AN EXPLORATORY STUDY OF MULTIPLE IDENTITIES IN

EAST ASIAN AMERICAN WOMEN WHO ARE ATTRACTED TO WOMEN

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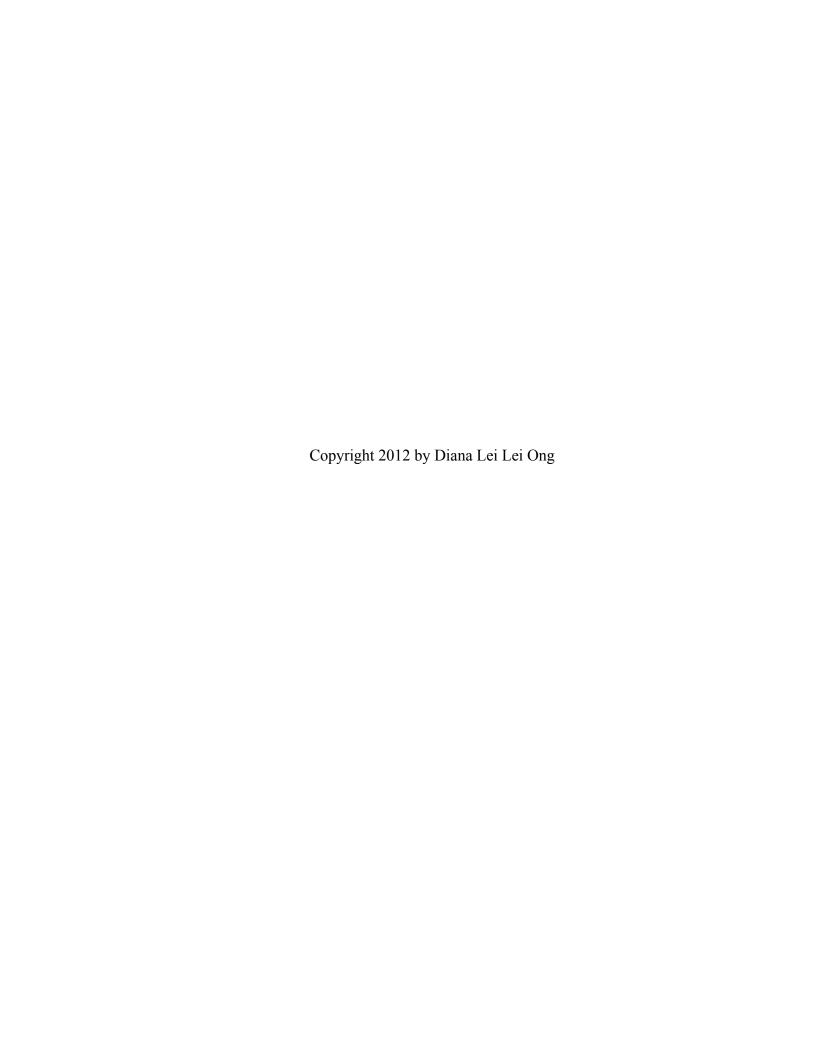
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ABSTRACT

This exploratory study examined the experiences of East Asian American women who are romantically or sexually attracted to women (EAAWAW). EAAWAW was selected as the most inclusive term for women self-identifying as lesbian, gay, queer, and bisexual. EAAWAW have previously been studied as a population that experiences unique challenges due to their multiple minority status. They have to navigate situations in which one or more of their minority statuses related to their gender, sexual orientation, and ethnicity are stigmatized, which might lead to psychological stress. Three main research questions were addressed in this study: 1) What are the challenges that EAAWAW face with regard to their sexual identity, gender, and ethnicity? 2) How do they deal with these challenges? Specifically, how might they utilize multiple self-aspects to manage stigma and stress associated with being attracted to women, East Asian, and female? 3) How do EAAWAW conceptualize themselves with regard to their identity and how does their self-concept vary across contexts? A qualitative analysis of nine semi-structured, in-depth interviews was completed using a grounded theory approach. Participants ranged in age from 25 to 65 and were all residing in the United States. The interview data were analyzed to uncover qualitative themes. These included the range of identities and roles with which EAAWAW identify, multiple minority stress, invisibility, conflict between sexual orientation and family and East Asian values, freedom from societal norms, positive discrimination, benevolent prejudice, social support, identity management, and cognitive reframes. Overall, despite the stigma-related challenges that EAAWAW experience, the individuals interviewed in this study demonstrated much resilience and a variety of coping strategies that allowed them to

move between communities and manage their multiple identities. These findings are

discussed as well as their important implications for EAAWAW, their families, mental

health professionals, and the communities to which EAAWAW belong. The study

suggests that these groups would benefit from an increased understanding of the nature of

multiple minority stress as well as the variety of cognitive, interpersonal, and identity

management strategies available to EAAWAW as they navigate different communities

and contexts in their personal and professional lives.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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CHAPTER I

Introduction

This study fills a gap in the literature on East Asian American women who are

romantically or sexually attracted to other women (EAAWAW) by examining how they

cope with multiple minority stress and how they manage multiple roles, identities,

communities, and aspects of themselves. The relatively little scholarly literature that

exists on the experience of EAAWAW focuses on the challenges they face. These

challenges include the stress stemming from their multiple minority status by virtue of

their gender, sexual orientation, and ethnicity (Chan, 1989; Greene, 1994; Szymanski &

Gupta, 2009). They also include the conflict that many EAAWAW experience around

managing multiple identities, communities, and aspects of the self due to incongruence of

their same-gender attractions with the norms of East Asian culture or mainstream

American culture (Bridges, Selvidge, & Matthews, 2003; Chan, 1997; Hahm & Adkins,

2009; Liu & Chan, 1996).

While this literature is valuable in understanding some aspects of EAAWAW's

experiences, it is dominated by a deficit perspective that largely overlooks the strengths

and strategies that EAAWAW use to overcome those challenges (Akerlund & Cheung,

2000). Indeed, although some empirical studies have found that the multiple oppressions

that EAAWAW face place them at higher risk of mental health problems (e.g. Szymanski

& Gupta, 2009), others have found that these individuals do not necessarily evidence

greater psychological distress than their European American counterparts (Cochran, Mays, Alegria, Ortega, & Takeuchi, 2007).

This study attempts to explain the inconsistency of those results by using a strengths-focused perspective to understand how EAAWAW experience, cope with, and overcome the challenges of managing different aspects of themselves that are interrelated but often difficult to integrate. In particular, it will explore whether EAAWAW's multiple communities and aspects of self might provide a buffer for the effects of those stressors.

Who is Included in This Study and the Rationale for the Term EAAWAW

The population examined in this study is East Asian Americans, which includes Chinese-, Japanese-, and Korean-Americans. While there is great diversity among them, these subgroups have been selected because they share some commonalities. These include the importance of the family unit, the significant influence of Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism, and the similarity in conditions for sexual minorities (Lee & Mock, 2005; Liu & Chan, 1996). In addition, the phrase "women who are romantically or sexually attracted to women" has been chosen over the identity label "lesbian." There are two reasons for this. The first is to avoid ascribing a label to individuals who do not necessarily self-identify as lesbian, and instead to refer to a group of individuals by their romantic and sexual attractions. The second is to take into account cultural differences in the construction of identity (Chan, 1997) and to allow participants to use their own language and vocabulary to describe their sexuality and sexual identity. Although much of the literature that forms the theoretical basis for this study uses identity labels such as lesbian and gay, they generally refer to individuals who have same-gender sexual and

romantic attractions, and as such, apply largely to the population that is the focus of this study.

CHAPTER II

Review of the Literature

Challenges EAAWAW Face

Multiple minority stress. According to Meyer's (2003) minority stress model, minority group members are at risk for mental health problems because of the chronic stressors that stem from social institutions, structures, and processes, stressors that are experienced in addition to general stressors experienced by all people. As members of several minority groups based on their gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and immigration status, EAAWAW may experience additive effects of minority stress due to these memberships. Greene (1994), for instance, has written about the triple discrimination (androcentrism, ethnocentrism, and heterocentrism) that lesbians of color face in their lives. In their study examining the relationship between multiple external and internalized oppressions and psychological distress among Asian American lesbian, bisexual, gay, and questioning individuals, Szymanski and Gupta (2009) found that racist events and internalized heterosexism exerted an additive effect on psychological distress.

Chan (1989) also examined Asian American sexual minorities' overall experiences of discrimination based on their minority statuses. Almost 90% of her female respondents reported that they experienced more discrimination because of being both Asian and lesbian. Interestingly, Chan (1989) notes that the majority of women in her study reported that they felt more frequently discriminated against for their ethnicity

than for their sexual orientation and suggests that the prevalence of the sexual stereotype that Asian women are "passive but exotic" (Chan, 1989, p. 19) might lead to greater prejudice due to race and gender than sexual orientation.

A source of stress related to having multiple minority statuses is the sense of invisibility. Purdie-Vaughns and Eibach (2008) propose that:

> Androcentrism – the tendency to define the standard person as male – ethnocentrism – the tendency to define the standard person as a member of the dominant ethnic group (i.e., White Americans in the U.S.) – and heterocentrism – the tendency to define the standard person as heterosexual – may cause people who have intersecting identities to be perceived as non-prototypical members of their constituent identity groups" (p. 378).

As a result of this, they argue that individuals with multiple minority group identities will experience "intersectional invisibility," meaning that others will tend to not see them as members of their constituent groups and distort their characteristics to make them fit the prototypes of those groups (Purdie-Vaughns & Eibach, 2008, p. 381). Applying this theory to the experience of EAAWAW, we might expect that they may experience invisibility as others may tend to see them as straight due to heterocentrism and that they will be marginalized within their already marginalized groups (i.e. in the East Asian communities and the LGBT communities). Purdie-Vaughns and Eibach (2008) do note that one advantage of intersectional invisibility is the possibility of avoiding more active forms of prejudice and so EAAWAW may benefit from this invisibility.

For EAAWAW, having same-gender sexual and romantic attractions can be considered a concealable stigma. As Pachankis (2007) asserts, having a concealable

stigma can be associated with potentially negative affective, behavioral, and cognitive implications related to the stress of worrying that others would find out about that stigmatized identity; having to regularly make decisions around whether to disclose that identity and if so, to whom, when and how; and being isolated from others who have the same stigmatized identity. This fear of discrimination due to marginalized sexual orientations fits with Herek's (2009) concept of "felt stigma," which refers to "expectancies about the probability that stigma will be enacted in different situations and under various circumstances an individual's knowledge of society's stance towards nonheterosexuals, including expectations about the likelihood of stigma being enacted in a given situation" (p. 70). The other two manifestations of sexual stigma that Herek (2009) outlines are "enacted stigma" (p. 68), which refers to actions that express stigma (e.g. antigay violence), and "internalized stigma" (p. 73), which is an individual's acceptance of the stigma as legitimate. Factors that contribute to the challenges associated with concealable stigma include the ambiguity in social situations about who knows or suspects that they have this stigma, and the possibility that they might misattribute the difficulties they experience to personal failings rather than to the stigma itself (Pachankis, 2007). EAAWAW may therefore experience stress related to vigilance and frequent decision-making around hiding or sharing their sexual orientation with others. According to Pachankis' (2007) model of the psychological implications of hiding a stigmatized identity, EAAWAW may also be at risk for lower self-esteem if they interpret stressful situations as an indication of weakness on their part as opposed to discrimination and prejudice against minority sexual orientations.

EAAWAW may experience additional ambiguity associated with having several marginalized social identities, as it may be difficult for them to ascertain if and which of those identities are targeted in a situation. Bowleg, Huang, Brooks, Black and Burkholder (2003) found in their qualitative study about the experiences of Black lesbians that even when some of their participants were certain that they had been the target of prejudice or discrimination, it was just as stressful not knowing if it was due to their sex, race, and/or their sexual orientation.

A particular form of racism that EAAWAW may experience is related to the model minority myth that assumes that Asian Americans have achieved the American dream and are seen as high-achieving, financially successful, and hard-working, and as having fewer psychological and social difficulties (Inman & Yeh, 2007; Narui M, 2011). While there are positive associations with this stereotype of Asian Americans, it does not recognize that the diversity of experiences and socioeconomic levels amongst Asian Americans and the reality that they, like other ethnic minority groups, experience racism (Inman & Yeh, 2007). Similar to the processes outlined in Purdie-Vaughns and Eibach's (2008) theory on intersectional invisibility, EAAWAW might experience invisibility as a result of not fitting the perceived "prototype" of the model minority.

As women, EAAWAW may be the target of discrimination based on their gender. As Glick and Fiske (2001) note, sexism can be in the form of hostile sexism, e.g. discrimination and harassment, or benevolent sexism, "a subjective favorable, chivalrous ideology that provides protection and affection to women who embrace conventional roles" (p. 109). While women may receive some benefit from benevolent sexism, Glick

and Fiske (2001) argue that this form of sexism reinforces women for conforming to conventional gender roles and so insidiously maintains gender inequality.

The concept of subtle forms of discriminations has been explored in much detail in the literature on microaggressions (e.g. Sue, 2010). According to Sue, Capodilupo, Torino, Bucceri, Holder, Nadal, and Esquilin (2007), racial microaggressions are "brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, or environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial slights and insults towards people of color" (p. 271). This definition can similarly be applied to gender, sexual orientation, and other minority identity statuses (Sue, 2010). Microaggressions can have a detrimental effect on physical and mental health (Sue, 2010), in part because they can be difficult to identify and to confront given their subtle nature (Sue et al., 2007). For EAAWAW, this might be exacerbated by the fact that they have multiple marginalized identities and could experience ambiguity when determining which identity or identities were targeted.

Family and gender roles. EAAWAW's same-gender attractions often come into conflict with family and ethnic cultural values. For them, disclosing their sexual orientation to family members, particularly parents, is threatening and scary (Li & Orleans, 2001). In one of the few published studies on this group, Chan (1989) found that of 35 self-identified Asian American lesbians and gay men (90% of the participants were of East Asian descent) surveyed at two Asian American lesbian and gay events, only 26% were out to their parents. This statistic was particularly notable because the mean number of years that the participants had been out was 6.2 years. In comparison, a greater percentage of them were out to other family members (77%) and even more were

out to their friends (97%). A more recent study by Li and Orleans (2001) using discourse

analysis to examine coming out discourses of Asian American lesbians also found that

the process of coming out to parents was difficult for their participants. Additionally,

they noted that the process seemed even more challenging for the parents who had strong

ties to Asian culture having only immigrated to the U.S. as adults. The women they

interviewed were aware that their parents had difficulty not only in accepting their sexual

orientation, but also in the task of coming out to other relatives and the community.

There are several cultural factors that make coming out to family and community

difficult for EAAWAW. The family unit, which includes extended family members,

plays a central role throughout the lifecycle in East Asian culture (Lee & Mock, 2005).

Furthermore, the family, the values it holds, and one's social role in the family are closely

associated with one's self-concept, and so losing one's family and not conforming to its

values may be particularly detrimental to self-esteem (Liu & Chan, 1996).

Many of the family expectations and cultural norms that EAAWAW challenge

revolve around generational and gender roles. These are highly structured in East Asian

cultures as a result of the impact of Confucianism (Liu & Chan, 1996). Traditionally,

women are expected to derive status and sense of self through their roles as daughter,

wife, and mother (Chan, 1992; Lee & Mock, 2005). As daughters, they are to obey their

parents; as wives, they are to support their husbands; as mothers, they are to perpetuate

cultural values by socializing their children appropriately (Greene, 1994; Liu & Chan,

1996). Many people mistakenly assume that EAAWAW cannot or chose not to have

children in addition to not entering into a heterosexual marriage. As a consequence,

EAAWAW are seen as rejecting traditional gender and family roles (Chan, 1992). For

both the individual and for the family, this can lead to a loss of "face," that is a loss of honor, dignity and prestige, since not fulfilling prescribed roles is considered a reflection of one's relatives as well as of oneself (Liu & Chan, 1996). As such, EAAWAW may be seen as a source of shame to their families, particularly to mothers. This is exacerbated if families consider them selfish for prioritizing their same-gender attractions, which many see as a matter of choice, to the detriment of the family instead of subordinating their individual needs and feelings to fulfill social roles and maintain social harmony (Greene, 1994).

Rules about generational roles contribute to the invalidation that EAAWAW often feel within the family regarding their sexual orientation and same-gender relationships (Liu & Chan, 1996). Parents are frequently not accepting or not open to discussing these aspects of their children's lives because according to Confucian hierarchical rules of relationships, communication in traditional East Asian families is from elder to younger, and it is the duty of children to respect and obey their parents.

In short, roles in the family, gender roles, and generational roles constitute important aspects of the self.

Sexuality in East Asian cultures. EAAWAW may also feel invalidated due to the silence around sexuality, a topic that is taboo in most traditional East Asian cultures. Disclosing same-gender attractions and declaring a minority sexual identity brings the subject of sexuality into the open. It is generally only discussed using biological terms and in the context of procreation. Parents often disapprove of their children exploring romantic and sexual feelings, allowing them to date only when they become young adults. This might be particularly challenging for young EAAWAW as the silence and

prohibitions make it difficult for them to understand their sexuality and integrate it into a cohesive self-image (Chan, 1994).

Caught between communities. EAAWAW often feel caught between the East Asian American community and the sexual minority community. EAAWAW tend to perceive others from their ethnic background as being less accepting of sexual minorities than those in the dominant culture (Chan, 1989; Greene, 1994). The fear of rejection and stigmatization from the ethnic community can be devastating (Liu & Chan, 1996). Like the family, it can be a significant source of support and provide a buffer against ethnocentrism in the dominant culture (Greene, 1994). This is particularly true for EAAWAW who have recently immigrated to the U.S. (Greene, 1994).

According to Confucian thought, one's loyalty is first to one's parents, then to one's sibling, and finally to one's spouse (Liu & Chan, 1996). EAAWAW in same-gender relationships may feel torn between their partner and their family, especially if their family's expectations differ from those of their partners. Relationship conflict may be particularly likely if the partner is from a different cultural background and is not aware of this hierarchy of loyalties.

EAAWAW may also see the East Asian community as denying the existence of sexual minorities who are of East Asian descent, viewing homosexuality as a "White, Western phenomenon" (Chan, 1989, p. 19). A factor contributing to this misconception is the lack of EAAWAW images in the media and out EAAWAW who can serve as positive models. Contrary to this belief, there is historical evidence of male and female same-gender sexual behavior and attractions in East Asian societies (Ng, 1989). Liu and Chan (1996) note, however, that there is no frame of reference for understanding same-

gender romantic or sexual relationships in traditional East Asian culture. Heterosexual marital relationships are considered the norm and symbolize the harmonious balance between yin and yang, as emphasized in Taoist philosophy. There are no rules for how to achieve this between two women. Confucianism also provides no rules for defining the roles of two women in a romantic or sexual relationship. Traditional East Asian culture therefore lacks not only a framework for understanding these relationships, but considers them as violating natural and societal order (Liu & Chan, 1996).

Because of the perceived lack of understanding and acknowledgment in East Asian culture, EAAWAW may stay closeted within the ethnic community even though they might be out in other areas of their lives (Chan, 1992). They might instead turn to sexual minority communities for support. Chan's (1989) study indicates, however, that they are not fully supported there either. Over 85% of her respondents felt that they were not acknowledged or accepted in the lesbian and gay community. According to one participant, "It is a problem to find my support only within the lesbian community, because I feel that I am either seen as 'exotic' and stereotyped, or unaccepted because I am Asian and not like the majority of White lesbians" (Chan, 1989, p. 19). The results suggest that in both the Asian American community and the sexual minority community, an important aspect of these individuals is invalidated (Chan, 1989).

The literature reviewed here on the challenges that EAAWAW face is largely based on clinical experience, theory, or quantitative studies. One aim of this study, then, is to gain a richer understanding of these challenges from the perspective of EAAWAW by using a qualitative interview methodology. Such a methodology yields rich narrative data from which the themes described above can emerge.

Issues of Identity and Identity Development

Many psychologists who have written on East Asian sexual minorities assume that these individuals develop a sexual identity that is ideally integrated into their ethnic identity. Chung and Katayama (1998), for example, argue that the psychological health of lesbian and gay Asian Americans is greatly dependent on the development of positive, integrated ethnic and sexual identities.

The challenges described above, however, pose barriers to this. Chung and Katayama (1998) acknowledge that strongly believing in and adhering to traditional Asian cultural values may be problematic in adopting a positive sexual identity because of Asian culture's heterocentricity. Conversely, identifying with U.S. lesbian or gay culture, which is predominantly associated with White middle-class culture, may raise problems in developing a positive Asian American identity because of ethnocentrism in the lesbian and gay culture. In addition, the extent to which an individual identifies as either lesbian or gay or as Asian American depends on factors such as how homophobic the individual perceives the Asian American community to be, how racist the individual perceives the lesbian and gay community to be, whether or not the individual has disclosed the individual's sexual orientation to the family and community, and how connected the individual is to the Asian American community and to the lesbian and gay community (Chan, 1989).

While being out and adopting a sexual minority identity can allow EAAWAW to be more authentic and to access group resources, such as group cohesiveness and solidarity (Meyer, 2003), it might also be detrimental for EAAWAW. For some EAAWAW, avoiding an overt self-identification as lesbian and not being open about

their sexuality while privately engaging in same-gender romantic or sexual behavior allows them to maintain their connection to their families and communities. As Greene (1994) notes, some cultures, including East Asian cultures, formally prohibit same-gender sexual behavior but may tolerate it if it is not accompanied by a label.

Models of sexual identity and ethnic identity development (e.g. Berry, Kim, Power, & Young, 1989; Cass, 1979; Sue & Sue, 1990; Troiden, 1989) may have limited generalizability to EAAWAW because they are based on Western assumptions of individual identity and sexual identity. Chan (1995; 1997) contends that these conceptualizations of identity do not exist in traditional East Asian culture. She argues that there is no notion of individual identity beyond a group identity or an identity as a family member, which are based on social roles. Furthermore, she also notes that in traditional East Asian culture, sexual identity and public expression of sexuality do not exist as concepts beyond the family's expectation of procreation, but that sexual expression occurs only in the private sphere. As Chan (1997) points out, there is a separation of the public self and the private self whereby the public self maintains important social roles and expectations to avoid loss of face for the individual and the family. The private self, on the other hand, might engage in a greater range of behaviors that may not be condoned by greater society. Declaring a sexual identity is to bring sexuality into the public realm and assert a separateness and individuality that deviates from cultural norms. Thus historically, there were no social categories or identity labels with which EAAWAW and other sexual minorities could define themselves.

Recently, however, Western paradigms of sexual identity have entered into East Asian societies and given rise to identity politics and subcultures amongst East Asian

sexual minorities. For example, in Hong Kong, Mainland China, Taiwan, and other Chinese communities around the world, sexual minorities identify with and organize around the identity label "tongzhi," which literally means "comrade," and Chinese women who are attracted to women have adopted identity labels that signify their sexual orientation and gender role within the female sexual minority subculture (see Leung, 2002, for a discussion of identity labels and gender role-playing in female tongzhi cultures). EAAWAW who have recently immigrated to the U.S. from their country of origin or who are connected to their country of origin may be familiar with these identity labels and the specifics of the sexual minority subculture. On the other hand, EAAWAW who were born in the U.S. or who have lived in the U.S. for a substantial period of time may adhere to more traditional East Asian attitudes towards sexual minorities or may be more socialized to the dominant American lesbian culture. Family members are also unlikely to be aware of the particulars of East Asian sexual minority culture or the existence, as this culture is still largely underground.

Because of the identity-related issues discussed in this section, another goal of this study is to examine EAAWAW's self-concept and identification. The qualitative interview method will allow EAAWAW to describe in their own terms how they see themselves.

Coping and Overcoming Challenges

Despite the challenges described above, sexual minority individuals with multiple minority status do not necessarily evidence greater mental health problems than their European counterparts. For instance, Consolacion, Russell, and Sue (2004) found that while White same-gender-attracted youth reported higher levels of depression, more

suicidal thoughts, and lower self-esteem than youths of any attraction, they did not find this to be true for Asian and Pacific Islander youth. How might EAAWAW cope with and overcome the challenges described above?

The cultural value of family unity and the strong bonds in the family may help families find a way to stay together through the painful coming out process (Liu & Chan, 1996). In addition, the split between public and private self might allow an individual to engage in same-gender romantic and sexual behavior as long as they maintain a public self that does not bring shame to the family (Bridges et al., 2003). Dominant U.S. lesbian and gay culture along with psychological theories that are based on it, such as Cass' (Cass, 1979) homosexual identity development model, emphasize coming out as the ultimate goal and an indicator of psychological health and self-acceptance. However, in East Asian culture, same-gender relationships and romantic or sexual behavior may be tolerated if they are kept private and not discussed. Shifting the focus from sexual identity to sexual and romantic behaviors may better enable EAAWAW to integrate their ethnicity and sexual orientation into a sense of self than trying to integrate a sexual *identity* with an ethnic *identity* (Chan, 1995).

Belonging to multiple communities can be difficult to manage, but it can also provide EAAWAW with different sources of support depending on their needs or situational factors (Chan, 1989). The sexual minority community can provide a refuge from heterosexism where, for example, they can publicly express affection with their partner, while the East Asian community provides a space in which they can receive a positive reflection of their ethnicity.

Several social and cognitive psychological theories provide potential answers to how EAAWAW cope with multiple minority status, communities, and aspects of the self. One theory is the self- complexity theory (Linville, 1987). Linville (1987) proposes a concept she calls "self-complexity," which is made up of several cognitive structures that she terms "self-aspects." These self-aspects, each associated with its own set of affects and features, may be a social role, a type of relationship, an activity, a trait, and so on. In the case of EAAWAW, for example, ethnicity and sexual orientation might be two self-aspects within a larger associative network of other self-aspects such as profession or family roles. Together, the self-aspects represent the self. There are two ways that self-representations may differ: by the number of self-aspects and by the extent to which self-aspects are distinct. Self-complexity depends on these two aspects of self-representation, namely that the greater the number of self-aspects and/or the more distinction there is among self-aspects, the greater the self-complexity.

Linville (1987) found that higher self-complexity served as a cognitive buffer against physical illnesses and depression associated with stressful events. She found that individuals with high self-complexity showed fewer physical and mental health symptoms at high levels of stress than individuals with low self-complexity. Interestingly, the reverse was true at low levels of stress: low self-complexity was associated with fewer physical and mental health symptoms than high self-complexity. She explains these results by proposing that for individuals with high self-complexity, maintaining multiple, distinct self-aspects may cause a chronic, low level of stress, due to conflicts in roles and multiple demands on their attention and time. McConnell, Renaud, Dean, Green, Lamoreaux, et al. (2005) found another factor that moderates the

relationship between self-complexity and well-being, and that is the perception of control that one has over one's multiple selves. Based on these results, EAAWAW who view themselves as having many roles and many aspects of themselves (e.g. identifying as lesbian, as East Asian American, as a tennis player, as a daughter, and as a lawyer) that do not overlap, and who see themselves as having control over these self-aspects would be expected to have a low level of stress on a day-to-day basis, but would be less at risk for physical and psychological problems during a major stressful event.

A similar social psychological concept that might have relevance for EAAWAW coping is the concept of social identity complexity (Roccas & Brewer, 2002). Whereas self-complexity looks at the complexity of different types of self-aspects, including personal attributes, social identity complexity refers to the subjective representation of multiple in-groups. Roccas and Brewer (2002) proposed four types of identity structures based on how these in-groups were subjectively represented. These were, in order of lowest to highest social identity complexity: intersection (seeing those who share all of the same group identities as part of one's in-group), dominance (seeing one identity as taking precedence over all other social identities and only considering those who share that primary identity as part of one's in-group), compartmentalization (seeing one group identity as primary depending on the context, thus allowing an individual to maintain multiple non-overlapping group identities but not activate them at the same time), and merger (seeing all those who share any of one's group identities as part of the in-group). This theory proposes that social identity complexity provides a buffering effect when there is a threat to an in-group.

Self-complexity and social identity complexity focus on cognitive buffers of stress, but multiple minority status individuals may take a more active role in coping. For instance, Narui (2011) found that Asian and Asian American gay, lesbian and bisexual university students were sensitive to the norms of different contexts and based their decisions to disclose their sexual orientation on those norms and how it might impact their social relationships within each context. Marginalized individuals can also strategically emphasize identities that are valued and deemphasize identities that are less valued in different social contexts (Shih, 2004). They can draw on alternate identities to protect themselves from stigma (Kiang, Yip, & Fuligni, 2008). This fits with Meyer's (2003) minority stress model that posits that the prominence of the minority identity can modify the impact of stress on well-being.

Based on the literature reviewed above, the following research questions emerge:

- What are the challenges that EAAWAW face with regard to their sexual identity, gender, and ethnicity?

- How do they deal with these challenges? Specifically, how might they utilize multiple self-aspects to manage stigma and stress that they experience as a result of being lesbian, East Asian, and female?

- How do EAAWAW conceptualize themselves and how does their self-concept vary across contexts?

CHAPTER III

Methods

Qualitative Research

This study employed a qualitative research methodology in order to explore the experiences of East Asian women who are attracted to women and who are currently living in the United States. The reasoning for adopting a qualitative rather than a quantitative approach was two-fold. Firstly, qualitative research can elicit richer, more detailed narratives from participants. It is more exploratory in nature than quantitative research and is aimed at generating rather than testing hypotheses (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Secondly, a quantitative methodology would have been less feasible for this study due to the difficulties involved in securing an appropriately large population sample. Although quantitative studies based on a larger number of participants can result in research findings that are more generalizable (Symanski & Sung, 2010), qualitative research has the advantage of being more flexible and open-ended (Corbin & Strauss, 2008), allowing the researcher to follow-up on the intricacies of the data that are presented by participants.

An additional consideration in selecting this methodology was the lack of existing research that explores the experiences specific to EAAWAW, as discussed in the previous chapter. Many researchers have subsumed EAAWAW within larger categories such as Asian American or ethnic minorities, or samples that include all genders rather

than only people who self-identify as female.

In this study, in-depth responses to the research questions were gathered by conducting semi-structured interviews. These responses were then analyzed in accordance with the general principles of grounded theory in order to arrive at some broader conclusions about the experiences of women in the United States with multiple minority status due to their ethnicity, gender, and sexual orientation.

Grounded Theory

Grounded theory is a specific form of qualitative research, first developed in 1967 by Glaser and Strauss (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). The goal of grounded theory is to develop a theory through the qualitative analysis of data, and to then use this theory as the basis for future research. This contrasts with other theoretical approaches that are more abstract or derived from grand theory rather than grounded in empirical data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The aim of the current study was to elicit rich narrative data about the specific experiences of EAWWAW rather than to build a generalizable theory about this population that might be applied to other studies. Therefore, its methodology does not represent pure grounded theory (Corbin & Strauss, 2008), but is nonetheless still guided by the procedures associated with grounded theory. These procedures are outlined in more detail below.

Participants

Selection criteria. Women who were ethnically East Asian, living in the United States of America, over the age of 18 years, and who were romantically and/or sexually attracted to women were eligible for the study. Additionally, they had to be cognitively able to provide informed consent.

Recruitment. Individuals were recruited via networking and snowball sampling. Personal and professional contacts were asked to identify potential participants and ask their permission to be contacted for the study. A request for participation with the researcher's contact information, study information, and selection criteria was sent to these contacts and potential participants (see Appendix A). This request for participation was also distributed on Asian American women and Asian American queer women email lists.

Demographics. To protect the confidentiality of participants, their demographic information will be presented here in aggregate form. Nine women who considered themselves ethnically East Asian and attracted to women were interviewed for this study. The age of participants ranged from 25 to 65 and the mean age was 36 ($SD = 11.50$). Five participants (55%) identified as ethnically Chinese, and one participant (11%) identified as ethnically Korean. Three participants (33%) identified as Taiwanese and were included in this study because they responded to the participant recruitment letter (Appendix A) that contained the selection criteria and because Taiwan is considered part of Greater China and East Asia (Zhang, 2003). Of the nine women, two (22%) were born in the United States and the remaining seven (78%) were born outside of the United States. Of the seven participants who had moved to the U.S. since birth, six were born in countries in East Asia and one was born in a South American country. The number of years that these seven participants had lived in the U.S.A. ranged from 5 to 31 ($M = 23$, $SD = 18.41$). Four (44%) of the participants' parents were living outside of the U.S.A. in their countries of origin at the time of the interview while the other five (56%) participants' parents lived in the U.S.A. The parents of one of these participants were

born in the U.S.A. The other four participants' parents emigrated to the U.S.A. and had lived in the U.S.A. between 11 and 32 years ($M = 22.5$, $SD = 9.11$). The educational level of the women interviewed for this study was relatively high; the highest level of education completed for eight out of nine participants (89%) was a graduate or professional degree and the highest level of education completed for the remaining participant (11%) was a bachelor's degree. Eight participants (89%) were in relationships with female partners at the time of their interview and one (89%) participant was not in a relationship.

Measures

 Demographics sheet (see Appendix B). Participants were asked to provide information about their demographics such as age, ethnicity, place of birth, and age they arrived in the U.S.A. They were also asked about languages spoken, level of education, relationship status, and gender of partner, if applicable. In addition, participants were also asked their parents' country of origin, geographical location at the time of the interview, and if they lived in the U.S.A., when they immigrated.

 Semi-structured interview (see Appendix C): This interview was developed by the principal investigator and comprised of open-ended questions about the participants' self-concept; roles they played and communities that were important to them; how their identity changed across different times and contexts in their lives; what aspects of their identity were more private or more public than others; and experiences as EAAWAW, in particular, things that they liked or found challenging with regard to their sexual orientation, ethnicity, and gender, and what they found helpful in dealing with those challenges.

Procedure

The principal investigator conducted all interviews and in order to reach the greatest number and diversity of participants, participants were given the option of completing the interview in person, over the phone, or via online video or audio call using the computer program, Skype.

Before the interview began, the principal investigator obtained informed consent from each participant. For in-person interviews, the participant was asked to sign a consent form (see Appendix D) and a consent form for audio recording (see Appendix E) and copies of these forms were given to the participant for her records. For interviews conducted over the phone, the script for oral consent was read to the participant and when requested, was emailed to her (see Appendix F). For interviews conducted via online video or audio call, the consent form and the consent from for audio recording (see Appendix D and E) were emailed to the participant. For interviews conducted via phone, video call or audio call, participants provided their written consent. Participants then completed a demographics page (see Appendix B) if the interview was conducted in person or the interviewer completed it with the participants if not in person. Participants were then interviewed with a semi-structured interview (see Appendix C). All interviews were audio recorded, whether conducted in person, over the phone, or via online video or audio calls to ensure accuracy in reporting participants' responses and so that they could be transcribed and analyzed. Participants were given the option to withdraw at any point in the study; however, all participants completed the study protocol.

Treatment of data. Participants were assigned a participant number, which was the only identification used on response materials. Copies of the consent form that the

principal investigator retained was kept in a locked storage cabinet. To maintain confidentiality, they were kept separate from hard copies of the interview data, audio recordings and interview transcripts, which were kept in another secure location. After all identifying information was removed from the audio recordings, the interviews were transcribed by the principal investigator and a professional transcription service. No identifying information was attached to the transcriptions or audio recordings. All electronic files containing transcripts or audio recordings of the interviews were transferred to the principal investigator's computer and password protected. Any audio recordings, transcripts of interviews, or other data collected from the participants will be maintained in confidence by the investigator in a locked file cabinet or password protected computer files for three years after the completion of the study. After three years, the principal investigator will destroy all documents with identifying information and all audio records.

Data Analysis

One purpose of the analysis was to identify themes common among the women interviewed. The data collected were qualitative interviews describing the challenges these women experienced with regard to their gender, sexual orientation, and ethnicity, their self-concept, how they managed multiple self-aspects and communities, and how they managed challenges. A second purpose of the analysis was to examine whether the challenges described in the literature reviewed above were still relevant given that some of the literature was somewhat dated, or if there were new ways to conceptualize those challenges. A third purpose of the analysis was to explore whether and how multiple communities and self-aspects provide a buffer for stress stemming from those challenges,

and if there was preliminary evidence that the theories of self-complexity (Linville, 1987; Renaud et al., 2005), social identity complexity (Roccas & Brewer, 2002), and identity switching (Kiang et al., 2008; Shih, 2004) were pertinent to understanding how EAAWAW's cope with multiple self-aspects and identities. This study suggests directions for future research in these areas.

After the data was collected, it was analyzed using the basic principles of grounded theory methodology (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Three phases of data analysis were included in grounded theory (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). In the first phase, open coding, the goal was to extract and collapse data into general categories for smaller subsets of data. The transcript was analyzed as a whole to extract major themes and each line of each transcript was examined to understand the micro level themes. Data were examined and categorized by similarities and differences. In the second phase, axial coding, the goal was to understand the causal relationships, main phenomenon, condition, and consequences of the various categories. To do this, the relationships between the categories and subcategories were identified. In the final phase, selective coding, categories that were already identified were further collapsed under the main categories to form the core categories of the model. Categories were connected through a paradigm model that forms the grounded theory. In this study, this final stage was carried out with the goal of identifying general themes that can account for the experiences of EAAWAW.

CHAPTER IV

Results

This chapter will outline the responses of the study's participants. There were three major sections to the interview: self-concept, fluidity of identity, and experiences, benefits, challenges, and coping.

Self-Concept

When asked how they would define their identity, participants reported feeling that this was a broad question, which made it somewhat challenging to answer. They answered in a wide variety of ways. Eight of the 9 participants (89%) answered with at least one sexual orientation identity label to define themselves. One participant (11%) identified as lesbian and gay, four participants (44%) identified as lesbian, and three participants (33%) identified as queer. One participant (11%) said that it was hard for her to assign an identity label to her sexual orientation because she felt that she had not had enough partner relationships to do so. She did explain that she was attracted to both men and women. Two participants (22%) specified the age at which they came out as part of their self-definition. With regard to gender specifically, five participants (56%) explicitly stated that they were women. In terms of race and ethnicity, four participants (44%) identified as Asian, one participant (11%) identified as Chinese, and two (22%) identified as Chinese-American and specified which generation of Chinese-American they were. Two participants (22%) mentioned their country of origin as part of their identity, two

participants (22%) identified as immigrant, and two participants (22%) stated the region in the U.S. in which they grew up. Two participants (22%) mentioned family roles (sister and parent). Three participants (33%) included their profession as part of their identity, two participants (22%) noted their level of education, and one participant (11%) identified as working class. There were a variety of other ways that participants defined their identity including personality traits (3 participants, 33%), decade of life (1 participant, 11%), and hobby (2 participants, 22%). One participant (11%) reported identifying with an animal, because she had difficulty relating to other humans and found them more judgmental than animals.

When asked in a separate question about roles that they play in their lives, all participants mentioned roles they played in their family. These roles were often the first that they mentioned. Eight participants (89%) mentioned daughter, five participants (56%) mentioned sister or stepsister, five participants (56%) mentioned partner, wife or girlfriend, one participant (11%) mentioned aunt, one participant (11%) mentioned parent, one participant (11%) mentioned granddaughter, and one participant (11%) mentioned sister-in-law. In addition, four participants (44%) noted their role as a pet owner, three participants (33%) mentioned their professional roles, and two participants (22%) reported being an activist. Other roles that participants mentioned playing include friend (2 participants, 22%), caregiver (1 participant, 11%), provider (1 participant, 11%), and leader (1 participant, 11%).

Participants were asked about the groups of people or communities that were important to them. Family was the group that was mentioned the most (5 participants, 56%). Four participants (44%) cited their friends. Four (44%) mentioned the queer

Asian community and three (33%) mentioned the queer/LGBT community. Two participants (22%) mentioned their coworkers and one (11%) mentioned the broader professional community in which she works. Two participants (22%) talked about communities oriented around activities or hobbies. The activist community (one participant, 11%), the alumni college community (one participant, 11%), and the local neighborhood community (one participant, 11%) were other groups of people that participants listed as important to them. Participants talked about those groups or communities as being supportive to them. In contrast, one participant (11%) talked about a more mixed relationship with her partner's family, which she saw as having a big impact on her life. Her partner is not out to her family but they know that she and her partner live together. She had some difficulty defining the relationship, saying:

> [My partner]'s parents, if I'm [in] a heterosexual relationship, they're my in-laws… Well I don't know how to define that… Her parents don't treat me like in-laws… So they do have like a lot expectation of the in-laws like the brothers' wives and they have a lot of expectations about how they should interact with them, how they should behave, how they show off, those sort of things that they do, but they don't have that expectation of me. So in that sense, I do have some safety or some kind of protection but at the same time, like, that means that they don't recognize me as part of the family.

She went on to say:

> I can imagine the future, if [my partner] and I are still dating, if [her] parents are sick or even pass away and there will be a lot of decisions that they make will impact… where we live, how we are going to live our [lives] .

Fluidity of Identity

Participants were asked how their identity has changed or stayed the same across different times in their lives. One participant (11%) reported that her identity has stayed constant throughout her life, as she has always felt different from other people ever since she was a child. The other eight participants (89%) noted distinct changes in their identity that have taken place in different phases of their lives so far and changes that occurred in response to key experiences or turning points in their lives.

Three participants (33%) mentioned high school and/or adolescence as being a distinct period in which an aspect of their identity became more salient than others. For example, one participant described gender as being a very important aspect of her identity while studying at a girls' school. Another noted, "When I got to high school, I was really forming my place and identity as a low income Chinese American" because she became aware of middle class students who had more opportunities than her. A third participant talked about how her priority up until she entered college, and thus her identity as a student, was to excel in school.

Five participants (56%) talked about college as another important time with regards to their identity development. Three participants (33%) indicated that it was in college that they developed their sexual orientation identity. One participant in particular talked about joining a lesbian club:

In my senior year in college, I joined this club, lesbian club in my college and I realized that, "Ooh, this feels right, this group of people and what they're like." So I started [dating] my first girlfriend, it was a disaster, but it was fine because it felt so right. I started to identify myself strongly as a lesbian back then.

Another participant talked about how she developed her racial identity during college:

> In college was when I really developed a racial identity or a critical lens on my
> own racial identity, particularly what it meant to be Asian American, not so much
> Chinese American but more Asian American and being in a larger race category.
> And then it was in my later college years when I started understanding about
> being a person of color so I do identify as a person of color and what that means
> to build that political identity as a person of color, to ally myself with African
> American folks and Latino and Arab Americans and whatnot and Native
> Americans as well.

In addition to race and sexual orientation, participants mentioned other aspects of their identity that were important to them during college: two participants (22%) described joining activity groups that formed an important part of their identity.

Moving to the U.S. was a turning point that three participants (33%) noted, with two (22%) talking about the development of their ethnic, racial, and national identity. One participant stated, "I mean I think the biggest thing was sort of like being subsumed under the larger umbrella of East Asian and just sort of being a part of all of that." Another participant who was raised by her parents to identify as Chinese while she was growing up in Taiwan, started to consider herself Asian and Taiwanese when she came to the U.S.:

> I never feel like I was Asian until I probably came to this country… People start
> calling me Asian and then I found that interesting at that time because throughout
> all my life, I was Taiwanese like there was no doubt about that and then, well – I
> was Chinese. I think my parents really [tried] to educate me that I'm a Chinese. I

think the whole concept of Taiwanese was probably developed later on in my life like in my mid-20's [when I moved to the U.S.]. I started realizing that being Taiwanese maybe because I started encountering a lot of Chinese [and] I realized my experiences were different from Chinese people.

Two participants (22%) talked about how their sexual orientation identity shifted when they moved to the U.S. One of them reported thinking that she was "born attracted to girls" but that after meeting a "wider range of guys" in the U.S. than in her country of origin, she "realized that [she is] also attracted to interesting people, whether they are guys or girls." The other participant reported that when she moved to the U.S., she learned about LGBT issues and decided that figuring out her sexuality was a priority for her.

One participant talked about how she chose a different sexual orientation identity when she was told that she could not be a lesbian if she had dated a transgender man:

Identity-wise, I guess I switched from lesbian to queer because I wasn't quite sure what queer meant in terms of who you're allowed to date. And then so someone once told me, "Well, if you dated a trans-man then you should be queer." So I was like, "Okay then, I guess I'm queer." Because I'm not against dating them. I'm not against really dating anyone.

All nine participants (100%) talked about coming out at some point during the interview. With regard to how coming out changed the way they experienced their identity across time, two participants (22%) reported that it helped their identities feel more integrated. One participant who talked about keeping her lesbian identity separate from everything else prior to coming out to her parents reported that coming out to them

has "been one of the fundamental changes in terms of experiencing roles because… I can talk about the totality of the experience because all of those identities are known and also accepted." For one participant, coming out was prompted by a life-threatening accident that she experienced:

> I think before I lead a very sheltered, conservative and model Asian life where I was very compliant with people's demands and lived up to expectations... but it wasn't until I had… a freak accident… I stood there and I thought, "Wow I survived this, I could've almost died." I thought to myself, "Why was I alive? And why in the world wasn't I married? Why didn't I have a family?" And those questions were really forced upon me, really to find some introspection as why I didn't have what other people had. I came to the realization that you know why, I must be gay and it was just there and the struggle between admitting to it and owning up to that fact and also coming out proved a very, I guess, a very hard struggle… [it] brought me through this change of identities and finally to this point where I'm finally comfortable with all of them and have integrated all of those concepts and the coming out process.

One participant (11%) talked about coming out in the context of getting divorced from her husband and how her identity shifted from being a wife, daughter-in-law, and other family roles to being more independent and seeing her sexual orientation as a more important aspect of her identity.

Participants were asked about which aspects of their identity were more private or more public than others. At one end of the spectrum, one participant who described her identity as very integrated reported that all aspects of her identity were public. At the

other end of the spectrum, another participant who described feeling that the "world is very judgmental" stated that she is "always private about almost everything." All the other participants' responses indicated that which aspects of their identity were public or private often depended on context and with whom they were interacting.

One context in which four of the participants (44%) were more private was at work. All of them were private about their sexual orientation in the workplace. One participant reported worrying about co-workers judging her for her life outside of work while another participant talked about being out with her boss but not with work clients because they are "very conservative." One participant, an educator, talked about not using pronouns when describing her partner at work because some of her students have made homophobic comments. In contrast, two participants (22%) who were out at work talked about how their sexual orientation was relevant to the education and the research that they did for their jobs. Another two (22%) who were also out at work talked about having supportive co-workers or bosses. For instance, one participant who described her boss as "open-minded" and understanding of the challenges women in their profession face, gave this example of how he advocated for her:

> When we work with the Asian clients in China, they don't think I should… fly business class… They think that I don't deserve that because I'm a woman. He would fight for me. He would say that, "We need to fly business class because… we work better and she should stay at the same level of hotel that I do, because [if] we rest better, we [will] work better.

Within the context of family relationships, four participants (44%) talked about being private about their sexual orientation with at least some family members, for

example with one or both parents, with a sibling, or with extended family members. One

participant indicated that a factor in not being out to relatives was those family members'

level of acculturation to the U.S. She reported being out to "everyone [in her family

with] the except[ion of] my oldest sister who has a significant age difference from me,

and my mom… [they] are culturally more different from me than the rest of my sisters."

Other participants mentioned that they are not out to their extended family members

because they do not have a close relationship with them or because they live far away.

Two participants (22%) described being able to bring their partners to family events prior

to coming out to their families. For instance, one participant said,

> Before I came out… my parents really liked [my partner] and…she wanted to be
>
> with my parents and we'll have meals together… I can talk about her a lot with
>
> my family. And now, they really can't accept any of us so… they don't want to
>
> hear about her name. So there are a lot of things I cannot share with them.

Aspects of their identity that participants were comfortable being public included

their profession and other aspects that were not stigmatized. One participant said, "I

think the Americanized version and the… perfect Asian person, professional person, and

dutiful daughter were probably the… more public roles that I played, because that's what

society expected you to be." Another participant said, "My identity as a business woman

is very public. I talk about it on my Facebook to my family and they are proud of it. They

recognize it. Everyone is fine with it."

Participants noted that some aspects of their identity, namely their gender and

race, were visible or more obvious than others and that they did not have much control

over how public they were. For example, one participant said, "I look Asian and I speak

with [an] accent and then I think that's something that is just public and it's not that I have a choice [about]." Aspects of their identity that participants cited as not immediately obvious included their family roles, their religion, their immigration status, and their sexual orientation.

In instances when participants could control how public or private aspects of their identity were, they described ways they managed this. Three participants (33%) described using technology to keep certain aspects of their identity private. One participant reported creating a category for contacts on Facebook in her country of origin and making her relationship status not visible to them. Another participant said:

> When it comes to lesbian or an activist, I had to open another account on Facebook to post as I like as an activist or about protests or about political critique. Because I can't offend anyone on my official Facebook, I had to open another account on behalf of my [pet]. My [pet] counts as me, the activist, lesbian part of me that speaks up for me because my [pet] only connects with my lesbian friends and family members I trust.

A third participant said:

> I had a gay Facebook and I had a professional Asian career woman Facebook that was acceptable and I had six different emails for different purposes of corresponding, for out of the closet or in the closet potential, and what different character I would present myself [depending on] which circumstances I'm involved with, which group of people I'd be in contact with.

Participants also talked about choosing whether or not to challenge others' assumptions of them as a way of managing how public or private an aspect of their identity was. One participant explained:

> What people understand or see me as is being colored by their own minds and their own assumptions, so what assumptions I decide to challenge and/or clarify… is part of my decision-making process as well, like… if someone assumes I'm straight, I can decide [to] let them continue believing that I'm straight or [I can] decide to out myself…"

Experiences, Benefits, Challenges and Managing Challenges

Participants were asked about their experiences as East Asian American women who are attracted to women (EAAWAW). In particular, they were asked about benefits and challenges related to their ethnicity, gender and sexual orientation. They were also asked what helped them cope with those challenges.

Benefits. Four participants (44%) mentioned being more "marketable" in the workplace as a benefit that they experienced as an EAAWAW because, as one participant described it, they fill the "diversity boxes" with regard to gender, sexual orientation, race, ethnicity, and national origin. One participant said:

> Maybe one advantage of being Asian is a need to meet a quota. So if it's a college and you're applying to the positions and they're all White professors then they're like, "We need someone of color so we'll hire the Asian."

Another participant reported, "Everyone is talking about China right now so suddenly, there's definitely a rise in Eastern Asian people at work… everyone thinks that China will be the future star. So that helps." One participant also talked about possibly being

seen as more "marketable" on the dating scene because she is ethnically different from most other lesbians in her city. She said, "I guess people find me interesting because I'm different and it could be a conversation starter."

In a similar vein, five participants (55%) described being able to provide a different perspective as a benefit. As one participant put it:

I have the Western value that I'm getting familiar with and I have the Eastern value that I grew up with. So it gives me really a broader… view to play on. I have this freedom to see the world from different perspectives… At work, usually because I am the only woman in the room, in conferences, I am able to give fresh perspective as well.... I'm free from a lot of mental traps than my male colleagues.

Another participant said:

I think being East Asian and female in the personal realm… really does add multiple layers of complexity toward your character and your way of viewing life, which brings much more richness and intricateness to how you approach life and interpret things in life as well, and what you contribute, and [how] you interact and how you deal with people. And I find that very positive.

Three participants (33%) talked about how they have gained empathy as a result of their experiences as EAAWAW. One participant said:

Being a woman who is attracted to other women and having felt all these prejudices and complexes and self-imposed torture… I've become a more compassionate person at work in dealing with other people and in my personal life as well, being more understanding of them, being more accepting.

Another participant who experienced some degree of marginalization as a queer woman talked specifically about being able to relate to transgender individuals whom she described as being marginalized in the LGBT community: "In some ways being queer, I can relate more to trans people than… maybe a lesbian, I'm not sure, I can't speak for them. But I feel certain kinship to the T's."

A benefit that four participants (44%) mentioned was having access to a supportive community and its resources. Two participants (22%) talked about how welcoming and supportive the queer female Asian community was when they came out. One participant said:

> Being Asian and lesbian, being in a very accepting community right now… [I'm] luckier than my counterparts [who are] Caucasian and lesbian because I've heard of other people not having as much of a community and support or extended community as well… I find myself to be quite fortunate.

Two other participants (22%) talked about having access to identity-based organizations or activities, e.g. film classes for queer women.

Two participants (22%) mentioned that because they do not fit traditional societal norms and scripts, they had some freedom to create their own paths or definition of family. As one participant said:

> There is no assumption about who is going to bear children, what that child's going to be, what that child represents, and what the value of their child in the family is. Like those are all things that are assumed [in heterosexual relationships]. And I think that in our relationship… none of those assumptions take hold and so you start off from a different level of conversation about… what

your relationship is with biology. So I don't have to get [pregnant] if I don't want to."

Another participant said:

The benefits and challenges were that it was a wide-open field. You could be involved in creating change because most of the time as I was growing up there's nothing like it. So you could sort of write your own ticket… There was no pattern, there was no prior template but I could do what I want.

Four participants (44%) noted that they benefited from positive stereotypes or benevolent prejudice. Participants reported being seen as "smart" because they are Asian or "non-threatening" because they are Asian and female. One participant said:

I think being an East Asian woman, there is less discrimination towards me [when I'm trying to rent an apartment] or negative discrimination because there's positive discrimination of like, "Oh, she'll be thoughtful and not go party." [Or other people thinking,] "Oh you're so beautiful" and getting free drinks from that.

Two participants also mentioned that their ethnicity helps them to pass as straight because others assume that they are not lesbian/gay/bi/queer if they are Asian.

One participant talked about one benefit to having multiple minority status:

Being Chinese was really an advantage too because I was already seen as different. And since I was already seen as different, the queer part was just another layer. It wasn't like I was queer and white. Sometimes people didn't dare say things to me because they were afraid it would be perceived as… homophobic and racist. So I'm able to as an Asian, as a Chinese to go to White queer communities and also raise points that I think some other people like a

White person wouldn't be able to raise as a part of racism because racism is still a very touchy subject.

Other benefits that participants cited included enjoying being in relationships with women because women are "softer" and "nurturing" (two participants, 22%), having less ambiguity with regard to male friends who might have been sexually or romantically interested if they thought the participant was straight (one participant, 11%), and being involved in creating social change (two participants, 22%).

Challenges. Participants talked about experiencing homophobia, for example, not being treated equally or being seen as "a nuisance or abomination" due to being gay. One participant, for instance, talked about early messages she learned about LGBT people:

> When I was little, the experience was terrible because it was really stigmatized in the media, in [my] family. I remember my mother took me on a walk when I was, I don't know, maybe in high school. We went past this bakery and my mom told me that, "Oh, this bakery was run by a couple, a lesbian couple." Oh my god, I still remember her face. It was such a -- like she spoke with such a shame for them. It's like they are creeps, they are like some shameful criminals. I still remember and then realized that I would never tell her when I was at home… I told her later when I was in college. When I went home, I didn't feel safe. On the news, it's all bad news. Lesbian couple committed suicide. Gay couple was raided by police. Gay party was raided by police. Gay couple killed each other. It was really bad.

Six participants (67%) also mentioned how they perceived Asian or people in Asia as more homophobic than Caucasian people or people in the U.S. One participant said:

> It's hard to be an Asian lesbian, because the social pressure in Asia is bigger, so that sucks. It's tough to be an Asian woman because the expectations on Asian women in Asia are also very narrow. You're expected to have certain goals, certain ways of behaving… We're supposed to be submissive, cute, naïve, and attracted to [men].

Three participants (33%) also talked about how some Asian people see homosexuality existing only in Western or Caucasian societies. As one participant said:

> I think initially it was just very difficult, because it felt almost wrong, something that was never seen or heard of because in Asian culture you don't see it… For a lesbian woman there was so much of an uncommon factor that it felt very much awkward and shameful to have similar feelings towards other woman as well… It was very painful I would say. I know it's not culturally accepted and culturally demonstrative, you don't see that acted out or expressed in Asian society.

One participant described how her friends in Taiwan see her sexual orientation as a "choice of lifestyle" and how they see her as "bold" and "wild" for making this "choice." This participant also expressed concern that people in her country of origin would make assumptions about her being a disappointment to her parents:

> I mean people still stare at you right now in the United States, even in [the major metropolitan city that I live in]. But still, I think the look is very different in Taiwan. Yeah, I feel like… there's more discussion about…how disappointed your parents are and how you're not getting married and how you try not to go

into the traditional roles of being a woman. I think those are discussed more, a lot more.

All nine participants (100%) described feeling worried at some point in their lives about being rejected by immediate and extended family members, coworkers, religious friends or friends in general if they came out to them. Parents' Christian beliefs were a factor for one participant's anticipated (but ultimately ungrounded) fear of her parents' rejection and for another participant's experience of actual parental disapproval. One participant stated:

> I think the Christian aspect of it was probably more important to my parents than to me, like it's beyond a cultural, "Oh, I can't believe that you're doing this. This is not the Chinese way," which is really not what my parents would say… A lot of it was their underlying faith and that worry was definitely a part of [not coming out to them].

Two participants (22%) talked about wanting to "protect" their parents by not coming out. One of them explained:

> One…worry [was] of… parental expectations and their concept of my life as well as the success of my life and [a second worry was about] what it would do to my parents in the more public setting…recognizing that in an Asian family or at least a Chinese family, the… social capital of parents [is] very often enhanced by the success of their children both in school and in terms of profession and recognizing that in my parents' social circle, they have had great social capital derived from my [sibling's] and my own success and in some ways [I was] irrationally being concerned that my being gay will devastate that social capital as well.

Participants talked about challenges related to being a woman. One participant described the pressure she feels from others asking her when she will get married and have children:

It seems like if you don't have children, you don't have marriage, that somehow you're a fail[ure] in the most important life… task… It's like I'm not complete as a woman and… for me, that assumption [really had an] impact on me as well, so it's an emotional process.

Three participants (33%) talked about women not being as equally represented as men in the workplace or in LGBT organizations or men having more power in decision-making processes than women. One participant talked about the underrepresentation of women when she volunteers at a non-profit LGBT organization:

I'm constantly in social settings where the funders are men and we're talking about having White or Asian men give us money and I guess I see them as a community that I'm different from… I'm like, "Well… they're not interested in hearing in what a woman has to say in this context because it's all these gay boys who are all together and they just want to hear what a gay boy or what a cute gay boy has to say."

Three participants (33%) talked about encountering sexism within their families, such as not being as valued as male siblings. For example, one participant who has a younger brother talked about "having to prove myself… as the reliable and worthy eldest female child… it has been a struggle… overcoming the chauvinism within the Asian culture and the family setting as well." Four participants (44%) talked about experiencing, witnessing, or worrying about sexual harassment and their physical safety. One

participant talked about getting "cat calls" and being afraid to bike, walk alone at night, or take public transportation. Another participant said, "I've seen one man touch his dick, his hard dick against a woman and the woman wasn't saying anything. And yeah that one situation where that happened, I kind of like freaked out." Four participants (44%) talked about challenges related to having a child within the context of being in a same-gender relationship. For instance, one participant reported having to go back into the closet in order to adopt a child while other participants talked about the biological challenges of conceiving one themselves.

Participants talked about experiencing racism in different forms. One participant talked about microaggressions she experienced: "It's some really little --it's everything in all those little aspects that you can feel that they don't treat you just the same as if you are White." Three participants (33%) mentioned the negative impact of stereotypes of Asian people. For example, one participant said, "[Others expect] me to behave a certain way and if I don't then they don't really understand why. A kind of like the whole quiet Asian…woman stereotype." As she explained, even positive stereotypes were hurtful to her:

I still do receive a lot of stereotypical comments like, "Oh, you're Asian, do you like rice?" It's like all those stupid… politically insensitive remarks, kind of ignorant remarks, I think that are… some of the challenges. People stereotyping you like, "Oh, you must be good at math." I know it's a joke but it's still kind of hurtful or people really not understanding some of the cultural differences. I guess… blatant, ignorant comments kind of bother me.

Four participants (44%) talked about feeling that others focused on their identity label rather than seeing them as individuals. Specifically, three participants (33%) reported that even though they might benefit from being able to fill diversity quotas, their coworkers might think they got their jobs or promotions because of their minority status rather than their actual qualifications. One participant said:

> There's a lot of racial tension [where I work], [it's] kind of unspoken maybe because they do try to kind of fill a quota of some sort… to… introduce diversity and then there are some people who kind of believe like, "Oh, I was passed up for this promotion because this person had a different ethnic background." And I guess that could be a challenge for me, like [others] not seeing me for my skills or my talents, they just… see my skin color.

The fourth participant described this phenomenon on a more general level, "I feel like somehow like people see me more like you're Asian and then you're Taiwanese and then somehow, your personality comes last."

Two participants (22%), one who grew up in Singapore and another who grew up in Taiwan, talked about how others assume that because they are ethnically Chinese, they are from the People's Republic of China (PRC). They described the challenges of having to explain the ways in which their identity is different from those from the PRC. One of them compared this to coming out as not heterosexual and having to explain who she is:

> So I find it interesting [that being Taiwanese and not being heterosexual has] some similarities. We have to literally explain to people… you almost have to come out like a Taiwanese, "I'm a Taiwanese, I'm different from other people from China" and you have to like go through this lengthy explanation of the

politics and history, the culture… With the people who don't know me well enough, I also feel like I have to come out, to tell them I'm not heterosexual even though…I can…[pass] as a heterosexual woman and then you also have to go into the lengthy explanation of being a Taiwanese and a queer woman… I find those similarities [between] those two identities.

Three participants (33%) also described challenges related to being immigrants to the U.S. One participant said, "You do have… [a] different layer of challenge when you're an Asian immigrant. It's more like the cultural thing… Americans do not fully recognize and appreciate us." Another participant described feeling like she is a different person in the U.S. because Americans do not understand her sense of humor and vice versa:

> Yes, being an immigrant, I also find it hard to be myself, because I like to be funny. When you're with a group of Americans, often it's hard to be funny anymore because I don't have the cultural background to make jokes. I don't really understand their jokes, the books they read… the movies they watch… I find that many Americans are not interested in other cultures. So either I choose to be immersed or… assimilated in their own way of living or there's nothing in common between us… I mean there are interesting Americans, but it's just in general I find it difficult to be myself. So that's the other reason I become quiet. And it's killing me because I'm not a quiet person. I'm not shy.

While some of the challenges described above involve more than one minority identity, some participants talked more explicitly about challenges associated with the

intersection of multiple minority identities and being a minority within a minority. As one participant explained:

> So I think in terms of experience… it's very difficult to be of three minorities… Sometimes… you are just too different, like you're a woman… you're of a racial minority and you're of a sexual minority, like that's just a little bit too much… [Others] can accept either that you're a white woman or you are an East Asian man but being an East Asian woman is difficult and being an East Asian woman who is gay is just like not even something that they can contemplate.

Two participants (22%) talked about how their relatively young age interacts with gender, sexual orientation and ethnicity and how that might lead others to treat them with less respect. One participant noted how her ethnicity intersects with income level and described the "invisibility of lower-class East Asians" due to the assumption she has encountered that East Asians are wealthy and usually work in a lucrative field. "Invisibility" was a term participants used when talking about being a minority within a minority, for example, "being at the person of color event where it's primarily like more African-American and Hispanic women" or having "nobody at a [lesbian] bar look like me." With regards to the latter, another participant who was mentioned earlier as saying that her ethnicity might make her more "marketable" on the dating scene later added in her interview:

> I mean, I don't know if [my ethnicity] helps… but sometimes it could be a deterrence because [other lesbians are] kind of thrown off, like… it's just like in the heterosexual dating worlds, like people tend to kind of want to date their own race or ethnicity.

One participant talked about feeling "hyperaware" of being in a biracial couple when deciding on where to live because that was one more level of being a "minority" that made her feel like "an anomaly." Two participants (22%) mentioned the difficulty in finding other EAAWAW because it was hard to find people who shared their multiple minority statuses. One participant who identifies as Christian and lesbian talked about a period in her life when she avoided joining any identity-based groups because she did not want to have to pick just one identity and because those two groups were in conflict with each other. She explained:

> I wasn't interested at that time in letting one part of that identity just become who I was… It was as if choosing to be part of [one identity-based] organization was a public declaration of an identity and …[it] was like taking on a lot of assumptions of what people thought about each of them. So I guess I didn't join either [the Christian organization or the LGBT organization] because of that… At that point… I felt as if I was a closeted Christian and a closeted gay person at the same time… [I didn't like that] the major assumption about the people who were in those groups were that those identities were primary.

Three participants (33%) talked about feeling unsure at times about what aspect of their identity others were interacting with. For example, one participant said,

> When I was getting this kind of work [that was associated with a job level below mine], I did not know whether or not because I was the youngest, whether I was a woman or whether or not I was Asian and wasn't going to talk back… So that was one of the environments in which I think that the identities are merged to each

other and maybe one upon each other and made [it] just easier to be more invisible than let's say a 6-foot-tall white man.

Managing challenges. All 9 participants (100%) described social support as helping in dealing with the challenges they experience as EAAWAW. Three participants (33%) mentioned family support. One participant talked about this in terms of their acceptance: "It helps to be out to my family and there are varying levels of acceptances; [that] they generally accept me also is useful or helpful." Another participant talked about the practical as well as emotional support she received from her mother:

I mean, this is a woman who never went to college or worked in the corporate world, but in spite of that was able to provide me [with] very practical advice on how to tackle all of these things… She gave me the courage to go out there and ask for a premium wage when people were paying men more wages, 25% more, and she gave me the courage to go and ask for the same thing, if not more, twice as much as male counterparts.

All nine participants (100%) mentioned getting emotional and practical support from friends. One participant talked about having friends regardless of their background "who have treated my experiences… like regular experiences of human beings…recognizing that it is the experience of [me] rather than the experience of [me] as a East Asian a woman who is interested [in] other women." Other participants talked specifically about having Asian lesbian friends. One participant described having "big sisters," explaining that "because we have all common bonds, [we] encouraged each other through our pursuit of new relationships or experiences, [we share] ways of coping with things." Another participant talked about having other Asian lesbian friends "who we could joke

with, laugh with, talk about our families… you felt like you weren't alone." Five participants (56%) talked about receiving support from the Asian American queer women community at large. One participant said:

> Because it's such a tight knit community, they really want to help you and then when you can, you can help other people. So for example, I'm looking for a job and then this one lady that I met in [the city I used to live in], we had a lunch appointment and then she tried to help me with my resume and tried to give me some leads on how I should look for jobs.

Another participant reported feeling understood and relating to others in her East Asian lesbian group who "tend to have the same social cultural background that they understand your language, no matter your body language, physical language or, you know, visual language." Other sources of social support that participants cited as being helpful in dealing with challenges they faced as EAAWAW were supportive bosses (two participants, 22%), partner (one participant, 11%), and partner's mother (one participant, 11%). Additionally, two participants (22%) talked about how helpful it was to be in a work environment that supports diversity. Two participants (22%) mentioned psychotherapy being helpful for them. One participant (11%) talked about actively not being friends with people who are not accepting of their sexual orientation.

Two participants (22%) talked about how Asian cultural values provide a buffer for them. One participant mentioned the emphasis on education as beneficial while another participant talked about the value placed on respecting parents as helpful in maintaining a relationship with them despite their rejection of her sexual orientation. Specifically, she said that although her parents treat her and her partner badly, it helps her

to find some respect for them so that she "can still have somewhat [of a] relationship with my parents… I will not regret if, at one point, if something [happens] to them, I'm the last one to know." This participant talked about finding empathy and understanding for why her parents are so rejecting of her sexual orientation, which helps her to see them not as "malicious" but rather as wanting to "protect" her. Furthermore, she described finding her own way of honoring her parents because she cannot do so in the traditional manner or the manner they desire (e.g. getting married to a man, going to church and practicing Christianity, having children). She explained her definition of honoring her parents in this way:

> Understand[ing] where they come from and respect[ing] their beliefs are ways of showing how much I honor them. I don't think they perceive things that way, but then I think at least that's how I have come up with my own definition… I feel it's my [way of] coping and probably like my own way of dealing with things, otherwise I think it would be too painful to think about that.

One participant talked about education level, social class, and privilege as buffers against prejudice:

> When you go to the best schools in [my country of origin], somehow, whatever you do is recognized, even if you are a lesbian. You have less pressure on you from society because they think you're successful. So whatever you do, it's fine. And also you get better connections, better jobs, more financial independence… It's just things are much easier for other people from that social class… So for people who are less privileged, less fortunate, it just becomes worse.

"Hiding" was as a coping strategy that some participants mentioned. For instance, one participant reported "hiding [her] emotions from girls" and hiding her sexual orientation from women, though she noted that this sometimes interfered with her ability to make friends. Another participant talked about "trying to escape [expectations of women in her country of origin and judgment related to not being able to meet them] and hide in the U.S."

Five participants (55%) talked about geographical location as a helpful factor. Five participants (55%) described experiencing greater acceptance in the U.S. with regard to their sexual orientation and less pressure to conform than when they lived in or visited Asian countries. Two participants (55%) reported that being far away from unsupportive family was helpful. Finally, one participant (11%) talked about the benefits of living in California because there was a big EAAWAW population there.

Participants also described several other methods of coping. Three participants (33%) reported having role models or mentors such as "a strong mother who is a feminist" or a boss who advocates for them. Two participants (22%) mentioned having or seeking out positive or neutral media representations. One participant (11%) mentioned finding online resources related to LGBT issues. Another (11%) talked about being more "independent" and "capable" in order to have the freedom to love and rely on whomever she would like. One participant (11%) described trying to better understand the source of stereotypes, for example the stereotype that Chinese people are doctors, engineers or lawyers:

Growing up, most my friends didn't have parents who are doctors or engineers or lawyers. And then when I started meeting people who have parents who were

doctors and engineers and want to become them, I was like, "Oh that's what people are making assumptions of me," and kind of just like understanding where some of these assumptions are coming from.

In addition, participants talked about attitudes or approaches that have been helpful in challenging situations they have faced. With regard to coming out, one participant (11%) mentioned being intentional in assessing how accepting others might be of them before coming out. Three participants (33%) described emphasizing positive aspects of themselves to counter others' negative assumptions about their minority status. For instance, one of them stated, "I hide and then show them the best aspect of me, before we trust each other and I come out to them. That's… sort of a tactic I use to make new friends." Two participants (22%) talked about avoiding areas of town or public modes of transportation that might increase their risk of being attacked or harassed. For one participant (11%), rehearsing a situation before entering it and allowing herself to have an emotional reaction to a situation were beneficial. She said:

> I imagine myself… walking… through scenarios and then being like, "If this is what's happening then this is what I would do," so like I can respond well in that situation… and react quickly as opposed to being paralyzed. So I kind of train myself for that… [And] letting myself have emotional reactions…like say that I have a really negative gut reaction, I need to follow that and respect that. So that's useful… in that it allows me… to then think about what's an appropriate reaction.

Other helpful attitudes and strategies that participants mentioned included developing greater acceptance of a situation that they cannot change (3 participants, 33%)

and actively deciding to make sexual orientation a positive aspect of their lives (1

participant, 11%). Two participants (22%) talked about communicating with and

educating others who were not sensitive to issues related to their identities. As one of

them said, "I find it helpful to…just sit down and…[have] a healthy discussion with that

person, explaining myself… exposing other people who would not have otherwise had

the experience or the discussion or the knowledge of my ethnic background."

Participants also mentioned making compromises (1 participant, 11%), being patient (2

participant, 11%), and being empathic toward others (2 participants, 22%) as helpful.

One participant illustrated this when she said:

> I think the best part is to be able to listen to what people have to say and to listen
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> to their feelings and to sort of hold them for a while. And then I like to chew on
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> things for a while and then come back with something, then just figure out how
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> you can reach what's important to them and sort of integrate it with what's
>
> important to you... To be able to say, "Okay I can see this, but can you see this?"
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> And it works, sometimes you… go head on with somebody but then you can't
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> hate them for it. It's not that they're personally evil or anything like that, it's just
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> that [that's] where they come from. And eventually you can come to some
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> middle ground I think. You might not get what you want, all of what you want
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> but some of what you want and eventually get more of what you want… You
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> have to see it from a different perspective and put yourself there and see what
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> they're really feeling.

Compartmentalization and adapting. Six participants (67%) talked explicitly,

sometimes using powerful and emotive language, about how they managed multiple

"communities," "personas," "identities," "roles," and "worlds." All six of them talked about how currently or at one point in their lives, they kept these separate or they adapted to different contexts. These contexts included family, friends, work, the Asian community, the White feminist community, and the queer community. Three participants (33%) reported being able to integrate their identity or mostly feeling congruent across different contexts; one participant (11%) talked about being in the process of integrating different aspects of herself; and two other participants (22%) reported currently engaging in some form of "compartmentalization." Participants used the following terms to describe means and methods through which they managed multiple roles, identities, and communities: "compartmentalize," "keep separate," "move into/between," "adapt," "take on [a culture/community's] ideals," "fit in," "shift," "play a different role," "switch on" or "switch off," "present" and "behave differently," "detach," "amputate," "blend boundaries," "juggle," "filter," "different pieces [of oneself] came out," "have that inner conversation [about what to share]," "don't think about [certain aspects of oneself]," "integrate," "be flexible," and "educate others."

Participants also described their subjective experience in this process. One participant reported:

> [I was] this mentally unstable struggling person trying to juggle it all and just find myself during that time. And so all these different identities that really were flying all over the place at the same time, …they couldn't coexist at the same time and then I couldn't manage integrating them because I couldn't admit to myself that they were part of one person and they all could coexist together and that I didn't have to be in the closet.

Another participant stated, "[It] has been so compartmentalized in the way that I don't feel like I'm complete… I find it very rare to have that situation or social context that I feel completely comfortable to hold all these identities." She did note, "I feel like the way I perceive myself in terms of… aspects of identities… are quite stable, but in terms of how I behave and how I present myself… it's different [depending on] the context." A third participant compared herself to "those little chameleons where you could change spots and as you moved into different places in the world, in your communities, you just took on and adapted more."

Reasons that participants gave for compartmentalizing aspects of themselves included being a "private person," not wanting coworkers to judge them, not wanting to "mix business with pleasure," "personal preference," using it as an "easy emotional way of dealing with life situations," "survival," managing their parents' disapproval of their sexual orientation and feeling that they were unable to reconcile different aspects of their identity.

Participants who did integrate aspects of their identity did so due to a variety of circumstances and through a few different means. In one instance, one participant talked about her workplace playing a big part in being able to integrate different parts of her identity because it placed great value on diversity and her job was related to aspects of her identity. For two participants, coming out to their families and experiencing their families' acceptance helped them to start integrating their identity, while for another participant, the coming out process as a whole was the turning point for her. With regard to how participants actually integrated their identities, one participant mentioned that she created social groups with other EAAWAW and was then able to bring all parts of herself

to those groups. Two participants (22%) described talking about their friends and personal life with their families as a way of integrating aspects of themselves. One of them said, "I feel like if I just keep talking about [my friends to my parents]… then they would be more interested and it would be easier for me to kind of blend those boundaries [between them]." Two participants (22%) mentioned actually introducing people from separate communities in their lives, particularly their parents and their friends. One of them described doing so not long before our interview in this way:

> I had finally, for the very first time, invited all my lesbian friends over to my house for lunch to meet my mom and get to know my mom better… I checked with her and she sent out the feelers and she told me that it was my house and that she accepted me for who I was, and that she felt that my friends were her friends and she wanted to meet all my best lesbian friends… It's a privilege to have that, so I'm not taking it for granted.

CHAPTER V

Discussion

In this chapter, the themes that arose during the interviews with participants will be discussed. The themes are divided broadly into four sections: identity and self-concept, challenges, benefits, and managing challenges. These sections are further broken down into sub-categories that emerged across the nine interviews. Finally, the limitations of this study and implications for clinical work, for East Asian American women who are attracted to women (EAAWAW) and their families and communities, and for future research are also discussed.

Variation and Complexity of Self-Concept

Participants defined themselves in a wide range of ways with regard to identities, roles and communities that were important to them. With regards to sexual orientation, participants used a variety of identity labels (e.g. gay, lesbian, queer, and bisexual) to describe themselves, while one did not use any sexual orientation label and instead described her sexual orientation by explaining to what genders she was attracted. Some participants went beyond just describing their race or ethnicity; they also chose to list their country of origin, their immigration status, and the geographical region in the U.S. where they grew up. Indeed, participants' self-definition was not limited to their gender, sexual orientation, and ethnicity. Several participants mentioned their professional identity and level of education, which suggests that what they do and what they have

achieved in their professional and educational lives were salient to them. Even prior to being asked about roles they played in their lives, two participants spontaneously mentioned family roles as being part of their identity. Other ways of identifying themselves included personality traits, hobbies, age, socioeconomic class, and in one instance, an animal with which a participant felt a kinship. This points to the complexity with which participants saw themselves.

Participants also reported playing a wide range of roles in their lives, most of which were relationship-oriented. The fact that all nine mentioned family roles indicates the importance of family to this population, which may be related to the emphasis that is placed on family roles within East Asian cultures (Liu & Chan, 1996). Of note, eight out of nine participants listed their role as daughter to their parents even when they were living far away from their parents or had experienced a rupture in their relationship due to their parents' rejection of their sexual orientation. In addition to daughter, family roles they mentioned included sister, stepsister, granddaughter, partner, girlfriend, wife, parent, and pet owner. Other relational roles that they listed were friend, caregiver, and provider. Some participants cited their work-based roles, such as leader, activist, or professional roles. Participants indicated that all of these roles were important to them with one participant indicating that for her, there was no differentiation between her identity and her roles.

Challenges

Minority stress and multiple minority stress. Participants described experiencing stigma related to their sexual orientation, gender, and ethnicity, which is consistent with existing literature (Chan, 1989; Greene, 1994; Szymanski & Gupta,

2009). In some of the instances of stigma they described, it was clear that the stigma was related to one of their minority statuses.

Sexism. With regard to stigma specifically related to their gender, participants mentioned examples ranging from not being given as many opportunities as male colleagues to being in professional settings where women were underrepresented and had less of a voice than men, and from being less valued than male family members to dealing with gender role expectations. Some participants also described experiencing or worrying about being sexually harassed or abused because they were women.

Racism. With regard to stigma related to their race, several participants mentioned that others associated stereotypes with them, some negative but most positive, because they were East Asian. Positive stereotypes that they described included how others assumed they were "good at math," "a doctor" or a "lawyer," and had "a lot of money." Despite receiving some benefits associated with these positive stereotypes, some participants in this study nonetheless described this phenomenon as negative. One participant, for example, used words such as "stupid," "politically insensitive" and "hurtful" to characterize others' comments about her being Asian.

The experiences described above are consistent with the literature on the model minority myth. According to Sue (2010), the model minority assumptions associated with Asian Americans (a broader category than East Asian American women) are supported by statistics that show that this population has a higher level of education, higher average income, and fewer instances of divorce, mental disorders, and delinquency; however, as a result of this perceived success, many people may incorrectly assume that Asian Americans are less prone to being the target of racism than other

ethnic minority groups (p. 151–152). It is clear from participants' responses that they certainly experience the impact of racism.

Another challenge participants described that was related to their ethnicity was others' assumption that people who look Chinese are from the People's Republic of China. As a result, two participants who grew up in Taiwan and Singapore respectively felt they had to correct other people and explain the differences between their country of origin and the PRC. One participant described having to "come out" as Taiwanese just as she would when she comes out as queer. Another participant who was ethnically Chinese and born and raised in the U.S.A. encountered similar experiences while traveling in countries where there were many business people from the PRC. People in those countries assumed that she was from the PRC and was wealthy. There is little within the psychological literature on this specific topic but given the large ethnically Chinese Diaspora, future research is warranted.

Some participants reported feeling that others' categorization of them as Asian and the assumptions that came along with that obscured their individuality, for example, their personality or their actual strengths and capabilities. This experience was evocatively summed up by one participant who noted that her personality "comes last" after ethnic identity markers such as Asian and Taiwanese.

Heterosexism. With regard to challenges related to their sexual orientation, participants predominantly talked about fears that others would reject them, negatively judge them, or physically attack them based on their sexual orientation, which is consistent with Herek's (2009) concept of "felt stigma." Participants mentioned several sources of felt stigma, such as the exposure to negative media representations of LGBTQ

people, the lack of visibility of Asian LGBTQ people in the media and in the Asian community, and the witnessing of parents' negative reactions to LGBTQ people. Of note, few participants mentioned having experienced overt expressions of homophobia. This does not necessarily mean that they did not experience this form of stigma; rather, it may be an indication that what was more salient to them was their fear of others' reactions. Another reason for this might be related to what some participants noted as an assumption that East Asian people are all heterosexual. As a result of this, they were able to pass as straight and thus might avoid stigma related to sexual orientation.

Microaggressions. In many instances that participants described, stigma was experienced in the form of microaggressions rather than more overt or physically harmful forms of aggression (Sue et al., 2007; Sue, 2010). Examples of microaggressions that participants mentioned included cat calls, being asked if they like rice because they are East Asian, and not being recognized as a lesbian couple due to the assumption that all East Asian people are heterosexual. One participant explained her experience of microaggressions by remarking, "Every day you are being reminded that you are a woman attracted to women. It's like you can't forget that. It's just the reality of the life, that a lot of the decision[s] you make you have to be conscious."

Multiple minority identities. In addition to reporting instances in which they experienced stigma related to each of those individual minority statuses (gender, race, and sexual orientation), participants also described stigma that involved two or more of these minority statuses. For instance, some participants talked about others expecting them to be "quiet," "meek" and "submissive" because they were Asian women and being surprised when these participants did not fit that stereotype. Another participant reported

several occasions in which men asked her and her partner if they would like to sleep with them. Several participants also reported experiencing stigma related to other aspects of their identity, such as their age, social class, and immigrant status, and being part of a biracial couple. For example, one participant reported feeling invisible as an ethnically Chinese person from a low-income background given that she does not fit into the model minority myth.

One participant talked about the compounding of multiple minority identities being too different for others to comprehend or too much to handle. As one person put it, being either a white woman or an East Asian man is relatively easy for people to accept, but being an East Asian woman is harder to grasp, and "being an East Asian woman who is gay is just like not even something that they can contemplate."

Sometimes, participants had difficulty ascertaining which of their minority statuses was the reason for others' biases, as one participant noted when she said she was not sure if her students were treating her with less respect than her colleagues because she was young, Asian, female, or lesbian. While there is literature on how individuals appraise and respond to threats to their social identity (Major & O'Brien, 2005), little has been written about how individuals with multiple minority identities experience and deal with situations where it is unclear which identity is threatened (Nabors, 2012).

Invisibility. Several participants talked about challenges associated with feeling invisible. Sometimes it was related to the assumption others had that same-gender sexual or romantic attraction did not exist in East Asian communities. Oftentimes, it was related to being in the minority or being a minority within a minority, e.g. being a "lower class East Asian," as one participant said, or being at a person of color event where everyone

else was predominantly African American or Hispanic, or being the only EAAWAW in a lesbian bar. Purdie-Vaughns and Eibach (2008) proposed that people with multiple minority group identities experience what they termed "intersectional invisibility" (p. 377) because, due to androcentrism, heterocentrism, and ethnocentrism, people with those group identities do not fit the prototypes of their identity groups. There is some overlap here with the experiences described above in which participants felt that one identity was obscuring others, or that they were assumed to be from the PRC just because they were ethnically Chinese.

Conflict with family and East Asian cultural values. Participants indicated that they were less likely to disclose their sexual orientation to other East Asian individuals, with participants who grew up in an East Asian country and then moved to the U.S.A. in particular talking about feeling freer to be open about their sexual orientation in the U.S.A. One reason some participants cited for not sharing their sexual orientation with other East Asian people was that there were no visible women who were attracted to women in their ethnic communities and in the media. The lack of visibility contributed to their sense that same-gender attraction was shameful. Some of them made reference to others' belief, as well as their own, that same-gender attractions were, as one participant put it, a "Western idea." This is consistent with the literature that suggests that many East Asian individuals believe that homosexuality is not something that exists within East Asian societies (Chan, 1989).

Another reason participants gave for not wanting to be out to other East Asian individuals was that participants perceived them as less accepting of same-gender attractions. This was related to the sense that their sexual orientation was incompatible

with gender and family roles in East Asian cultures. For instance, one participant reported feeling like a failure as a woman and a disappointment to her parents for not getting married to a man and not having children. Concern that not living up to cultural gender role expectations might result in their family members losing face and losing "social capital," as one participant described it, were major factors in participants' decision to not come out to their family or others in their ethnic communities. One participant also reported worrying that others would gossip and spread the news about her sexual orientation to her family members. As Liu and Chan (1996) noted, one's self-concept is connected with one's role in the family, such as daughter, wife, and mother, as well as with family values, so one's self-esteem is negatively affected when one does not conform to those roles and values. This can be compounded by the sense of "constant scrutiny" that accompanies attempts to live up to the family's expectations about gender roles and being aware of the importance of maintaining face (Liu & Chan, 1996, p. 143). One participant echoed this when she compared the judgmental "look" she gets in her country of origin with the more benign "staring" that she experiences in the United States.

Participants also talked about feeling greater pressure to conform and not stand out as a result of East Asian values in their country of origin. Some of them felt like they were going against the cultural value of social harmony by having a minority sexual orientation and in some cases, having a gender expression that was considered not "feminine." As one participant said, her straight friends in her country of origin saw her as "bold" and "wild," suggesting that they perceived her "choice" to be queer as being unconventional and intentionally so. This is consistent with the emphasis that is placed

on social harmony within East Asian cultures and the perception that adopting a minority sexual identity is selfish as it prioritizes individual desires over the needs of the family (Greene, 1994).

Related to this theme of not conforming to cultural and family values was the experience of not having a clear definition for understanding same-gender partner relationships and how they fit into other social and family relationships. For example, one participant described how her relationship to her partner's family was undefined. This was due in part to her partner not being out to her parents, which meant that she was not treated as a daughter-in-law in the same way that the wives of her partner's brothers were. At the same time, however, she was aware that any important decisions that her partner's family makes would still have a big effect on her and her partner's lives. Such experiences are consistent with literature about the lack of a frame of reference for same-gender romantic and sexual relationships in East Asian cultures that generally have clearly defined and highly structured gender, generational, and family roles (Liu & Chan, 1996). It may be that if families are accepting of an EAAWAW's sexual orientation and the EAAWAW is able to get married or have some kind of a commitment ceremony that the family recognizes, the family may then start to apply gender and social role scripts to the EAAWAW.

Benefits

Positive discrimination and benevolent prejudice. A theme that emerged from the interviews was participants' experiences of others treating them positively because of their gender and ethnicity. Several participants, for instance, reported thinking that their minority statuses were helpful in their job search and job promotions because they filled

diversity quotas. They also saw the positive stereotypes associated with being East Asian, e.g. being "smart," as beneficial at times. Participants also described being seen as "weak" or "cute" because they were women, but receiving advantages from it in the form of help or free drinks. This experience of being seen primarily for one's group identity can obscure one's individuality and can lead to negative reactions from others as described above, but in these instances, participants felt that they had gained from it. While there is some literature that asserts that benevolent attitudes towards a minority group, such as benevolent sexism, maintains inequality between the minority group and the dominant group (Glick & Fiske, 2001), it is interesting to note that these participants saw it as largely positive.

Providing perspectives and developing empathy. A notable benefit that participants saw of having minority statuses and multiple minority identities was their ability to look at things from different viewpoints. They described being able to draw on their experiences as a woman and an East Asian individual to approach things, interact with others, and interpret things in a variety of ways. Some noted that this was a particular advantage in group settings where they were in the minority. Participants also noted that they developed greater empathy as a result of being marginalized as EAAWAW.

Freedom from societal norms. While some participants found it challenging that there was no frame of reference in East Asian cultures to understand same-gender sexual and romantic attractions, others talked about the freedom that this gave them. It allowed them, for example, to create their own definition of family. Participants described being able to choose whom they considered to be in their family in that they

could choose to include not only people with whom they were biologically related but also friends whom they considered siblings. One participant also talked about having the freedom to decide whether or not to get pregnant as her partner can get pregnant if they so choose. As such, these participants were able to rewrite the rules for family and partner relationships rather than simply follow those set by a heteronormative society.

Managing challenges

Social support. The fact that all nine participants cited some form of social support as a factor that helped them to manage the challenges they face as EAAWAW clearly indicates how important social support is for this population. The sources of support that were mentioned varied widely and included family, friends, other EAAWAW, bosses, coworkers, partners, partner's family, and therapists. Social support came in the form of practical help, advice, encouragement, validation of experiences, and being seen as an individual and not as an identity category. Having a community of EAAWAW helped participants counteract the isolation and shame associated with the lack of visible EAAWAW in society at large and in the media as well as in predominantly White LGBT communities and heterocentric East Asian communities. Since participants often felt that one or more of their minority identity statuses obscured their unique attributes as a human being, they found it helpful when others treated them as individuals. Participants also reported that it was helpful to get advice from others, particularly on the subject of how to negotiate issues related to having a minority status such as how to navigate the lesbian dating scene and how to advocate for oneself as a woman.

Identity management. Participants employed a variety of strategies to decide whether, when, and how to reveal minority identities that could be hidden (e.g. their sexual orientation and national origin) as well as how to present themselves in order to manage stigma associated with those identities. When asked to describe her decision-making process around revealing an aspect of her identity, one participant listed three specific conditions: if that aspect of her identity was related to the conversation at hand, if it would deepen her connection with the others, or if it would provide some benefit to her such as benevolent prejudice. Before revealing a marginalized identity status, some participants assessed the level of acceptance by a person (e.g. parent, extended family member, coworker, business client, friend), by a community (e.g. activity group, family, LGBTQ community, East Asian community, feminist community), or in an environment (e.g. country of origin, work). One participant assumed that people who subscribed to traditional East Asian values, for example, people who grew up in East Asia and who were older, would be less accepting of her sexual orientation and so chose not to come out to people who fit those characteristics. Another participant assessed that the expectation in one particular setting was that if a person joined an identity-based group, others would assume that that identity was primary. As such, she chose not to join any of the groups. In contrast, when she was in a work environment that valued inclusivity and diversity, she felt that she could be more open about all of her identities. Narui (2011) argued that individuals' decisions to reveal their sexual orientation were based at least in part on the set of expectations about sexual orientation that people in a specific setting had. She used the Foucauldian concept "discursive norms" (p. 1219) to explain these expectations and showed that GLB individuals were aware that revealing their sexual

orientation could alter the "power dynamics" within each setting as well as their relationship with the people they told (p. 1223). Participants in this study demonstrated a similar sensitivity to the expectations of different contexts and the potential impact that revealing different aspects of their identity, most notably their sexual orientation, might have on relationships with others in those contexts.

One way in which participants described managing their identities was consciously choosing to challenge or not to challenge others' assumptions that they did not have a marginalized identity, for example, the commonplace assumption that they were straight. As one participant said:

> What people understand or see me as is… colored by their own minds and their own assumptions, so what assumptions I decide to challenge… is part of my decision-making process… like I can decide if someone assumes I'm straight, I can… let them continue believing that I'm straight or you know, decide to out myself.

This participant was aware of the social interactive process by which her identity is constructed or understood and furthermore, she expressed a sense of agency in this process. Another way that participants managed their multiple identities was to decide what pieces of information about themselves to omit or filter. They mentioned not talking about aspects of their personal life when at work or with parents when they assessed that those were contexts in which their sexual orientation was not accepted. A third strategy was strategically emphasizing aspects of themselves that were valued depending on the context. In the context of family, for example, participants emphasized their professional status because that was a source of family pride or being a dutiful

daughter. One participant talked about showing the "best aspect" of oneself before coming out to others. This is consistent with literature on identity management regarding how individuals protect themselves from stigma by highlighting identities that are valued and downplaying devalued identities in a particular social context (Kiang, Yip, & Fuligni, 2008; Shih, 2004).

Participants shared their subjective experience of having multiple identity statuses and employing identity management strategies. The language some of them used to describe this experience was relatively neutral. Words such as "move into/between" and "be flexible," for example, suggest an ability to move quite freely between different contexts and identities without implying an obviously detrimental effect on them. Other terms indicate a more conscious level of adaptation to fit into norms and to meet the expectations of others. These included words such as "filter," "adapt," "fit in," "behave differently," and "play a different role." These words suggest that they were aware of the need to change how they presented themselves in order to get by. Other words that some participants used were much more emotive and connote a sense of the struggle they encountered when managing or compartmentalizing different aspects of their identity. One participant spoke of "hiding" her emotions and sexual orientation from other women and how this negatively impacted her ability to connect with them. The struggle participants experienced in selectively not disclosing aspects of their identities was particularly evident in language like "detach" and "amputate." One participant used powerful language to describe her experience of managing multiple identities:

> I think… in between was the inner self that was really crazed and all over the
> place… I think it was the real me inside tried to figure out which persona was

really me… That this person that was out of control and seeing all these through different eyes and trying to figure out which persona was me, as if I was separate and deciding and figuring it out. There were all these four or three personas that I was looking into and deciding what to become… There was real me, which I was struggling with as well all the emotions was also put aside as well. At this point, I was just emotion and chaos, I guess.

As Pachankis (2007) argues, hiding a stigmatized identity can indeed have negative psychological consequences. At the same time, he notes that concealing the stigmatized identity can be adaptive when the context is unsupportive and that there is evidence of more adverse effects on well-being when one discloses the identity to someone who is not accepting than not telling anyone at all (p. 399). For some of the participants who reported having to compartmentalize or adapt to different contexts at various times in their lives, this process of adaptation could be considered a means of empowerment and coping. In fact, one participant saw her ability to move between contexts as a strength and that it actually helped her to integrate her identities:

> The gift I have is being able to be flexible and being able to move between communities and between situations. I think that's one of my strengths that I'm able to do it. I'm able to move from community to community and the shift of identities now it's been great because it's all integrated. But if I wasn't able to go from community to community to community I don't think I would have been able to integrate.

For another participant, compartmentalizing her sexual orientation and her family was the only viable way for her to maintain her connection to her family.

The strategy of compartmentalizing that participants described is similar to Roccas and Brewer's (2002) second most complex form of identity structure that they term "compartmentalization," in which one of several group identities becomes primary depending on the context. As Roccas and Brewer (2002) suggest, complex representations of multiple in-groups (in the case of participants in this study, the family, work, EAAWAW friends, straight friends from high school, and so on) can provide a buffer against the stress caused when there is a perceived threat against one of those in-groups, for example the LGBTQ community.

Changing cognitions. One theme that emerged with regard to coping was participants' attempts to reframe challenging situations. This showed a high degree of cognitive flexibility on the part of the participants and appeared to be very helpful when dealing with the expectations of others and with challenging situations that they felt they could not change. For instance, one participant made it a point to see her sexual orientation as a positive thing in her life. Three participants described the process of becoming more accepting of situations that they could not change and others spoke of cultivating their own patience and willingness to compromise. Another participant found a way to reframe what it means to her to honor her parents when she could not honor them in the ways they wanted. In her case, she was able to create a new understanding of her responsibilities as a daughter by learning to "respect" and "understand" her parents' beliefs, even if she was unable to live up their expectations by living her life in the way they had hoped.

Limitations of This Study

One of the limitations of this study was the relatively small number of participants that were interviewed. While the nine participants who were recruited were geographically dispersed across the United States and were of a variety of ages and professional identities, having a larger number of interviewees would have allowed for a greater representation of the experiences of EAAWAW. The sample of EAAWAW interviewed in this study was also relatively homogenous in that the education level was high, eight out of nine were ethnically Chinese, and their geographical location was limited to three states in the U.S.A. Given this limitation it is important to avoid generalization of these results to a broader EAAWAW population.

The qualitative nature of this study, while helpful in eliciting rich information about the subjective experiences of participants, also meant that it was not designed to confirm or disconfirm existing theories about the experiences of EAAWAW. Furthermore, the experiences that participants described are limited to their own lives and cannot be assumed to be representative of all EAAWAW. Due to the selection process that was employed in this study, namely snowball and networking sampling, people who were already interested in the topic and who may have spent more time thinking about identity issues were more likely to respond to the call for participants, leading to selection bias. Finally, all of the interviews were designed and conducted by myself, and as I have a personal interest in this subject matter, it is possible that the results of this study may also be affected by researcher bias. This should be taken into consideration when interpreting the research findings discussed above.

Implications of This Study

      Implications for future research. The results of this study suggest several areas that are worth pursuing in future studies. Expanding the scope to include more EAAWAW from a greater variety of socioeconomic status, levels of education, ethnicities, and geographical locations would capture a greater range of experiences. Themes that warrant further exploration include the ambiguity over which minority identity or identities are being stigmatized in a given situation and how EAAWAW manage this situation; the phenomenon of being assumed that one is from the People's Republic of China if one looks ethnically Chinese; identity management strategies, especially that of compartmentalization; the impact of the model minority myth; and the experience of invisibility. Given the frequency with which participants talked about work as a significant context in their lives and an important aspect of their identity, it would be helpful to further explore how EAAWAW navigate their work lives and how their professional identities intersect with their other identities. With more states and countries legalizing same-gender partnerships, research could be done to understand the experiences of EAAWAW who have been able to get legal recognition for their partnerships as well as their families and how this fits with cultural values around marriage, gender roles, and generational roles.

      While this study focused on the experiences of EAAWAW, it would be valuable to explore the experiences of the families of EAAWAW. How, for example, do they negotiate the coming out process with EAAWAW family members and with other immediate and extended family members, the ethnic community, and society in general? Do they engage in similar identity management strategies to deal with stigma associated

with having a family member who has same-gender attractions? How do they reconcile the ways in which same-gender attractions conflict with family and East Asian cultural values?

Implications for mental health providers and training. Two participants mentioned the benefits they had gained from seeking support from therapists. Mental health providers can play an important role in helping EAAWAW navigate different contexts in their lives. The themes that emerged from this study provide directions for these providers and those in training.

When working with clients who are EAAWAW, it is important to consider how the interaction of their gender, sexual orientation, and ethnicity impact their self-concept, their interactions with families, ethnic and LGBTQ communities, and society in general. Since EAAWAW often feel invisible due to one or more of their minority statuses and since they find that one status sometimes obscures their individuality, mental health professionals should seek to understand all aspects of their identity, not just ethnicity, gender, and sexual orientation, and the uniqueness of who they are and their experience. They may want to pay special attention to how their clients do not fit the prototype of their minority groups (e.g. not being from the PRC if they are ethnically Chinese or coming from a low-income background) and how this impacts others' perceptions and interactions with them. Assisting EAAWAW in finding social support would also be beneficial. Connecting them with other EAAWAW would be helpful for countering the isolation and lack of visibility of EAAWAW, but as participants in this study mentioned, support can come in myriad forms and from various sources.

It would be important to understand what cultural values are important to them and to their families and if possible, find ways to reframe those values so that they are more congruent with their same-gender attractions and to creating their own scripts when their experience falls outside social norms. Employing identity management strategies to cope with stigma can be stressful and mental health professionals should be aware of the emotional and psychosocial costs that come with it. At the same time, however, mental health professionals can avoid over-pathologizing EAAWAW by keeping in mind the adaptive nature of some identity management strategies, particularly when the perceived cost of not employing them would be greater than the cost of not using them. This might be particularly important when the impact of losing the connection to one's family is more painful than the ability to be out in all contexts of one's life. Finally, it might be helpful to take a resilience approach whereby stressful situations are seen as an opportunity for growth and not a sentence for poor outcomes.

Implications for EAAWAW and their families. EAAWAW and their families may benefit from many of the recommendations for mental health professionals and training in the previous section. In particular, given the importance of social support that participants in this study cited, they might want to find individuals and communities that can provide support for one or more of their marginalized identity groups. This can be in the form of online support communities, particularly for those who live in areas where there are few EAAWAW. Families of EAAWAW would also benefit from social support, ideally in the form of other families of EAAWAW to share experiences and strategies for dealing with challenges. It would also be beneficial to not interpret experiences of discrimination and prejudice as personal failings but to more accurately

attribute them to stigma. Being aware of the impact of heterocentrism, androcentrism, and ethnocentrism, as well as the impact of microaggressions might help with this. In addition, for EAAWAW who are able to get legally married or partnered, the legal recognition of their partnership might provide their families a framework for understanding their same-gender relationships or allow them to see if they can use existing cultural and societal scripts for gender and generational roles.

Implications for East Asian and LGBTQ communities. East Asian communities and LGBTQ communities are clearly important to EAAWAW as they provide support associated with at least one of their marginalized identities. At the same time, given the invisibility that EAAWAW experience when those communities do not reflect their other marginalized identities (e.g. the invisibility they feel when the LGBTQ communities are predominantly white), it would be beneficial to carry out more education within East Asian communities on the issues related to minority sexual orientations within ethnic minority groups, as well as within the LGBTQ communities with regard to the cultural issues of EAAWAW. It would also be helpful to find ways to bridge those communities, for example, by jointly hosting activities.

CHAPTER VI

Conclusion

This study gave East Asian American women who are attracted to women an opportunity to talk at length about their identities, roles, communities, and experiences, with a focus on the challenges they encounter related to their multiple minority status and the strategies they use to manage these challenges. The use of a semi-structured interview resulted in detailed, in-depth discussions about the nine participants' individual life stories and their subjective experiences of dealing with the conflicts that occur between different aspects of their identity, as well as the benefits associated with being a woman, being ethnically East Asian, and being attracted to women. Although much of what they reported has already been discussed in existing literature on EAAWAW, Asian American LGBTQ populations more generally, and other individuals with multiple minority status, findings in this study suggest that there is more work that can be carried out in order to understand more fully the unique challenges that this population faces as well as the different strategies EAAWAW can employ in order to help them manage the stresses of multiple minority stigma.

Although this study was limited in scope and only interviewed nine participants, it was apparent even within this small sample size that a great deal of diversity exists among EAAWAW and that their experiences cannot be explained solely by looking to their ethnicity, sexual orientation, and gender. Participants derived an important sense of

self as well as a significant amount of social support and psychological resilience not just

from their roles within their immediate family, but also from their families of choice

(friends, partners, pets, etc.), their professional lives, their activism and hobbies outside

of home, their work, and the EAAWAW community. One striking finding of this study

was the extent to which participants were able to consciously manage different aspects of

their identity and the various communities to which they belong in order to deal with

prejudice, maintain harmonious relations at work and with family members, and

reconcile conflicts in values and norms between their sexual orientation and the contexts

of family and work. While their subjective experiences of employing identity

management strategies such as compartmentalization sometimes echoed literature on the

negative impact of multiple minority stress (e.g. Pachankis, 2007), they also reflected a

high degree of resourcefulness and resilience, which suggests that for many EAAWAW,

it may not be necessary to integrate all of their identity aspects in all contexts of their

lives to be considered psychologically healthy. This is an important area for future

research.

There were several implications of this study. It is essential for mental health

providers, families, minority communities, and EAAWAW themselves to be aware of the

diversity that exists among individuals with multiple minority status. In addition, it is

important to be sensitive of the challenges that can arise when these individuals have to

negotiate the differences in values or norms that exists within and between communities

and contexts. It is also essential to recognize the resilience and adaptive nature of

strategically choosing not to disclose one's sexual orientation in certain contexts and

using other identity management strategies to negotiate the complexities associated with

being EAAWAW.

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APPENDIX A

PARTICIPANT RECRUITMENT LETTER

Dear _____,

My name is Diana Ong and I am a doctoral candidate in Clinical Psychology at the Rutgers Graduate School of Applied and Professional Psychology in New Brunswick, NJ. I am currently engaged in a study examining the experiences of East Asian American women who are attracted to women.

I am seeking East Asian women of the following descriptors to share their experiences by participating in an interview with me:
- 18 Years of age or older
- Ethnically Chinese, Japanese, or Korean
- Romantically and/or sexually attracted to other women

The interview will take about one and a half hours to complete and can be done in four ways: 1) in-person in a location that is private and convenient for you, 2) over the phone, 3) via online video or audio call using the computer program Skype, or 3) over online instant messaging using Skype. Participation in the study is completely voluntary and participants are free to not answer any questions or withdraw from the study at any time. The information provided will be recorded and held in the strictest confidence.

Interested potential participants can sign up for the study by contacting me at ongd@eden.rutgers.edu or 203-376-0670. Any questions regarding this study will be answered by the principal investigator (Diana Ong), or Dr. Nancy Boyd-Franklin, faculty advisor at Rutgers Graduate School of Applied and Professional Psychology (848-445-3924).

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Diana Ong, Psy.M.
Clinical Psychology Doctoral Candidate

APPENDIX B

DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

Today's Date: _____

Age: _____

Ethnicity: _____

Where were you born? _____

If not born in the U.S., what age did you come to the U.S.? _____

What is your father's country of origin? _____

    Does your father live in the U.S.?   Yes   No

    If yes, what year did your father immigrate to U.S.? _____

    If no, where does your father live? _____

What is your mother's country of origin? _____

    Does your mother live in the U.S.?   Yes   No

    If yes, what year did your mother immigrated to U.S.? _____

    If no, where does your mother live? _____

What is your first language? _____

What other languages do you speak fluently (if any)? _____

Highest Level of Education Completed:

    ___   High School

    ___   Associate Degree

    ___   Bachelors Degree

    ___   Graduate Degree; please specify: _____

Are you currently dating someone?   Yes   No

If yes, what gender is your partner? _____

How long have you been dating him or her? _____

APPENDIX C

SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW

A. Self-Concept

1. How would you define yourself? You can be as broad as you would like.
    a. Are there other ways that you would define your identity?
2. Are there aspects of your identity that are more important than others? If so, what aspects are more important and how?
3. What are some roles you play in your life?
    a. How important are these roles to your identity?
4. Please describe groups of people or communities that are important to you.
5. Please describe the relationship between different aspects of yourself, roles that you play, or groups of people in your life.
    a. How do they complement, conflict with or not relate to each other?

B. Fluidity of Identity

6. How has your identity changed or stayed the same across different times in your life?
    a. Have different aspects of your identity become more important to you at different times? If so, how? If not, can you elaborate?
7. How about different contexts in your life today? How does your identity change or stay the same?
8. What aspects of your identity or roles that you play are more private or more public than others?
    a. How are they more private or more public?
    b. What determines how private or public they are?
    c. (Optional) How does that change or stay that same across different times or contexts in your life?

C. Experiences (Benefits, Challenges and Coping)

9. What has it been like for you being an ethnically East Asian woman who is attracted to women?
    a. Is there anything else you'd like to add in terms of things you've liked or have found challenging as an East Asian American woman who is attracted to women?
10. What has been helpful for you as an ethnically East Asian woman who is attracted to women?
    a. Please describe people or groups of people who have been particularly helpful to you and how they have been helpful?
11. How do you see the relationship between your ethnicity, gender and sexual orientation?
    a. Please describe ways in which they complement, conflict or are not related with each other.
12. What benefits and challenges have you experienced that are specific to being ethnically East Asian?

a. What has been helpful in dealing with those challenges?
13. What benefits and challenges have you experienced that are specific to being a woman?
    a. What has been helpful in dealing with those challenges?
14. What benefits and challenges have you experienced that are specific to being a woman attracted to women?
    a. What has been helpful in dealing with those challenges?

D. Other questions

15. Is there anything else that you think might be helpful for me to know about that I haven't asked?
16. What are your reactions to what we have talked about today?
17. Do you know of other East Asian women who are attracted to women who have similar or different experiences from what you've described to me today?
18. If you were doing the interview, are there other questions you would have asked?

APPENDIX D

INFORMED CONSENT AGREEMENT

AN EXPLORATORY STUDY OF MULTIPLE SELF ASPECTS AND COMMUNITIES IN
EAST ASIAN AMERICAN WOMEN WHO ARE ATTRACTED TO WOMEN

You are invited to participate in a research study. Before you agree to participate in this study, you should know enough about it to make an informed decision. If you have any questions, please ask the investigator. You should be satisfied with the answers before you agree to be in the study.

Purpose of the Study

This study explores the potential challenges that East Asian American women who are attracted to women face and how they deal with these challenges. The study wants to understand your experience, thoughts, and feelings about being an East Asian American woman who is attracted to women. A doctoral student at the Graduate School of Applied and Professional Psychology at Rutgers University is conducting this study as a fulfillment of dissertation and doctoral requirements. It is anticipated that 10 – 20 individuals will participate in this study.

Study Procedures:
You will be asked to complete a sheet of demographic information, and then interviewed about your experiences, thoughts, and opinions regarding being an East Asian American woman who is attracted to women. The interview will take about one and one half hours.

Interviews done in person, over the phone, or via online video or audio calls will be *audio* recorded to contribute to the authenticity of the study. These interviews will then be transcribed. Interviews done over online instant messaging will have the text of the chat saved. Any audio recordings and paper copies of interview transcripts, text from internet instant messaging chats, or other data collected from you will be kept confidential by the researcher in a locked file cabinet. Electronic data files will be password protected and only the researcher will know the password(s). All audio recordings and documents containing identifying information will be destroyed at the end of the study.

Risks: The interview focuses on your current experiences as an East Asian woman who is attracted to women. It is my hope that the interview will be a positive experience for you. However, talking about some of the challenges you have faced or are currently facing may cause discomfort for you. If you experience distress related to the study, please contact the researcher and discuss this with her, so that she can assist you and help provide you with referrals as necessary. A second risk is a possible unintentional breach of confidentiality, that is, if someone other than the researcher accidentally gets access to identifying information. The researcher will minimize this risk by taking the numerous steps outlined below under "Confidentiality."

Benefits: Your experience and knowledge have tremendous value to understanding issues affecting East Asian women who are attracted to women. In addition, the opportunity to share your experience may be valuable to you.

Confidentiality: All records will be kept **confidential** to the extent permitted by law through the following steps: (1) all audio recordings, paper copies of transcripts, text from internet instant messaging chats, or other data collected from you will be kept in a locked file cabinet, (2) the consent form, which contains your name, will be kept in a locked file cabinet separate from

Subject's initials: _____

interview data, (3) electronic data files will be password protected and only the researcher will know the passwords, (4) the interviews done over the internet will use the computer program, Skype, which uses security measures such as encryption to protect the privacy of Skype users, (5) each participant will be assigned a participant number, which will be the only identification used on audio recordings, electronic data files, and interview transcripts, (6) data will be available only to the research team, and (7) all documents containing identifying information will be destroyed at the end of the study.

Your responses will be grouped with other participants' responses and analyzed collectively. If a report of this study is published or presented at a professional conference, all common identifying information will be disguised to protect your confidentiality. This will include changing your name and other demographic information (e.g. age, education level).

Research Standards and Rights of Participants: Participation in this study is **VOLUNTARY**. You may choose not to participate and you may withdraw at any time during the study procedures without any penalty to you. In addition, you may choose not to answer any questions with which you are not comfortable. Also, if you refer other individuals for participation in this study, your name may be used as the referral source only with your permission.

If you have any questions, concerns or comments regarding your participation in this study, you may contact the investigator or the investigator's dissertation chairperson at any time at the addresses, telephone numbers or emails listed below.

Diana Ong, Psy.M. (Investigator)   Nancy Boyd-Franklin, Ph.D. (Chairperson)
Counseling and Consultation Service   Rutgers University
The Ohio State University   Graduate School of Applied and Professional Psychology
4th Floor, Younkin Success Center   152 Frelinghuysen Rd
1640 Neil Avenue   Piscataway, NJ 08854
Columbus, OH 43201-2333
Telephone: (203) 376-0670   Telephone: (848) 445-3924
Email: ongd@eden.rutgers.edu   Email: boydfrank@aol.com

If you have any questions about your rights as a research subject, you may contact the IRB
Administrator at Rutgers University at:
Rutgers University, the State University of New Jersey
Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects
Office of Research and Sponsored Programs
3 Rutgers Plaza
New Brunswick, NJ 08901-8559
Tel: 848-932-0150
Email: humansubjects@orsp.rutgers.edu

I have read and understood the contents of this consent form and have received a copy of it for my files. I consent to participate in this research project.

Participant Name (Print) _____

Participant Signature _____   Date _____

Investigator Signature _____   Date _____

Subject's initials: _____

APPENDIX E

CONSENT FOR AUDIO RECORDING

You have already agreed to participate in a research study entitled, An Exploratory Study of Multiple Self Aspects and Communities in East Asian American Women Who are Attracted to Women, conducted by Diana Ong. We are asking for your permission to allow us to audio record (make a sound recording) as part of that research study.

The recording(s) will be used for analysis by Ms. Ong.

The recording(s) will be distinguished from one another by an identifying case number not your name.

The recording(s) will be stored in a locked file cabinet by identifying number not by name or other information that might disclose your identity. Digital recordings stored on a computer will be password protected. The recording(s) will be retained until the project is completed and the dissertation has been successfully defended. It is expected that the recording(s) will be destroyed within three years after your interview.

Your signature on this form grants the investigator named above permission to record you as described above during participation in the above-referenced study. The investigator will not use the recording(s) for any other reason than that/those stated in the consent form without your written permission.

Participant Name (Print) _____

Participant Signature   _____   Date _____

Principal Investigator Signature _____ Date _____

Subject's initials: _____

APPENDIX F

SCRIPT FOR ORAL CONSENT

AN EXPLORATORY STUDY OF MULTIPLE SELF ASPECTS AND COMMUNITIES IN

EAST ASIAN AMERICAN WOMEN WHO ARE ATTRACTED TO WOMEN

I am a doctoral student at the Graduate School of Applied and Professional Psychology at Rutgers and I am conducting a research study to fulfill dissertation and doctoral requirements. You are invited to participate in this study, which explores the potential challenges that East Asian American women who are attracted to women face and how they deal with these challenges. If you agree to participate, you will be asked some basic demographic questions and then interviewed about your experiences, thoughts, and feelings about being an East Asian American woman who is attracted to women. We are also asking for your permission to make an audio recording of the interview so it can be transcribed later for analysis. The interview will take about one and a half hours. It is anticipated that 10-20 individuals will participate in this study.

In terms of benefits and risks of the study, your experience and knowledge have tremendous value to understanding issues affecting East Asian women who are attracted to women. In addition, the opportunity to share your experience may be valuable to you. However, talking about some of the challenges you have faced or are currently facing may cause discomfort for you. If you experience distress related to the study, please contact the researcher and discuss this with her, so that she can assist you and help provide you with referrals as necessary. A second risk is a possible unintentional breach of confidentiality, that is, if someone other than the researcher accidentally gets access to identifying information. The researcher will minimize this risk by keeping information you provide **confidential** to the extent permitted by law. The data about your interview will be stored in a locked file cabinet or kept in a password protected electronic file in order to keep it confidential. The data will only be available to the research team and no identifying data will be disclosed. All audio recordings and documents containing identifying information will be destroyed at the end of the study.

Your responses will be grouped with other participants' responses and analyzed collectively. If a report of this study is published or presented at a professional conference, all common identifying information will be disguised to protect your confidentiality. This will include changing your name and other demographic information such as age and education level.

Participation in this study is **VOLUNTARY**. You may choose not to participate and you may withdraw at any time during the study procedures without any penalty to you. In addition, you may choose not to answer any questions with which you are not comfortable. Also, if you refer other individuals for participation in this study, your name may be used as the referral source only with your permission.

If you have any questions, concerns or comments regarding your participation in this study, you can contact me at (203) 376-0670 or my dissertation chairperson, Dr. Nancy Boyd-Franklin at (848) 445-3924. If you have any questions about your rights as a research subject, you may contact the IRB Administrator at Rutgers University at (848) 932-0150.