that's what we have just attempted. (HKNHD5)

Although she told me about [her problems in her relationship], and I was married, it didn't mean that I could understand her world, as we have a twenty-two-year difference. So, I just left her alone.... I would prefer not to see her like that; as the space between my ma and I had been very obvious; and we didn't belong to the highly dependent type of mother and daughter. (HKHD3)

The narratives here are consistent with the understanding of friendship as a relationship between independent adults, but there are those who consider “dependence” to

be important. Here, the “friendship ideal” seems inextricably bound to family expectations, and cannot be seen as an alternative of a familial relationship.

My mother and I aren't like friends. But I do hope that we can be friends.... An ideal relationship for me is to feel fun to be together or to be more like friends than a mother and daughter. But after all, a family is something you trust implicitly. I think a family is functioning well if you can depend on your family when you are in trouble. (JPHD2)

After giving birth, I've been hoping that my mom would depend on me more. Perhaps, having a child myself, I can appreciate that being a mother spells hardship. Sometimes I feel that, “Oh, I see, it's so toilsome for her”. So, sometimes, I want to help her more; however, probably because she loves me very much, she doesn't want me to overwork. When I go back for dinner, she doesn't let me wash the dishes, whereas, before I got married, I always did the dishes. Maybe this is trivial, but I really wish that she would depend on me more in our relationship ...Like, regarding housework, or financially. (HKHD8)

I find it a bit embarrassing to talk with ma about male-female relationships. Perhaps, because if I talk about it with her, I have the feeling that she would no longer treat me as a little girl. I wish that... I wish to remain being taken care of by her. (HKHD5)

Existing studies have shown that having the potential to become a mother or actually being one would connect the daughter to the mother. We do see some signs of this. Among lesbian daughters, none of whom is a mother in our sample, gendered labor is one way that they connect with their mothers.

Marriage, Mother/Mothering and Gendered Labor

As extant literature suggests, heteronormative connection – marriage or having children— does provide a basis for connection, but at the same time, some daughters see it as a source of distancing or the loss of certain connections with the mother.

Certain things have changed after I got married. In the beginning, I was unaccustomed to many things in the new setting, where I was living with my husband and mother-in-law. There were things that we need to break in, so to speak. However, I didn't tell ma about this, because I didn't want her to worry. Later on, after I had a miscarriage, and I began sharing more with ma, telling her about the things happened in this new home. ... I feel that more and more things have been improved. The fact that my status and my role have been changing, I've become closer to her world. (HKHD3)

The sense of identification is also obvious in the words of another heterosexually identified daughter in Hong Kong:

I think my case is very interesting, because we're talking about me and my ma, and then me and my daughter. Sometimes, when I see my ma I seem to see my future. (*Laughter in the group*) When I see my daughter, I seem to see my past. It's a very interesting feeling. I am like looking at myself in a mirror, which has two sides, and both reflect an image of me.... (HKHD4)

However, another heterosexual daughter notes that this very identification as a mother can limit what is shared between mother and daughter:

It might also depend on whether you have a child or not. My younger sister has basically been getting along well with my mother. On top of this, the fact that she isn't married and has no children enables her to tell my mother all kind of things. As for me, we talk about how to raise children. She tells me things like "make them study harder". (JPHD2)

Among non-heterosexual daughters who do not have children, some use gendered labor as a way of connecting with the mother. This could also reflect their trying to relate

on the mother's terms or construct a relationship based firmly on their experiences as a daughter who has been taken care of by the mother.

I would accompany my mom to go grocery shopping, when we lived together. I was kind of down when I was working on my master's, and going out with my mom to shop for grocery was the only activity for that day. So, I'd accompany my mom.

And after she has left home and started living with a partner...

At times, I would cook, and would talk about grocery. Then, I'd deliberately call my mom to ask her, how much [seasoning] to add, how long to marinate. It's like a topic, but it's also like me seeking help. Actually, I want to be pampered a little, to give myself a chance to chat with her. (HKNHD1)

Similarly, from a lesbian-identified daughter in Tokyo:

I started doing the things I like, and now I really cook, and do knitting, so I think my mother was probably surprised, when I said 'teach me how to knit' to my mother. Like 'you want to do that?' Like 'I do, I do, teach me'. Maybe that, her teaching me how to knit a muffler, or like asking her how do you make that dish? on the phone. (JPNHD1)

The appreciation of the mother lies mostly in her traditional role as a care-giver, but not invariably so. And there is no clear differentiation by culture, age or sexual orientation.

I appreciate my mom very much. I think that she is a good woman. (Chuckling) She is also very energetic, full of energy to do different things. She's very bright. I appreciate her a lot./.../ I think her fortitude in bearing with my troublesome pa is really not easy! (Chuckling) I think her maintaining this marriage and conserving the "woman's way" is not easy; therefore, I am proud of my mom. (HKHD6)

When you become a mother, having a child, the way you see your mother might be different from how it used to be. /.../ When you have a child, you realize that parents sacrifice themselves to take care of their children. Parents give more priority to what children want to do than what they want to do.... I feel sorry /.../ Mother, you have been through a lot. You have sacrificed yourself a lot. (JPHD2)

I appreciate her very much. She is a very traditional Chinese woman. Family is the most important thing to her. She puts us before anything else. We—my sister, myself and my pa—are her priority. She herself is always the last. That's how I feel. And, she is really caring. These days I get up at six-thirty, and she got up at six, and prepared breakfast for you, and cooked and packed lunch for you to take to work. I feel really touched by her. Moreover, my elder sister has given birth to a baby, and she is willing to take care of the baby. Sometimes, I feel bad when I see my sister who comes home and just goes straight to the bedroom and sleep; she actually is responsible to take care of the baby, but instead, she just leaves him with my ma, who looks after him twenty-four hours a day. After putting the baby to bed, which is around eleven o'clock, my ma then has to do the dishes, and does this and that. It's about midnight when she can finally retire for the night. Actually, I sometimes feel that it's really toilsome for my ma. (HKHD5)

One must have one's own life. Just now [another participant] told us that she appreciates her mother for being a very traditional woman, whereas, I personally do not. My mother didn't get much education; she is a Chinese-Indonesian, she went abroad during the anti-Chinese incident, and then she married my father in Hong Kong. Her education standard is primary school or junior high; therefore, she didn't have any sustained working experience in Hong Kong. When our financial condition was bad, she put her entire livelihood, entire economic expectations on me. (HKHD7)

The last quotation seems to resonate with the Chinese daughters Evans (2010) interviewed. The last two quotations suggest a correlation between a daughter's compliance or lack of compliance with conventional gender expectations and her appreciation of the conventional mother. However, this pattern is not consistently found among the participants.

Regardless of whether they appreciate the mother as a woman who has lived her life living up to traditional expectations, there is almost invariably appreciation of what the mother has done for them:

I didn't praise her then, but when I look back at it now, something like making me lunch boxes every day, doing things around the house properly, I can't do that now so I think that's amazing. (JPHD3)

She was a full-time housewife and was always in the house. But, really after I started working and became a contributing member of society, the greatness of what she had done for the family.... For me too, she made meals and everything from scratch, and the clothes too, were really all hand-made. In that sense, although I could only understand after I became an adult, but she had lived, in her own way, for the sake of the family. In that part I really respect her. (JPNHD2)

Are gender expectations or even unequal gender ideologies perpetuated through these mother-daughter interactions based on gendered labor or heteronormative motherhood? One or two married daughters who are themselves mothers seem to appreciate the mother as a mother and identify with her on the experience of motherhood, but most do not. Mothers are appreciated for their hard work, regardless of one's position with respect to gender norms, and importantly, such appreciation does not necessarily form a basis of identification. This shows the complexity of intimacy in familial relationship: the friendship model superimposed on a mother-daughter relationship could re-work but also retain elements of familial obligations, perhaps especially in the Asian context.

Some have complained about the burden of the mother's care for them, such as the pressure of having to go home for dinner or of the mother's taking care of them in minute

ways. This is true especially among daughters in Hong Kong who live with or are in close physical proximity from their mothers. However, when the care is extended to the partner, most do feel it assuring and name it as indicative of the mother's acceptance of their partner, especially among non-heterosexual daughters.

The Partner's Role

With respect to their partner's role, a few heterosexual daughters' immediate response is: "function-less". At times, they attribute to their partners some stylized roles, such as "the entertainment ambassador". Some also note the husband's acting as a buffer between them and their mothers. The following remarks are quite typical:

If you ask me his role in our mother-daughter relationship, it turns out that he really has no function. (*Laughter in the group*) I feel that he has no function; because if I quarrel with my ma, he would step aside; he wouldn't step in; as he sees it as trouble.../.../ His one and only one rather obvious affiliation is that, during big festivals, he would present a monetary gift. (HKHD3)

Sometimes I get very grumpy over something, and I feel like arguing against my mom. If three of us were together, my boyfriend would try to dissuade me, urging, "Please don't be like this! Arguing does not do any good"; or winking at me to give me a signal. He also understands my mom very well, so he actually tries his best to satisfy her to make her happy. He feels that if my mom is happy, life would be better for me, or at least would be easier. (HKHD1)

Similarly, for non-heterosexual daughters, some partners remain in the background, but it is due to their being closeted or the lack of acceptance by the daughter's family. When they do connect directly with the mother, they seem more proactive than just acting as a buffer, and at times, they'd actually foster a better relationship between mother and daughter.

[My partner] gets along with my mother. /.../ However, if my mother says anything about [heterosexual] marriage, I'd say 'I have no intention of

getting married [to a man]'. We had that talk, but I got a partner whom I wanted to be with forever, and, so I introduced her to my parents. And, conversely [my partner] is kind to them. They talk a lot. /.../ and [my partner] smiles when she talks, so it's easy for my mother to talk (JPNHD2)

For non-heterosexual daughters, the relationship of the partner to the mother or the family of origin is not pre-defined, and some describe how the relationship is negotiated. The mother might treat the partner as a guest, a good friend of the daughter, or a daughter. Being treated as a "good friend" spares the partner from kin obligations and tension in a traditional family relationship, but at the same time, it also does not allow a full integration of the partner into the family or a relationship with the mother. At the same time, while the sexual orientation of the daughter might have added extra work for the mother in managing her kin network, even if she herself has accepted the daughter's way of living, quite many daughters report their mothers' being appreciative of the fact that they have found a companion for life.

Like a guest. Eat together. But not regularly. I feel that mom and dad have a very good impression of her, because they feel that their daughter stays at her place for free. Mom has talked to me before: Do you give some money to her, staying at her place? So they feel that this girlfriend is very good, plus she takes care of me. When my girlfriend comes for a meal, Dad and Mom would treat her very well. (HKNHD1)

One mother took some time to come to terms with her daughter's disclosure.

Then after a while, she thought through, and on her own initiative suggested making [the partner] her foster daughter, and even introduced her to the relatives. (HKNHD8)

Obviously, the mother's failure in accepting her daughter's sexual orientation would be extended to her partner and their relationship:

After appeasing her for a long while [after coming out], I thought I had pacified her. Then, I can't remember too well whether in the midst of it we

did have dinner together with my ex or what. Anyway, one time, my ex and I went out somewhere, and then she suggested to cook and eat at home. I said, "Let's go home and have dinner!" Then, taking it for granted, we goofed off and went home. When we arrived, we got scolded, and scolded! "What are you taking me for? You came up here expecting me to cook for you?" /.../ Bringing a man home would not have caused any problem. (HKNHD6)

Being spared from the tension and obligations embedded in traditional kin relationships might also prevent the partner from being fully integrated into the family.

...many things do happen in real life: divorce, [husband's] keeping mistresses, step-mother, step-father. Very messy, very complicated! [My mother] knows quite a lot. She probably feels that, "Oh, you have avoided these miseries! ... And also that, the daughter-in-law needs to come forth and handle matters of the clan, and be present. Whereas, mine doesn't need to, but [she] hides away! That's right ! And also that, the daughter-in-law needs to come forth and handle matters of the clan, and be present. Whereas, mine doesn't need to but she hides away instead! (HKNHD6)

Well, mine doesn't hide away, but would just be there. However, as she doesn't have a status, people dare not expect anything from her. She's just a "good friend". What can they say about a "good friend"? Yes, the same style. She is nicer to my girlfriend than to my sister-in-law. That's a very big difference that I've noticed. She's hypercritical towards my sister-in-law, and has high expectations. Like, "When you go back, you didn't cook for my grandchildren!" Whatever, it's, "Hm, hm!" (HKNHD7)

Regardless of how such a relationship is interpreted, mothers do express gratitude and perhaps relief at the fact that the daughter has found somebody to share her life with, even when they cannot exactly characterize the relationship. There are plenty of examples.

[My mother] doesn't know what kind of relationship we have, but she says 'for the time being you have someone you can trust'. It's like, she has sort of

seen her or talked with her, so probably in terms of the quality of personal relationships I have, she probably feels relieved. That's what I think sometimes.../.../ Like when we're talking about her as a friend and I say her name, she's talking happily, she looks like she seems to be having fun. I just may be beautifying it though. (JPNHD3)

Mom was very touched, because there's a girlfriend who's so nice to her daughter. At the airport, mom kept asking my girlfriend about her mother. Once we got home, she asked me if my girlfriend's mother knew about our relationship. It seems she wanted to understand how the other mother thought. I said, she didn't know. And she got very disappointed. I felt that she was hoping to understand the support from the other mother. (HKNHD1)

My ma also, that is, she used to worry about me. She always said, "Eh, you find a man!" But, in recent years, she wouldn't. She said she worried that I would be all alone, she worried that I would be single. She always says, "So-and-so is quite good, have you looked her up?" (HKNHD4)

She felt that, "Ah, someone is taking care of you!" And then, she turned to lecture me, "*Aiya*, don't leave all the work to her!" Right, right, it's like that. So, I believe that she just wants me to find a compatible partner. And, she also thinks that there should be a balance in the relationship, and she will take care of me....When we were together, we pretended that we were sharing. So, she felt, "Ah, she's helping you!" It's because then I was studying for a period of time. This made it more apparent that, "Ah, my partner is supporting me". Then, when we split up, [mom] asked about this and that, and so I told her, "Right, actually I had been supporting her." Then she said, "[Splitting up] is good, good!" She's relieved. (HKNHD6)

Oh, ... my parents feel that it is fine as long as my other half is nice to me. Our family has an attitude to life, which I pretty much like. It says: "Actually, to live [survive] is not so difficult; it's all right whether to eat porridge or rice." So, they think that there's no need to have a lot of money or something.

But whether someone is nice to you is important! So, when [my partner] was taking good care of me at home, peeling grapes for me, the two of them were watching us with much delight. (HKNHD7)

Regardless of whether the mother has accepted the daughter's sexual orientation, she engages in extra work to manage appearance, particularly among relatives.

And when the relatives came, mom would put away my girlfriend's (framed) picture when I was not aware. (HKNHD1)

But my mom is very scared that our neighbors would know and think too much. We'd try to be careful too. Or when we eat together, we'd take mom to somewhere far from where they live. Also, would worry about running into relatives.... my mom would find some reasons/excuses to explain to my relatives why I am not married yet. Like, because I am busy at work, that I am a woman of the times, and so on and so forth. I feel that there's a lot of pressure on her. But she won't talk to me directly. (HKNHD2)

I don't really know, because though my ma has accepted it, she actually dares not let our relatives know about it; because she dreads coping with this kind of matter. But we've never discussed it. But, I think the main problem is, one time, I did suggest. As my partner also has "come out" to her family. They would invite me to have dinner with them. While my ma had known it for so long, so I thought, why couldn't we? Anyway, after all, my brother still said no. Then, I believe that it was actually my ma who didn't want it, because my sister-in-law's family was present. (HKNHD6)

It is important to note that while the mother might be doing the kin work, it does not mean that she agrees with her relatives:

One time, relatives asked why I wasn't married. Mom talked to me afterwards: they don't understand [more like, they're dumb and unreasonable]. (HKNHD3)

Incidentally, the extra kin work the mothers reportedly do might suggest that transgression in gender norms matter less to them personally but more in managing appearance, in “saving face” perhaps, in the kin network (see also Hom 2007 for similar observations of the Asian American community with respect to their children’s sexual orientation).

The gratitude some mothers in Hong Kong reportedly express for the “companion” the non-heterosexual daughter manages to find, among those who have disclosed their sexual orientation, might have revealed the practical foundation of the normative expectations of heterosexual marriage in Chinese society, in terms of having somebody to rely on, perhaps in one’s old age, and in finding somebody for mutual support. This is not to say that heteronormativity does not have an effect but that it might operate through socioeconomic power or status. Indeed, heterosexual daughters with male partners who are financially dependent on them have kept this a secret from their mothers. On the other hand, a non-heterosexual daughter’s doctorate managed to silence her relatives who had been making damning comments about her masculine appearance and so on. This might reflect more generally the mother’s “investment” in daughters both as a familial strategy – so that they will be taken care of in their old age – and as a mother’s commitment to giving the daughter the opportunities that she did not have (see Jackson, Ho and Jin 2013). Ironically, the focus group discussion in Hong Kong reveals that socioeconomic status might compensate for gender transgression among the middle class rather than the working class. In addition, education achievement itself – getting a Ph.D., for example – might be a more valued indicator of status for the middle class. It is also possible that there is a better understanding of sexual orientation specifically and sexual diversity in general among those with higher education. Indeed, a non-heterosexual daughter from a working-class background explains that she and her mother live in two different worlds:

I feel that there’s too big a gap between her world and my world. I remember that one time, they talked about homosexuality on TV, and she asked me what’s homosexuality, and I didn’t answer. That’s because it’s unimaginable in her world, and she wouldn’t have thought that it’d happen to her daughter.

We're also very different when it comes to talking more deeply about emotions, political views. I would feel that there's a bigger and bigger gap in the way we think. It's OK to talk about everyday matters... It's her political views. Then, afterwards, she got influenced. Because our political positions are so different, the gap in our sense of value is very big. (HKNHD9)

Similar interpretations about socioeconomic achievements cannot be readily made about our participants in Japan, despite that the vast majority of them are from middle class background. Some daughters are appreciative of the education opportunities they are given, but we do not detect any sign that such opportunities or achievements exempt them from the pressure to conform to gender or sexual norms. Possible explanations of the difference between Hong Kong and Japan here might lie in the parents' experiences of sociopolitical instability and the utilitarian familial norms in Hong Kong, and differences in the status of women in society as well as the strength of the ideologies of marriage and motherhood in the two societies. Heteronormativity and gender transgressions are complex multidimensional ideas and practices worth exploring in greater depth in their socioeconomic and political contexts.

Concluding Thoughts

The current analysis is part of a larger project comparing mother-adult daughter relationships in Hong Kong and Japan. By including heterosexually- as well as lesbian-identified adult daughters in our sample, we expand our analysis beyond the narrow focus on the process and impact of "coming out" on familial relationship in studies of non-heterosexual children to queer sociological analysis of the family to identify intricate dynamics in mother-daughter relationships. By contextualizing our Asia-centered comparative research in extant Euro-American empirical and theoretical analyses, we hope to interrogate commonly used and universalized concepts, ground them in cultural contexts, and refine analytical tools for future analysis. In this paper, we reported on the findings from focus group interviews with daughters in Hong Kong and Tokyo. In this last section,

instead of summarizing the findings, we'd highlight a few findings that have implications for later analysis.

The use of monetary gifts in the practice of intimacy raises further question of the impact of social class as well as gender inequality in mother-daughter relationships. Regardless of sexual orientation, daughters in Hong Kong use monetary gifts as a practice of filial piety and to express their love for their mothers. This finding is consistent with extant research, which tends to interpret it as a traditional cultural practice that has been extended to women, given their socioeconomic advancement in society, which in turn might have resulted from the mother's or parents' "investment" in them. As discussed in the analysis above, the impact of social class as well as gender equality in society needs to be explored to further understand this particular practice of intimacy in Hong Kong and its apparent absence in Japan. In particular, gift-giving as a practice of intimacy can be further explored in the Japanese context, and which is likely to be associated with social class and women's advancement in society as well.

With respect to identification and intimacy, we found intriguing if inconsistent patterns. There is no clear pattern showing motherhood or housewifery as a basis of identification and hence intimacy between mother and daughter. Lesbian-identification, which could be seen as an absolute lack of heteronormative identification between mother and daughter, does not necessarily intervene with the practice of intimacy, or rather, disclosure and acceptance could enhance intimacy. Gendered labor has been revealed as a basis of connection, regardless of the daughter's sexual orientation. This is certainly an area worth probing in depth, and the present analysis shows that perhaps "motherhood" as a basis for identification, as Evans (2010) sees in her sample of Chinese daughters, needs to be "unpacked" to reveal how daughters with diverse life courses and sexual orientation can relate to some aspect of a "mother", and how that very process cannot be detached from the larger context of gender ideology and inequality. Further, the possibility of same-sex marriage and family can be probed more directly to explore the impact of and also consequence on gender expectations in mother-daughter intimacy.

Closely connected to the issue of identification is emotional closeness. Jackson and Ho (2012) juxtaposed emotional, disclosing/confiding intimacy with physical, practical and companionate intimacy in interpreting the difference in mother-daughter relationships in Hong Kong and the United Kingdom. The daughters' holding off of disclosure out of consideration for the mother in our study renders it difficult to consider the lack of disclosure as lack of intimacy, but rather an expression of emotional intimacy. Further, while "friendship" is held up as an ideal, as has been observed in the Jackson and Ho's UK sample (Jackson and Ho, 2012; Jackson, Ho and Jin 2013), and also to some extent among Evans's "modern" daughters (Evans 2010), some of our participants refer to friendship and (familial) dependence in the same breath. These findings point to the importance of not assuming these models of intimacy to be mutually exclusive and of exploring how these models of intimacy might be intricately related.

Not all non-heterosexual daughters have disclosed their sexual orientation to their mothers, and for those who did, the relationship with the mother varies. At the same time, the type of tension some of them experience is not unlike that of at least one heterosexual daughter who has in some way transgressed gender expectations in her relationships, career path, as well as appearance. The many dimensions of transgression should be explored in greater depth, especially in the context of the specific heteronormative gender ideologies in Japan and Hong Kong.

The findings from the focus group interviews with the daughters articulate with current research and at the same time raise questions for further analysis. We plan to explore these questions at the next stage of this project, which would consist of in-depth interviews with mothers and daughters at the two research sites. In exploring these questions, we aim not only at understanding the substance of mother-daughter relationships, but also to contextualize and refine concepts and models in interpreting practices of intimacy in the family.

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