

2011

"Because she's my mom" : an exploratory study of adult lesbian women's understanding and management of relationships with mothers who reject their sexuality

Ana Elisa Echevarria

Follow this and additional works at: <http://scholarworks.smith.edu/theses>

---

#### Recommended Citation

Echevarria, Ana Elisa, "'Because she's my mom" : an exploratory study of adult lesbian women's understanding and management of relationships with mothers who reject their sexuality" (2011). *Theses, Dissertations, and Projects*. Paper 1062.

This Masters Thesis has been accepted for inclusion in Theses, Dissertations, and Projects by an authorized administrator of Smith ScholarWorks. For more information, please contact [elanzi@smith.edu](mailto:elanzi@smith.edu).

Ana Elisa Echevarria  
“Because She’s My Mom:” An  
Exploratory Study of Adult Lesbian  
Women’s Understanding and  
Management of Relationships with  
Mothers Who Reject their Sexuality

## ABSTRACT

This study explored the ways in which lesbian adult women, who have been rejected by their mothers because of their sexuality and maintain relationships with them, understand and manage those relationships as well as their motivation for maintaining the relationships. Since limited research has focused on adult lesbian women who have maintained a relationship with a mother who rejects their sexuality, a qualitative, exploratory study was chosen as an appropriate research design.

This qualitative study used a flexible interview format comprised of semi-structured, open-ended questions presented to 13 self-identified adult lesbian women who had been out to their mothers for at least two years and had maintained a relationship with them after they had rejected their sexuality. Participants were asked about the nature of their relationships with their mothers prior to disclosure of their sexuality, immediately following disclosure and at the time of the interview, about what impact their mothers’ rejection had on them, why they chose to maintain the relationship, and how they manage the tension in the relationship about their mothers’ rejection of their sexuality.

The findings yielded diverse impacts on participants of rejection by their mothers, including difficulty in romantic relationships, questioning of their sexuality, and mental health issues. Participants also listed a variety of motivations for maintaining relationships with their mothers post-rejection, with many expressing that they value their

connections to their families as a whole and that there are other aspects of their relationships with their mothers outside of their sexuality and mothers' rejection. There was widespread consistency in the use of limited and avoidant communication with mothers as a way of managing the tension in the relationship about the participant's sexuality. Suggestions for further research were described that may assist in the understanding of lesbian women's relationships with mothers who reject their sexuality.

**“BECAUSE SHE’S MY MOM:” AN EXPLORATORY STUDY OF ADULT LESBIAN WOMEN’S  
UNDERSTANDING AND MANAGEMENT OF RELATIONSHIPS WITH MOTHERS WHO  
REJECT THEIR SEXUALITY**

A project based upon an independent investigation,  
submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of Master of Social Work.

Ana Elisa Echevarria

Smith College School for Social Work  
Northampton, Massachusetts, 01063

2011

## Acknowledgements

First and foremost, I would like to thank Stefani Joanne Angelina Germanotta for providing the perfect soundtrack to produce my own opus. Today you debuted “The Edge of Glory” and this song expresses how I feel at this moment as I finish the last piece of this masterpiece.

I want people to know that I love my mother. Maybe it’s because she carried me for 9 months, helped to shape the being I am today, or forced me to find the strength to live and love the way that is right for me. I am eternally grateful for her love and existence and even her shortcomings! She is MY MOM!!!

Thank you to all the brave and strong women I had the opportunity to interview for this project. You are AMAZING! I am proud to share a common her-story with you.

To Antwan, Carlota, Diana, Doris, Elizabeth, Marissa, Michelle, Nilsa, Paulina, Rubi, Shawn, Sarah, and Steven, thank you for supporting me and loving me through this experience. You know me and believe in me. You are my family of choice. Thank you Jacob & Nicole for lending me \$500 to pay for part of my post-residency, and Jennifer & Jose for all your financial and emotional support! It was a worthwhile investment.

Muchas gracias Jean LaTerz for never giving up on me and making sure I wrote the whole enchilada. No matter how many deadlines I missed or times I felt like giving up, you always encouraged me with NO SHAME OR BLAME. You rock!

Last but certainly not least to Gina “Babu” Russell, THANK YOU for helping to conceive and give birth to our first baby. I know we will birth and raise many more as soon as you make an honest woman out of me. You have supported, praised, encouraged, loved, pushed, and challenged me. Your help as my research assistant helped me complete this big thingy. You are the most important person in my life and I love you.

## Table of Contents

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .....	ii
TABLE OF CONTENTS .....	iii
LIST OF TABLES .....	iv
CHAPTER	
I INTRODUCTION .....	1
II LITERATURE REVIEW .....	4
III METHODOLOGY .....	40
IV FINDINGS .....	47
V DISCUSSION .....	80
REFERENCES .....	92
APPENDICES	
Appendix A: Recruitment Email .....	105
Appendix B: Screening Form .....	106
Appendix C: Human Subjects Review Approval Letter .....	107
Appendix D: Consent Form .....	108
Appendix E: Mental Health Referral Sources .....	110
Appendix F: Interview Schedule .....	112

## List of Tables

### Tables

1. Participant characteristics.....	50
2. Relationship with mother prior to disclosure, at time of disclosure, and at time of interview .....	52
3. Impact of mother's rejection of sexuality.....	55
4. Reasons for maintaining relationship with rejecting mother.....	62
5. Strategies for managing interpersonal tension with mother about sexuality.....	71

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

In 1997, Ellen DeGeneres made mainstream television history when her character came out as a lesbian in the self-titled comedy series. The real-life actor had come out earlier that year, and her biological mother is briefly seen as one of the people in the television scene where the character Ellen makes her announcement, “I’m gay”. Unfortunately, the network dropped the television series at the end of season due to its perceived lack of appeal and criticism of overly gay content and serious new tone. The American public did not get to witness how Ellen’s television mother, who had been preoccupied with finding her a husband, comes to terms with Ellen’s sexuality. In real life, DeGeneres’ mother, Betty DeGeneres, described being shocked when her daughter came out to her as a lesbian but later become one of her strongest supporters (DeGeneres, 2000). What would have become of Ellen DeGeneres if her mother rejected her sexuality? Would she be as successful as she is today, be in a committed relationship, or have issues with her sexuality and/or concerns with mental health?

Many self-identified lesbians who came out in the late 1990s and early 2000s have had to disclose their sexuality to mothers who are not as embracing, supportive or accepting as Betty DeGeneres. For these adult lesbians, disclosing their sexuality to their mothers may cause a serious rupture at worst and interpersonal tension at best within the



mother-daughter relationship. Several studies have examined how and when self-identified lesbians come out to their parents and significant others (D'Augelli, Hershberger & Pilkington, 1998; Grambling, Carr & McCain, 2000; Savin-Williams, 1998; Waldner and Magrader, 1999) and the impact of rejection by others on self-identified lesbians (Jordan & Deluty, 1998; Ryan, Huebner, Diaz & Sanchez, 2009); however, no research has focused on adult lesbian women who have maintained a relationship with a mother who has rejected their sexuality. In the absence of research studies and literature on this specific topic, several theoretical frameworks were used to try to understand the subject matter of interest. Models on adult development, women's development and lesbian identity development as well as theories on mother-daughter relationships, intergenerational family system theory, and the life course perspective presented a conceptual framework for understanding how adult lesbian women experience and develop their identities as women and as lesbians within a family or system at a particular time in history. These models and theories provided insights concerning the motivation behind adult lesbian women's decision to maintain their relationships with their biological mothers who reject their sexuality, though no literature found directly addressed this. Research on the impact of parental rejection on lives of gay/lesbian children and the ways in which individuals manage interpersonal tension, particularly within families, were helpful in guiding the analysis of how lesbian women understand and maintain relationships with mothers who reject their sexuality.

The primary goal of this research was to explore adult lesbian women's motivation in maintaining and understanding of their relationships with their biological mothers who reject their sexuality and how this rejection has affected their lives. This

exploratory study consisted of semi-structured interviews with 13 women from across the United States who self-identify as lesbian, have been out to their mothers for at least two years, have maintained contact with biological mothers post-disclosure, and are around the age of 30. Using a qualitative, flexible method design, the research questions were designed to elicit information about participants' experience and understanding about maintaining a relationship with their biological mothers who reject their sexuality. Participants were asked to describe their relationships with their mothers prior, during and after disclosure, the impact of their mothers' rejection, why they maintained the relationship and how they have managed the relationship post-rejection.

The overarching goal for this study was to gain a better understanding of adult lesbian women's development in the context of a familial relationship and to contribute to the social work field by expanding awareness about interpersonal tension, women's development and lesbian familial relationships and how to support lesbian women who find themselves relating to family members that reject their sexuality. This study provided a forum for 13 women to recount their experiences, and the author hopes that these women's stories will contribute to a previously neglected field of knowledge. The findings of this study will, hopefully, advance the knowledge base so that psychotherapy treatment for this population will be more effective and responsive to the complex needs, desires, feelings and relationships of adult women.

## CHAPTER II

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### *Introduction*

This qualitative study explored adult lesbian women's motivation in maintaining and understanding of their relationships with their biological mothers who reject their sexuality. Knowing, accepting, and identifying oneself as a lesbian can be an extremely stressful and difficult experience. Disclosure involves risks of rejection and stigmatization. Several studies have looked at how and when self-identified lesbians come out to their parents and significant others (D'Augelli et al., 1998; Grambling et al., 2000; Savin-Williams, 1998; Waldner and Magrader, 1999) and the impact of rejection by others on self-identified lesbians (Ryan et al., 2009; Jordan & Deluty, 1998); however, no research has focused on adult lesbian women who have maintained a relationship with a mother who has rejected their sexuality. In the absence of literature on this specific topic, this chapter presents and critiques theoretical and empirical research on related topics to provide a framework for this research study. The literature reviewed is organized into five major topics: women's adult development, lesbian identity development, theories on mother-daughter relationships and the impact on development, disclosure and post-disclosure. These peripheral areas of exploration reviewed in the following literature provide a context in which to approach the questions address in the proposed research and to identify the areas of interaction between existing literature and the proposed study.

## *Women's Adult Development*

Scholars have offered numerous models and descriptions of the course of adult development, varying greatly in their characterization of the primary goal of this process as well as in the structure of the process itself (Robbins, Chatterjee, and Canda, 2012). These dominant theories have changed over time in fields of study outside of psychology, such as sociology, adding novel perspectives in recent decades. One aspect of human adult development includes identity development. Specifically, gay and lesbian identity development is a growing field of research that is particularly relevant to this study. This section on women's adult development looks at various theories on adult lesbian development. First, the section outlines adult development research and theories by Erikson, Levinson, Elder and Chodrow followed by Greene's Critique of Developmental Theories providing a more dynamic view of women's development.

### *Erikson*

The earliest and most influential model of human development was that proposed by Erikson (1950), characterizing the path from infancy to death as the completion or resolution of a series of eight tasks or dilemmas. Erikson proposed that this life course is fixed, with full development requiring the experience of all eight stages. One is unable to move to the next stage before the current is completed. Four of these stages constitute adulthood, beginning with the development of identity over role confusion during adolescence, followed by the use of that identity to become intimate with another person rather than remain isolated during the early 20s, leading to a stage in which the primary concern is for the following generation in the form of child-rearing, lasting through the mid-60s, ending with a wisdom-based acceptance of oneself. Erikson's model is one of

developmental progress, with a specific end-goal toward which the individual is always moving, if he or she is successful in each stage. The overarching goal is one of separation and individuation and ending when the individual fully accepts him or herself.

### *Levinson*

In contrast to Erikson's focus on separation and self-definition of the individual, a subsequent model proposed by Levinson (1978) posited that the major features of an individual's life structure at a given time are relationships. This life structure is described as the pattern or design of an individual's life at a particular time, created by the individual, and influenced by the individual's personality style, made up of the individual's relationship to a spouse, children, co-workers, family, or groups within society. The end goal remains one of individuation; the sign of development to the final stage is the separation from important teachers and mentors. Levinson, unlike Erikson, did not argue that the path of development was one of linearly increasing quality, with an individual moving toward a specific goal. Rather, Levinson's model included contrasting periods of stability in life structure with periods of transition, when the previous life structure is evaluated and adapted. Levinson's (1978) description of human development was similar to Erikson's in its separation of development into stage-like eras, and in its assumption that the sequence of these eras is universal. Additionally, the focus of Levinson's developmental model was on the individual's definition of, work toward, and accomplishment of a dream. This dream is not necessarily realized at the end of the individual's development. Levinson did broaden his theory to include women and he concluded that women experience the same stages as do men in their development, but that the particular decisions and content of those stages differ by gender (Levinson,

1996).

The primary difference between these two developmental models is that Levinson does not assume the development of an individual to be progress toward an endpoint or goal. Levinson only goes so far as to argue that an individual will experience change in the manner he describes, not necessarily improvement.

### *Elder*

Both Erikson and Levinson's models could be thought of as placing the individual in a historical vacuum of sorts focusing solely on internal processes. Sociologist Glen Elder (1974) proposed a significantly different way of understanding the development of human beings, with an emphasis on the experience of important social/historical events, the timing in an individual's life when such events occur, and the roles an individual plays throughout his or her life. This Life Course Theory assumes neither discrete stages nor a fixed sequence. Rather, Elder's theory is concerned with the influence of social and historical events experienced by an individual on the pattern of that individual's life course. Elder argued that the cultural and historical context in which an individual develops largely shapes the course of that development. Additionally, the age at which a social event occurs in the life of an individual has a differential impact on the effects of that event. For example, a shared historical event will have a different effect on someone who is middle-aged when it occurs than it will on someone who is in early adolescence at the time. Elder (1974) added that the development of an individual is largely influenced by the networks of shared relationships in which that individual resides. Also key is Elder's assignment of agency to the individual. That is, Elder argued that individuals largely construct their own life courses within the social/historical opportunities and

constraints that exist around them. This notion fundamentally contradicts the pre-determined courses of human development posited by Erikson and Levinson.

*Chodorow*

The previously mentioned models, particularly those of Erikson and Levinson, treated the development of women as an afterthought, a minor addendum to a central model based on studies of men. The chapter in which Erikson first introduced his model was titled “The Eight Stages of Man” (1950). Similarly, Levinson’s major work describing the study that led to his model was his book, *Seasons of a Man’s Life* (1978). In the 1970s, feminist scholars such as Chodorow (1978) began to craft theories specifically of women’s development, most notably in her work, *The Reproduction of Mothering*. In it, Chodorow presented her explanation of how women become mothers. She framed her explanation in developmental terms by sourcing much of the desire and capacity for a woman to become a mother in the early childhood relationship of the woman and her own mother. Chodorow also characterized a woman’s understanding of herself as centered on her relation to others, a concept that was then built upon by feminist researchers at the Stone Center at Wellesley College in the early 1980s. Surrey (1991) constructed a model of women’s development from the work of the Stone Center identified as Self-in-Relation Theory, arguing that a woman develops her sense of self “in the context of important relationships” (p. 2). Surrey (1991) highlights the contrast between this relationally based model of women’s development and the traditional (male) models that place independence and autonomy as the ultimate goal of a fully developed individual.

### *Greene's Critique of Developmental Theories*

The developmental theories described above provide an informative but ultimately incomplete framework for studying the impacts of a mother's rejection of her daughter's lesbianism for the purposes of this study. Greene (2003) puts forth valuable critiques of each of the above models and each model's limitations that prevent a thorough and flexible understanding of women's psychological development. She rejected the assigned normativity and fixedness of the stage models proposed by Erikson and Levinson, arguing that instead development should be seen "as responsive to changed circumstances and as potentially open-ended" (p. 117). In her examination of adult developmental theory, Greene accepted much of Elder's Life Course Theory but critiques the assignment of an ability to change according to particular periods in a woman's life. Commenting on Stewart and Healy's (1989) study of women based largely on Elder's earlier work, Greene argued that the data they analyzed showed that women are capable of having "transformative experiences at any age" (p. 117). An additional weakness in the Life Course Theory is in its characterization of the relationship between an individual and his or her historical context as simply the former being shaped by the latter. More accurately, Riegel (1977) noted, "through their activities individuals change the socio-historical conditions which at the same time change the individuals" (p.16). This view allows for greater agency on the part of individuals, a crucial departure from earlier perspectives on human development, particularly that of women.

Greene (2003) also found flaws in the Self-in-Relation Theory proposed by feminist scholars in the 1970s, questioning the implications of their definition of women as centrally concerned with relationships to others. Calling into question the labeling of



this thinking as “feminist,” Greene noted that “such attention and sensitivity to the needs of others is a feature of those without power” (p. 64). Particularly relevant to this study, and in stark contrast to the work of Chodorow, Greene cautioned that ascribing the entirety of a woman’s development and personality to the early relationship with her mother diminishes the impact of relationships with other family members and the many important others in a woman’s life, in addition to that of the social/historical context. Greene’s observation also leaves room for significant impact of a woman’s relationship with her mother later in life, as this study will explore. Greene supports a dynamic view of women’s development, influenced by an “ongoing exchange” between women and their social, historical, and physical environments, one that allows for “emergence” throughout the life course (p. 141). It is through Greene’s lens that this study will investigate and attempt to make meaning of the impact of mothers’ rejection on their lesbian daughters.

### *Lesbian Identity Development*

This study is concerned not only with adult women but lesbian adult women. Thus, in this section theory and research on lesbian identity development will be examined that includes the following subtopics: gay Identity development models; lesbian identity development models; diversity in lesbian identity development; and theoretical considerations for lesbian identity development.

Within the body of work on human development, a growing field of research exists on the development of gay and lesbian identity. As with the field of adult development, these studies began with a focus on gay men, but have more recently begun to study lesbian identity development separately. Additionally, some scholars (Parks,

Hughes, and Matthews, 2004) have begun to study the intersection and co-development of racial identity along with lesbian identity. With an eye toward the diversity of the sample interviewed for this study, these perspectives are important for framing the analysis.

### *Gay Identity Development Models*

Parallel to the field of human development, early models of gay identity development were stage-based, linear processes. The earliest and most influential of these models was that proposed by Cass (1984), positing that the development of a gay or lesbian identity takes place through six distinct stages. This developmental process begins with *identity confusion*, during which an individual realizes and acknowledges his or her attraction to members of the same sex. This stage is followed by *identity comparison*, when the individual evaluates his or her difference. *Identity tolerance* comes next, when the individual experiments with the concept of his or her identity as gay or lesbian. Next, the individual goes through *identity acceptance*, coming to terms with his or her identity as gay or lesbian followed by *identity pride*, when feelings of loyalty and pride toward his or her gay or lesbian identity develop. Finally the individual comes to *identity synthesis*, and is able to integrate his or her gay or lesbian identity into a larger self-identity. While this model has been supported by empirical research (Cass, 1984; Yarhouse, 2001), this theory has also been criticized for its imposed linearity and for its basis on a specific subgroup, that of white gay males (Logan, 2006; McCarn & Fassinger, 1996; Parks et al., 2004; Reynolds & Hanjorgiris, 2000; Yarhouse, 2001).

### *Identity Development Models*

Researchers have noted a number of problems in simply applying the models of gay male identity development to women's lesbian identity development. Specifically, these male-based models do not incorporate the more fluid nature of lesbian identity development, nor do they recognize the relatively greater importance of relationships in lesbian identity (Logan, 2006; Reynolds and Hanjorgiris, 2000). Other significant differences between the development of lesbian identity and that of gay male identity include the fact that lesbians appear to be capable of residing simultaneously in more than one phase of the lesbian identity process, a finding not supported by research on gay men (Logan, 2006; McCarn and Fassinger, 1996).

Nonetheless, relatively few studies have been conducted exclusively on the development of lesbian identity in women. Primary among them has been the work of Savin-Williams and Diamond (2000), in which they find significant differences in the timing and structure of important events in the development of lesbian identity compared to that of gay men. Savin-Williams and Diamond (2000) note that women experienced all milestones of lesbian identity development, other than disclosure, later in life than did men, and that the context for the realization of same-sex oriented identity was more frequently emotionally oriented for women and sexually oriented for men.

Diamond (2005) also noted fluidity in primary attractions among women who have at some time experienced same-sex attractions and same-sex relationships. They also noted reluctance among some women to apply a particular label to themselves, and others who desired flexibility around the application of a label (i.e. lesbian or bisexual) pertaining to sexual orientation. These findings do not fit the Cass model in which the

formation of a gay identity centers on the application of a label to oneself. The individual first struggles with or tries on the label, then compares oneself to others who use that label, then takes pride in that label, and finally integrates that label into a larger self-identity. The emotional or relational nature of women's lesbian identity has led Peplau (2001) to advocate for a female sex-specific notion of *relationship orientation* over the more common, and male-centric, idea of sexual orientation.

#### *Diversity in Lesbian Identity Development*

Within women as a group, there is also significant diversity in the development of lesbian identity based on racial and ethnic differences. The vast majority of research on lesbian identity development has been conducted with white women, leading McCarn and Fassinger (1996) to note that existing models for lesbian identity development do not adequately take into consideration the impact of multiple, intersecting minority identities and multiple corresponding forms of oppression. Additionally, there are distinct cultural differences in expectations and values regarding lesbian identity across racial and ethnic groups that greatly impact the experiences and development of lesbian women (Fukuyama and Ferguson, 2000; Greene, 1994; Parks et al., 2004).

Recent studies have attempted to simultaneously address the development of multiple identities among lesbian women of color, viewing this development as a series of dynamic processes, where context and environment may require a woman to emphasize or more closely identify with her racial or lesbian identity at various times (Chan, 1989; Parks et al., 2004; Rosario, Schrimshaw & Hunter, 2004). Some of these findings have shown the importance of other factors in the identity development of lesbians of color, including family support and bonds, religious tradition, gender roles,

and involvement in cultural community (Chan, 1989; Espin, 1987; Fukuyama & Ferguson, 2000; Greene, 1994, 2000; Loiacano, 1989; Lui & Chan, 1996; Rosario et al., 2004).

Empirical studies comparing sexual identity development among white lesbians and lesbians of color have shown somewhat contradictory results. Some studies show differences in the timing of various milestones and others found no significant differences (Loiacano, 1989; Logan, 2006; Morris & Rothblum, 1999; Parks et al., 2004; Rosario et al., 2004). These studies were consistent in their findings that lesbians of color were likely to begin to examine their sexual orientation and come out to their families earlier in life, but were not as likely to share their sexual orientation with others outside of their families as were white lesbians. One of these studies (Parks et al., 2004) concluded that the pace of sexual orientation discovery is slower for women of color, while two other studies found that women of color are more likely to begin to identify themselves as lesbians earlier in life (Morris and Rothblum, 1999; Rosario et al., 2004). Grov, Bimbi, Nanín, and Parsons (2006) found no difference in age in out to self or others, and that people of color were less likely to be out to the parents. Moreover, Rosario et al. (2004) also determined that due to the relative lack of cultural pressures against being gay or lesbian for white youth as compared to youth of color, white youth who are gay and lesbian have a more consistently positive attitude toward their sexual orientation.

#### *Theoretical Considerations for Lesbian Identity Development*

Gender and cultural differences aside, there are additional theoretical considerations important to understanding the complex process of lesbian identity development. As previously noted, studies have found considerable fluidity in women's

definitions of themselves in regards to sexual orientation (Diamond, 2005). Much of the thinking around stage-based models of gay and lesbian identity development assumes the end of this process to be defined by stability of identification, particularly after disclosure (Cass, 1979). Any variability in this identification is perceived as the result of continued internal discomfort with the individual's gay or lesbian identity. Yet for women, the development of a lesbian identity does not appear to be a linear progression nor necessarily one with a distinct end. For this reason, a life course perspective is also important for understanding the progression of women's lesbian identity.

Simultaneously, the development of lesbian identity is greatly impacted by the social and historical context in which the individual exists. Parks (1999) found significant differences between birth cohorts in her study of sexual orientation, with women who came of age in the 1980s, whom she labeled "Liberation Era," reporting an earlier age of awareness than did those who came of age in the pre-Stonewall era, specifically women who reached adulthood (age 18) before the Stonewall Riots of 1969. Similar findings were discovered for age at first sexual involvement, disclosure, and self-labeling. Parks's study supports Hammack's (2005) argument that the trajectory and important milestones of gay and lesbian identity development are "fundamentally altered" by historical events (p. 275). These dynamics necessitate a flexible consideration of the meaning and development of lesbian identity across the life course, largely affected by the specific historical period in which that life course takes place.

As with earlier discussion of research on human development and the importance of time and timing, research (Elder, 1974; Stewart and Healy, 1989) has shown that the age of an individual at the time a particular historical event occurs results in differential

level of exposure or awareness to these events or social changes, which in turn implies varied impacts on the development of the individual's gay or lesbian identity. Recent work on sexual orientation by Cohler & Galatzer-Levy (2000) has begun to more explicitly incorporate a life course theoretical perspective, outlining at least five distinct birth cohorts in the development of gay and lesbian lives: (1) pre-War (World World II), (2) post-War, (3) post-Stonewall, (4) AIDS, and (5) post-AIDS. For the purposes of this study, the group of interest is the post-AIDS cohort, characterized as individuals who came of age in the mid to late 1990s and had witness the effectiveness of AIDS treatment, and began to witness HIV as a chronic, manageable illness. This most recent cohort/generation also came of age during a period that saw the appearance of gay-straight alliances in their secondary schools and the depictions of homosexual characters in mainstream media. Thus, this cohort/generation has come to terms with their gay/lesbian identity what seems to be a much more accepting social climate.

#### *Theories on Mother-Daughter Relationships and the Impact on Development*

Theoretical and empirical research has shown that the relationship between mother and daughter is the most salient intergenerational relationship in the lives of both women (Fischer, 1991). Attempts to understand the dynamics and importance of the mother-daughter relationship have been tainted by early psychoanalytical characterizations of the mother as a negative and damaging presence in the lives of children and families. Early psychoanalytic theory has been criticized in recent decades, in part for having an overwhelmingly male point of view. More recent scholarship has suggested that the mother-daughter relationship is the model for women's sense of

empathy and tendency toward connectedness. Many have argued that self-definition, rather than occurring as the result of separation and individuation as is posited in traditional models of development, occurs for women within the context of relationship, in particular that between the mother and daughter (Chodorow, 1978, Jordan, 1984; Miller, 1991; Surrey, 1991). Shrier, Tompsett, and Shrier (2004) write that a woman's self develops "through the internalization of experiences of progressively more complex relationships marked by mutual identifications, empathy, and concern for maintaining the relationship" (p. 105). The following section presents different aspects related to theories and research on mother-daughter relationships that include Development within Mother-Daughter Relationships; Emerging Adulthood; Mother-Daughter Life Cycles; and Intergenerational Family Systems Theory.

#### *Development within Mother-Daughter Relationships*

Some empirical work has also investigated the development of self within the mother-daughter relationship. Bergman and Fahey (1996) conducted a follow-up study on two pairs of mothers and daughters 30 years after they were initially studied, and found that a mother's ideas and opinions about her daughter impacted both how the mother interacted with her daughter and how the daughter understood herself and others. The authors asserted that early interactions were foundational for the daughter's sense of self, and found variable and creative potential and changes for the ways in which the daughters made use of these formative experiences throughout their lives. Other empirical work by Palladino-Schultheiss and Blustein (1994) found that women who have strong relations with their parents were more likely to develop a more complete ego identity. The aspects of parental relations they identified as important included strong



attachment, the holding of beliefs and values similar to those of their parents, and lack of guilt, anxiety, mistrust and anger toward the mother. Rastogi and Wampler (1999) found cultural differences in ideas that daughters had regarding their ideal relationships with their mothers. Comparing groups of Asian Indian American, European American, and Mexican American women, Rastogi and Wampler found that, “within certain cultures it is entirely possible to have a high degree of connectedness and interdependence and high differentiation within the mother-daughter relationship” (p. 334).

Other impacts on the mother-child relationship, both positive and negative, have been identified in the literature outside of the development of self. Robinson (2000) found that adolescents who experienced a positive relationship with their mothers and flexibility in their family system subsequently had more positive intimate relationships in terms of trust, communication, empathy, comfort, and self-disclosure. Conversely, individuals whose mothers displayed rejection and control of their children by using criticism, withholding affection, and manipulation with guilt and anxiety were significantly more likely to be hospitalized for depression than those whose mothers did not display such behavior (Crook, Raskin, & Eliot, 1981). This study showed similar but less “dramatic” impacts of such behavior by the father (p. 956).

While much research has been focused on attachment to parents during early childhood, an increasing body of literature has shown that parental attachment remains important for identity development and emotional well being of children through adolescence and early adulthood (Holmbeck & Wandrei, 1993; Kenny, 1990; Kenny & Donaldson, 1991; Kobak & Sceery, 1988; Lopez, Watkins, Manus, & Hunton-Shoup, 1992). Large studies on high school students determined that most adolescents

maintained strong attachments to their parents and continued to identify with their parents' values without an unhealthy impact on internal or external adjustment (Offer, Ostrov, and Howards, 1981; Rutter, Grahm, Chadwick & Yule, 1976). Others have investigated the process by which adolescents are able to disengage from their parents healthily while maintaining connections to them (Frank, Pirsch, & Wright, 1990; Grotevant & Cooper, 1985; Perosa & Perosa, 1993; Perosa, Perosa, & Tam, 1996; Ryan & Lynch, 1989; Steinberg, 1990). Perosa et al (1996) stated that this balance is achieved through successful expression and resolution of conflict. When adolescents are able to share their differing opinions with parents in an environment that is accepting, the family can renegotiate the parent-child relationship, allowing the distinct young adult to be expressed (Grotevant, 1987). This process can be facilitated by family members, maintaining clear boundaries across generations (Anderson and Fleming, 1986; Perosa and Perosa, 1993).

### *Emerging Adulthood*

Research by Arnett (2004) has identified a distinct phase of life for individuals aged 18 to 25 as *emerging adulthood*. While the distribution of power in the parent-child relationship certainly changes during adolescence, data show that a balance of power between the child and parent does not occur until the child is in his or her 30s (Buhl, 2008). During the period of emerging adulthood, children continue to receive a great deal of support from parents, in the form of advice, help, and gifts, the level of which declines later in the life span. Many aspects of emerging adults' well-being are greatly impacted by their relationship with their parents, even if they are not living with them. The emerging adults' ability to adjust to new roles, capability for intimacy, and health and

risk-taking behavior are all benefited by an ongoing close parental relationship (Noack & Buhl, 2004). The likelihood of important life-course events and transitions, such as entering into significant relationships, attaining higher education, and having children are also impacted by the patterns in family interactions, strong emotional ties, and the transitions in the composition of the family (Aquilino, 2006). For emerging adults to experience ideal healthy development, the parent-child relationship should balance increasing autonomy and independence on the part of the child with ongoing strong attachment and emotional support from the parents (Hill & Holmbeck, 1986; Ryan & Lynch, 1989). Parents, likewise, experience a new level of support from their children when those children reach emerging adulthood (Noack & Buhl, 2004). Parents recalled receiving more emotional support even beyond what their children reported (Veevers and Mitchell, 1998).

#### *Mother-Daughter Life-Cycle*

Researchers who have specifically examined the mother-daughter relationship through the daughter's adulthood have identified a "life-cycle" for the relationship. This life-cycle contains several important transitions: adolescence, the daughter's marriage, the daughter becoming a mother, and the old-age and dependency of the mother. Parkes (1971) referred to these as *abrupt alterations*, which impact both the mother and daughter individually but also the relationship between them. Fischer (1981) stated that when a daughter gets married, and in particular when she has children, it can "lead to a reordering of the mother-daughter relationship, on both symbolic and interactional dimensions" (p. 621). Others have noted that a daughter's internal self-representation can also be affected by her relationship with her mother during adulthood (Cohler and

Grunebaum, 1981). They argue that development continues, determined in part by prior development as well as current interpersonal experiences and intrapsychic processes.

### *Intergenerational Family System Theory*

An additional perspective on the developmental impact of parent-child relations is that of intergenerational family system theory. Here researchers looked at how the entire family operates as a system, and how that system adapts in response to changes in individual members. These adaptations, as well as the psychological distances and relationships between family members, are conceived of as the family's *differentiation* (Sabatelli and Mazor, 1985). This differentiation is key in the intergenerational family model. The level of differentiation within a family is governed by the extent of fusion and triangulation (Bowen 1978, Williamson, 1981). *Fusion* occurs when boundaries are blurred between two family members, leading them to expend so much energy in the attempt to seek one another's love and approval or to criticize one another for not providing it that they are unable to pursue self-determined goals. *Triangulation* is a dynamic in which two individuals experience a high level of anxiety within the dyad, and involve a third person to relieve the tension and conflict between them.

Theory and research have found that women are more at risk of suffering negative consequences of problems in family boundaries, as they are trained to take on nurturing roles (Fullinwider-Bush and Jacobvitz, 1993; Gilligan, 1987; Vuchinich, Emery, & Cassidy, 1988; Walters, Carter, Papp, & Silverstein, 1988). Perosa, Perosa, and Tam (2002) found that young adult women whose parents did not involve them in triangulation and who respected their increased need for autonomy and personal boundaries were more able to explore and commit to a stable identity. Adolescent women

whose mothers encouraged them to express differences had stronger identity development, while those whose mothers were overprotective did less exploring of options, which resulted in weaker identity development. Other research found that women who reported feelings of guilt about acting independently of their parents, not discussing their differences with parents, or expressing fear of parental opposition were less likely to explore and act on their own choices (Frank et al. 1990, Fullinwider-Bush and Jacobvitz, 1993, Garbarino, Gaa, Swank, McPherson & Gratch, 1995, Kamptner 1988; Perosa et al. 1996).

Intergenerational theorists would argue that personal development takes place within the context of a multigenerational family system, and that differentiation is a healthy process that can take place within that system (Williamson, 1981). Intimate relationships are found within and outside of the family unit, and an individual's level of differentiation is determined by his or her ability to manage individuality and togetherness within a relationship system (Kerr and Bowen, 1988). Individuals who are able to differentiate within their family system are able to relate to their parents as peers with equal power. This theory suggests that relationship with a mother can be mediated by relationships with other family members, and that people may make sacrifices in order to remain within the system. In the face of conflict, some members might limit communication in order to remain a part of the family.

## *Disclosure*

Researchers have identified the event and process of disclosure of gay or lesbian identity as critical within the course of development of that identity, as well as the need to study that process separately from overall identity development (Buhrke, Ben-Ezra, Hurley, and Ruprecht, 1992; Morin, 1977, Reynolds and Hanjorgiri, 2000). Specifically, some researchers have placed the process of disclosure within the context of larger human development identifying it as necessary to create a stable sense of identity, the main task of Erikson's (1950) late adolescence and early adulthood stage (Cass, 1979; Groves & Ventura, 1983; Loicano, 1989; Minton & MacDonald, 1984; Troiden, 1989). To better understand this important event/process in the lives of gays and lesbians, research has been done and is presented here on the impact of disclosure on the individual and family, descriptive statistics on the timing, extent, and recipients of disclosure, differences in disclosure dynamics by gender, differences by race and ethnicity, the re-characterization of disclosure as an ongoing process, and familial responses to disclosure by a gay or lesbian son or daughter. Major findings on these subtopics are addressed below.

### *Impact of Disclosure on Individual and Family*

As stated above, some developmental theorists place disclosure of gay and lesbian identity as a necessary precursor to completing the task of adolescence/early adulthood (Cass, 1979; Groves & Ventura, 1983; Loicano, 1989; Minton & MacDonald, 1984; Troiden, 1989). Others have focused more specifically on the characteristics of the adolescent/adulthood transition that overlap with disclosure, emphasizing that analysis of disclosure should take place in the context of developmental transitions experienced by

all individuals, regardless of sexual orientation (Boxer and Cohler, 1989). For example, Larson and Richards (1994) highlighted the increase in self-disclosure and questioning of self generally during adolescence. Harter (1990) noted that the movement toward an adult identity sometimes necessitates a change in an individual's view of him or herself and others. Disclosure of an individual's gay or lesbian identity has been consistently described as a difficult, distressful process (Boon and Miller 1999; Grambling et al, 2000; LaSala 2000). But, disclosure has also been shown to result in positive mental health outcomes and personal growth (Balsam, 2003; Halpin and Allen, 2004; Konik and Stewart, 2004; Moradi, Mohr, Worthington, & Fassinger, 2009). Specifically, studies have shown that gay and lesbian individuals who are more out had fewer symptoms of depression or anxiety, reported less stress (Jordan and Deluty, 1998; Lewis, Derlega, Berndt, Morris, & Rose, 2001; Mohr and Fassinger, 2003), experienced improved psychological well-being and quality of life (Halpin and Allen, 2004; LaSala, 2000; Savin-Williams, 2001). Some subjects of these studies have directly linked these positive changes to disclosure of their gay or lesbian identity (D'Augelli, 1991; LaSala, 2000). Other studies have more recently looked at the processes by which disclosure leads to these positive outcomes, focusing on Stress-Related Growth (SRG) (Bonet, Wells, & Parsons, 2007; LaSala, 2000; Monroe, 2001; Savin-Williams, 2001) and, more specifically, Coming-Out Growth (COG) (Vaughan and Waehler, 2010). Vaughan and Waehler (2010) found, with some inconsistencies, that higher levels of stress related to disclosure in turn led to higher levels of personal growth. The particular growth resulting from disclosure has been noted as potentially useful for managing the difficulties related to being a sexual minority (Brown 1989; Moradi et al., 2009).

Fear of parental opposition and feelings of guilt for acting independently can play major roles in a lesbian's reluctance to disclose her sexual identity to her parents. In the context of the above discourse on the parent-child and particularly mother-child relationship, disclosing one's lesbian identity can be especially disruptive for that relationship and the family as a whole. Zitter (1987) stated that a daughter who comes out to her mother has an impact throughout the entire family and may cause a shift in coalitions within the family. Disclosure emphasizes a daughter's boundaries and is a significant statement of difference from her mother, which frequently results in feelings of loss for both the mother and her daughter. Many mothers experience initial negative reactions, often around fear of violence or harm coming to their daughter as a result of her lesbian identity. Mothers also expressed feelings of loss and disappointment, feeling they had lost their daughter as a positive reflection of themselves, disappointment that some ideas they had about their daughter's life and future would not be realized, and shame and concern about what others would think of them as a mother should they too learn of their daughter's lesbian identity (Pearlman, 2005). Most mothers, though they initially had negative responses to their daughters' disclosure and reported difficulties in their relationships with their daughters for a period following the disclosure, experienced changes in their attitudes over time, adjusting to the reality of their daughter's lesbian identity.

#### *Descriptive Statistics on the Timing and Process of Disclosure*

A significant body of descriptive statistics has been gathered in an attempt to describe the timing and process of disclosure by gay and lesbian individuals. In studies of self-identified gay and lesbian youth, the vast majority first disclosed to a friend of the



same age, with less than 10 percent reporting that they first disclosed to a parent (D'Augelli and Hershberger, 1993; Savin-Williams, 1998). When youth do disclose to a parent, most (60 percent) first tell their mother, with the next largest share (25 percent) coming out to both parents together (Savin-Williams, 1998). Floyd and Bakeman (2006) noted that much of the research on the timing of disclosure has focused solely on contemporary youths who typically self-identified in the 1990s. Floyd and Bakeman (2006) used a life-course historical perspective on coming-out trajectories, examining gay and lesbian identity development milestones among early (self-identified before 1985) and recent (self-identified in 1985 or later) cohorts. Floyd and Bakeman (2006) found that among individuals in both the early and more recent cohorts who self-identified during adolescence, those in the early cohort typically did not disclose to others for an average of more than six years, after age 20. Those in the more recent cohort mostly disclosed during adolescence, including to parents, before the age of 20. This is consistent with findings by Grov et al. (2006) that over time, both men and women are disclosing at younger ages.

However, Floyd and Bakeman (2006) did not find that more recent cohorts are self-identifying at younger ages; rather, they determined that 60 percent of those who self-identified at a young age were part of the early cohort. The main difference they found was in timing of disclosure relative to both age and time of self-identification. Recent work by Grov et al (2006) found a mean age of disclosure to others of 21.12 years for women, and 20.6 years for men, in a sample of 2,700 gay and lesbian individuals ranging from age 18 to 84. They found significant differences by age group in average age of disclosure, with 18 to 24 year old men and women reporting an average age of

disclosure at 16.9 and 16.7 years, respectively, 35 to 44 year old men and women reporting an average age of 20.5 and 22.9 years, respectively, and men and women over the age of 55 reporting an average age of disclosure of 24.1 and 27.4 years, respectively.

There is a significant amount of data on disclosure dynamics among lesbians from the National Lesbian Health Care Survey, conducted by Bradford, Ryan, and Rothblum from 1984 to 1985. They found that lesbian women were much more likely to be out to all of their gay and lesbian friends (88 percent), than to all of their heterosexual friends (28 percent). Somewhat fewer of the women (27 percent) were out to their entire families, and 19 percent were not out to any of their family members. Among their co-workers, only 17 percent were out to all of the people with whom they worked, while 29 percent were not out to any co-workers (Bradford, Ryan, and Rothblum, 1994). A later study of the same data set found that women over age 55 were much less likely to be out than were younger women (Bradford, Ryan, and Rothblum, 1997)

#### *Gender Differences in Disclosure*

Important differences have been identified in the disclosure experience for women compared to that of men (Riddle & Morin, 1977; Troiden, 1979). In terms of timing, women on average disclose their lesbian identities later than do men. Additionally, the gap (10 years) between the age at which younger and older cohorts of women report disclosing is much wider than that between similar cohorts of men (7 years) (Groves et al, 2006). The disclosure process itself has been shown to be distinct from that of men, with Morris (1997) characterizing coming out for lesbian women as a “multidimensional process,” made up of identity formation, disclosure to others, sexual expression/behavior, and lesbian consciousness (p. 2). While for gay men, same-sex sexual activity is widely

seen as the catalyst for self-identifying, some studies have found that for women, the establishment of an identity as a lesbian or as same-sex attracted precedes and does not necessitate actual sexual activity with another woman (Rothblum and Brehony, 1993; Morris, 1997).

The meaning of the term for women may have changed over time as well, as demonstrated in work by Kennedy and Davis (1993). In their interviews with women who self-identified as lesbians during the 1930s, 40s, and 50s, they found that, among those subjects who remembered using the term, the specific meaning of *coming out* was the incidence of an initial sexual relationship with another woman. Recent work has shown that for women, the process of disclosure is very frequently “identity-centered” rather than “sex-centered,” which characterizes the process for most men (Floyd and Bakeman, 2006, p. 292).

#### *Disclosure Differences by Race and Ethnicity*

Some researchers have argued that the additional burden of racism and cultural constraints impacts the timing and likelihood of disclosure for gays and lesbians of color compared to their white counterparts (Chan, 1989; Espin, 1987; Loiacano, 1989). Some empirical studies supported this conclusion, stating that African American, Latino, and Asian gays and lesbians have higher negative attitudes toward homosexuality and are not as likely to share their gay or lesbian identity with others in their community of color (Chan, 1989; Espin, 1987; Greene, 1994, 2000; Loiacano, 1989; Morris & Rothblum, 1999; Rosario et al., 2004). Grov et al (1996) found no significant differences in the age of self-identification or initial same-sex sexual experience between white gays and

lesbians and their counterparts of color, but did find that white men and women were much more likely to have disclosed to their parents than were men and women of color.

Within these diverse groupings of gays and lesbians of color, there have been studies on specific racial/ethnic groups. Studies of Asian American gays and lesbians have found that they are less likely to disclose their sexuality than are white gays and lesbians, due to a fear of rejection by their community. Those Asians who do come out likely have a stronger affiliation with their sexual than racial/cultural identity (Chan, 1989; Greene, 1994; Lui & Chan, 1996). Similarly, others have found that Latina lesbians are also less likely to come out in their cultural communities, arguing that this reluctance may be due to the relative importance of family and community in Latino culture (Espin, 1987; Greene, 1994; Lui & Chan, 1996; Parks et al., 2004). While African American lesbians were found to face similar resistance and disapproval within their cultural community, studies have shown that when they have children, African American lesbians more frequently stay involved with family (Green, 1994, 2000; Loiacano, 1989). One study found that older women of color were more likely to have disclosed to their families than were younger women of color, the reverse of the dynamic for white women (Parks et al, 1994). Older white women were much less likely to be out to their families than were younger white women (Parks et al, 1994). Greene (1997) stated that for many gays and lesbians of color, disclosing their gay or lesbian identity may be considered an “act of treason” against their families and culture (p. 221).

### *Post-Disclosure*

Research on post-disclosure has been growing in the last decade. Even though lesbians today are arguably living in a less homophobic society than 30 years ago, homophobia and its consequences exist and must be dealt with. Therefore, it is no surprise that adult lesbian women continue to manage their lesbian identity (i.e. determining whether to come out or not and when), or have to deal with negative responses from family of origin because of their sexual identity, or even worse cope with parental rejection of their sexuality, and therefore learn how to manage these familial interpersonal tensions in order to maintain contact with parents and/or remain apart of the family system. These subtopics will be examined in this section followed by a brief summary of the entire literature reviewed in this chapter.

### *Ongoing Process of Identity Management*

Some scholars have argued that disclosure is an ongoing process rather than a discrete event (Oswald, 2000). In his model of gay identity development, Coleman (1981) proposed a more fluid conceptualization of disclosure, in which moving to the final stage does not indicate completion, or that the process has ended. Rather, Coleman theorizes that as individuals continue their lives and confront new environments, they may return to earlier stages (1981). Morris (1997) describes lesbians as having to conduct a “risk assessment” every time they encounter a new person, in which they must compare the possible outcomes, positive and negative, of disclosing their identity (p. 12). In his study of gay men, Harry (1993) described this ongoing process as “being out” rather than “coming out,” and he found differences in degree of “outness” associated with age,

occupation, income, and social network (p. 28). Henry (1993) concluded that people “adapt” to their surroundings in making decisions about when to disclose (p. 38).

Disputing the notion proposed in earlier models of gay and lesbian identity development that an individual’s identity is not fully integrated without “universal disclosure,” McCam and Fassinger (1996) proposed a model that included a dual process for lesbians to simultaneously consider numerous environments, including geographic location, work place, and racial/ethnic community, when deciding whether it is safe to disclose (p. 519). This dynamic has been termed *identity management* by Reynolds and Hanjorgiris (2000), wherein gay and lesbian individuals must continuously re-examine how their sexual identity interacts with their other identities, and in some cases re-define what that sexual identity means to them throughout their entire lives (p. 50).

#### *Responses by Family of Origin*

A great deal of the work on disclosure and its impacts on the lives of gay and lesbian individuals centers on the dynamics within the family of origin following disclosure. In his work studying gay and lesbian youth, Savin-Williams (1998) notes that there are significant struggles faced by the youths themselves, the individual members of the youth’s family, and the entire family system following the disclosure of a youth’s gay or lesbian identity to the family. Family member responses differ according to role, to some degree, with more mothers (46 percent) than fathers (28 percent) accepting their child immediately following disclosure (Pilkington and D’Augelli 1995). This finding contrasts sharply with the vast majority of gay and lesbian youth (90 percent) who felt they were supported by their peers upon disclosing (Rotheram-Borus, Rosario, and Koopman, 1991). There have also been patterns found in family support according to the

gender of the child disclosing; Pilkington and D'Augelli (1995) found that sons felt "protected" by their mothers but that daughters did not experience similar feelings of support.

The disclosure of a daughter's lesbian identity can be a major disruptive event for both parents and the family system. There is a wide range of emotions experienced by parents immediately following a child's disclosure of a gay or lesbian identity, including: loss, shame, guilt, shock, denial, anger, grief, failure, pride and acceptance (DeVine, 1984; Griffin, Wirth, & Wirth, 1986; Hamersmith, 1987; Herdt & Koff, 2000; Muller, 1987; Robinson, Walters, & Skeen, 1989; Saltzburg, 1996). Empirical studies have found that most parents react negatively when they initially learn of a child's sexual identity as gay or lesbian. Robinson et al (1989) found that two thirds of parents characterized their initial response as negative, consisting of grief-like reactions. Seventy-four percent reported fear for their child's well-being, 64 percent reported initial sadness, 58 percent reported regret, and 49 percent reported depression. A vast majority of the participants reported they were able to work through their initial negative feelings and achieve acceptance (97percent). However, a family's initial negative response may decrease in intensity over time. Research by Cramer and Roach (1988) showed that youth reported much less positive relationships with their parents initially after disclosing but that over time these relationships improved. This finding is consistent with other studies, which showed that after two years of disclosure, parents were less homophobic than were those who have more recently learned of their child's sexual identity (Holtzen 1993; Holtzen and Agresti 1990).

Some research has identified differential responses to disclosure of gay or lesbian identity based on the gender of the parent and of the child. Ben-Ari (1995) discovered differences by parent gender in regards to guilt and acceptance reactions. Fathers felt more guilt than did mothers. Fathers felt more guilt about lesbian daughters than they did about gay sons, while mothers with a gay son felt more guilt than did those of lesbian daughters. In terms of general acceptance based on the gender of the child, Ben Ari's study found parents of lesbian daughters were less accepting than were those of gay sons (1995).

A few researchers have investigated factors of family system structure that may predict familial responses to a child's disclosure of gay or lesbian identity. Some have argued that the prior levels of cohesiveness among family members may predict how parents will react to their child disclosing, or if the child is likely to disclose at all. DeVine (1984) defines this cohesiveness as the level of "emotional bonding that occurs between family members and the degree of autonomy that this bond affords members within the system" (p. 10). He found that in families with high levels of bonding but low levels of autonomy, characterized by enmeshment and rigidity, the child is unlikely to disclose until forced to by dynamics outside the family system. In families that are disengaged and chaotic, with low levels of bonding, gay or lesbian children are unlikely to disclose due to a concern that the family system is not strong enough to adjust to the new information. Other more recent work has shown that a prior relationship between parent and child that is positive indicates a higher likelihood of positive resolution following disclosure (Savin-Williams and Dube, 1998). In a study of gay men's characterizations of their closeness with their parents prior to disclosing and of how their



parents responded upon their disclosing to them, Willoughby, Malik, and Lindahl (2006) found that men who reported that their families were cohesive and able to adapt perceived their families' subsequent reactions to their disclosure as less negative than did those who reported rigidity and disconnectedness within their families.

### *Parental Rejection*

There has been a great deal of research consistently showing a negative impact on gay and lesbian young adults who experienced rejection following the disclosure of their sexual identity. Ryan et al (2009) found that higher rates of family rejection were associated with many indicators of poor mental and physical health for gay and lesbian youth. The youth who reported rejection by family were 8.4 times more likely to report suicide attempts, 5.9 times more likely to experience high levels of depression, 3.4 times more likely to use illegal drugs, and 3.4 times more likely to engage in risky, unprotected sex than were similar youth who reported low or no rejection from family. Family attitudes toward a daughter's lesbian identity may range from a lack of support to her identity being ignored or characterized as deviant (Peterson and Gerrity, 2006). The lack of a supportive home or familial environment can result in negative relational outcomes for lesbian women (Gair, 1995). Women who are rejected by their families following their disclosure of their sexual identity "may not feel fully entitled to a fulfilling love relationship." (p. 115). In contrast, research has shown the positive impact of family support in mediating the effect of abuse and harassment from external sources. Hershberger and D'Augelli (1995) investigated the impact of verbal abuse, threats of attack, and assault on the mental health of gay and lesbian young people and found the support of family significantly decreased the level of stress and psychological issues.

Additionally, Luhtanen (2003) found similar results for lesbian and gay adults determining that family support, in addition to connection with gay and lesbian communities, predicted significant increases in self-esteem and life satisfaction.

An informative framework for contextualizing rejection within families is that of Parental Acceptance-Rejection theory (PAR) developed by Rohner (2004). Here *parent* included any important caregiver of the individual. This theory has been validated by a number of empirical studies across diverse populations, including low-income African American and white youth (Crook et al., 1981; Rohner, 1994; Veneziano and Rohner, 1998) and Hispanic/Latino youth (Dumka, Roosa, and Jackson, 1997). The heart of the theory organizes perceived acceptance-rejection of children by caregivers into four themes: warmth-affection, hostility-aggression, indifference-neglect, and undifferentiated indifference (Rohner, 2004; Rohner, Khaleque, & Cournoyer, 2005). *Warmth* includes the extent to which the child perceives verbal, physical, and symbolic expressions of love from the parent, including affection and care. *Hostility-aggression* is defined as direct physical or verbal rejection, including verbal or physical abuse and violence. *Indifference-neglect* is characterized by the lack of warmth but also the lack of direct abuse, where parents may seem withdrawn, unavailable, or may not provide basic necessities for the child. *Undifferentiated rejection* is treatment that the child experiences as void of care and love, but is neither warm nor hostile nor neglectful. Empirical studies investigating outcomes for children who perceive rejecting behavior on the part of their caregivers have shown that they are more likely to experience depression, substance abuse, maladaptive attachment styles in adulthood, low self-esteem, and low coping skills (Rohner, 2004; Rohner et al., 2005).

Work by Koken, Bimbi, and Parsons (2009) examined the reactions of families of young adult transwomen to their disclosures in the framework of PAR theory. They found that 40 percent of subjects reported hostility-rejection, usually in the form of verbal and physical abuse; 40 percent experienced indifference-neglect, receiving the “silent treatment” as well as withholding of material and practical support; 55 percent reported perceiving undifferentiated rejection, where they did not report abuse but also did not report feeling loved or supported. An interesting finding was that many participants who did not report improvement in their families’ opinions regarding their sexual and gender identity continued to maintain contact with them, even when this contact was “brief and unfriendly” out of a desire to maintain contact with their families (Koken et al., 2009, p. 858).

#### *Managing Interpersonal Tensions*

There are various strategies used by both family members and the disclosing child to manage tension regarding the disclosure of sexual orientation. One strategy used by many families that are not accepting following disclosure is silence; any discussion of personal matters that may touch on the gay or lesbian identity disclosure is avoided (Boxer, Cook and Herdt, 1991; DeVine 1984; Herdt and Boxer 1993; Martin and Hetrick, 1988; Robinson, Walters, and Skeen, 1989). Another tactic gay and lesbian youth may employ to maintain the structure of the family following disclosure is to create emotional or geographic distance between themselves and their families, reducing verbal and physical contact and becoming independent (Brown, 1989).

Birditt, Rott, and Fingerman (2009) studied the strategies used by adult children and their parents to manage interpersonal tensions, characterizing these strategies as

either destructive, constructive, or avoidant according to previous similar research (Birditt, Fingerman, and Almeida, 2005; Blanchard-Fields, Stein, and Watson, 2004). In addition to studying the frequency with which each type of strategy was used, the authors also looked for differences by race/ethnicity, gender, and age of parent and child, as well as the implications these management strategies may have for the quality of intergenerational relationships. Lazarus (1999) described strategies used to manage interpersonal tension as attempts to control one's emotional response to an interpersonal conflict or to actually alter the conditions of that conflict. Those strategies categorized as *destructive* included name-calling or yelling; those labeled as *constructive* included working with the other participant(s) in the conflict to try to resolve it or making attempts to understand the perspectives of the other participant(s) (Canary and Cupach, 1988). *Avoidant* strategies included in the study were those intended to maintain the relationship despite the conflict, rather than more negative types of avoidance. These avoidant strategies included avoiding the discussion of particular topics, avoiding communication altogether for a period of time, or taking no action (Birditt and Fingerman, 2005; Blanchard-Fields et al., 2004).

Birditt et al. (2009) found that constructive strategies were the most frequently used by parents and their adult children. In terms of comparisons by gender, they did not find differences in type of strategy used by sons as compared to daughters, but they did find differences comparing parent gender. Birditt et al. found that mothers were more likely to use avoidant strategies than were fathers, while roughly equal numbers of mothers and fathers used constructive and destructive strategies. In terms of differences by race/ethnicity, European American families were more likely to use avoidant strategies

than were African American families. The authors mention the possibility that this finding may be due to cultural differences wherein African Americans express more affect (Vrana and Rollock, 2002) and generally report a greater importance of and reliance on family ties (Chatters and Taylor, 1990; Umberson, 1992). In their analysis of relationship quality and interpersonal tension management strategies, Birditt et al. found that parents and their adult children who used constructive strategies also reported higher levels of affective solidarity and lower levels of ambivalence. Those who used destructive strategies reported greater ambivalence but did not report lower affective solidarity. In contrast, those who made more use of avoidant strategies reported lower solidarity and greater ambivalence, which contradicted the authors' expectation that avoidance would result in greater solidarity and lower ambivalence, as avoidance has previously been characterized as a method intended to maintain relationships (Hagestad, 1987). Birditt et al. (2009) concluded instead that avoidance is not necessarily beneficial to relationships.

### *Summary of Literature*

The body of literature directly related to the focus of this study is extremely limited. In this chapter, I have identified areas of intersection that may offer some insight into the experiences of adult lesbian women and their relationships with their biological mothers who reject their sexuality. Models on adult development, women's development and lesbian identity development as well as theories on mother-daughter relationships, intergenerational family system theory, and the life course perspective offer a conceptual framework for understanding how adult lesbian women experience and develop their identities as women and as lesbians within a family or system and in a particular time in

history. These models and theories may also provide insights concerning the motivation behind adult lesbian women's decision to maintain their relationships with their biological mothers who reject their sexuality though no literature found directly addressed this. The research on disclosure of sexuality demonstrates the differences among lesbians of different races, ethnicities, and cohorts/generations and how these variables may impact the lesbian identity development process. Research on the impacts of parental rejection on lives of gay/lesbian children and the ways in which individuals manage interpersonal tension, particularly within families, may be helpful in framing the analysis of how lesbian women understand and maintain relationships with mothers who reject their sexuality. In the next chapter, I will further elaborate on the purpose of this study and the research methods used in exploring this study. It will outline the research design, ethics and safe guards, method of data collection and data analysis as well as researcher bias and pre-study limitations.

## CHAPTER III

### METHODOLOGY

Since limited research has focused on adult lesbian women who have maintained a relationship with a mother who rejects their sexuality, a qualitative, exploratory study was chosen as an appropriate research design. The primary objective of this study is to explore adult lesbian women's motivation in maintaining and understanding of their relationships with their biological mothers who reject their sexuality and how this rejection may have affected the lives of these adult lesbian women. A qualitative research method is warranted in order to gather rich narrative data directly from the participants' perspectives. This qualitative study used a flexible interview format comprised of semi-structured, open-ended questions to gather data, resulting in thematically analyzed narratives from the participant's perspective. Anastas (1999) described how flexible methods research using unstructured data can help capture the experience of interest from the words of the individuals who have lived this experience, allowing it to be explored and captured in the context. This chapter presents the methods of research used in this study and describes sample selection, ethics and safeguards, data collection, data analysis procedures, and researcher bias and pre-study limitations.

### *Sample*

I used a purposive, snowball sampling technique to recruit participants. I sent an email request (Appendix A) to personal and professional colleagues that fit the selection criteria or who could refer individuals who may be interested in participating in this study. I also sent email announcements to lesbian listservs seeking research participants who fit the criteria. Finally, participants were asked to forward the email request they received to anyone they knew fit the criteria. The recruitment took place electronically.

Once a potential participant indicated interest in the study, screening questions were asked (Appendix B) via email. Inclusion criteria for participation in this study were the following: 1) Participants had to be born female; 2) Participants had to self-identify as lesbian; 3) Participants had to have come out to their biological mothers who rejected their sexuality at least two years prior; 4) Participants had to be able and willing to maintain contact with biological mothers post-disclosure.

For the purpose of this study, *rejection* is defined as the perception by a lesbian that her mother does not demonstrate support for or acceptance of her homosexuality. Participants were not provided with a definition for rejection, but had to self-select as having a mother who rejects their sexuality. The age range selected for this sample is sensitive to cohort effect in terms of lesbian identity development (Hammack, 2005; Parks 1999) as well as to research by Levinson (1986) identifying the 30s as an important period in a woman's life in terms of evaluating life structures/relationships and building new structures/relationships. This age period may be of particular importance in studying young adult women's decisions to maintain relationships with rejecting mothers. The women interviewed were not mothers themselves, as the presence of grandchildren may



have complicated/confounded the relationship between the participant and her own rejecting mother (Fischer, 1981). Efforts were made to obtain a diverse sample in regards to race, ethnicity, gender presentation, and professional work experiences.

### *Ethics and Safeguards*

The design of this study was approved by the Human Subjects Review Board of the Smith College School for Social Work (see Appendix C). Approval of the proposal indicated that the study was in concordance with the NASW Code of Ethics and the Federal regulations for the Protection of Human Research Subjects. Informed consent letters were sent to all potential participants (see Appendix D) in advance of interviews. The informed consent letter described the study and defined the selection criteria for participants, explained their rights as human subjects, and outlined the risks and benefits of participating in the study. Signed informed consent letters were obtained before the interviews began. The participant and researcher each kept a signed copy of the informed consent document, and I will continue to keep these documents in a secured environment separate from the data for three years after the conclusion of the study as mandated by Federal regulations.

The interviews were conducted over the internet or phone in the privacy of the participant and researcher's home to protect confidentiality. The interviews were digitally recorded with the consent of the participant. To ensure confidentiality per Federal Guidelines and the mandates of the social work profession, once recorded I transcribed the data, which were analyzed thematically, and removed and/or disguised all identifying information. The coded information and other documents were password protected during research activity and will be stored for at least three years in a secured location,

after which time all information will be destroyed if no longer needed by this researcher. Prior to starting the interview, I explained to participants the purpose and design of the research project, and the nature, benefits, and risks of participation. I informed them that participation is voluntary and that all the information gathered will be held with strict measures of confidentiality per Federal Guidelines. Participants were informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any point before April 15, 2011 by communicating to this researcher their wish to do so. Participants were also told that they have the right to refuse to answer any question during the interview or to end their participation at any time during the interview, at which time all materials relating to them would have been immediately destroyed.

### *Risks*

Participants were asked to reflect upon and share their experiences, thoughts and feelings associated with their relationship with their rejecting mothers. Sharing personal experiences and associations can be difficult and uncomfortable, and the weight of this topic may intensify these negative effects. Talking about maternal rejection can elicit intense and uncomfortable feelings, including fear, anger, shame and guilt. Participants may have experienced emotions, thoughts and memories that they were previously unaware of in themselves and/or did not expect to experience as a result of participating in this study. Participants were provided with a list of referrals for mental health professionals (Appendix E).

### *Benefits*

Potential benefits of participation included an opportunity to remember and share personal experiences about their relationship with their mothers, an opportunity that they may never have had previously. While talking about their personal relationship with their mother can be difficult and uncomfortable, it can also elicit pleasurable experiences, including insight, understanding and self-awareness. Participants may also have benefitted from knowing that they were contributing to research that will help social workers and other interested parties understand more about how they have coped and managed an important and challenging relationship.

### *Data Collection*

The method for data collection was an open-ended, semi-structured interview that focused on the areas described above. Twelve out of the 13 interviews were conducted online with the use of a webcam. I was able to see and hear all but one of the participants during the interview. Due to technical difficulties, one interview had to be conducted over the phone, because the participant's webcam was not working at the time of the interview. All interviews were recorded with a digital recorder by I, who later transcribed the interviews. All identifiable information from the interviews was disguised and/or removed to ensure confidentiality. The length of each interview ranged from 20 to 45 minutes, depending upon the participant's responses. A prescribed list of questions was used to guide the interviews (see Appendix F), however probes and modifications of questions were used when salient themes, patterns and concepts emerged. Therefore, each interview varied according to the information that came out of the discussion. In addition,

information gleaned from the initial interviews was used to re-structure interview questions going forward.

### *Data Analysis*

Data collected from the demographic questionnaires were analyzed manually, while narrative data collected during the taped interviews were transcribed and then analyzed for content using the grounded theory model as described by Anastas (1999). During data collection I took notes on relevant information and highlighted particular common themes or unusual responses. Through constant comparative method, this researcher analyzed the data for similarities and differences throughout the processes of data collection and data analysis. Anastas (1999) refers to Strauss and Corbin (1990) who founded grounded theory as a method that calls for systematic and careful analysis of the data to identify the lowest common denominators that become the themes that are reported in the research. The data was then transcribed and reread again for commonalities or themes. Finally, a process of data reduction was undertaken by way of coding the content of the interviews. The transcripts were compartmentalized by question, and then into discrete categories based on occurrence of similar words, phrases, and themes across the responses of the study participants. A spreadsheet was designed to capture the relevant data according to topic and across participants, thus providing a visual representation of the data that allowed for easier identification of themes and patterns. Representative quotes were used to substantiate these themes or ideas. Data were also compared to determine similarities and differences with respect to the literature review.

### *Researcher Bias and Pre-study Limitations*

Researcher bias and self-analysis were considered carefully in conducting this study and analyzing the data. There is a potential bias in my interpretation of the findings due to her own personal experience with similar dynamics in her own family of origin. I identify as a lesbian adult woman who has a mother that rejects her sexuality. My biases may have impacted the design of the survey questions in that she has inherent interest in certain areas and experiences with managing her relationship with her mother. However, every effort was made to phrase the questions so as to not impose personal assumptions and values about lesbianism, values about family, decisions about interpersonal communication and ideas about interpersonal conflict.

Due to the small sample size and selected research design, generalizations cannot be made from the results of this study. Moreover, since the recruitment and interviews were conducted through the internet, the responses are restricted to a population that has internet access. Rather, the findings provide an in-depth understanding of some of the experiences of adult lesbian women and how they manage interpersonal tension related to sexual orientation with their biological mothers. It is hoped that the data gathered through this study and presented here will contribute to the small body of literature on adult lesbian women and inform future research on the topics covered here. The following chapter will present the findings from the proposed study.

## CHAPTER IV

### FINDINGS

The primary objective of this study was to explore adult lesbian women's motivation and understanding in maintaining a relationship with their biological mothers who reject their sexuality and how this rejection has affected their lives. This chapter contains the findings from interviews with 13 adult lesbian women from across the United States who have been out to their mothers for at least two years, self-identify as lesbian, have maintained contact with biological mothers post-disclosure, and are around the age of 30 years old.

The interview questions were designed to elicit information about participants' experience and understanding about maintaining a relationship with their biological mothers who reject their sexuality. Participants were asked to describe their relationships with their mother prior, during and after disclosure, the impact of their mothers' rejection, why they maintained the relationship and how they managed the relationship post-rejection. The central themes were chosen based on the most frequent responses to each of the major questioning areas. Additionally, information will be provided on outlying responses to each question. Presentation of the participants' own words, identifying information disguised, occurs whenever possible, as direct quotations are found to be the most effective means for presenting the material.

Through an Internet video chat interview, the researcher was able to observe visual cues in addition to patterns in voice of participants. In one case, due to technical difficulties, the Internet chat did not work and a telephone interview was conducted. This interview was also the shortest in length. For most participants (n = 10), their affect seemed at ease while talking about the interview topics, as though this was not the first time they had considered or discussed these experiences and thoughts. In three cases, however, interviewees seemed to appear more agitated or unsettled by the interview than the others, at some points seeming near tears. The major findings are divided into the following four sections: 1) participant demographics, 2) description of participant's relationship with her mother prior to disclosure, immediately following disclosure, and at time of interview 3) impact that mother's rejection of sexuality had on adult daughter, 4) participant's motivation for maintaining the relationship following her mother's rejection, and 5) strategies for managing interpersonal tension with mother about sexuality.

#### *Participant Demographics*

Thirteen participants were interviewed according to the process described in Chapter III. The average age of adult women participants was 30 years old, with a range from 27 to 33 years. In terms of racial diversity, out of the 13 total participants, 8 self-identified as white, two identified as multi-racial, one identified as black, one identified as Latina, and one identified as Asian (see Table 1). The average age at time of disclosure of sexuality to mother was 20 years of age, with a range from 17 to 26 years. The average number of years since disclosure of sexuality to mother was just over 9 years, with a range from three to 15 years. Between racial groups there was some difference in patterns of age of disclosure to parents. The two women who reported

disclosing their sexuality to their mothers at the latest ages were both women of color, and the average age of disclosure to parents for white women in the sample (age = 19.6 years) was more than two years younger than that for women of color in the sample (age = 22.2 years). The average age of mothers at the time of interview was 58 years, with a range from 52 to 63 years (one mother is deceased). Eleven of the mothers were raised in the United States, and one was raised in Italy and the other in China.



Table 1  
*Participant Characteristics*

Demographics (n = 13)	<i>n</i>	<i>%</i>
<b>Race/ethnicity</b>		
White	8	61.5
Multiracial	2	15.4
Black	1	7.7
Latina	1	7.7
Asian	1	7.7
<b>Educational attainment</b>		
Some college	1	7.7
Bachelor's degree	5	38.5
Master's degree	5	38.5
Juris doctor	2	15.4
<b>Socioeconomic class growing up</b>		
Middle class	10	76.9
Lower class	3	23.1
<b>Geographic region</b>		
Northeast	5	38.5
West	4	30.8
Midwest	2	15.4
South	2	15.4
<b>Proximity to mother*</b>		
Live far	10	76.9
Live close	2	15.4
	<i>Average</i>	<i>Range</i>
Participant age	30	(27 - 33)
Age at time of disclosure to mother	20	(17 - 26)
Years since disclosure to mother	9	(3 - 15)
Age of mother	58	(52 - 63)
	<i>White Women</i>	<i>Women of Color</i>
Average age at time of disclosure to mother	19.6	22.2

\*One mother is deceased

Most participants were quite educated, with all but one having attained a Bachelor's degree or higher. In terms of highest educational attainment, one interviewee had some college, five interviewees had Bachelor's degrees, five interviewees had

Master's degrees, and two interviewees had Juris Doctors. The vast majority of study participants (n = 10) reported growing up middle class in terms of socioeconomic status, and the rest (n = 3) reported growing up lower class. Most adult daughters currently live in the Northeast United States (n = 5), followed by the West (n = 4), Midwest (n = 2) and South (n = 2). Nearly all participants (n = 10) reported living far from their mothers, while two reported living close to their mothers (one mother is deceased). All of the adult women have siblings, and most (n = 9) reported themselves to be younger/est children. One respondent is a middle child, and three were older/est children.

*Description of Relationship with Mother Prior to Disclosure, Immediately  
Following Disclosure, and at Time of Interview*

Participants were first asked to describe their relationships with their mothers prior to disclosing their sexual identity, then to describe the relationship immediately following their disclosure, and finally to comment on the nature of the relationship at the time of the interview. The results will be presented as follows: relationship prior to disclosure, relationship immediately following disclosure, and relationship at time of interview.

*Relationship Prior to Disclosure*

Participants were asked to describe their relationship with their mother prior to disclosure. These responses were categorized as "close" or "not close." Just over half of the participants (n = 7) reported that they had been close to their mothers while growing up or prior to disclosure (see Table 2).

Table 2

*Relationship with mother prior to disclosure, at time of disclosure, and at time of interview*

Participants (n = 13)	<i>n</i>	%
Closeness to mother prior to disclosure		
Close	7	53.9
Not close	6	46.2
Type of rejection at time of disclosure		
Hostile/aggressive	8	61.5
Undifferentiated	5	38.5
Relationship at time of interview		
More acceptance due to romantic relationship	2	15.4
More acceptance due to physical distance	1	7.7
More acceptance not mentioned	10	76.9

One lesbian daughter recalled, “We were close, with very open talking.” Another recalled, “While we were very close and she was a provider and a protector, we often fought and disagreed on things....We had a great relationship overall but we disagreed on specific things.” Another participant described her relationship with her mother prior to disclosing as “really good, really close. We had a lot of fun together. I totally trust her opinion; I look to her opinion on a lot of things.” Six daughters reported that they had not been close to their mother prior to disclosing their sexuality. One said, “Growing up we were not very close at all. I mean, for many reasons. First of all, culture clash. I am first-generation American in a Chinese household. She was a single mom, working a lot, often working more than one job.” Another stated, “Prior to coming out at 19, we had a very distant relationship. My grandmother was the one who raised me dominantly. My mother was in and out of the picture.”

### *Relationship Immediately Following Disclosure*

Participants were then asked to describe the relationship with their mothers immediately following their disclosure. Since all participants self-identified as having been rejected by their mothers because of disclosing their sexuality, their descriptions of relationships immediately following that disclosure were categorized as being either hostile/aggressive rejection or undifferentiated rejection, as described in Chapter II. Most adult daughters (n = 8) described the relationship in ways indicative of hostile/aggressive rejection. For example, one daughter reported,

After I came out, she threw a bible at me. I was driving and I told her I think I like women; she was very angry. She said I was going to hell and it is completely wrong, it's a phase. I need to give myself some time. She was very angry. She is still very angry when we do have conversations about it.

Another adult daughter described her mother's reaction when she returned home from college after cutting her hair very short. Upon first seeing her haircut, the participant said,

(My mother) freaked! It's one thing to choose the hard road, she would say, and you have been always been the kid to choose the hard road and there is one thing to rebel and make it a statement, but it is another to broadcast it to the whole world with the way you dress and cut your hair. You look like a boy and clearly want to be a boy. It set off 10-12 screaming, raging, in each your face, emotionally charged conversations over the next two years during which my "homosexual lifestyle" would come up. She would say, "You disgust me. You're a disgrace to the family."

Another participant reported being kicked out of the home by her family following her disclosure of her sexuality, though she noted that her parents continued to check up on and assist with her basic needs, such as food. The remaining five participants reported behavior more consistent with undifferentiated rejection, lacking outright verbal abuse or

intentional neglect. One adult daughter described, “Although she begged for me to really try to date men and settle down with a man in the future, she didn't attack me for being gay. She didn't embrace it at all but she wasn't down my throat.” Another stated, “After she found out she was very quiet. She didn't want to believe me; she didn't really want to listen.”

#### *Relationship at Time of Interview*

Participants were then asked to describe their current relationship with their mothers. Three participants reported that their mothers had become somewhat more accepting since their disclosure, with two citing a relationship with a partner as the impetus for that increased acceptance, and one citing the increased physical distance between her and her mother. One participant described the impact of her relationship with her partner on her mother's level of rejection, saying,

People I've met since (coming out who) are making the choice of coming out, one of my biggest things is if they don't accept you at first, it is okay. But when they see that you are happy, they see that you are in a happy, healthy, committed relationship, and she meet that partner of yours, it can do wonders in terms of their acceptance. I feel like no matter you're the orientation, your culture, your background, age, generation, they recognize love. If they see that you are in love and someone loves you, especially when it comes to family, that's all they can ask to happen to you.

Another study participant directly linked the increased acceptance she has witnessed from her mother to the increased physical distance between them since she disclosed her sexuality. She stated:

She was always a very controlling mom, but since moving away, she's really backed off of that. ... In our relationship, whether she acknowledges or not that she used to be controlling and very shaming and blaming in her disciplinary style, she's definitely changed with my being away. I think she realizes what is

important in missing me and when I am there, she isn't going to fight with me about the length of my hair or what I wear.

The majority of study participants (n = 10) did not identify an increase in acceptance from their mothers from the time of their disclosure to the time of interview.

*Impact of Mother's Rejection of Sexuality*

When participants were asked to describe the impact of their mother's rejection of their sexuality, nine major themes emerged, each mentioned by at least two participants. The list of themes and the number of times each was mentioned is shown in Table 3. These themes were: difficulty in romantic relationships, questioning sexuality, lack of self-acceptance, decreased self-esteem/self-worth, growth from the experience, mental health issues, already felt rejected, developed other family, and doubts/hesitations.

Table 3  
*Impact of mother's rejection of sexuality*

Participants (n = 13)	<i>n</i>	%
Difficulty in romantic relationships	9	69.2
Questioning sexuality		
Questioned	6	46.2
Did not question	4	30.8
Lack of self-acceptance	5	38.5
Decreased self-esteem/self-worth	4	30.8
Growth from the experience	4	30.8
Mental health issues	3	23.1
Already felt rejected	3	23.1
Developed other family	3	23.1
Doubts/hesitations	2	15.4

### *Difficulty in Romantic Relationships*

The theme that emerged most frequently was difficulty in romantic relationships, mentioned by nearly three-fourths of participants (n = 9). One adult daughter said of her mother's rejection,

It profoundly affected my relationship with my first girlfriend. I was doing a lot of self-hating, internalize homophobia, all the stuff I have the language for now. At the time I was a really angry person. I took a lot of my rejection out on my partner. I was not good to her and wasn't good to myself.

Another participant noted, "In terms of relating to other people and being emotionally close to other people until more recently has been kind of difficult." A third participant took a different perspective on the difficulty her mother's rejection has caused in her romantic relationships. She stated,

I think my mom did a very good job raising me, very loving. It's hard in a relationship now because my partner doesn't see that about my parents. She just sees, especially my mom, that they treat me shitty sometimes. ... It's affected me in the sense of not being able to share that with them and having to see my mother's imperfections through my partner's eyes too. I'm just wishing that my mother would be that person she is to me to my partner. I wish my partner could see how loving and great she is but she can't. It's very difficult, immensely difficult. My mom doesn't even know I have a partner.

### *Questioning Sexuality*

The next most frequently mentioned theme was that of causing study participants to question their sexuality. Six respondents stated that their mother's rejection caused them to question their own sexuality or its roots, while four stated that their mother's rejection did not cause them to question their sexuality. The remaining three participants did not mention an impact on their understanding of their sexuality. Describing the uncertainty about her sexuality she has experienced due to her mother's rejection, one

participant said, “In terms of sexuality, it has made me question; I say maybe I am just in love with her, maybe I can be in love with a man too.” Another participant found herself attempting to explain the roots of her sexuality following her mother’s rejection. She said, “Because I grew up with a single mom environment, I never had a father, I wondered when I was younger if I had a dad, would I be gay?” Other participants specifically stated that their mother’s rejection did not cause them to question their sexuality. One stated,

Right from the start even with the immediate rejection and aggressive response, I wasn’t scared straight. The decision to come out took a full year of really thinking about it....like what could I do instead of coming out? I just decided this is who I am, and I am tired of hiding it, and I am just going to put it out there. I never second guessed my sexuality based on my mother’s response.

#### *Lack of Self-Acceptance*

Five women identified a lack of self-acceptance related to their sexuality specifically as an impact of their mothers’ rejection. One described, “It makes me feel like being gay is wrong. ... I don’t feel comfortable. I am slowly trying to be okay with people knowing. I get very uncomfortable and unsure.” Another recalled, “I didn’t think about it having any impact until the last two years. It has made me feel ashamed or bad about being a lesbian, not proud or not something I want to share.” The other eight participants did not specifically mention difficulty accepting their lesbian identity as a result of their mothers’ rejection.

#### *Decreased Self-Esteem/Self-Worth*

Four study participants made statements indicating that their mothers’ rejection of their sexuality had resulted in a decreased sense of self-esteem and/or self-worth. One



participant described, “My mom affected my self-esteem a lot; with the way our relationship was, it was a huge struggle for me to accept that I deserved happiness, to recognize my value as a person, and to receive any kind of love and affection.” Another said,

In terms of relating to other people and being emotionally close to other people until more recently has been kind of difficult. It left a deep feeling of.....even though I could sort of intellectualize it and say, “I am fine the way I am.”, there is still the underlying feeling that maybe I am not okay and sort of a feeling of being rejected.”

One participant acknowledged that her mother’s rejection impacted her self-esteem but noted that the intensity of that impact was moderated to some degree by the prior hostile nature of her relationship with her mother. She recalled,

That’s not to say that there weren’t nights that I didn’t cry, and there wasn’t a streak of time (I thought) if momma couldn’t love me, how could anybody love me, maybe I should just die. Yes, all those thoughts went through my head, but I think they were quieter and less intense than for someone who had had a good relationship with their parents or mothers.

The fourth participant who mentioned decreased self-esteem as a result of her mother’s rejection stated that she felt less “belief in (her)self.” The other eight participants did not specifically mention impacts on their sense of self-esteem or self-worth as part of the impact their mothers’ rejection had on them.

#### *Growth from the Experience*

Four participants noted that they had grown from the experience of having been rejected by their mothers. Many of these comments centered on a forced independence or self-reliance. One participant commented, “I am figuring it out on my own; my mom doesn’t give me input.” Another described, “It has certainly helped me to have to

develop my own ideas about myself, what (my) values are, and the things I prioritize, and kind of move away from the values I grew up with.” A third study participant identified a particular lesson she’d learned as a result of working through her mother’s rejection, saying,

Ten years later after introspection, therapy, and processing with friends, and the loss of a mother daughter relationship, I gained this unique and amazing support around me. I learned a lot about acceptance through her non-acceptance.

Another respondent said,

(I had to decide) whether not I wanted to live this life as a lesbian, I didn’t know if I was strong enough to do this. Then throughout my 20s in relationships, I just made a decision that I don’t sleep with my mother at night, so I had to get through this. This is being a lesbian, being a Mexicana, going through school. It just pushed me to better myself, to say nobody can take anything away from me, but it was a whole process. It helped me better myself, as well as build my self-confidence.

The other eight participants did not specifically mention ways in which they had grown from the experience of being rejected by their mothers.

### *Mental Health Issues*

Some of the same adult daughters who described growing from the experience of being rejected by their mothers also described struggles with their mental health following their mothers’ rejection. Three adult participants in all specifically reported mental health issues as an impact of their mother’s rejection of their sexuality, and all of these women also identified ways in which they had grown from the experience. One respondent described her state of mind after being rejected by her mother. She said,

I was suicidal. I felt like I didn’t have anything left. I was discharged from the military for homosexual conduct in 2002. The military was my other family and so to be rejected by my mother was a double whammy. I felt like I didn’t have anything left. The only thing that was pushing me was going to school. I didn’t

have any education and was discharged from the military and luckily got all my benefits so the only thing I had was school.

Another respondent mentioned going through ten years of therapy following her mother's rejection of her sexuality, and a third identified depression as a result. She recalled,

At some point I had some problems with depression. In working through that, I am certain that my relationship with my mom contributed to that.

The remaining participants (n = 10) did not mention specific mental health issues as an impact of their mothers' rejection.

#### *Already Felt Rejected*

Three respondents reported that they had already felt rejected by their mothers before disclosing their sexuality to their mothers. One participant said

As a kid there was a lot of rejection going on because I was a very out-going, very gregarious, sort of rebellious, too much to handle kind of kid...I think I was in her eyes the cause to many of her problems. So we never had a good bond. When she rejected my sexual orientation, it was sort of just another piece of the rejection pie.

Another respondent recalled, "There has been so much rejection throughout my whole life ... (of) my career choices, my sexual orientation, etc." The third connected her previous rejection to gender presentation issues, describing,

In many ways, I felt rejected by her all along when it came to certain things as far as like what I wore, what I wanted to do, what kind of toys I wanted. I was always kind of told my decisions were wrong, because I was a girl and girls were supposed to do certain things.

The other interviewees (n = 10) did not report having been previously rejected by their mothers.

### *Developed Other Family*

Three participants stated that they had built their own families made up of accepting friends in response to their rejections from their mothers, while the other 10 participants did not mention creating their own families of friends as a result of their mothers' rejections. One woman who did mention building her own family of friends described,

It forced me to see my friends as my family. Fortunately I have a great group of friends. I kept building my friend circle, which I think it is common in the LGBT community when you can't count on your family.

Another said, "We get more support and response from our friends than our family, and ... I still have supportive friends so I feel ... independent and my friends are more important because they are more reliable." The third participant stated that her mother's rejection "was a great motivator for me to ... create a family and supportive system and surrounding that loved me and embraced me."

### *Doubts/Hesitation*

Two participants stated that they felt less sure of themselves in general, particularly of the decisions they make following their mother's rejection of their sexuality. One described,

It affected my self-esteem, or my belief in myself, that my decisions are right. I tend to hesitate. ... Her rejection left me scared and confused and with a lack of belief in myself.

Another said, "I think I second guess a lot of things that I feel." The other 11 interviewees did not mention doubting their decisions or becoming more hesitant.

### *Motivation for Maintaining Relationship with Rejecting Mother*

Study participants gave a total of 14 different reasons explaining why they maintained a relationship with their mother after she rejected their sexuality (see Table 4). Ten of these reasons were mentioned by two or more respondents, with the remaining four each unique to an individual. These reasons will be discussed in decreasing order of frequency. The themes that will be discussed are as follows: because she's my mom, there's more than just this, valuing her family, hope for change, rationalize rejection, prove mom wrong, mom still proud, change family pattern, guilt, motivated by relationship with other family member, stubbornness, cultural expectation, don't want to devastate mom, and needs mom's emotional support.

Table 4

*Reasons for maintaining relationship with rejecting mother*

Participants (n = 13)	<i>n</i>	%
Because she's my mom	7	53.4
There's more than just this	6	46.2
Valuing her family	5	38.5
Hope for change	4	30.8
Rationalize rejection	3	23.1
Prove mom wrong	2	15.4
Mom still proud	2	15.4
Change in family pattern	2	15.4
Guilt	2	15.4
Motivated by relationship with other family members	2	15.4
Stubbornness	1	7.7
Cultural expectation	1	7.7
Don't want to devastate mom	1	7.7
Needs mom's emotional support	1	7.7

### *Because She's My Mom*

More than half ( $n = 7$ ) of the adult daughters at one time in their response to why they have maintained a relationship with their rejecting mother said, nearly verbatim, "Because she's my mom." One expanded on this, saying, "She's my mom. She was the one that was given to me spiritually. She was given to me and I was given to her to challenge one another, to show our strength." Another participant said, "Whether she liked me or not, she would have to open the door when I rang the bell, she was my mom." Another said, "She is my mom. I do want to have a relationship with her." A response typical of those made by the other four adult daughters who mentioned this theme was simply, "Well, because she's my mom. She's my mom," as one daughter said. The remaining participants ( $n = 6$ ) did not mention this as part of their explanation for why they maintained a relationship with their mother after she rejected their sexuality.

### *There's More Than Just This*

Nearly half ( $n = 6$ ) of study participants stated that they maintained a relationship with their mother after she rejected them because there was either more to them (participant) as a person than their sexuality, or more to the relationship with their mothers than just the rejection. One woman said, "There are other things she values more like my health and my financial success; everything else falls by the wayside." Another explained,

I think we have enough of other things, (like) my love for her. I really enjoy her as a mom. There are certain things I definitely would miss if I didn't talk to her. Those things come first.

Another participant noted that in “every other aspect of my life, she has been there to support me.” Another specifically noted that her sexuality was one of many parts of her. She said, “I’ve maintained a relationship because being gay is one aspect of me in the beginning.” The other seven interviewees did not specifically mention this in their responses.

### *Valuing Her Family*

Five participant daughters said they maintained a relationship with their mother because of how much they value their family as a whole, with one saying simply, “My family is important to me.” Another participant explained,

Despite these terrible things going on, my family is hysterical. There was a certain amount (that) I didn’t want to lose those good pieces. I wanted to be invited to (*named family events*). There were memories positive enough that I didn’t want to give it all up.

Another described the tension between wanting to be a part of her family and wanting them to know all of her, including her sexuality. She stated,

I am so attached to my family. I want my family around. I grew up with a huge family, all of us being together. I value that. I love family and close friends, being together. I want to keep that but also be open with my sexuality too and not hide from anybody, not hide from them. I can’t force them to accept that, but at least respect it. I just want my family around.

The other interviewees (n = 8) did not identify the importance of their family as a whole as part of their motivation for maintaining a relationship with their mother after she rejected them.

### *Hope for Change*

Four adult daughters reported that they maintained their relationships with their rejecting mothers out of a hope that their mothers would come to accept their sexuality over time. One said,

I had hope that as I got older and became more successful, that all that stuff would show her that me being gay had nothing to do with me as a person. Yes it will affect who I choose as a partner but it doesn't impact me or who I am.

Another recalled, "In my core self, I really wanted it to work out and really willed it to work out even though she put me through hell for 10 years." Another study participant described her hope in the past tense, saying,

I thought that with time it would get better. I thought it was an initial reaction and that with time she would see that I was the same person I had always been it's just that she knew something else about me. But it didn't work out that way.

The fourth woman who identified hope for change as a motivator in maintaining her relationship with her mother expressed a strong belief that her mother will eventually come to accept her. She said, "It hasn't been an easy road. I believe someday (she) will accept me; I am her daughter and she will accept me for who I am." The other nine adult daughter participants did not share that they maintained their relationships with their mothers in part due to a hope that their mothers would become more accepting over time.

### *Rationalize Rejection*

Three interviewees expressed an understanding of their mothers' rejections or offered explanations of it in response to why they maintained the relationship following their mothers' rejection. One adult daughter whose mother was raised in another country described her understanding of her mother's rejection. She said,



I understood it wasn't lack of love. It was a complete inability to understand ... this concept, because it is something she's never been exposed to....That reasoning allowed me to maintain some sort of relationship with her.

Another woman explained, "I knew it was fear and lack of education and small mindedness; I knew she had it in her to open her mind." The third interviewee stated that she believed her mother was rejecting in part because her mother did not have a support network to work through her feelings about her daughter's sexuality. She said,

I understand where she comes from and it's easier that she is not cruel. Even though she makes comments that are hurtful, I think that's just her way of expressing how she feels because I don't think she has other people to talk to about my sexuality as well for fear of judgment.

Understanding of their mothers' rejection was not part of the other ten study participants' responses.

### *Prove Mom Wrong*

Two participants expressed a desire to prove their mothers wrong about the assumptions their mothers made regarding the participants' sexuality. One woman said that she believed that if she was successful in life, it would "show her that me being gay had nothing to do with me as a person." The other woman who expressed that part of her motivation in maintaining the relationship was to prove her mother wrong also admitted that she was proving something to herself as well. She explained that she maintained the relationship with her mother,

So I could prove to her my sexual orientation doesn't have to define me as a horrible person. She doesn't have to like it. She doesn't have to think of the nitty gritty of it but she can like me still. I really wanted to prove to her she could like me still, but it really felt like she didn't. For her, my sexual orientation was all of me. That was a motivating factor, proving her wrong or at least. Maybe (it) was for my own mind, because you know maternal rejection can do a number on your brain, so maybe I had to prove it to myself as well.

The other 11 participants did not identify a desire to prove their mothers wrong as part of their motivation for maintaining the relationship.

### *Mom Still Proud*

Two adult daughters explained that they maintained their relationships with their mothers following their mothers' rejection because they knew their mothers were still proud of them. In one case, this pride was directly linked to educational achievement.

This woman explained,

Also I think she feels proud a lot of my accomplishments. In a way I know it makes her happy for me to have a relationship with her because I got a Master's degree. I am the only of my siblings that has a BA or MA and she is very proud of the things I've done in my life.

Another remarked that she continued to have a relationship with her mother,

Maybe because I also know that they still do love me, they are always saying, when ever I talk on the phone with my mom, she hangs up the phone saying, I love you. I know they have been always really proud of me and my brother through school and college and stuff. They are always bragging about little accomplishments we've had to strangers. So I know she still loves me. I think she wants to turn a blind eye or hopes that part will change.

The remaining interviewees (n = 11) did not acknowledge that their mothers were still proud of them as a motivating factor in continuing their relationships with their mothers.

### *Change in Family Pattern*

Two participants identified a desire to change relational patterns within their families as a reason they maintained relationships with their mothers. Both specifically mentioned the relationships they had observed between their mothers and their mothers' mothers. One explained,

My mom is a little, I feel sorry for her. I feel like she doesn't mean to be this way. I honestly don't want to be that way. I saw the relationship she had with her mother. It was a very tense relationship. They both were back and forth all the

time saying the other one was very hurtful, selfish, and mean. And when my mom spits venom at me, I can be like her and have this horrible relationship with my mother, or I can try to change and be a better mother than she is I have to start with my mother in order to do that with my kids. It is important to overcome that trait. I saw how bad it was with my mother and her mother.

Another participant was primarily raised by her grandmother and observed the relationship between her mother and her grandmother, saying, “And then I saw their relationship was like mine with my mother, distant and very judgmental.” This was a motivator for the woman to try to build a different pattern with her own mother. The other 11 study participants did not mention specific family patterns they wanted to interrupt or change.

### *Guilt*

Two women mentioned guilt as part of their motivation for maintaining the relationship with their mothers. One explained, “And I would say guilt. I would feel guilty not to have some contact with her.” Another participant described feelings of guilt about her relationship with her mother that pre-dated her disclosure of her sexuality and her mother’s subsequent rejection. She characterized her behavior towards her mother as a way of rejecting her mother. She recalled,

I feel guilty for not being closer with her. But I don’t think it is just related to the sexuality. I think it pre-dated that. I feel like she wanted to be closer and I feel like she would try to take steps to be closer but I had already put up a wall because I didn’t trust her or I would know that she wouldn’t agree or accept what I would want to share anyway. I already build up a wall and she had violated my trust a few times, but I still feel guilty like that was all high school stuff. She loves me and wants to be closer but I just don’t. I kind of rejected her.

Feelings of guilt were not mentioned by the other 11 interviewees.

### *Motivated by Relationship with Other Family Members*

Two participants explained that another member of their family had motivated or encouraged them to maintain a relationship with their mothers following their rejection of the participants. One woman recalled that her grandmother, who was her primary care-taker, told her to maintain the relationship with her mother. She recalled,

(I remember) my grandmother telling me, she's your mom. No matter what, she will always be your mother. You have to find a way to get along or you have to remember what you loved about her.

Another woman described a dynamic within her family that made her believe she had to maintain a relationship with her mother in order to have one with her father, who was more accepting of her. She said,

Also, my parents are very close, almost too close. They don't really do anything apart from each other. I haven't had as much conflict with my dad and he's been much more supportive. It's hard to have a relationship with my dad without also having some sort of relationship with my mom. And in terms of keeping the peace in the family, I didn't want to completely distance myself from her.

### *Other Reasons Mentioned*

The following reasons were each mentioned by one study participant and not by any of the other 12. An example is provided for each.

#### *Stubbornness:*

I think it was more my stubbornness, in like no you are going to accept me because I do. I know the good things about you and about our relationship. I was told and raised with the idea that family comes first and no one is going love you like your family does, all of that. So it was a case trying to get my mom to practice what she had preached.

*Cultural Expectation:*

I don't think it is necessary to cut her out. I think that is something that white people expect you to do. We don't do that. We don't stop talking to each other. We don't do that. (If) we don't get along, we tell each other what we don't like about each other.

*Don't Want to Devastate Mom:*

I think she would be crushed and devastated, it would cause her a lot of pain if I cut her out. Part of it (is that) I don't want to hurt her feelings.

*Needs Mom's Emotional Support:*

(In) every other aspect of my life, she has been there to support me. I ended up moving out in the middle of one of my relationships, moving out of my mom's house after college, I lived on my own for a year. Then I ended up having to come back and I live in the apartment above her. Knowing that she gave me that opportunity to come back was a big thing as well. Even though there are tough times, she is still there for me in some aspects. I just think that knowing that she has always been there. If she wasn't there it would be horrible.

*Strategies for Managing Interpersonal Tension with Mother about Sexuality*

During the course of the interviews, participants mentioned six different ways of managing the relationship with their mothers following the rejection of their sexuality (see Table 5). Two or more participants mentioned five of these methods; one was mentioned by only one person. The methods will be reported in decreasing order of frequency and are as follows: limited/avoidant communication, physical distance helped, lessened intensity of rejection, another issue overshadowed, constructive communication, and importance of own happiness.

Table 5

*Strategies for managing interpersonal tension with mother about sexuality*

Participants (n = 13)	n	%
Limited/avoidant communication	13	100
Physical distance helped	10	76.9
Lessened intensity of rejection	3	23.1
Another issue overshadowed	2	15.4
Constructive communication	2	15.4
Importance of own happiness	1	7.7

*Limited/Avoidant Communication*

All study participants reported avoiding communication about particular topics related to their sexuality, avoiding communication about their personal lives, or limiting communication completely with their rejecting mothers. One daughter recalled, “I didn’t expect her to embrace it; I told her to acknowledge this and we don’t have to speak about it ever again, I can accept that.” Many participants described avoiding talking about their personal or love lives with their parents in order to maintain peace. One shared,

Now, well we talk occasionally but it’s pretty superficial. I don’t really share that much about my life with her because she doesn’t really want to know. I still wish that were different but it’s been so long at this point that I kind of (clears throat) accept that that’s how it is.

Another woman named these off-limit topics explicitly in a conversation with her mother.

She recalled,

We got into a fight when she came to visit me two years ago and she said something about, “Do you ever think you’re gonna get married?” I said, “Listen, you made it clear to me that you don’t want to be in my business so you don’t want to know about that so don’t ask questions about my business.” After that she actually stopped asking about my love life. There is obviously a tension. My mom is a very loving person as long as she’s not mad. ... But now the status quo, I just keep it going the way it is. No one is upset. No one is pissed off.

Other participants mentioned the limiting of physical contact, with decreased visits between themselves and their mothers. One contrasted the state of her current relationship with her mother to how it was prior to disclosing her sexuality. She said,

We were much closer. I was able to talk to her about my relationship. It's not like that now. She doesn't really come over to my place. I know she tries but it is very uncomfortable for her and I can see it, and it makes me uncomfortable so I don't share anything that is going on with my life with my relationship with her. I want her to, I want her to accept and just be, "It's okay honey, I accept you are gay." She kind of plays it off, she pretends that she is okay with it.

Another adult daughter explained that nearly all of her contact with her mother is limited to email since she disclosed her sexuality. She stated,

Now it's (our relationship) almost non-existent. I have been in California since 2004 so we only see each other once a year. We never talk on the phone. Maybe she's called me, like, once. We don't have much in common socially or politically. ... In a sense my dad also rejects it, too, but he's nicer, though. They both kind of ignore it. They both kind of reject it... I still maintain a relationship with my dad, so it's not specific to her.

One participant daughter identified an additional element of distance between herself and her mother, adding to the feelings of disconnect she experienced following her mother's rejection of her sexuality. She said,

It leaves limited things to talk about. If I bring up anything remotely queer, she gets awkward and changes the subject. ... I really don't like talking to her. We talk. I feel sad saying it, but I don't really connect. My mom is also white and I really identify as a woman of color. I'm really reflective on that part of myself. There is a lot about my mom that I feel very disconnected (from). We talk about once a week, sometimes less. More than not we get tension in the conversation.

Another participant described the limits on communication in two ways, first as initiated by her mother, and then as initiated by the participant. She said of her mother's limiting,

When I had a relationship after I told her, probably a year and half afterward, I said this is my girlfriend, she was pretty much disgusted by it and didn't want to discuss it. She would change subject or really not listening to me talk. She kind of just shut me out in the conversation..... She just didn't want to hear it anymore.

She then went on to describe her own limiting of communication, saying,

I closed down a bit with conversation and talking to her about a lot of stuff. My conversations now are more general and they're shorter. If we were to have a serious talk about something, she a lot of the time will walk away from them. It hurts. If something really emotionally affects her, she walks away and doesn't want to deal with it.

### *Physical Distance Helped*

Nearly all (n = 10) daughters reported that physical distance from their mothers helped them to manage their relationships with their mothers following the rejection.

One participant described,

Our relationship is rockier and we are less close. I've learned more about myself in the last few years or so living far away from her. . . . We just don't have the kind of relationship I need at this point where I would like to sit down and talk about my feelings, though we've had some really great conversations but not necessarily about my sexuality or dating life. So it's different. It's definitely transformed. I am also more mature, more of an adult and have different things going on in my life than before I told her.

Another reported an improvement in her relationship with her mother following her moving away. She said,

In our relationship, whether she acknowledges or not that she used to be controlling and very shaming and blaming in her disciplinary style, she's definitely changed with my being away. I think she realizes what is important in missing me and when I am there, she isn't going to fight with me about the length of my hair or what I wear.

Another interviewee noted that living farther from her mother had increased her sense of independence. She explained, "Living far way, I have a sense of autonomy now versus identifying myself with my family; I feel much more independent." Another participant stated that living away from her mother decreased the intensity of her mother's rejection. She said, "It was good that there was long distance; since I didn't live in the same city as



my parents, it was never really in my face.” Of the three participants who did not express that living far away from their mothers made it easier to manage the relationship post-rejection, two still live close to their mothers, and one’s mother is deceased. The two who live in close proximity did not specifically mention the impact of that proximity on their ability to manage their relationships with their mothers. However, the researcher did observe differences in the affect and verbal presentation of these two participants during the interview, as noted in the introduction to this chapter. The two participants who reported living in close physical proximity to their mothers at the time of their interviews were among those who seemed less settled and more emotionally distraught than the other interviewees.

#### *Lessened Intensity of Rejection*

Three participants reported that they had been able to manage the relationships with their mothers following their rejections because their mothers had become less intensely rejecting of their sexuality. One described,

Right now it’s the best it’s ever been. I don’t talk to her often. It’s the closest it’s always been. The urge to talk to her and be close to her has increased because she doesn’t criticize me as much. I am older and she doesn’t think it is worth the fight anymore. I have grown up and proven her wrong with certain things and I think she is happy about that.

Another participant explained,

She was always a very controlling mom, but ... she’s really backed off of that. For the last probably 8 years she has just fallen in love with the person I am with.

In these cases, the participants described a decrease in their mothers’ criticisms of them as part of what has enabled them to maintain their relationships with her. None of the

other 10 study participants specifically described such a decrease in negativity from their mothers

#### *Another Issue Overshadowed*

Two adult daughters reported that they had been able to manage their relationships with their mothers following their rejection in part because another more pressing issue had come up that overshadowed the conflict over the adult daughter's sexuality. One identified trouble experienced by a sibling, saying, "My sister isn't exactly succeeding so a lot of her attention has shifted to her more on her." Another respondent described a change in her relationship with her mother when her mother became terminally ill. She recalls,

My relationship with her was framed in the context of her illness. The last year of her life, we were in a caretaker-terminally ill patient relationship. I was the primary caretaker. ... She died at a time...where we were at a place of peace (for the first time) in almost a decade.

None of the other 11 study participants mentioned the rejection being overshadowed by another issue in the family.

#### *Constructive Communication*

Two participants reported significant changes in their relationships with their mothers after having a serious discussion with their mothers about the quality of their relationships. One recalled,

There was an ultimatum point... where I was like we have all these surface conversations, I didn't like how the relationship is, I haven't throughout the years but I never brought it up because I'd rather have some type of relationship with my mom than none, because it's my mom. I do love her. She's still an important person, a good person. I wanted to maintain something and I felt scared that if I kind of kept pushing it that that would be it. It was hard and emotional whenever I thought about trying to talk about it. But when I came into my relationship with my partner that I've been with now I said this is it, I can't handle how things are

anymore. I kind of gave her an ultimatum I guess. Since then, over the past year it's gotten a lot better, it's probably the best that it's been but it's still not something that she thinks is okay.

The other participant who mentioned having a direct conversation with her mother that resulted in an improvement in the quality of their relationship framed her strategy in confronting her mother within the lessons she had learned from her mother growing up, referring to the task as having to "re-raise" her mother. She explained,

I was stubborn and on this mission that if she really believed all the things she told me growing up, she is going to learn to practice those. So I really fought back with her and was adamant on it. Any time that she said to me that was negative, I was able to take a lesson she had taught during my childhood and put it back on her. We joke now about how I had to re-raise her. Because that's my mom and I love her. I knew it was fear and lack of education and small mindedness, I knew she had it in her to open her mind and to get to where she is now. I knew that and felt that inside.

No other participants reported engaging in this type of direct confrontation with their mothers about the state of their relationship.

### *Importance of Own Happiness*

Another participant explained that she has been able to manage the relationship with her mother since deciding to focus on her own happiness rather than on trying to please her mother. She explained,

I've just come to a point that I know that I may lose her when I do decide to either to become partners with someone for the rest of my life or even if I decide to have a child on my own, I know that she still wouldn't be happy. So I am not striving for her happiness or approval anymore. It is about me and what I want and what's going to make me happy. I realize that she's going to miss out on what I've done with my life. She's already has missed out on my life but I have the constant of my tias and tios and my sisters now that they are 18 and older...and make their own decisions.

None of the other 12 study participants specifically mentioned an increased focus on their own happiness as a method of managing the relationship with their mothers since being rejected by them.

### *Summary*

This chapter presented the findings from interviews with 13 adult lesbian women who were rejected by their mothers because of their sexuality and have maintained relationships with them about how they understand and manage those relationships. On some topics there was widespread consistency in themes within responses to interview questions, while on others participants reported a great number of different thoughts and experiences. Descriptions of prior relationships with mothers were split nearly in half between previously close or not close, as were characterizations of the type of rejection experienced at the time of disclosure. There were a wide variety of themes that emerged in participants' responses to what impact their mothers' rejection had on them as well as to their reasons for maintaining relationships with their mothers after this rejection. The most similarity was seen in descriptions of the ways in which interviewees managed their relationships with their rejecting mothers.

In describing their relationships with their mothers prior to disclosure of their sexuality, just over half ( $n = 7$ ) of participants characterized the previous relationship as close, while the rest reported that they had not previously been close to their mothers. Eight participants described rejection experiences consistent with hostile/aggressive rejection, while the remaining five reported experiences more typical of undifferentiated rejection.

Descriptions of the impact mothers' rejection had on interviewees were greater in number and showed less consistency than did responses to questions about the nature of relationships prior to disclosure and the specific type of rejection experienced. A total of nine different themes were identified within descriptions of the impact mothers' rejection had on their daughters, with only three being mentioned by five or more participants. The most common impact mentioned was difficulty in romantic relationships (n = 9), followed by questioning of one's sexuality (n = 6), and a lack of self-acceptance (n = 5). Challenges in romantic relationships could be tied to a number of other impacts identified, including feelings of uncertainty about one's sexuality, a lack of acceptance of one's sexual identity, and decreased self-esteem (mentioned specifically by four participants), so it is not surprising that it was the most frequently cited impact.

The most diversity in responses was found in participants' explanations of their reasons for maintaining relationships with their mothers post-rejection. Fourteen different themes were identified from participants' responses to this question, with only three mentioned by five or more women, and four mentioned by only one woman each. The most common response given by interviewees (n = 7) when asked why they maintained their relationships with their mothers post-rejection was, "Because she's my mom," suggesting the understood inherent importance and uniqueness of the mother-daughter relationship to these participants. The next most common reason given (n = 6) for maintaining the relationship post-rejection was a statement that the relationship was about more than just the rejection or that the daughter's identity was about more than just her sexuality. Some participants noted that they knew their mothers valued and supported other things about the participants' lives, and some stated that being gay was only one

part of who they are. The next most frequent response given (n = 5) was that women maintained their relationships with their mothers because of how much they value and/or enjoy their families as a whole.

Finally, the question that evoked the greatest consistency in responses was that exploring how women manage their relationships with their mothers post-rejection. Every participant mentioned avoiding or limiting communication with their mothers as a way they either currently or at one time managed the tension about their mothers' rejection of their sexuality. Most frequently interviewees mentioned avoiding topics related to their personal or love lives in conversations with their mothers, and many also mentioned limiting or avoiding contact altogether. Nearly all study participants (n = 10) also mentioned that increased physical distance between themselves and their mothers helped them manage the relationship post-rejection. Some cited a greater sense of independence and autonomy while one noted that living farther from her mother meant that her mother's rejection was not "in (her) face." In contrast, the two participants who reported still living near their mothers showed more unsettled affect while discussing the interview topics than did the other participants.

Possible implications of these findings as well as connections to existing literature will be addressed in the subsequent chapter.

## CHAPTER V

### DISCUSSION

The objective of this exploratory qualitative study was to explore adult lesbian women's motivation in maintaining and understanding of their relationships with their biological mothers who reject their sexuality and how this rejection may have affected the lives of these adult lesbian women. The dynamic complexities of mother - daughter relationships were examined through the perspective of the adult lesbian daughter. This chapter discusses the findings in the following order: 1) key findings, 2) implications for social work practice, 3) recommendations for future research, and 4) conclusion.

#### *Key Findings*

While some findings contradicted the previous research on mother - daughter relationships, many of the findings in this study supported the mother/daughter dynamics identified in Chapter Two. The key findings from this study and their connections to existing research are presented on the following major areas: the role of race/ethnicity, changes in acceptance over time, type of rejection experienced, impact of rejection within parental acceptance-rejection theory framework, motivation for maintaining relationship within family systems framework, and communication and distance in managing relationship post-rejection.

### *Role of Race/Ethnicity*

Some current research indicates that lesbian women of color often have difficulty finding balance between conforming to familial and community expectations and embracing their identity as lesbians; as a result, this complexity may delay the coming out process (Hunter, 2007). The findings in this study support Hunter's conclusion because the women of color disclosed their sexuality, on average, more than two years later than did their white counterparts. Also, the two participants who disclosed to their mothers the latest (age 25 and 26) were both women of color. Unfortunately, the interview schedule did not include specific questions as to the adult daughters' perspective on their ethnic and racial background and how this impacted their experiences with disclosing to their mothers. Therefore, it is difficult to draw conclusions about the role that culture or social class played in their disclosure or coming out process; however, out of all the women who participated in the study, three women of color mentioned race/ethnicity in their interviews without being asked about the impact of race or ethnicity on their decisions regarding disclosure or their relationships with their mothers.

### *Changes in Acceptance over Time*

In regard to research on acceptance over time, only three of the participants reported that while their mothers did not initially agree with or accept their lesbian identity, over time their mothers' rejection became less intense. This could be interpreted as indicating that these mothers became more accepting, though none was described as completely embracing her daughter's lesbian identity. This finding does not necessarily support the literature on family adjustment following disclosure where initial parental



reaction of shock, hurt, or anger may later progress toward one of acceptance of love (Savin-Williams, 2001). However the interview guide also did not specifically ask if relationships with mothers had changed or improved over time. Participants were simply asked to describe their relationships before, at the time of, and after disclosure. Thus, participants may have experienced some acceptance that they did not specifically mention in their interviews. Furthermore, self-selection into the study might have created a skewed sample of daughters who have not experienced improvement or change in their relationships with their mothers, and this experience may differ from the experiences of the entire population of gay and lesbian individuals who have disclosed to their parents. The form of communication used by most participants to manage their relationships with their mothers may also explain the lack of change and/or improvement in the relationships. The vast majority of participants reported that mother and daughter have avoided engaging with one another and/or discussing any issues that may be related to daughter's sexuality.

#### *Type of Rejection Experienced*

Participants in this study were somewhat more likely to report initial rejection experiences typical of hostile/aggressive rejection than those of undifferentiated rejection, but over time most relationships settled into a pattern of undifferentiated rejection. This finding is in accordance with research using parental acceptance-rejection (PAR) theory to study familial responses to disclosure by young adult transwomen. The PAR theory showed that these family relationships did not appear to progress toward greater acceptance, but rather over time more of the participants mentioned undifferentiated rejection as opposed to any other type of rejection (Koken et al, 2009).

### *Impact of Rejection within Parental Acceptance-Rejection Theory Framework*

Similar to other research that used the PAR theory to explore a child's experience of rejection, the data presented here showed that the participant's relationship to her mother may shape the participant's perception of her mother's acceptance/rejection. These findings validate previous PAR theory studies indicating that long-term impacts of being rejected by parents include lower quality romantic relationships, difficulty with mental health, and decreased self-esteem (Rohner et al, 2005). These results are also in accordance with research by Crook et al (1981) showing that adults whose mothers showed rejecting behavior were more likely to be hospitalized for depression.

### *Motivation for Maintaining Relationship within Family Systems Framework*

Participants' motivation for maintaining their relationships with rejecting mothers can be understood from the perspective of family systems theory, which is helpful in interpreting many of the major reasons mentioned by participants when discussing their attitudes about maintaining such a relationship. Family systems theory suggests that the relationship with a rejecting mother may be mediated by relationships with other family members, and that individual members may make sacrifices to stay in the system and maintain their particular role (Williamson, 1981; Kerr and Bowen, 1988). Participant responses revealed that relationships with other family members motivated or enabled them to maintain their relationships with their mothers post-rejection, along with those that showed that participants valued their families as a whole, support this understanding of family as an interdependent system. Additionally, this perspective may help to make sense of the frequent response, "Because she's my mom" when interviewees were asked why they have maintained their relationship with their rejecting mother. This particular

response could reflect the strength of the mother's role in the family as well as that of the participant's role as daughter. Koken et al.'s (2009) finding that many transwomen who were rejected by their families continued contact with them illustrates the kind of sacrifices individuals rejected because of their sexual orientation or gender identity may make to maintain their role within the family system.

### *Communication and Distance in Managing Relationships Post-Rejection*

The finding that all respondents currently used or at one time used limited/avoidant communication to manage their relationships with their mothers post-rejection is widely supported in the literature on familial response post-disclosure by gay or lesbian youth (Boxer, Cook and Herdt, 1991; DeVine, 1984; Herdt and Boxer 1993; Martin and Hetrick, 1988; Robinson, Walters, and Skein, 1989). Data presented in this study indicate that this phenomenon continues for individuals who disclose in early adulthood as well. Birditt et al. (2009) found that mothers were particularly likely to use avoidant/limited communication as a tactic for managing tension in interpersonal relationships, a finding that is supported here. The two respondents in this study who described confronting their mothers about the superficial, limited or hostile nature of their relationship made use of constructive communication strategies, consistent with those described in Birditt et al.'s (2009) work. Also consistent with that study were the improved relationships reported by those respondents who used constructive communication with their mothers.

Another strategy identified in research on familial responses to disclosure by gay and lesbian young adults as being common in managing relationships post-rejection is the

increase in physical distance between the child and rejecting family (Brown, 1988). The findings of this study support the idea that families use physical distance to maintain the family structure post-disclosure, with nearly all respondents citing distance between themselves and their rejecting mothers as an important factor in maintaining and even improving their relationships with their mothers.

### *Implications for Social Work Practice*

Challenges related to the coming out process are often what bring lesbian women into therapeutic treatment, whether it is coming out to oneself, to others, to family, or managing the consequences of previous disclosure. Because of the continuing existence of homophobia in our culture, disclosing one's identity as a lesbian can cause significant discomfort, anxiety, conflict and tension. When coupled with the impact of being rejected by a parent, more serious mental health issues can occur. Struggles around coming out and managing one's identity following disclosure may impact development and need to be taken seriously to assist clients in integrating their identities and managing internal, intrapsychic conflict as well as external, interpersonal conflict.

Clinicians should familiarize themselves with issues related to coming out, managing identity, conflict, and integrating lesbian identity. Clinicians could assess developmental milestones within the lesbian identity development process that take into consideration temporal and cohort factors as a way of understanding where the client stands in this progression. Focusing clinical work on coming out and identity development/management can also serve to normalize people's experiences, counteracting some of the isolating and alienating impacts of homophobia and rejection.

Use of a diagnostic assessment of development that takes into consideration sexual identity can help clinicians distinguish between true developmental issues caused by intrapsychic, internal conflicts and those brought on due to dealing with homophobia from rejection and environmental, external factors.

Moreover, clinicians can take initiative in talking about questions regarding disclosure to families, since this difficult process is often avoided in communication. Clinicians should think not only about the presence but also the omission of talking about disclosing to family, and work to understand why it is not coming up. After a lesbian adult woman has made the decision to come out to her mother or parents, she must still work on managing the relationship(s) that can still continue to impact her sense of self. Family system theory may be an appropriate perspective to understand relational concerns, as the participants in this study want to maintain contact despite their mothers' rejection. Work with lesbian adults who have faced rejection of their sexuality by mothers should include 1) how to maintain the relationship as well as 2) how to maintain mental health and have constructive conversations and healthy relationships with self and the rejecting mother. In the case of rejection that does not continue to be directly aggressive as described in this study, both parent and child want to maintain connection. Many participants struggled to do so in the most productive, healthy way possible. How best to support that is the responsibility of clinicians.

Finally, clinicians who are sensitive to the issues faced by lesbian women and their families may play an important role in promoting the acceptance of lesbian adult children. Even with familial acceptance, lesbian women will still face societal prejudice and discrimination. However, love and acceptance from immediate family may act as a

buffer against the stigma encountered in public settings. Programming aimed at social awareness about the impact of parental rejection of homosexuality is needed to encourage a broader social acceptance of homosexuality especially within familial relationships.

### *Recommendations for Future Research*

As an exploratory effort, this study did not specify a particular theoretical framework as an organizing structure. Future related research could benefit from a more focused theoretical framework. All future research on this sample population would benefit from a larger sample size, as the small number of participants in this study limits the generalizability of the findings. This study incorporated several theories and models to understand the objective of this research. Below are three possible theoretical frameworks outlined in this study that, if employed alone would have with slightly different research designs and study purposes, which are as follows: parental acceptance-rejection theory, intergenerational family systems theory, and life course theory.

#### *Parental Acceptance-Rejection Theory*

Research on lesbian women who have been rejected by their mothers because of their sexuality could be conducted within the framework of parental acceptance-rejection theory (PAR theory). This framework would lend itself well to an investigation focused on the impact of rejection by parents on mental health, self-esteem, and intimate relationships. The ideal study design would be longitudinal in order to provide data on the process of family acceptance over time, reducing the loss of information that occurs in purely retrospective questioning. The use of self-report questionnaires such as the Parental Acceptance-Rejection Questionnaire could aid in standardizing characterizations of the types of rejecting behavior experienced by participants. A PAR theory approach

could provide understanding of characteristics of accepting and rejecting families, as well as the dynamics of partial, full, or no parental acceptance and how those dynamics impact children later in life.

### *Intergenerational Family Systems Theory*

Further research on adult lesbian women who have been rejected by their mothers could be conducted within an intergenerational family systems framework, with a focus on the entire family system rather than only the mother-daughter dyad. This approach could provide measures of psychological health and the participants' ability to differentiate while maintaining familial connection and how that impacts functioning in other intimate relationships. Such a study should be longitudinal and would require more information about the whole family system and the different ways members of the family connect and relate to each other, in terms of enmeshment and differentiation. A study of this nature could begin to understand the interaction of individuation and togetherness within a familial relationship, as well as the implications of that balance for intimate relationships outside of the family. It would be critical to measure the importance to the participant of the mother-daughter relationship and compare it to that of relationships with other family members. One limitation of the present study was the assumption that the mother-daughter relationship was of special importance to participants compared to those they have with other family members.

A study guided by intergenerational family systems theory on adult lesbian women rejected by their mothers could look at the quality of family relationships through the lens of communication in the context of interpersonal tension management. Such work could help create and recommend strategies to aid members of a family in dealing

with interpersonal tension/conflict. A more narrow research focus on the strategies employed by participants and what was helpful in managing their relationships post-rejection could develop more ways to improve the quality of familial relationships. It would also be informative to conduct a comparative study looking at heterosexual women in addition to lesbian women who have ongoing conflict with their mothers, and to examine how that conflict affects their development, relationships, and sense of self. Conducting research on lesbian women who have been rejected by their mothers from a life course theory perspective would be ideal to examine the impact on a dynamic, historically situated lesbian identity development process. Life course theory emphasizes the significance of time in development, both within an individual's lifetime and within a social/historical time period. Life course theory works within a developmental framework on an individual that locates her within a particular cultural and historical context. Given societal shifts in acceptance of homosexuality, the placement of a participant within a historical cohort and period could be informative for understanding experiences of rejection and acceptance within and outside of her family. An additional level of understanding could be gained by designing a cohort study for a specific region to examine how people make meaning of an event, as well as the reciprocal relationship between events and the individuals who experience them; individuals who are influenced by a social or historical event also influence what happens.

Life course theory also posits that the age of an individual at the time an event occurs, results in a differential impact on the individual. This approach confirms the importance of age and generation in shaping women's lives and provides a lens on how social change and personal change interact with one another. Within the field of life



course theory is the concept of a social clock, defined as set of strongly held societal norms, both internal and external, dictating the age at which various activities of men and women are deemed appropriate. There may be differences in the social clock for heterosexual versus lesbian women, and comparative research guided by life course theory could uncover these patterns.

Whatever area of focus used within life course theory would require studies use of narrative and biographical data as a promising way of studying women's psychological development because participants are able to make meaning of own their stories as locate selves in history and time, use their own voice and thus leaning towards a feminist approach in design study.

### *Conclusion*

This study explored the ways in which lesbian adult women, who have been rejected by their mothers because of their sexuality and maintain relationships with them, understand and manage those relationships as well as their motivation for maintaining the relationships. The findings yielded diverse impacts on participants of rejection by their mothers, including difficulty in romantic relationships, questioning of their sexuality, and mental health issues. Participants also listed a variety of motivations for maintaining relationships with their mothers post-rejection, with many expressing that they value their connections to their families as a whole and that there are other aspects of their relationships with their mothers outside of their sexuality and mothers' rejection. There was widespread consistency in the use of limited and avoidant communication with mothers as a way of managing the tension in the relationship about the participant's sexuality.

The results of this study serve as an indicator of the possible power of connection to families of origin, and the desire for lesbian daughters to maintain that connection in spite of interpersonal tension and challenges. The findings of this study also reveal that there are parents who don't want to abandon their children or reject them completely despite strong disapproval of their sexuality and who are unsure of how to relationally manage this tension/conflict. Many of the adult lesbian daughters in this study are able to see their mothers as more than just a rejecting force, and the mothers of participants in this study are similarly willing to maintain a connection regardless of their daughters' sexuality. The researcher commends efforts made by mothers and daughters to engage with one another in spite of deep disagreement and hopes that mothers who reject their children because of their sexuality will continue to re-evaluate their beliefs and values regarding the importance of their relationship with their daughters relative to their disapproval of their sexuality.

## References

- Anastas, J. W. (1999). *Research design for social work and the human services*. (2nd ed.). New York: Columbia University Press.
- Anderson, S., & Fleming, W. (1986). Late adolescents' identity formation: Individuation from the family of origin. *Adolescence*, 21, 785-796.
- Arnett, J. (2004). *Emerging adulthood: The winding road from the late teens through the twenties*. New York, NY US: Oxford University Press.
- Balsam, K. F. (2003). Trauma, stress, and resilience among sexual minority women: Rising like the phoenix. *Journal of Lesbian Studies*, 7(4), 1-8.
- Ben-Ari, A. (1995b). The discovery that an offspring is gay: Parents', gay men's, and lesbians' perspectives. *Journal of Homosexuality*, 30(1), 89-112.
- Bergman, A., & Fahey, M. (1996). Two women and their mothers: On the internalization and development of mother-daughter relationships. *Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association*, 44(Suppl.), 449-482.
- Birditt, K. S. & Fingerman, K. L. (2005). Do we get better at picking our battles? Age differences in descriptions of behavioral reactions to interpersonal tensions. *Journals of Gerontology: Psychological Sciences*, 60B, 121-128.
- Birditt, K. S., Fingerman, K. L., & Almeida, D. (2005). Age differences in exposure and reactions to interpersonal tensions: A daily diary study. *Psychology and Aging*, 20, 330-340.
- Birditt, K. S., Rott, L. M., & Fingerman, K. L. (2009) "If you can't say something nice, don't say anything at all": Coping with interpersonal tensions in the parent-child relationship during adulthood." *Journal of Family Psychology*, 23(6), 769-778.
- Blanchard-Fields, F., Stein, R., & Watson, T. L. (2004) Age differences in emotion-regulation strategies in handling everyday problems. *Journals of Gerontology: Psychological Sciences*, 59B, 261-269.
- Boon, S., & Miller, R. (1999). Exploring the links between interpersonal trust and the reasons underlying gay and bisexual males' disclosure of their sexual orientation to their mothers. *Journal of Homosexuality*, 37(3), 45-68.
- Bowen, M. (1978). *Family therapy in clinical practice*. New York: Jason Aronson.

- Boxer, A. M., & Cohler, B. J. (1989). The life course of gay and lesbian youth: An immodest proposal for the study of lives. *Journal of Homosexuality*, 17(3-4), 315-355.
- Boxer, A.M., Cook, J.A. and Herdt, G. (1991). Double jeopardy: Identity transitions and parent-child relations among gay and lesbian youth. In K. Pillemer & K. McCartney (Eds.), *Parent and child relations throughout life* (pp. 59-92). Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Bradford, J., Ryan, C., & Rothblum, E. D. (1994). National lesbian health care survey: Implications for mental health care. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, 62(2), 228-242.
- Bradford, J., Ryan, C., & Rothblum, E. D. (1997). National Lesbian Health Care Survey: Implications for mental health care. *Journal of Lesbian Studies*, 1(2), 217-249.
- Brown, L. (1989). New voices, new vision: Toward a lesbian/gay paradigm for psychology. *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, 13, 455-458.
- Buhl, H. M. (2008). Significance of individuation in adult child-parent relationships. *Journal of Family Issues*, 29(2), 262-281.
- Buhrke, R. A., Ben-Ezra, L. A., Hurley, M. E., & Ruprecht, L. J. (1992). Content analysis and methodological critique of articles concerning lesbian and gay male issues in counseling journals. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 39(1), 91-99.
- Canary, D. & Cupach, W. R. (1988). Relational and episodic characteristics associated with conflict tactics. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, 5, 305-325.
- Cass, V. (1979). Homosexual identity formation: A theoretical model. *Journal of Homosexuality*, 4(3), 219-235.
- Cass, V. (1984). Homosexual identity formation: Testing a theoretical model. *Journal of Sex Research*, 20, 143-167.
- Chan, C. (1989). Issues of identity development among Asian American lesbians and gay men. *Journal of Counseling and Development*, 68, 16-20.
- Chatters, L. M. & Taylor, R. J. (1990). Social integration. In Z. Harel (Ed.), *Black aged: Understanding diversity and service needs* (pp. 82-99). Newburg Park, CA: Sage.
- Chodorow, N. (1978). *The reproduction of mothering*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

- Cohler, B. J. & Galatzer-Levy, R. M. (2000) *The course of gay and lesbian lives: Social and psychoanalytic perspectives*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Cohler, B. J., Grunebaum, H., & Robbins, D. M. (1981). *Mothers, grandmothers, and daughters: Personality and child care in three-generation families*. New York: Wiley.
- Coleman, E. (1981). Developmental stages of the coming out process. *Journal of Homosexuality*, 4, 31-43.
- Cramer, D.W. and Roach, A.J. (1988). Coming out to mom and dad: A study of gay males and their relationships with their parents. *Journal of Homosexuality*, 15, 79-91.
- Crook, T., Raskin, A., & Eliot, J. (1981). Parent-child relationships and adult depression. *Child Development*, 52(3), 950-957.
- D'Augelli, A.R. (1991). Gay men in college: Identity processes and adaptations. *Journal of College Student Development*, 32, 140-146.
- D'Augelli, A.R. & Hershberger, S.L. (1993). Lesbian, gay, and bisexual youth in community settings: Personal challenges and mental health problems. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 21(4), 421-448.
- D'Augelli, A. R., Hershberger, S. L., & Pilkington, N. W. (1998). Lesbian, gay, and bisexual youth and their families: Disclosure of sexual orientation and its consequences. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, 68(3), 361-371.
- DeGeneres, B. (2000). *Love, Ellen: A mother/daughter journey*. New York: Harper.
- DeVine, J.L. (1984). A systemic inspection of affectional preference orientation and the family of origin. *Journal of Social Work & Human Sexuality*, 2, 9-17.
- Diamond, L. M. (2005). What we got wrong about sexual identity development: Unexpected findings from a longitudinal study of young women. In A. Omoto & H. Kurtzman (Eds.), *Sexual orientation and mental health: Examining identity and development in lesbian, gay, and bisexual people* (pp. 73-94). Washington, D.C.: American Psychological Association Press.
- Dumka, L. E., Roosa, M. W., & Jackson, K. M. (1997). Risk, conflict, mothers' parenting, and children's adjustment in low-income, Mexican-immigrant, and Mexican-American families. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 59, 309-323.
- Elder, G.H. (1974). *Children of the great depression: Social change in life experience*. Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press.

- Erikson, E. H. (1950). *Childhood and society*. New York: W.W. Norton & Co.
- Espin, O. (1987). Issues of identity in the psychology of Latina lesbians. *Boston Lesbian Psychologies Collective* (pp.35-51). Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press.
- Fischer, L. R. (1981). Transitions in the mother–daughter relationship. *Journal of Marriage & the Family*, 43(3), 613-622.
- Fischer, L. R. (1991). Between mothers and daughters. *Marriage and Family Review*, 16, 237-248.
- Floyd, F., & Bakeman, R. (2006). Coming-out across the life course: Implications of age and historical context. *Archives of Sexual Behavior*, 35(3), 287–296.
- Frank, S., Pirsch, L., & Wright, V. (1990). Late adolescents' perceptions of their relationships with their parents: Relationships among deidealization, autonomy, relatedness, and insecurity and implications for adolescent adjustment and ego identity status. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 19, 571-588.
- Fukuyama, M. A., & Ferguson, A. D. (2000). Lesbian gay, and bisexual people of color: Understanding cultural complexity and managing multiple oppressions. In R. M. Perez, K. A. DeBord, & K. J. Bieschke (Eds.), *Handbook of counseling and psychotherapy with lesbian, gay and bisexual clients* (pp. 81–105). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association
- Fullinwider-Bush, N., & Jacobvitz, D. (1993). The transition to young adulthood: Generational boundary dissolution and female identity development. *Family Process*, 32, 87-103.
- Garbarino, J., Gaa, J., Swank, P., McPherson, R., & Gratch, L. (1995). The relation of individuation and psychosocial development. *Journal of Family Psychology*, 9(3), 311-318.
- Gair, S. R. (1995). The false self, shame, and the challenge of self-cohesion. In J. M. Glasshold & S. Iasenza (Eds.), *Lesbians and psychoanalysis* (pp. 107-123). New York, NY: The Free Press.
- Gilligan, C. (1982). *In a different voice: Psychological theory and women's development*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Grambling, L. F., Carr, R. L., & McCain, N. L. (2000). Family responses to disclosure of self-as-lesbian. *Issues in Mental Health Nursing*, 21(7), 653-669.

- Greene, B. (1994). Ethnic-minority lesbians and gay men: Mental health and treatment issues. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, 62(2), 243-251.
- Greene, B. (2000). African American lesbian and bisexual women. *Journal of Social Issues*, 56(2), 239-249.
- Greene, S. (2003). *The psychological development of girls and women: Rethinking change in time*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Griffin, Wirth, & Wirth (1986). *Beyond acceptance: Parents of lesbians and gays talk about their experiences*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall Inc.
- Grotevant, H. (1987). Adolescent development reconsidered. In C. Irwin Jr. (Ed.), *New directions for child development: Vol. 37. Adolescent social behavior and health*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Grotevant, H., & Cooper, C. (1985). Patterns of interaction in family relationships and the development of identity exploration in adolescence. *Child Development*, 56, 415-428.
- Grov, C., Bimbi, D. S., Nanín, J. E., & Parsons, J. T. (2006). Race, ethnicity, gender, and generational factors associated with the coming-out process among gay, lesbian, and bisexual individuals. *Journal of Sex Research*, 43(2), 115-121.
- Groves, P. A., & Ventura, L. A. (1983). The lesbian coming out process: Therapeutic considerations. *Personnel & Guidance Journal*, 62(3), 146-149
- Hagestad, G. O. (1987). Parent-child relations in later life: Trends and gaps in past research. In J. B. Lancaster, J. Altman, A. S. Rossi, & L. R. Sherrod (Eds.), *Parenting across the lifespan* (PP. 405-433). New York: Aldine De Gruyter.
- Halpin, S. A., & Allen, M. W. (2004). Changes in the psychosocial well-being during stages of gay identity development. *Journal of Homosexuality*, 47(2), 109-126.
- Hammack, P. (2005). The life course development of human sexual orientation: An integrative paradigm. *Human Development*, 48, 267-290.
- Hammersmith, S.K. (1987). A sociological approach to counseling homosexual clients and their families. *Journal of Homosexuality*, 14, 173-190.
- Harry, J. (1993). Being out: A general model. *Journal of Homosexuality*, 26(1), 25-39.
- Harter, S. (1990). Self and identity development. In S. Feldman & G. Elliott (Eds.), *At the threshold: The developing adolescent* (pp. 352-387). Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

- Herdt, G., & Boxer, A. (1993). *Children of horizons: How gay and lesbian teens are leading a new way out of the closet*. Boston: Beacon.
- Herdt, G. & Koff, B. (2000). *Something to tell you: The road families travel when a child is gay*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Herschberger, S. L. & D'Augelli, A. R. (1995). The impact of victimization on the mental health and suicidality of lesbian, gay, and bisexual youths. *Developmental Psychology*, 31(1), 65-74.
- Holmbeck, G. N., & Hill, J. P. (1986). A path-analytic approach to the relations between parental traits and acceptance and adolescent adjustment. *Sex Roles*, 14(5-6), 315-334.
- Holmbeck, G. N., & Wandrei, M. L. (1993). Individual and relational predictors of adjustment in first-year college students. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 40, 73-78
- Holtzen, D. W. (1993). *Family responses to homosexuality: Correlates of homophobia, gay or lesbian self-disclosure and parent/sibling homophobia*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Boston College, Chestnut Hill, MA.
- Holtzen, D. W., & Agresti, A. A. (1990). Parental responses to gay and lesbian children: Differences in homophobia, self-esteem, and sex-role stereotyping. *Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology*, 9, 390-399.
- Jordan, J. (1984). *Empathy and self-boundaries*. (Work in Progress No. 16) Wellesley, MA: Stone Center Working Paper Series.
- Jordan, K. M., & Deluty, R. H. (1998). Coming out for lesbian women: Its relation to anxiety, positive affectivity, self-esteem and social support. *Journal of Homosexuality*, 35(2), 41-63.
- Kamptner, N. L. (1988). Identity development in late adolescence: Causal modeling of social and familial influences. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 17(6), 493-514.
- Kennedy, E. L., & Davis, M. D. (1993). *Boots of leather, slippers of gold: The history of a lesbian community*. New York: Penguin.
- Kenny, M. E. (1990). College seniors' perceptions of parental attachments: The value and stability of family ties. *Journal of College Student Development*, 31, 39 - 46.



- Kenny, M. E., & Donaldson, G. A. (1991). Contributions of parental attachment and family structure to the social and psychological functioning of first-year college students. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 38, 479 - 486.
- Kerr, M. E., & Bowen, M. (1988). *Family evaluation: An approach based on Bowen theory*. New York, NY US: W W Norton & Co.
- Kobak, R. R., & Sceery, A. (1988). Attachment in late adolescence: Working models, affect regulation, and representation of self and others. *Child Development*, 59, 135-146.
- Koken, J. A., Bimbi, D. S., & Parsons, J. T. (2009). Experiences of familial acceptance–rejection among transwomen of color. *Journal of Family Psychology*, 23(6), 853-860.
- Konik, J., & Stewart, A. (2004). Sexual identity development in the context of compulsory heterosexuality. *Journal of Personality*, 72(4), 815–844.
- Larson, R., & Richards, M. (1994). *Divergent Realities: The Emotional Lives of Mothers, Fathers, & Adolescents*. New York: Basic Books.
- LaSala, M. C. (2000). Gay male couples: The importance of coming out and being out to parents. *Journal of Homosexuality*, 39(2), 47–71.
- Lazarus, R. S. (1999). *Stress and emotion: A new synthesis*. New York: Springer.
- Levinson, D. (1978). *The Seasons of a Man's Life*. New York: Knopf.
- Levinson, D. (1996). *The Seasons of a Woman's Life*. New York: Knopf.
- Lewis, R., Derlega, V., Berndt, A., Morris, L., & Rose, S. (2001). An empirical analysis of stressors for gay men and lesbians. *Journal of Homosexuality*, 42(1), 63–88.
- Logan, C. (2006). Counseling lesbian clients. In C. C. Lee (Ed.). *Multicultural issues in counseling: New approaches to diversity* (pp. 291-301). Alexandria, VA: American Counseling Association.
- Loiacano, D. (1989). Gay identity issues among Black Americans: Racism, homophobia and the need for validation. *Journal of Counseling Development*, 68, 21-25.
- Lopez, F. G., Watkins, C. E., Jr., Manus, M., & Hunton-Shoup, J. (1992). Conflictual independence, mood regulation, and generalized self-efficacy: Test of a model of late-adolescent identity. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 39, 375-381.

- Luhtanen, R. K. (2003). Identity, stigma management, and well-being: A comparison of lesbians/bisexual women and gay/bisexual men. *Journal of Lesbian Studies*, 7(1), 85-100.
- Lui, P., & Chan, C. (1996). Lesbian, gay, and bisexual Asian Americans and their families. In J. Laird & R. Green (Eds.), *Lesbians and gays in couples and families: A handbook for therapists* (pp. 137-152). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass
- Martin, A. D., & Hetrick, E. S. (1988). The stigmatization of the gay and lesbian adolescent. *Journal of Homosexuality*, 15, 163-183.
- McCarn, S., & Fassinger, R. (1996). Revisioning sexual minority identity formation: A new model of lesbian identity and its implications for counseling and research. *The Counseling Psychologist*, 24, 508-534.
- Miller, J. B. (1991). The development of women's sense of self. In J.V. Jordan, A.G. Kaplan, J.B. Miller, I.P. Stiver, & J.L. Surrey (Eds.), *Women's growth in connection. Writings from the Stone Center* (pp. 11-26). New York: Guilford Press.
- Minton, H. L., & McDonald, G. J. (1984). Homosexual identity formation as a developmental process. *Journal of Homosexuality*, 9(2/3), 91-104.
- Mohr, J. J., & Fassinger, R. E. (2000). Measuring dimension of lesbian and gay male experience. *Measurement and Evaluation in Counseling and Development*, 33, 66-90.
- Monroe, E. J. (2001). Drawing upon the experiences of those who are out: A qualitative study of the coming-out process of gays and lesbians. Doctoral dissertation, The University of Iowa.
- Moradi, B., Mohr, J. J., Worthington, R. L., & Fassinger, R. E. (2009). Counseling psychology research on sexual (orientation) minority issues: Conceptual and methodological challenges and opportunities. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 56(1), 5-22.
- Morin, S. F. (1977). Heterosexual bias in psychological research on lesbianism and male homosexuality. *American Psychologist*, 32(8), 629-637.
- Morris, J. F. (1997). Lesbian coming out as a multidimensional process. *Journal of Homosexuality*, 33, 1-22.
- Morris, J. F., & Rothblum, E. D. (1999). Who fills out a "lesbian" questionnaire? *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, 23, 537-557.

- Muller, A. (1987). *Parents matter: Parents' relationships with lesbian daughters and gay sons*. Tallahassee, FL: Naiad Press.
- Noack, P., & Buhl, H. M. (2004). Child-parent relationships. In F. R. Lang & K. L. Fingerman (Eds.), *Growing together. Personal relationships across the lifespan* (pp. 45-75). Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Offer, D., Ostrov, E., and Howards, K. I. (1981), The mental health professional's concept of the normal adolescent, *Archives of General Psychiatry*, 38, 149-153.
- Oswald, R. (2000). Family and friendship relationships after young women come out as bisexual or lesbian. *Journal of Homosexuality*, 38(3), 65–83.
- Parks, C. A. (1999). Lesbian identity development: An examination of differences across generations. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, 69, 347–361.
- Parks, C., Hughes, T., & Matthews, A. (2004). Race/ethnicity and sexual orientation: Intersecting identities. *Cultural Diversity and Ethnic Minority Psychology*, 10(3), 241-254.
- Parkes, C. M. (1971). Psychosocial transitions. *Social Science and Medicine*, 5(April), 101-115.
- Pearlman, S.F. (2005). When mothers learn a daughter is a lesbian: Then and now. *Journal of Lesbian Studies*, 9(3), 117-137.
- Peplau, L. (2001). Rethinking women's sexual orientation: An interdisciplinary, relationship-focused approach. *Personal Relationships*, 8(1), 1-19.
- Perosa, S., & Perosa, L. (1993). Relationships among Minuchin's structural family model, identity achievement, and coping style. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 40, 479-489.
- Perosa, L., Perosa, S., & Tam, H. (1996). The contribution of family structure and differentiation to identity development in females. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 25(6), 817-837.
- Perosa, L. M., Perosa, S. L., & Tam, H. (2002). Intergenerational systems theory and identity development in young adult women. *Journal of Adolescent Research*, 17(3), 235-259.
- Peterson, T. L. & Gerrity, D. A. (2006). Internalized homophobia, lesbian identity development, and self-esteem in undergraduate women. *Journal of Homosexuality*, 50(4), 49-75.

- Pilkington, N.W., & D'Augelli, A.R. (1995). Victimization of lesbian, gay, and bisexual youth in community settings. *Journal of Community Psychology*, 23(1), 34-56.
- Rastogi, M., & Wampler, K. S. (1999). Adult daughters' perceptions of the mother–daughter relationship: A cross-cultural comparison. *Family Relations*, 48(3), 327-336.
- Reynolds, A. L. & Hanjorgiris, W. F. (2000). “Coming out: Lesbian, gay, and bisexual identity development.” In R. M. Perez, K. A. DeBord, & K. J. Bieschke (Eds.), *Handbook of counseling and psychotherapy with lesbian, gay, and bisexual clients* (pp. 35-55). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.
- Riddle, D. I., & Morin, S. F. (1977, November). Removing the stigma: Data from individuals. *APA Monitor*: 16, 28.
- Riegel, K. (1977). “The dialectics of time.” In N. Datan and H. W. Reese, *Life-span developmental psychology: Dialectical perspectives on experimental research*. New York: Academic Press.
- Robbins, S.P., Chatterjee, P., & Canda, E. R. (2012). *Contemporary human behavior theory: A critical perspective for social work (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.)*. Boston: Allyn & Bacon.
- Robinson, B.E., Walters, L.H., & Skeen, P. (1989). Response of parents to learning that their child is homosexual and concern over AIDS: A national study. *Journal of Homosexuality*, 18 (1/2), 59-80.
- Robinson, L. C. (2000). Interpersonal relationship quality in young adulthood: A gender analysis. *Adolescence*, 35(140), 775-784.
- Rohner, R.P. (1990) *Handbook for the study of parental acceptance and rejection*. Storrs: University of Connecticut, Ronald and Nancy Rohner Center for the Study of Parental Acceptance and Rejection.
- Rohner, R. P. (1994). Patterns of parenting: The Warmth dimension in cross-cultural perspective. In W. J. Lonner & R. S. Malpass (Eds.), *Readings in psychology and culture* (pp. 113– 120). Needham Heights, MA: Allyn & Bacon.
- Rohner, R. P. (2004). The parental “acceptance–rejection syndrome”: Universal correlates of perceived rejection. *American Psychologist*, 59, 830–840.
- Rohner, R. P., Khaleque, A., & Cournoyer, D. E. (2005). Parental acceptance–rejection: Theory, methods, cross-cultural evidence, and implications. *Ethos*, 33, 299–334.

- Rosario, M., Schrimshaw, E. W., & Hunter, J. (2004). Ethnic/racial differences in the coming-out process of lesbian, gay, and bisexual youths: A comparison of Sexual identity development over time. *Cultural Diversity and Ethnic Minority Psychology*, 10(3), 215-228.
- Rothblum, E. D., & Brehony, K. A. (Eds.). (1993). *Boston marriages: Romantic but asexual relationships among contemporary lesbians*. Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts.
- Rutter, M., Graham, P., Chadwick, D. F. D., & Yule, W. (1976). Adolescent turmoil: Fact or fiction? *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, 17, 35-56.
- Ryan, C., Huebner, D., Diaz, R.M., & Sanchez, J. (2009). Family rejection as a predictor of negative health outcomes in White and Latino lesbian, gay, and bisexual young adults. *Pediatrics*, 123, 346-352.
- Ryan, R., & Lynch, J. (1989). Emotional autonomy versus detachment: Revisiting the vicissitudes of adolescence and young adulthood. *Child Development*, 60, 340-356.
- Sabatelli, R. M., & Mazor, A. (1985). Differentiation, individuation, and identity formation: The integration of family system and individual developmental perspectives. *Adolescence*, 20(79), 619-633.
- Saltzburg, S. (1996). Family therapy and the disclosure of adolescent homosexuality. *Journal of Family Psychotherapy*, 7(4), 1-18.
- Savin-Williams, R. C. (1998). The disclosure to families of same-sex attractions by lesbian, gay, and bisexual youths. *Journal of Research on Adolescence*, 8(1), 49-68.
- Savin-Williams, R. C. (2001). *Mom, dad, I'm gay: How families negotiate coming out*. Washington D.C.: American Psychological Association.
- Savin-Williams, R. C., & Diamond, L. M. (2000). Sexual identity trajectories among sexual-minority youths: Gender comparisons. *Archives of Sexual Behavior*, 29, 607-627.
- Savin-Williams, R.C., & Dube, E. (1998). Parental reactions to their child's disclosure of a gay/lesbian identity. *Family Relations*, 47(1), 7-13.
- Schultheiss, D., & Blustein, D. L. (1994). Contributions of family relationship factors to the identity formation process. *Journal of Counseling & Development*, 73(2), 159-166.

- Shrier, D. K., Tompsett, M., & Shrier, L. A. (2004). Adult mother-daughter relationships: A Review of the theoretical and research literature. *Journal of the American Academy of Psychoanalysis & Dynamic Psychiatry*, 32(1), 91-115.
- Steinberg, L. (1990). Autonomy, conflict, and harmony in the family relationship. In S. Feldman & G. Elliott (Eds.), *At the threshold: The developing adolescent* (pp. 225-276). Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Stewart, A. J. and Healy, J. M. (1989) Linking individual development and social changes, *American Psychologist*, 44(1), p. 30-42.
- Strauss, A., & Corbin, J. (1990). *Basics of qualitative research*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Surrey, J. L. (1991). The “self-in-relation”: A theory of women’s development. In J.V. Jordan, A.G. Kaplan, J.B. Miller, I.P. Stiver, & J.L. Surrey (Eds.), *Women’s growth in connection. Writings from the Stone Center* (pp. 51-66). New York: Guilford Press.
- Troiden, R. R. (1979). Becoming homosexual: A model of gay identity acquisition. *Psychiatry*, 42, 362-73.
- Troiden, R. R. (1988). Homosexual identity development. *Journal of Adolescent Health Care*, 9(2), 105-113.
- Umberson, D. (1992). Relationships between adult children and their parents: Psychological consequences for both generations. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 54, 664-674.
- Vaughan, M. D., & Waehler, C. A. (2010). Coming out growth: Conceptualizing and measuring stress-related growth associated with coming out to others as a sexual minority. *Journal of Adult Development*, 17(2), 94-109.
- Veevers, J. E., & Mitchell, B. A. (1998). Intergenerational exchanges and perceptions of support within 'boomerang kid' family environments. *The International Journal of Aging & Human Development*, 46(2), 91-108.
- Veneziano, R. A., & Rohner, R. P. (1998). Perceived paternal acceptance, paternal involvement, and youths’ psychological adjustment in a rural, biracial southern community. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 60, 335–343.
- Vrana, S. R. & Rollock, D. (2002). The role of ethnicity, gender, emotional content and contextual differences in physiological, expressive, and self-reported emotional responses to imagery. *Cognition & Emotion*, 16, 165-192.

- Vuchinich, S., Emery, R., & Cassidy, J. (1988). Family members as third parties in dyadic family conflict: Strategies, alliances, and outcomes. *Child Development*, 59, 1293-1302.
- Waldner, L. K., & Magruder, B. (1999). Coming out to parents: Perceptions of family relations, perceived resources and identity expression as predictors of identity disclosure for gay and lesbian adolescents. *Journal of Homosexuality*, 37(2), 83 - 100.
- Walters, M., Carter, B., Papp, P., & Silverstein, O. (1988). *The invisible web: Gender patterns in family relationships*. New York: Guilford Press.
- Williamson, D. (1981). Personal authority via termination of the intergenerational hierarchical boundary: A new stage in the family life cycle. *Journal of Marital and Family Therapy*, 7, 441-452.
- Willoughby, B.L., Malik, N.M., & Lindahl, K.M. (2006). Parental reactions to their sons' sexual orientation disclosures: The roles of family cohesion, adaptability, and parenting style. *Psychology of Men & Masculinity*, 7(1), 14-26.
- Yarhouse, M. A. (2001). Sexual identity development: The influence of valuative frameworks on identity synthesis. *Psychotherapy: Theory, Research, Practice, Training*, 38(3), 331-341.
- Zitter, S. (1987). Coming out to mom: Theoretical aspects of the mother-daughter process. In Boston Lesbian Psychologies Collective (Eds.), *Lesbian Psychologies: Explorations and Challenges* (pp. 177-194). Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press.

APPENDIX A

RECRUITMENT EMAIL

*Adult lesbian women and their relationships with their mothers*

**A Call for Participants!!!**

My name is Ana Echevarria and I am conducting a study that explores how adult lesbian women maintain and understand their relationships with their biological mothers who reject their sexuality. This research is part of my degree for a Masters of Social Work from Smith College School for Social Work.

Participation includes a brief (5-10 minute) pre-interview over the phone and a 45-60 minute, one-on-one interview at a convenient location. Participants must be between 28 and 40 years old, self-identify as lesbians, have disclosed their sexuality to their mothers at least two years previous, have been initially rejected by their mothers due to their sexuality, and have maintained a relationship with their mother since their disclosure.

If you are interested, and/or have any questions or concerns about this research, please contact me at the information provided below. If you are unable to participate in this research, but know of others who may be interested, please let me know and/or forward this email.

Thank you so much for your time.

Sincerely,  
Ana Echevarria

aechevar@smith.edu



APPENDIX B  
SCREENING FORM

Welcome! Thank you for your interest in my research. First there is a brief screening process **to determine your eligibility for the study.** Please answer the following questions.

1. How old are you?
2. Were you born female?
3. Do you identify as a lesbian?
4. Have you disclosed your sexuality to your mother? When did you disclose to your mother?
5. Does your mother reject your sexuality?
6. Have you maintained a relationship with your mother since you disclosed your sexuality?
7. Do you have children?

## APPENDIX C

### HUMAN SUBJECTS REVIEW APPROVAL LETTER



---

Smith College  
Northampton, Massachusetts 01063  
T (413) 585-7950  
F (413) 585-7994

---

March 9, 2011

Ana Echevarria

Dear Ana,

Your revised documents have been reviewed and they are fine, with one tiny exception. We see that you have decided to define your population as adult lesbians whose mothers "reject their sexuality". That is fine and is probably a sharper focus for your study. You missed one line where you had the old definition. In your screening questions, you should change question 5 to "Does your mother reject your sexuality?" Otherwise, you have invited those whose sexuality was originally rejected but whose mother is now on board and it is clear you wanted to stick to the "continuing to reject mothers". Please change that one question so you are consistent and send the altered questionnaire to Laurie Wyman for your permanent file.

*Please note the following requirements:*

**Consent Maintaining Data:** You must retain all data and other documents for at least three (3) years past completion of the research activity.

*In addition, these requirements may also be applicable:*

**Amendments:** If you wish to change any aspect of the study (such as design, procedures, consent forms or subject population), please submit these changes to the Committee.

**Renewal:** You are required to apply for renewal of approval every year for as long as the study is active.

**Completion:** You are required to notify the Chair of the Human Subjects Review Committee when your study is completed (data collection finished).

We are glad to give final approval of your study.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Ann Hartman / shw".

Ann Hartman, D.S.W.  
Chair, Human Subjects Review Committee

CC: Jean LaTerz, Research Advisor

## APPENDIX D

### CONSENT FORM

#### Consent to Participate in a Research Study

Dear Potential Participant:

My name is Ana Echevarria and I am conducting a study that explores how adult lesbian women maintain and understand their relationships with their biological mothers who reject their sexuality. The data will be used for my thesis as part of my Masters in Social Work degree through Smith College School for Social Work, and possible future presentations and publications. To qualify for the study, you must be a US citizen, have been raised primarily in the United States, and be fluent in English. You must be a woman who identifies as a lesbian, have been out to your mother for at least two years, and have maintained contact and a relationship with your mother who rejects your sexuality. You must also have maintained contact and a relationship with your mother since disclosing your sexuality. You must be between the ages of 28 to 40 and not have any children of your own.

Participation in this study entails taking part in a one-on-one interview that will be audio recorded, and that will be approximately 45 minutes at a location and time that is convenient for you. The interview will include a few questions about your background. The interview involves open-ended questions about your relationship with your mother.

Your experiences and perspectives can contribute to how social workers and other helping professionals understand the relationships between adult lesbian women and their mothers and how lesbian women maintain relationships with mothers that reject their sexuality. You may also gain personal benefit from sharing and reflecting on this topic. However, there are potential but limited risks associated with participating in this study, which include the possibility of your having uncomfortable feelings while talking about your personal memories, thoughts and feelings associated with your experiences of your mother's rejection of your sexuality and the subsequent relationship you have maintained. I will provide you with a list of mental health professionals in your area in case you wish to explore the feelings that arise in the course of the interview or afterwards.

Your confidentiality will be maintained in this study. All interview data will be coded; any identifying information will be altered to protect your confidentiality. I will review the data from your interview with my research advisor only after all identifying information has been removed. You will not be identified in any way in the final report of this research, which will include a written thesis, public presentation, and possible future publications. I will personally transcribe all audio data. Per federal regulations, all materials from this study will be stored in a locked/password protected location for at

least three years, or until no longer needed for this research, after which they will be destroyed.

Your participation in this study will be on a voluntary basis and will include no financial benefits. You may decline to answer any questions during the interview. You may withdraw your participation in this study at any time by contacting me, before, during, or after the interview, until April 15, 2011. Should you choose to withdraw from this study, I will destroy all materials relating to your participation. Please feel free to contact me at anytime before, during, or after participation if you have any questions or concerns. You may also contact the Chair of the Smith College School for Social Work Human Subjects Review Committee at (413) 585-7974 if you have any questions or concerns about this study. Your participation is greatly appreciated and will be valuable for the completion of this research study.

Thank you,  
Ana Echevarria  
aechevar@smith.edu

**YOUR SIGNATURE INDICATES THAT YOU HAVE READ AND UNDERSTAND THE ABOVE INFORMATION AND THAT YOU HAVE HAD THE OPPORTUNITY TO ASK QUESTIONS ABOUT THE STUDY, YOUR PARTICIPATION, AND YOUR RIGHTS AND THAT YOU AGREE TO PARTICIPATE IN THE STUDY.**

**Please keep a copy for your records.**

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Researcher: Ana Echevarria

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

## Appendix E

### MENTAL HEALTH REFERRAL SOURCES

#### Mental Health Resources in the San Francisco Bay Area

##### **The Center: San Francisco LGBT Community Center**

1800 Market Street  
San Francisco, CA 94102  
(415) 865-5664  
center@sfcenter.org

##### **Lyon-Martin Health Services**

1748 Market Street, Suite 201  
San Francisco, CA 94102  
(415) 565-7667  
info@lyon-martin.org

##### **Dimensions Clinic**

Castro-Mission Health Center  
3850 17<sup>th</sup> Street  
San Francisco, CA 94114  
(415) 934-7789  
www.dimensionsclinic.org  
dimensions.clinic@gmail.com

##### **Gaylesta, Psychotherapy Referral Services Website**

www.gaylesta.org  
contact@gaylesta.org  
(888) 869-4993, Therapist Referral Service

##### **The Pacific Center**

2712 Telegraph Ave.  
Berkeley, CA 94705  
(510) 548-8283  
info@pacificcenter.org  
Drop-In Hours: Monday through Friday, 4pm to 8pm

##### **Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender National Hotline**

1-888-THE-GLNH  
(1-888-843-4564)

National Referral Sources

**The National GLBT Help Center Hotline**

Toll-free: 1-888-THE-GLNH (1-888-843-4564)

Hours:

Monday thru Friday, 1pm to 9pm, Pacific Time

Saturday, 9am to 2pm, Pacific Time

Monday thru Friday, 4pm to midnight, Eastern Time

Saturday, Noon to 5pm, Eastern Time

*All services are free and confidential.*

**Affirmations: The Community Center for LGBT People and Their Allies**

Toll-free Helpline, 1-800-398-GAY

Tuesday-Saturday, 4pm to 9pm

*All services are free and confidential*

## APPENDIX F

### INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

1. Describe your current relationship with your mother. Describe your relationship with your mother immediately following your disclosure of your sexuality. Describe your relationship with your mother prior to disclosure.
2. What impact did your mother's rejection have/had on you?
3. What factors influenced your decision to maintain a relationship with your mother following her rejection?
4. What impact, if any, has your relationship with your mother had on your ideas about yourself, your sexuality, and your romantic relationships?

#### Demographic Questions and Family History (scheduled for the end of the interview)

Communication to participant prior to beginning demographic questions: As I ask you the following demographic questions, feel free to talk about anything you think/feel might be relevant to the research.

1. Where were your parents born and where did they grow up?
2. Where were you born?
3. What was it like in terms of class where you grew up? How do you identify yourself in terms of class?
4. How do you identify yourself in terms of race and ethnicity?
5. Do you have other siblings? What is your placement?
6. Where have you spent your adult years?
7. What's your highest level of completed education?