Taiwanese Lesbians Viewing Female Figures in Paintings:

A Phenomenological Study

by

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Statement of Originality

I, TZENG, Yi Hsin, hereby declare that I am the sole author of the thesis and the material presented in this thesis is my original work except those indicated in the acknowledgement. I further declare that I have followed the University's policies and regulations on Academic Honesty, Copyright and Plagiarism in writing the thesis and no material in this thesis has been submitted for a degree in this or other universities.

Abstract

In response to a lack of academic attention paid to the relationship between lesbian spectatorship and aesthetic perceptions of paintings, this study is an inquiry into the Taiwanese lesbian experience of viewing paintings, in particular paintings that contain female figures. Descriptions and themes regarding the phenomenon were generated through semi-structured, in-person interviews with twenty participants. Twelve major themes were then analyzed and examined according to van Manen (2016b)'s existential method of spatiality, temporality, relationship, and corporeality. Three research questions guided the process: *What is it like to view paintings for Taiwanese lesbians? How does this group of women interpret and make sense of paintings containing female figures? What does such an experience mean for Taiwanese lesbians in the context of Taiwanese society?*

The findings showed that, firstly, participants tended to see their personal evolution or moments from their own everyday lives reflected in paintings. Through the act of viewing female figure paintings, they were able to draw connections to themselves, other women, and the places occupied by women in a wider patriarchal society. Secondly, participants demonstrated a high awareness of issues surrounding gender and other inequalities, and they often derived messages of empowerment from female figures in paintings that they selected. Thirdly, they tended to gravitate towards female figures with diverse, ambiguous, or unconventional appearances.

This is a phenomenological study, aiming to describe commonalities between participants via a philosophical method of crossing over viewers' minds and bodies. Thus, it not only sheds light on a group of people currently underrepresented in visual arts and art education, it also offers a unique, intimate understanding of the lived experience of Taiwanese lesbians. It is my

hope that the findings contribute to raising gender awareness, and offer useful suggestions to visual artists, museum curators, and art educators alike. The experience of viewing paintings can be seen as a safe place of self-discovery, thus promoting paintings as a platform for initiating discussions related to social and gender issues.

Keywords: painting, lesbian, female figure, phenomenology

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List of Abbreviations

APA   American Psychological Association

EdUHK   The Education University of Hong Kong

TTHA   Taiwan Tongzhi Hotline Association

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Chapter ONE: INTRODUCTION

1-1 Research Background

Debating Along with the Realization of Marriage Equality

In May 2017, Taiwan's constitutional court ruled that same-sex marriage was legal and gave the parliament two years' time to amend its marriage laws. If Taiwan's parliament failed to take legislative action or to amend the civil law, same-sex couples would be allowed to register and automatically obtain "the status of a legally recognized couple" (Constitutional Court, Judicial Yuan, Taiwan, 2017, Reasoning section, para. 17). In response, conservative groups of opposing same-sex marriage initiated a referendum to restrict marriage to one man and one woman under the Civil Code; in late 2018, seven million people voted in favour of agreeing the referendum, taking 38.76% among registered voters and 72.48% among actual voters (Central Election Commission, 2018). In the end, the government announced a special bill that granted same-sex married couples almost the same rights as heterosexual couples in May 2019. At an international level, this made Taiwan the first place in Asia to legalize same-sex marriage; at a national level, it was not only an official recognition of the rights of sexual minorities but also a way to open up discussion about homosexuality among both government officials and Taiwanese citizens.

Gender Equality Education in Taiwan

The concept of "gender mainstreaming" was proposed at the United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women in 1995, making gender equality central to any policy or program design with the intention of initiating deep organizational change (Wang, 2014). Influenced by this world trend, Taiwan enacted the Gender Equality Education Act in 2004 to "promote substantive gender equality, eliminate gender discrimination, uphold human dignity, and

improve and establish educational resources and environments for gender equality" (Law & Regulations Database of Taiwan, Chapter 1, Article 1, 2018). The most important message of the action was to "recognize differences" and "take affirmative actions" in our education systems (Wang, 2014, p. 25). From 2015 to 2020, the total number of gender inequality incidents increased more than two-and-a-half times, rising to 13,493 cases across all academic levels, sixteen years after the Gender Equality Education Act came into effect (Taiwan Ministry of Education, 2020). A survey into difficulties experienced by sexual minorities in Taiwan reports that almost 60% have experienced hostile treatment as a result of their sexual identity and 29% have previously considered suicide (Chien, 2012). The form of violence most commonly experienced by this group is verbal abuse and bullying, mainly during high school (Chien, 2012; Ji, 2019).

My Relationship with Paintings

I was obsessed with paintings and drawings long before I could read. I enjoyed crouching on piles of paper and pens, doodling the walls of my room. Every sleepless night, I would create strange animals on patch of wall beside my pillow and then let my imagination carry me up to the ceiling. I had a talent for duplicating and recalling; I could produce flawless imitations of newspaper illustrations seemingly without any effort, and sketch out detailed scenes from recent excursions. Visiting museums or galleries was always my favorite activity because I was fascinated by standing in front of paintings and looking at them. Paintings seemed to talk to me, and I would dive headlong into this kaleidoscope-like world, where I could escape the scolding and judgement of adults. Each painting had its own narrative and I never tired of looking for details. For me, paintings have always been magical windows onto other people's lives. Even after several years of immersing myself in contemporary art training in the United States, I still feel the same intense connection with paintings.

A Forgotten Experience

Taiwan embraces a kind of hybrid culture, mixing Taiwanese aboriginal culture, Japanese colonialism, transplanted Chinese culture, post-war American cultures, and local Confucianist Han cultures (Sang, 2014). Among these elements, my viewpoint was greatly influenced by my interactions with Western books, Western scholars, and teachers with Western education. Ever since I was young, I had had more contact with and exposure to Western paintings than Chinese or other Eastern paintings. In the past, my experience of viewing paintings tended to involve attempts to be neutral, desexualized, and de-politicized in order to keep an objective or detached attitude. Most of the time, I learned about a painting from books or authority figures before viewing it on my own. I used to obey what textbooks instilled in me, using so-called professional knowledge to interpret paintings, a knowledge which usually came from a perspective that was Western-centered, heterosexual, and male. Hence, I seldom viewed paintings with a fresh or naive eye. As a professional artist, however, I seldom take my personal codes, such as those regarding gender, race, identity, or social status, into consideration. Intentionally or unintentionally, I found that I forget who I was when standing in front of paintings. Through conversing with my participants for this study, I have been able to experience paintings in a completely new way.

Being a Researcher, Educator, and Artist

As a visual artist with a traditional painting background, I am interested in interacting with my audiences. I am particularly fascinated by the way they talk about paintings, regardless of whether or not they have formal art training. Having been an art educator for almost twenty years, I am also curious about how students view and interpret paintings outside the standard answer provided by textbooks. I found particularly enlightening the essay, "A challenge for art

education" and its line: "Teachers must be aware that at least ten percent of their classes may be composed of homosexual adolescents" (Lampela, 1995, p. 242). With these considerations in mind, this study seeks to understand: *What is it like for lesbian spectators to view paintings that contain female figures? What and how does such a viewing experience mean for them, and also for me?*

Listening and Understanding Others

I see this study as timely, documenting a turning point in perception of sexual minorities in Taiwan. Lesbian and gay people are shifting from being underground communities to being communities in the public eye. They are learning to talk about their relationships, partners, children, and inheritance matters in public forums such as classrooms, hospitals, offices, immigration departments, and even courts. It seems that Taiwanese people are engaging in increasingly open conversations relating to gender equality but also that public opinion remains divided and sometimes even hostile toward sexual minorities. At this critical moment of time, Taiwanese society needs more space and opportunity for mutual understanding. Having been an art educator and visual artist for many years, I chose to look into this phenomenon from my two professional fields, visual arts and art education. The aim was to obtain a better understanding of the nature and meaning of Taiwanese lesbian lived or existential experiences through the reflective and historic medium of paintings. My hope was that, after reading my research, the phenomenon of what-it-is-likeness to be a lesbian might speak to a reader's what-it-is-like-for-me-ness. I hope the research findings contribute towards raising gender awareness, and offer useful suggestions to visual artists, museum curators, and art educators alike. The experience of viewing painting experiences can be seen as a safe venue for self-discovery, thus promoting paintings as a platform for initiating discussions related to social and gender issues.

The main purpose of revealing these Othered voices is to promote a true equality of awareness and action in Taiwanese society.

1-2 Previous Study & Research Gap

Previous Studies on the Experience of Paintings

When discussing the experience of viewing paintings or artworks, most empirical research focuses on museum viewers' experiences (Carbon, 2017; Csikszentmihalyi & Robinson, 1990; Frois & White, 2013; Locher, 2012; Otto-Diniz, 2008; Roald, 2008; Smith, 2006; Tam, 2006), discussing the difference between art experts and non-art-expert viewers (Augustin & Leder, 2006; Leder, Belke, Oeberst, & Augustin, 2004; Lindauer, 2003; Neperud, 1986) or how aesthetic responses relate to the creative performances of young students (Chen, 2014; Hua, 2013; Sun, 2016). Very few studies shed light on the characteristics or features of the viewers themselves.

When considering gender and spectatorship, some studies point to differences both biologically and psychologically in the styles, subject matters, and symmetrical balance of paintings. (Gelder, et al, 2018; Neperud, 1986; Polzella, 2000; Salkind, L. & Salkind, N., 1997; Tuman, 1999). For example, Polzella (2000) finds that Rococo and Impressionist paintings evoke more feelings of pleasure among female participants compared with males. Gelder, et al (2018) experiment how viewing classical figure paintings triggers brain activities of female and male participants differently. As a whole, these studies show that the way women view paintings is indeed different from men, but results are not always consistent and involving with many elements at the same time. It is clear that aesthetic response is complex and potentially

influenced by professional training, knowledge, culture, visual elements, gender, sex, biological differences, and environment.

According to French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (1984), a person's taste in artwork is more a product of cultivation than something that they were born with. This means that viewers might project their own past memory, upbringing, growing experiences, or social background onto a painting consciously and subconsciously. Several psychological studies have suggested that sexual orientation plays a significant role in the psychological development of individuals (Becker, et al, 2014; Patterson, 1995). For example, it has been found that sexual minorities show a higher level of depression, suicide, and social alienation than their peers (Becker et al, 2014; Irish et al, 2019; Martin-Storey & Fish, 2019). Since the judgement or experience of artworks might be impacted by whom they stay with or what they are exposed to, the process of growing up as a lesbian might involve experiences of viewing paintings.

A Gendered Spectatorship

I searched for studies connecting sexuality with the experience of viewing paintings on Google Scholar and EdUHK school library resources, including ProQuest, Eric databases, National Digital Library of Theses and Dissertations in Taiwan, and China National Knowledge Infrastructure databases, but the results were extremely limited. Instead, I noticed that, firstly, my search for resources dealing with lesbian experiences led me to many discussions relating to self-identification, partnership, parenting, family formation, mental health, and caretaking, especially around issues of youth and learning environments (Biblarz & Savci, 2010; Chiang, 2008; Donovan & Barnes, 2019; Goldberg, 2010; Kwok, 2011; Lui, 2018; Pan, Yang, & Lin, 2012; Toomey, et al, 2013; Tseng, 2013) but very few about viewing experiences. Secondly, it became clear that "male gaze" and "female gaze" are both well-known terms in the context of

analyzing the ideology of spectatorship (Christian, 2010; Gamman & Marshment, 1989). However, when it comes to research into homosexuality and spectatorship, there is more emphasis on gay men, especially in the field of cinema (Champagne, 1997; Christian, 2010; Hart, 2013; Patricia, 2017).

Thirdly, in studies that do focus on lesbian spectatorship, a majority concentrates on analyzing the aesthetics or experience of reading or viewing literature, erotic dance, fashion magazines, popular cinema, or pornography (e.g., Leung, 2012; Lewis & Rolley, 1996; Lewis, 1997; Morrison & Tallack, 2005; Pilcher, 2016; Traub, 1991). In Taiwanese context, lesbian literature is more prominent than any other art medium (Chang, 1993; Lin, 2011; Lo, 2012; Yu, 2016). Nevertheless, none at all focuses on the aesthetics or experience of viewing paintings. Lastly, when lesbian spectatorship is discussed in the context of art education, studies approach it from the perspective of artmaking, discussing how lesbian or queer artists create artworks and the necessity of incorporating them in our courses and curricula (Cottingham, 1996; Stanley, 2007).

A Marginalized Perspective from Asia

Given the aforementioned exploration, it seems clear that lesbian spectatorship remains a marginalized area of study on an international scale, lacking investigation and attention from disciplines such as gender studies, visual art, and aesthetic experience. In 2018, I conducted a study into how heterosexual women and lesbians in Macau and Hong Kong talk about paintings. The results showed that lesbian participants were more aware of being female and of their social status as part of a sexual minority group. For instance, they concerned how female figures being portrayed, exposed, or objectified in the paintings as well as related their sexual orientation with the interpretation of paintings. These findings caught my attention and

prompted me to embark on the current study. Not only was I convinced of the practicability and value of expanding the line of research, I was also able to generate my initial research questions and narrow my focus to the perception of female figures in paintings. Furthermore, evidence of a unique lesbian lived experience encouraged me to proceed using a systematic method – that is, a phenomenological approach.

Consequently, this study aims to fill a critical gap in the current literature by providing an in-depth understanding of the experience of viewing paintings as a lesbian from both Eastern and Western art literature. As Taiwanese scholar Gian Jia-shin (1997) comments, while gay men have to address stigma, and how to destigmatize perceptions of gayness, the primary issue for lesbians is that of how to be seen. Gian believes that publishing lesbian periodicals is a means for lesbians to make themselves visible through languages, a way to say, "We are here" (Gian, 1998, p. 91). For me, Gian's remark prompts some questions: *Might lesbians speak out through their collective visual experience? If so, what does the act of viewing paintings mean for them? How do they experience paintings? What do they think, talk, and feel while viewing paintings? In my own research, might it be possible to discover an aesthetic phenomenon of viewing paintings?* My intention here is to make visible an invisible community, in the hope of providing a reference for future museum education programs, exhibition curators, or gender studies scholars.

Additionally, a hermeneutic phenomenology approach has never before been used to examine such an experience from the perspective of an Asian sexual minority. This study could therefore also be beneficial for the exploration of phenomenology in the area of visual arts. To the best of my knowledge, there is no literature exploring the connection between female same-sex desire and spectatorship of paintings. The main interest and goal of this phenomenological

study is to describe what Taiwanese lesbians have in common as they experience viewing and interpreting paintings with female figure images in the context of Taiwanese society.

1-3 Theoretical framework

The theoretical framework of this study is based on the theories of aesthetic experience developed by Csikszentmihalyi and Robinson (1990), on Lacan's concept of the gaze (1988), and on feminist film and queer theories. The term "aesthetic experiences" is often used to describe the experience of viewing paintings in the literature. In order to examine the various dimensions of lesbians' viewing painting experiences, I have followed Csikszentmihalyi and Robinson's structure of examining perceptional, emotional, intellectual, and communicational aspects separately. Several studies (e.g., Gelder, et al, 2018; Polzella, 2000; Salkind, L. & Salkind, N., 1997) have suggested that men and women do have different ways of viewing and gazing, culturally and psychologically, and both male and female gazing theories have been widely discussed. For this research, I utilized Lacanian three orders (1988) and queer theory to lay the partial foundation of the literature review. Another significant part of my theoretical framework has been to view and read all research materials through the lens of phenomenology.

Structure of the Thesis

This thesis consists of ten chapters, divided into various subchapters. The first chapter introduces the study, covering the title, focus, aim, research questions and background. The second chapter reviews related literature, employing a theoretical framework of aesthetic experience, gaze theory, sociology, feminist film and queer theory. The third chapter includes a literature review on Taiwanese history, culture, and social position of women. The fourth chapter explores the philosophical context of hermeneutic phenomenology, the chosen methodology for the study. The fifth chapter elaborates details of the research methods and

procedures, including the phenomenological approach of collecting, analyzing data, recruiting participants, and presenting findings. The sixth, seventh, and eighth chapters present the research findings, structured by van Manen (2016b)'s four existential aspects of lived experiences. The nineth chapter discusses the results arising from the three findings chapters. The last chapter contains a conclusion, discussion of the study's limitations and contributions, and suggestions for future researchers.

1-4 Research Focus and Rationale

Research Scope

This study focuses on two kinds of viewing experiences: first, participants' reflective experiences of previously viewing paintings; second, their experiences of viewing paintings as a reproduction. The first experience is similar to the experience of viewing paintings in a museum or gallery setting, while the second one involves viewing reproduced pictures. The intention of studying the first experience is to understand how participants feel and sense original paintings on the site reflectively and the second one is to examine how participants interpret and comprehend the content of paintings. Undeniably, viewing a reproduction of paintings is a different experience to that of viewing original paintings (Locher, Smith, & Smith, 2001; Smith & Wolf, 1993). However, John Berger (1974) provided a counter-argument to this during an episode of his television series on art:

> Faces of paintings become the message. Painting can be used to make arguments or points which may be different from original meanings. You are seeing them in the context of your own life. They are surrounded not by gilt frames, but by the familiarity of the room you are in, and the people around you… Reproduction makes it easier to connect our experience of art directly with other experiences. (BBC, Episode 1)

Building on this and considering that we live in an era of mechanical reproduction, I decided to have my participants view reproductions of paintings in settings already familiar to them. The familiarity created a sense of ease that extended to the reproduced image, allowing participants to focus on interpreting content and to draw connections more easily with their own life experiences. Therefore, I use the phrase *the experience of viewing paintings* to describe experiences viewing both original and reproduced paintings; it is also why I have extended the scope of my literature review beyond the field of viewing paintings.

Previous Experience of Viewing Paintings

This study aims to articulate what it is like to view paintings that contains female figures for Taiwanese adults who identify themselves as lesbians and who have had previous experience of viewing original paintings. This is a qualitative and descriptive study that intends to comprehend the experience of viewing paintings from the perspective of Taiwanese lesbians. Participants were recruited under the basis that they had previous experience of viewing original paintings in person before the interview. This enables a distinction to be drawn between their previous viewing experiences of paintings and other two-dimensional media, such as photographs, graphic design illustrations, or images in magazines. For the purpose of this study, it was crucial that participants could look back and then communicate their lived experiences with me because, as emphasized by van Manen, "phenomenological reflection is not introspective but retrospective" (2016b, p. 10).

Aesthetic Experience

The experience of viewing paintings is often discussed using terminology such as "aesthetics" or "aesthetic experience." These terms are commonly used in the fields of fine arts and art education in modernism. According to Csikszentmihalyi and Robinson (1990), aesthetic

experience may achieve a subjective "heightened state of consciousness," gaining "a form of understanding, sensory pleasure, emotional harmony, and transcending actuality" (p. 9-17). However, this philosophical concept has been restricted to an elevated level of experience in visual arts (Tam, 2006). Drawing on Csikszentmihalyi and Robinson, I would like to clarify my different usages of *the experience of viewing paintings* and *aesthetic experience* in this study.

The term *experience of viewing paintings* is a broad and encompassing definition, referring to what participants see, feel, think, act on, or connect with in the relation to paintings, regardless of whether they view paintings in an exhibition setting or a reproduced format. The term *aesthetic experience*, on the other hand, concentrates more on the mental, emotional, and psychological activities aroused by actual visual perception of artworks. Thus, the horizon of aesthetic experience cannot fully contain my discussion about the experience of viewing or gazing paintings in relation to power, knowledge, language, sexuality, or politics. Given these considerations, I use *experience of viewing paintings* to include the experience of viewing both real-life paintings and reproduction of paintings, whilst *aesthetic experience* refers instead to a specific and philosophical experience employed by aestheticians or theorists. Additionally, when I use the verb *viewing*, it is intended to include the mental and psychological interactions between viewers and paintings. This is to say that the act of viewing also serves as a vehicle for other human responses to paintings, such as thinking and interpreting.

Paintings

When mentioning paintings in this study, I employ a rather traditional definition of paintings. Paintings are regarded as two-dimensional painted matters, "a representation on a surface executed in paint or colours" (Oxford English Dictionary, n.d., para. b). Naturally, paintings

vary greatly in terms of content and style. According to my preliminary study, lesbian participants are more prone to discuss paintings depicting female figures; this also guided my choice of painting images that I provided my participants to view during our interviews. An additional criterion of selecting these painting images was to include diverse painting styles from different periods of history rather than going by particular titles or artists. The method of selecting painting images for the study was both purposive and exploratory.

Lived Experience

Phenomenology is "the reflective study of prereflective or lived experience" (Adams & van Manen, 2008, p. 614). "Lived experience" is a translation of the German word *Erlebnis*, literally meaning "living through something" (van Manen, 2016a, p. 39). The concept is used in this study, as used in the work of other phenomenologists, to "explore directly the original or prereflective dimensions of human existence" (van Manen, 2016a, p. 39). According to this understanding, we can only reflect on lived experience that is "already passed or lived through" (van Manen, 2016b, p. 36) because the living moment of now is always "already absent in our effort to return it" (Adams & van Manen, 2008, p. 617). Through exploring the lived through experiences of viewing paintings, this study attempts to name the possibilities of participants' lived experiences, give them a reflective description, and gain an understanding of their "pregiven and and already there" world, namely, the lifeworld (Husserl, 1970, p, 103-106).

1-5 Participants

I used both snowballing and purposive sampling methods to recruit participants for my study. In addition to spreading news through word of mouth, I also created free advertisement to run on social media and local independent bookstores in Taipei. Eligible participants were women

born and raised in Taiwan, with previous experience of viewing original paintings. Most importantly, potential participants needed to identify themselves as lesbians at the time of the study.

For phenomenologists, interviewing is the most fundamental and effective method of data collecting (Merriam, 2009; Van den Berg, 2005). It is a primary tool for collecting experiential narrative materials and building up conversational relationships with participants (van Manen, 2016b). In this study, I carried out two interviews with each participant. The first interview was to explore their past experiences of viewing paintings; the second was to elicit their interpretation of selected painting images. I had a total of twenty participants and each of our interviews lasted between one and two hours. In order to clarify and expand my initial findings, I invited five of those twenty participants for a third interview. This resulted in a total of forty-five interview transcripts, which provided sufficient materials for a phenomenological study.

I recruited participants of varying ages and backgrounds in order to get a broader picture of this relatively small community. Participants were between twenty and sixty years old. More than half held a bachelor's degree and were living in the Taipei metropolitan area. The majority had never received any formal art or design trainings; two had college degrees in art and design, and one a high school diploma. They had all viewed paintings before, although over half stated a preference for movies, literatures, or music. The frequency of their visits to museums or galleries ranged from "sometimes" to "seldom," an average of once a year or less. My research procedures will be elaborated further in Chapter Five.

1-6 Research Aims and Questions

The first aim of this research was to describe how Taiwanese lesbians experience viewing paintings and to explore their ways of viewing and interpreting paintings. The corresponding research question was: (1) ***What is it like to view paintings for Taiwanese lesbians?*** The following lines of inquiry included: How do they feel around paintings? What do they feel, think, and associate with paintings? What is it like to stand in front of paintings? What is their embodied experience of viewing paintings?

The second research aim was to obtain a deeper understanding of Taiwanese lesbians' lived experience of viewing and interpreting paintings that contain female figures. Through an interpretive and descriptive approach, this study aimed to explore the experience of viewing female figures by Taiwanese lesbians from their lifeworld. Hence, the second research question was: (2) ***How does this group of women interpret and make sense of paintings containing female figures?*** Its subordinating questions included: What do Taiwanese lesbians see and feel when confronted with paintings that contain female figures? How do they interpret the relationships between figures in paintings? What do they reflect on while viewing these female figures?

My third and final research aim was to find how participants found meanings in their experience of viewing female figures in paintings, in order to provide an insight for art professionals or people who values knowing about the experiences of othered social groups. Thus, my third question was: (3) ***What does such an experience mean for Taiwanese lesbians in the context of Taiwanese society?*** Subordinating questions included: What are the mutual experiences and common meanings behind Taiwanese lesbian experiences of viewing and interpreting paintings that contain female figures? What is such an experience about in relation to a specific culture and time?

In conclusion, these research aims were connected with each other in order to respond to the three research questions and fill the research gap between lesbian visual experience and the experience of viewing paintings. I adopted a phenomenological approach because it enabled me to listen carefully and directly to participants, allowing their descriptions of experience to illuminate the essential meaning of their lifeworld. Understanding such an experience phenomenologically has the following implications. Firstly, this qualitative study was to describe and explore the experience of lesbians in Taiwan viewing and interpreting paintings. Secondly, this study was beneficial to recognize participants' pre-reflective experiences of viewing paintings and thereby highlight female narratives told from the perspective of a sexual minority. Thirdly, this study was useful to comprehend the meaning of viewing painting experiences from the specific context of social, historical, and educational context of Taiwan.

1-7 Methodology

Philosophically, ontology relates to the nature of reality, the study of being, and pertains to the fundamental question (Given, 2008): What is the reality? Epistemology, on the other hand, relates to how individuals interpret reality; it is the study of knowledge, springing from the question: How can I understand the reality? How we know depends on the nature of reality and what constitutes the world decides how we understand it (Given, 2008). Hence, ontology and epistemology are interconnected. Unlike Cartesians' dualism, which disassociates the mind from the body, phenomenology asserts a mind-body connection, illustrating an embodied viewpoint of the self (Goldberg, Ryan, & Sawchyn, 2009).

Phenomenology is the study of our experience and consciousness (Smith, 2016). I chose phenomenology as a guiding principle for this study, philosophically and methodologically,

for the following reasons. From an ontological point of view, phenomenology sees each participant's experience as unique and interpretive, helping me to engage with and contextualize Taiwanese lesbians' experiences of viewing painting. From an epistemological point of view, phenomenology regards the personal experience of participants as a primary source of knowledge. In the context of this research, a phenomenological methodology, involved seeking an accurate and detailed description of the personal experiences of viewing female figures in paintings, as well as reflections on how this connected to a participant's background, memory, and history. Through repeated phenomenological analysis and interpretation, the overall intention was to reveal a visual experience of Taiwanese lesbians.

What Is Phenomenology?

Phenomenology, or the study of phenomena, was a philosophical movement initiated by the German philosopher, Edmund Husserl (1859-1938). I choose phenomenology as the methodology because of its intention to capture "what all participants have in common as they experience a phenomenon" from a first-person angle (Creswell, p. 92, 2013). While it is impossible to experience every other's lives and exactly as they do, applying the lens of phenomenology enables us to reach an understanding of their experiences. Through "'borrowing' other people's experiences and reflections, we can come up a better understanding toward a specific experience in the context of whole human experience" (van Manen, 2016b, p. 55). Finally, the target of a phenomenological study is "to construct a possible interpretation of the nature of a certain human experience" (van Manen, 1984, p. 44).

Why Hermeneutic Phenomenology?

Philosophers such as Martin Heidegger, Jean-Paul Sartre, and Maurice Merleau-Ponty built and expanded on Edmund Husserl's theories of phenomenology (Creswell, 2013). Using

Husserl's theory of transcendental ideas, Heidegger (1889-1976), a former student of Husserl established the foundation for hermeneutic phenomenology (Kafle, 2011). In Greek mythology, *Hermes* was a messenger of the Gods, interpreting their hidden meanings for mortals. That is, Hermes conveyed the intentions of the Gods to a community that did not speak the same language as them; likewise, hermeneutics have the capacity of making communities understand meanings previously unavailable to them (Davey, 2017). In Heidegger's connection of hermeneutics and phenomenology, a phenomenological approach becomes an interpretive one (Davey, 2017). This is because, as expressed by Gadamer, "interpretation is not an isolated activity but the basic structure of experience" (1984, p. 58).

Through the process of reading, reflecting, and writing, a researcher can describe and interpret the meaning of a lived experience. Hermeneutic phenomenology does not attempt to provide a universal explanation (Morris, 2013); instead, it is more a free action of "seeing meanings," looking for *what* and *how* participants experience the phenomenon in an insightful way (van Manen, 2016b, p. 79). On the whole, phenomenologists like to know how a specific group of people "makes sense of their everyday world" in order to obtain the essence or meaning of human experiences (Eddles-Hirsch, 2015, p. 251). Therefore, the trustworthiness of phenomenological studies usually lies in the agreement or recognition of readers; in whether or not they, literally or figuratively, "nod" in agreement at what a researcher is describing and interpreting (van Manen, 2016b). More details about the methodology of phenomenology will be elaborated in Chapter Four.

Experience Lived by the Researcher

Phenomenological research is not merely about the consciousness of viewing and interpreting paintings but also about self-consciousness—a consciousness of a self in these acts. For this

study, to live life means viewing, interpreting, and being a lesbian in this lifeworld. The intention is both to understand the lived experience of Taiwanese lesbians in relation to paintings and to re-discover my own lost experiences of viewing paintings as someone who identifies as part of this same sexual minority. To put it plainly, this kind of inquiry is an action and experience of understanding others, of understanding myself, and also of being understood. This is what van Manen (2016b) expresses, when he writes, "[a] phenomenological question must not only be made clear, understood, but also 'lived' by the researcher" (p. 44).

1-8 Contributions and Significance of Study

If starting point of respecting others is to understand them, then the foundation for understanding is to feel what they feel and sense what they sense. This means that we must first learn how to open ourselves up and then empathize with others, before respecting them. It is only then that true communication and conversation might begin. A charming feature of phenomenology is its unique, intimate way of talking to and connecting with people; it provides researchers a chance to live in the experience of other people truly and bodily. In the end, this insight reflects back onto us, the researcher and readers, revealing and rediscovering to us the version of ourselves we might not previously have been conscious of.

Articulating the nature of phenomenology, there are several layers of contribution and significance to this study. From a sexual minority perspective, this study proposes an understanding of how it feels like to view and interpret paintings as a Taiwanese lesbian, in particular how it feels for Taiwanese lesbians to view paintings containing female figures. From a pedagogical perspective, this study hopes to prove helpful not only to art educators, visual artists, curators, or museum professionals but also to anyone who cares about connecting with others in our society, who would like to understand our world from a nonmajor angle, or

who cherish the true value of human beings. From a personal perspective, the study has been a valuable opportunity for me to connect with myself and the wider community, through sharing similar languages and life stories. Last but not least, this study offers a starting point for Taiwanese people to deepen our comprehension of what it is like to live as a lesbian in Taiwanese society, and also to examine our heteronormative public space from the perspective of a sexual minority. Eventually, the research seeks that we are "not only seeing ourselves as other see us, we also need to see ourselves seeing one another" through the experience of viewing paintings (Olin, 1996, p. 218).

Chapter TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW I

2-1 Introduction

Chapters Two and Three present a review of the literature, focusing on the experience of viewing paintings from a Taiwanese lesbian perspective. Due to a lack of similar studies relating to lesbian spectatorship of paintings, I have chosen to review this topic in two main parts, from multiple perspectives. In Chapter Two, the aesthetic dimension of viewing paintings proposed by Csikszentmihalyi and Robinson (1990) forms the main structure of the review and extends into six perspectives, supported by related concepts and theorists. The six perspectives are: formal, emotional, phenomenological, social, psychological, and bodily. In Chapter Three, I consider Taiwanese lesbians in the context of history, culture, gender, art education, etymology, and phenomenology. The following chart (Table 1 and 2) gives an overview of the review framework.

The Theoretical Structure of Literature Review on the Experience of Viewing Paintings

Different Perspectives	Function of gaze	Major concepts	Major theorists	Empirical studies
Formal	reception option	perceptual dimension, Formalism	Immanuel Kant, Clive Bell, Edward Bullough, Clement Greenberg	Csikszentmihalyi & Robinson (1990)
Emotional	reception	emotional dimension, Expressionism	Leo Tolstoy, Benedetto Croce, R. G. Collingwood	Csikszentmihalyi & Robinson (1990)
Phenomenological	reception	minds and bodies inseparable	Heidegger, van Manen, Merleau-Ponty	Tam (2006)
Social	address	intellectual dimension, interpellation, cultural capital	George Dickie, Arthur Danto, Louis Althusser, Pierre Bourdieu	Csikszentmihalyi & Robinson (1990), Rubiales (2014)
Psychological	address	communicative dimension, mirror stage and three orders, two-directional and inspecting gazes	Jacques Lacan, Sigmund Freud, Michel Foucault	Csikszentmihalyi & Robinson (1990), Hill & Fischer (2008), Guizzo & Cadinu (2016)
Bodily	address	male gaze, female gaze, lesbian/queer gaze	John Berger, Laura Mulvey, E. Ann Kaplan, Mary Ann Doane, Jackie Stacey, Evans and Gamman	Lewis & Rolley (1996), Bloomfield (2005)

Table 1

The Theoretical Structure of Literature Review on Taiwanese Lesbians

Different Perspectives	Major concepts	Supported or Empirical studies
Historical	The history of female same-sex desire in China, New China, and Taiwan	Damm, (2005), Kang, (2009), Kong (2011), Sang (2014)
Etymological	The change of names from tong-xing-ai (同性愛), tong-xing-lian (同性戀), tong-chi (同志), lei-si-bian (蕾絲邊), to la- zi (拉子), and TP (踢婆) culture	Qiu (1994/2017), Xiao (1994), Sang (2014)
Social	The social status of Taiwanese women from the angle of lawmaking, surveys, and public speech	Ministry of Health and Welfare (2015), Modern Women's Foundation (2019), Chang (2019), The Gender Equality Committee (2019), Law & Regulation Database of Taiwan (2020)
Pedagogical	Viewing female images in general textbooks and visual arts textbooks	Lui (2004), Chen (2008), Lai (2011), Tang (2014),
Psychological	Lacanian three orders, Lesbian identity	Chuang (2000), McCarn and Fassinger (1996) Chen (2000), Lui (2001), Wray (2003)
Phenomenological	More sensitivities, greater awareness of the idea of diversity and comfort	Bourne (1990), Spidsberg (2007), Lee, Taylor, & Raitt (2010), Duffy (2011), Goldberg, Harbin, & Campbell (2011), Huxley, Clarke, & Halliwell (2011), deLeon & Brunner (2013), Bullard (2013), Nielsen & Alderson (2014), Goettsche (2014), Surdovel (2015), Bryan (2017)

Table 2

Two Ways of Viewing: Reception and Address

The discussion of spectatorship in literature often connects to the act of gazing or viewing, as well as to the power dynamics of viewing and being viewed, especially in relation to women or oppressed groups. Art historian Margaret Olin (1996) proposes that when paintings encounter viewers, they make viewers responsible for the effects produced; both the act of looking and being looked at become the theme of the paintings. In this way, paintings take on an active role, inviting specific individuals to engage with them; the act of gazing also becomes dynamic, bridging the gap between artworks and relative social theories (Reinhardt, 2010; Sturken & Cartwright, 2018). Hence, when studying *reception*, we look at how individual viewers make sense of images, such as what they say and how they react; when studying *address*, we look at where a specific group of viewers stand, including how their positions are created by images because "address is structural and relational" (Sturken & Cartwright, 2018, p. 105). According to the literature, the idea of viewing, looking, or gazing is usually transformative, moving from a perception-based act to a context-based theory. This might be why film theorist Mayne (1993) mentions that the theories of spectatorship usually concentrate on the side of address rather than reception. Following this categorization, the perspectives of form, emotion, and phenomenology reviewed in this chapter belong on the side of reception; while the social, bodily, and psychological perspectives in the next chapter fall within the scope of address.

Looking at modes of reception and address may complete our understanding of viewing paintings, on both a conscious and subconscious levels. Examining spectatorship in this way is to understand viewers through their own eyes or other people's eyes, as well as through the eyes of their social world and cultural settings, which will provide a complete picture of visuality for Taiwanese lesbians. I understand that my participants' experience of viewing

paintings that contain female figures is a complicated phenomenon. Therefore, I have approached this phenomenon from the multiple perspectives described above, aiming to be as comprehensive as possible. The overall aim of this literature review is to comprehend Taiwanese lesbians' visual experience of paintings cognitively, perceptually, culturally, psychologically, philosophically, and historically.

2-2 Defining Terms

2-2-1 Seeing, Looking, and Viewing

According to the Oxford English Dictionary, to *see* means to perceive with one's eyes; to *look* means to see, pay attention, and direct one's sight in an expressive manner; while to *view* means to look, inspect, review, or survey something in an official manner so as to assess the accuracy or authenticity (n.d.). Thus, in many ways, the term "viewing" seems to encompass the meaning of both looking and seeing. As visual culture theorists Marita Sturken and Lisa Cartwright (2018) point out, viewing has been linked to knowing since the Renaissance period. Philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein said, in the same vein, "we see it as we interpret it" (cited in Gunnell, 2014, p. 131). Through viewing, looking, or seeing, we establish a relationship between ourselves and this world. Viewing is a human instinct, a way for us to perceive our basic existence. I view, therefore, I am. When we are viewing, we are actually relating to paintings with multiple senses, such as feeling, smelling, or thinking. Consequently, I mostly use the term "viewing" to refer to relative aesthetic reactions. In this study, the experience of viewing paintings also implies the experience of seeing, looking, feeling, knowing, and interpreting paintings. These three terms (seeing, looking, viewing) will be used interchangeably in my writing.

2-2-2 Homosexuality

According to the American Psychological Association (APA), a gay man or a lesbian is defined as having "an enduring pattern of emotional, romantic and/or sexual attractions" with the same sex (2018, Sexual orientation section, para. 1). It also "refers to a person's sense of identity based on those attractions, related behaviors and membership in a community of those who share those attractions" (APA, 2018, Sexual orientation section, para. 1). Additionally, APA uses "gay men" to refer to "men attracted to men" and "lesbians" to refer "women attracted to women" (2018, Sexual orientation section, para. 1). In this study, I use the term "lesbian" to describe participants who identify themselves as women who are attracted to other women, choosing it over the clinical term "homosexual female," which is considered derogatory (Gay & Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation, n.d.). The only exception is when the term appears as a citation. When referring to sexual minorities, I sometimes also use the term "queer," of which a more detailed explanation will be given later.

2-2-3 The Role of Painting

In the Oxford handbook of aesthetics, paintings are defined as artifacts, physical objects, products of human ingenuity and skills, as well as expressions of ideas, emotions, and attitudes (Feagin, 2003). Paintings have fascinated me for as long as I can remember. For me, every painting is an independent entity and subject in its own right. In this study, painting are phenomenological channels, carrier, and mirrors reflecting participants' lived experience; at the core of this research is the aim of giving voice to Taiwanese lesbians and offering an accurate portrayal of how they view paintings. Why have I chosen paintings? Firstly, "painting is a non-discursive art form whose effects are realized through the arrangement of shapes and colors on a material support" (Gaiger, 2008, p. 1). Among all art forms, paintings are privileged to entail a kind of optical perception, connecting with a sense of intellect and spirit in the history

of visual arts (Olin, 1996). Secondly, compared with other visual artworks, it is unnecessary to possess prior knowledge to look at a representational painting because such paintings offer an experience similar to the viewing experience of the scene being portrayed (Gaiger, 2008). Hence, viewers can easily share perceptions founded in a similar visual world with artists and others. Thirdly, paintings provide space for speculation because a painting just *looks like* what it represents (Gaiger, 2008). Illusion plays an important role when viewing paintings, which is not necessarily the case with other art forms (Feagin, 2003). The function of illusion is not merely imitation or duplicity but also to call into question "what is taken to be real" (Feagin, 2003, p. 532). It is about the distance between the real and the represented. The illusion is our three-dimensional world recreated on the two dimensions, provoking thoughts and ideas in viewers' minds. "The way we think of paintings influences the feelings we have in response to them, and our feelings also influences the way we think of paintings" (Parsons, 1987, p. 39). Accordingly, paintings are easy to enter, sharable, and thought provoking, and this makes paintings a vehicle through which to reveal the thoughts and feelings of Taiwanese lesbians in a truthful but implicit way.

2-2-4 Aesthetics

The word "aesthetic" derives from Greek, *aisthetikos*, meaning "of or for perception by the senses, perceptive of things," later modelled in German and then adopted into English in the late eighteenth century (Online Etymology Dictionary, n.d., para 1; Oxford University Press, n.d.). It was not until the German philosopher Alexander Baumgarten used the term *aesthetic* in 1735 that it came to be a specific term, describing how artworks produce expressive experiences in audiences (Guyer, 2020). Baumgarten specifically used this term to include sensations and perceptions, the non-rational part of our consciousness (Csikszentmihalyi & Robinson, 1990). After him, "aesthetic" became an established part of modern language (Guyer,

2020). In brief, "aesthetics" is the philosophical study of taste and beauty, in relation to the nature of art and the ideas of how individuals interpret and evaluate artworks (Munro & Scruton, 2020).

Descartes' mind-body dualism indirectly encouraged scholars to think about the non-rational part of our consciousness when feeling awe and delightful in front of beautiful things (Calef, n.d.). When an aesthetic value is being experienced by a viewer, it is generating the aesthetic experience, a special subject-object psychological relationship between the viewer and the artwork (Ognjenovic, 1997). When a viewer's attention is focused on a painting, all other objects, events and everyday concerns are overshadowed (Cupchik & Winston, 1996; Ognjenovic, 1997). In this study, aesthetic experience is a particular state of mind, distinct from an everyday experience, with an emphasis more on the activity itself, rather than being result-orientated (Apter, 1984).

2-2-5 Gaze

In the dictionary, "gaze" means to "look steadily and intently," especially with "admiration, surprise, or thought" (Online Etymology Dictionary, n.d., para. 1). The word originates from the end of fourteenth century, deriving from the Old Norse verb "gaw," meaning to "stare or gape" (Oxford University Press, n.d., para. 1). In Olin's essay (1996), she defines a gaze as a longer and ardent look, bringing viewers the intensity of mingling "knowledge and pleasure" in the issue of "power, manipulation, and desire" (p. 208-209). In this study, the words of "look," "watch," "view," and "see" all imply the meaning of gaze; nevertheless, the word "gaze" is used specifically to stress the relationship of looking or relative theories, due to its complex definition. Additionally, the term "viewer" represents the person who sees, views, looks, or watches, while "spectator" indicates someone who gazes.

The Development of the Gaze in Visual Arts

Based on Olin's (1996) analysis, the term "gaze" has several unique features: first, gaze holds a particular place in discussions of the visual arts compared with other synonymous words. Second, while all these synonyms may imply sight, and sight being directed at an object, none of them has drawn as much attention from art theorists or critics as gaze. Third, using the term "gaze" requires more concrete references about the people and the condition involved in the action—namely, who is looking and under what kind of circumstance. Gaze plays a special role in the field of visual arts, referring to an innate visual approach of looking and thinking about artwork, and caring about how an artwork looks in the context of politics and society in relation to visuality.

Prior to the twelfth century, paintings tended to be understood in terms of optical senses, meaning in terms of the transmission of colours and lights; paintings served as a vehicle through which realizes visual perception through creating illusional looks on the painted objects (Olin, 1996). In this context, a painting functioned within its medium and the surfaces of canvas, emphasizing more on its double-sided action of looking within paintings, caring about who looks at whom and how gazes are returned, reflected, and meet each other in a painting (Reinhardt, 2010). This understanding of gaze was widely employed in early and pre-modern art criticism and remains active until now (Pettifer, 2017).

In contrast, contemporary criticism suggests that visual art is not made in a vacuum and gaze is "a form of communication" after the twentieth century (Olin, 1996, p. 208). The meaning of gaze in the contemporary art world focuses more on how the gaze embeds social implications, flying beyond the limit of medium and function within artworks (Reinhardt, 2010).

Consequently, we can observe how the definition of gaze has shifted from *looking intently* to *look with intent*, bringing more historical understandings to the significance of this intention. From the 1970s on, analysis of this gazing with intent has involved the discussion of sociological, feminist film and psychoanalysis theories (Reinhardt, 2010). This is also why I have borrowed the idea of reception and address from cinematic practices, mentioned earlier in this review. British writer Victor Burgin (1982) observes that, "[t]here can never be any question of 'just looking': Vision is structured in such a way that the look always-already includes a history of the subject" (p. 188). Dani Cavallaro (2001) makes a similar comment in *Critical and Cultural Theory*:

> The concept of the gaze describes a form of power associated with the eye and with the sense of sight. When we gaze at somebody or something, we are not simply 'looking.' The gaze probes and masters. It penetrates and objectifies the body (p. 131).

Simply speaking, the idea of gazing not only discusses the power-desire relation involved in the act of looking or viewing but also explores its consequence in order to gain knowledge and pleasure. The development of gaze in visual arts constitutes the main background of my literature review and helps me to understand how participants experience paintings.

2-3 Different Perspectives of the Experience of Viewing Paintings

What we see in the paintings tells us, as viewers, how to look. The content, images and visual qualities of a painting might shape the way we look at it, and the meanings we make from it. This review purposively appropriates Csikszentmihalyi and Robinson (1990)'s categorization for discussing the aesthetic experience. Csikszentmihalyi and Robinson invited fifty-seven

museum professionals to describe a recent, significant encounter with an artwork. Their empirical study was grounded in a phenomenological approach, with a high degree of comprehension and compatibility with regards to aesthetic experience. They propose that viewers experience paintings in four dimensions: perceptional, emotional, intellectual, and communicative. How a person experiences a painting is inextricably enmeshed with the issues of gender, power, knowledge, sociology, and psychology. Using Csikszentmihalyi and Robinson's four dimensions and idea of multiple spectatorships as a guide, I have carried out a literature review of related theories, such as gazing, mirror stage, queer theories, feminist film and sociology. In doing so, I aim to obtain a thorough understanding of how my Taiwanese lesbian participants experience viewing paintings. I also draw on the work of significant scholars and theorists such as Immanuel Kant (1724-1804), R. G. Collingwood (1889-1943), Sigmund Freud (1856-1939), Jacques Lacan (1901-1981), Michel Foucault (1926-1984), and Pierre Bourdieu (1930-2002).

2-4 Viewing Paintings from a Formal Perspective

"Look closely. The beautiful may be small."

— Immanuel Kant (cited from O' Brian, 1995, p. 3)

2-4-1 Perceptual Dimension

Based on both the findings of Csikszentmihalyi and Robinson (1990) and my previous studies, the perceptual dimension is usually the first and the most clearly articulated aspect. This aspect mainly focuses on formal elements and conception, such as form, line, shape, colour, and texture, as well as harmony, balance, proportion, and symmetry (Csikszentmihalyi and Robinson, 1990). This kind of sensing the objecthood and physicality of artworks is often

discussed under the dimension of perception. In Immanuel Kant's *the Critique of Judgment* (2007), he believes that aesthetic experience is universally communicable and "the sole foundation of the judgement of the taste is *the form of finality* of an object" (p. 52). In Kant's view, aesthetic experience has a kind of universality and common sense shared by all human beings. Thus, the objects that evoke pleasure in us will also evoke pleasure in others. This kind of pleasure is not hedonic but connects to amusement, leading to happiness and calm (Roald, 2008). Additionally, Edward Bullough (1912) declares that an aesthetic experience occurs when viewers eschew the utilitarian attitude and simply focus on the forms of objects. Clive Bell (1914) argues that there must be a common quality shared by all paintings and that a possible answer is its "significant form," which can convey feelings and become independent of time and culture (p. 8). These comments echo what Polish painter Stanislaw Witkacy points out in his statement that "the essence of any real work of art is its form" and that its value "does not depend on the life feelings…but consists solely in the unity of construction of pure formal elements" (cited in Dziemidok, 1993, p. 187). This dimension of aesthetic encounter is established on our ability to perceive compositional elements on the surface of paintings; viewers are meant to see, feel, or become aware of the quality of materiality right in front of their eyes, as well as leave the world of everyday life aside.

2-4-2 Formalism

For formalists, viewers do not need to understand the content of paintings; instead, they need to "bring with [them] nothing but a sense of form and colour and a knowledge of three-dimensional space" (Bell, 1914, p. 27). Formalists believe that the most significant criterion of viewing paintings is its form rather than its narrative approach or relationship with the outer world. In *Definition of Neo-Traditionism*, Maurice Denise (1890) proclaims that "Remember, that a picture, before it is a picture of a battle horse, a nude woman, or some story, is essentially

a flat surface covered in colours arranged in a certain order" (p. 21). Denise's manifesto clearly outlines an experience of viewing paintings exclusively reduced to the painting itself, concentrating mainly on the formal quality of paintings regardless of its expressive content.

In the 1960s, art critic Clement Greenberg and abstract painters advocated formalism in the United States, making modernism almost synonymous with formalism (Barrett, 2012). In Greenberg's *The Crisis of the Easel Picture* (1948/1961), he stated that the revolution of modern paintings begins from reducing their fictive depth and embracing their flatness. For Greenberg, "flatness, two-dimensionality," was all that separated paintings from other art forms (1982, p. 455). In other words, flatness signifies that painters reject applying any pictorial illusions or atmospheric light to create three-dimensional space on a two-dimensional surface. Following his thoughts, paintings can achieve "the autonomy of self-reference" and be detached from all social, political, or moral values (Barrett, 2012, p. 126). For formalists, the subject matters and content of paintings are not important, because formalists reject any possible reflection of the outer world. Instead, the value of a painting lies entirely merely in its form, rather than its visual illusions or historical background. Paintings are totally separate from our time and culture in order to achieve a being of purity. Visual form, in this reading, is both the beginning and end point of describing and interpreting paintings.

2-4-3 The Strengths and Limitations of Formalism

In the eyes of formalists, how the visual aspect of a painting come into being is much more important than its narrative content or its relationship with the world. On one hand, formalism marked a rediscovery of the materiality of paintings, including their flat surfaces, shapes, pigments, or even its structural supports and canvases, all of which had been disregarded by previous artists (Barrett, 2012). Formalists also encourage viewers to fully concentrate on the

act of viewing paintings rather than being influenced by politics, religion, or morality. On the other hand, an over-emphasis on formal or perceptual aspects not only dismisses artists' intentions but also refuse to acknowledge the side of utility (Bell, 1914; Csikszentmihalyi & Robinson, 1990). For the viewers who are unfamiliar with aesthetic principles or without visual arts training, formalism is challenging. It is somewhat contradictory that formalism requires viewers to have more knowledge of art history or avant-garde concepts in order to enjoy the simplest and most fundamental elements of forms.

2-5 Viewing Paintings from an Emotional Perspective

"To evoke in oneself a feeling one has once experienced, and having evoked it in oneself, then by means of movements, lines, colors, sounds, or forms expressed in words, so to transmit that feeling that others may experience the same feeling - this is the activity of art."
— Leo Tolstoy (1899, p. 43)

2-5-1 Emotional Dimension

Csikszentmihalyi and Robinson's (1990) study categorize viewers' emotional reactions and personal associations toward the content and form of artworks under the dimension of emotion. They found the emotional dimension to be the most frequently discussed area, invoking both positive and negative responses. As British aesthetician Ronald Hepburn (2009) describes, "it is not only sensations, feelings, moods, and emotions that may be expressed, but also attitudes, evaluations, atmospheric qualities, expectations, disappointment, frustration, relief, tensions, and relaxings" (p. 566). When discussing the emotional dimension, we usually connect it with aesthetic expressivism. Aesthetic expressivism is the idea that "artists are people inspired by emotional experiences, who use their skills with words, paint, music, marble, movement, and

so on to embody their emotions in a work of art, with a view to stimulate the same emotion in an audience" (Graham, 2001, p. 119).

2-5-2 Expressivism

Expressivism first developed alongside mid-eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Romanticism, in reaction to the rationalism of the Enlightenment period (Barrett, 2012). Tolstoy (1896/1995) proposed that artworks were the expression of human feelings and emotions. Through artwork, artists are entailed with sensitivities to communicate their feelings with viewers and to move audiences. Compared with formalism, expressivism gives a definite voice to the creators of paintings. In this view, art-making is a human activity and viewing paintings is a mental process. Poet Julian Bell (1999) states that expression is the main job of paintings and emphasizes this idea in *What is painting*: "Artists translate thoughts and feelings into two-dimensional paintings and then viewers transmute the line, colour and other formal elements back into thoughts and feelings" (p. 133). It has also been discovered that viewers of paintings tend to experience bodily empathy, which simulates the emotional expression or implied movement of the representation in paintings (Freedberg & Gallese, 2007). As architect Alberti (1972) expresses,

> the painting will move the soul of the beholder when the people painted there each clearly shows the movement of his own soul...we weep with the weeping, laugh with the laughing, and grieve with the grieving. These movements of the soul are known from the movements of the body (p. 80).

This feeling of physical engagement not only arouses a sense of bodily resonance with the painted figures but also enriches viewers' own emotional responses (Freedberg & Gallese, 2007).

Denying the material aspect of artwork, Benedetto Croce (1965/1995) believed that art is an intuitive and expressive knowledge which can be obtained through the imagination of individuals. Following Croce, R. G. Collingwood (1938) comments that art is not merely contemplation; it is an action. In other words, the experience of viewing paintings denotes that viewers can feel what the artists feel, and the imagination is shared by both viewers and creators (Collingwood, 1938). Paintings can be understood as an expressive form of artists and the role of viewers shifts from a passive receiver to an active collaborator. In conclusion, the expressive qualities of paintings are the main source of aesthetic feelings because expressivism is the science of expression. While formalists talk about the perceptional and formal aspects of paintings, expressivists use the form and content of artworks to communicate their emotions and feelings. While formalism offers a more universal and consistent experience of paintings, viewing *for paintings' sake*, expressivism opens a door leading to viewers' personal memories and past, viewing more *for viewers' own sake*.

2-5-3 The Strengths and Limitations of Expressivism

Aesthetician Richard Wollheim (1987) once declared that paintings are the creation of painters, primarily expressing the psychological states of their creators and then meanings inherited within paintings. However, not all paintings express feelings or emotions; sometimes paintings merely make us think or question. Expressivists emphasize the roles of imagination, intuition, and feelings, and in doing so they not only position artists in a more significant place socially but also assume that paintings can talk equally to both artists and viewers. In reality, this situation rarely occurs because paintings do not talk straightforwardly to their viewers. The image a painting projects might be very different from that which is received by its viewer. "The stronger the infection, the better is the art as art" (Tolstoy, 1896/1995, p. 140). This comment of Tolstoy's suggests that expressivists over-depend on the impact and commonality

of emotions, which ignores the differing backgrounds of a painting's viewers, and risks mistaking a viewer's tastes for an inherent value of a painting.

2-6 Viewing Paintings from a Phenomenological Perspective

"In learning this manner of looking, we learn a manner of being…not purely personal, but involves a way of interacting with others"

— Wentworth, Nigel (2004, p. 231).

2-6-1 Phenomenology

Phenomenology is a philosophical study or inquiry into how things appear to us as experienced from a first-person perspective (Creswell, 2013). Phenomenological studies look at how the human beings feel for a phenomenon in order to arrive at the essence or meanings of a lived experience. Hence, phenomenology sees human experiences as the source of all knowledge, and our minds and bodies as inseparable. Van Manen (2014) also suggests us applying empirical and experiential materials to assist our understanding; these materials include descriptions of an experience from the perspectives of ourselves or others, interviews, observations, and artistic sources. Therefore, in the following section, I look into several phenomenological writings and studies focusing on the experience of paintings.

2-6-2 Phenomenologists Viewing Paintings

Plato famously compares human beings to prisoners chained in a cave, experiencing themselves through the shadows projected onto the cave wall by the candlelight behind prisoners (Partenie, 2018). Freud (1914/2012) suggests that we form ourselves through

experiencing a Narcissus complex, falling madly in love with our own images and then working hard to resist indulging them. Lacan (1977) proposes that we first experience our own image in the mirror and grow up by continuously misrecognizing and misplacing it. These ideas all share a similar epistemological way of identifying the self via various gazes, perceptions, and interpretations, in a process of reflection-identify-self. Phenomenologically thinking, paintings are a similar medium to light, water, and mirrors, jointing subjects and the world around them together, but in a more subtle and imaginative way.

In the preface of *Phenomenology of Perception* (1945/2005), French philosopher Merleau-Ponty defines phenomenology as "returning to the world which precedes knowledge…the world is not what I think, it is what I live through" (p. vii, p. xviii). In *Eye and Mind* (1964), Merleau-Ponty talks about his viewing experience of viewing Cezanne's paintings and the Lascaux cave in his terms related to the body and flesh. He rejects the Cartesian view of false assumption; instead, he insists that our internal mind and external world, vision, and movement, are united by means of our bodies and perception. We not only see this world made of things but also see ourselves in this world. Light, colour, or depth are not things, but they are "awaken[ing] an echo in our body and because our body welcomes them …the painter 'takes his body with him,'…by lending his body to the world that the artist changes the world into paintings" (Merleau-Ponty, 1964, p. 162-164). Heidegger discusses Van Gogh's painting of a shoe in his *The Origin of the Work of Art* in 1950. He argues that the artist and his artwork cannot be understood independently of each other; while art is prior to both of them, forming a circular infinity (Harries, 2009). Only through artwork can we experience a thingly character of things and it is a viewer's responsibility to question the shoes in order to go beyond the corresponding theories (Harries, 2009). In Heidegger's view, Van Gogh's painting represents nothing because it transcends aesthetic representation and connects with beings; "art is the

creative preserving of truth in the work" (Heidegger, 1971/2001, p. 69). Hence, his way of experiencing paintings is speaking to our beings and showing the truth even though nothing is portrayed.

Phenomenologists usually approach human experience from both parts and from the whole, presence and absence, and particular and universal (van Manen, 2016b). This kind of phenomenon is found in certain empirical studies. For example, Tam (2006) conducted a phenomenological study of how Chinese non-art specialist adults experience paintings in museum settings. He observed participants' articulated and non-articulated aesthetic responses. In terms of articulated response, viewers make sense of paintings through their bodies, memories, feelings, knowledge, and texts; in terms of non-articulated ones, viewers may feel lost, unable to find words to describe their feelings, losing track of time, or even become completely silent in front of paintings. In the world of phenomenology, if we do not see or say something, it does not mean that it is unimportant or nonexistent. The relationship between the seen and the unseen is similar to the idea of negative space in paintings. Negative space is the space "around two-dimensional forms…within or against which positive forms are defined" (Bird, 2012, para. 1). The reason we can read a figure is because we can distinguish a subject from its background. We might not notice the background in the first instance, but it coexists with our embodied experiences of viewing an image. In a similar way, the experience of viewing a painting also helps us to discover our background, the self-consciousness, and way of being in the world. Both a figure and its background have an ability to define the other part. What is seen can see the unseen, speak for the unspoken, and then become completed as one unity.

Consequently, when a painting is viewed phenomenologically, it becomes an extension of the viewer's body and perceptions, embodying something present and non-present simultaneously. A phenomenological method sees viewing paintings a new avenue through which to comprehend a viewer's world of lived experience. In this way, experiencing paintings is like the act of "bringing truth into being" (Merleau-Ponty, 1945/2005, p. vii, p. xxiii).

2-7 Viewing Paintings from a Social Perspective

"We have our own reality, our own history, and our own gaze."

— Gamman & Marshment (1989, p. 63)

2-7-1 The Intellectual Dimension

According to Csikszentmihalyi and Robinson (1990), the intellectual dimension mainly concentrates on the theoretical and historical facts of paintings. In the dimension of intellect, viewers may discover not only an artist's unexpected meanings but also an artwork's own history, cultural position, and function. Arthur Danto (1981) maintains that viewing paintings within their cultural context, with an institutional and historical eye, is essential. George Dickie (1997) believes that the value of paintings is decided by institutional forces. In both these views, the social and cultural context in which a painting was created is an integral part of it. As Csikszentmihalyi and Robinson (1990) state, viewers value the "historicity" of artwork, which "can evoke the flavor of a time artworks belong to as well as provide a chance to rethink the context and reopen the artworks themselves" (p. 51). This kind of intellectual appreciation through understanding is also found in empirical psychological studies (Markovic, 2012; Roald, 2008). Based on my literature review, it happens often that when viewers do not have enough intellectual resources to interpret a painting, they feel distanced from it. The intellectual dimension is therefore a privileged one, requiring viewers of paintings to have had previous

access to historical or biographical knowledge in order to experience particular aesthetic reactions.

2-7-2 Viewing Paintings from a Sociological Perspective

Some theoretical approaches of viewing art are philosophical, while some of them understand art as a "social phenomenon" (Graham, 1997, p. 109). These theorists see the process and act of viewing as a social construction. It is about what it means to viewers and how viewers interpret what they view in relation to the society. Dickie (1997) emphasizes the importance of understanding the cultural context where the experience of viewing paintings happens. Sturken and Cartwright (2001) also analogize looking to speaking and writing: "looking involves learning to interpret and, like other practices, looking involves relationships of power" (p. 10). These scholars all believe that the act of viewing is never neutral, regardless of whether it happens privately or in public.

Marxist Louise Althusser (1971/2001) says that, "every work of art is born of a project both aesthetic and ideological"; that is, our desire, choices and preferences are all decided by ideologies; while law, family, church, schools, and artworks are parts of what he coins, the *ideological state apparatuses* (p.142). These apparatuses aim to maintain the ruling order and reproduce the relation of production in a capitalist society. Through the act of *interpellation*, a process of hailing, viewers voluntarily accept how they are named, defined, and effected by a system of beliefs or values behind the images (Althusser, 1971/2001). Sociologist Bourdieu (1984) proposes that one's taste in art is class-based, culturally specific, and non-universal. He believes that our taste or preference is a product of cultivation rather than something we were born with; it can be reproduced by cultural settings and inherited through learning (Bourdieu, 1984). In other words, painters address and recruit their viewers in order to complete their

intentions; vice versa, viewers who share similar backgrounds develop their preferences via collective experiences of imitating and socializing. Thus, viewing paintings becomes a social space that encourages viewers to conform to ideological expectations with regard to what they like, accept, believe, or even internalize (Sturken & Cartwright, 2018).

In an empirical study from a sociological perspective, Rubiales (2014) conducted interviews with twenty-one participants to examine their experience of viewing paintings in museums. She discovered that an intense aesthetic experience usually happens under two premises: first, being aware of viewing original paintings and, second, possessing adequate cultural capital. She defines this contextual cultural capital as a set of "socially interiorized cultural attitudes, preferences, and behaviors" as well as a local knowledge produced by a group of people sharing similar interpretations of artworks (Rubiales, 2014, p. 29). Her conclusion echoes Bourdieu and consists with other studies on the topic. For example, Griswold (1987) discovered that the same novel was interpreted very differently in three different cultural contexts.

Compared with viewing paintings from formal or emotional perspectives, the current discussion concentrates more on the power relation between spectators, paintings, and the contextual background of both. As what Evans and Hall (1999) remark, when it comes to looking, "[t]he viewer is understood as socially positioned, these positionings shaping the parameters within which interpretations are made" (p. 310). Some discussions from this perspective focus on paintings and artists; that is, the idea of possessing knowledge of a painting and its artist to satisfy and inspire its viewers. Some discussions concentrate on how visual culture turns into one powerful aspect of confirming personal and collective identity through the act of viewing and gazing (Spencer, 2014). In conclusion, an aesthetic encounter is a lived experience that varies according to the individual, depending on their social context,

presuppositions, and competence. The experience of viewing paintings can thus be considered a reflection of viewers' social class or identity.

2-8 Viewing Paintings from a Psychological Perspective

"Painting applies a substance, particles of colour, where was nothing before, on the colourless canvas. Psychoanalysis is more like carving, taking away from the block of stone all that hides the surface of the statue contained in it".

— Sigmund Freud (cited from Sayers, 2007, p. 1)

2-8-1 Freud and Lacan

When discussing the psychological theory of spectatorship, Jacques Lacan's notion of gaze is commonly mentioned. Lacan was a French psychoanalyst who reinterpreted Freud's ideas to explain the becoming of human as well as how language and ideology influence the development of identification in the late twentieth century (Barret, 2012). This influential postmodern figure shifts our understanding of self and truth from Freud's empirical and biological tradition to a linguistic and ideological method. In addition, both Freud and Lacan were interested in artworks and language. For Freud, an artist's psychology and creativity provides the basis for understanding and appreciating her art; Lacan, on the other hand, focuses less on an artist's intention, and more on analyzing the links in artistic discourse (Funch, 1997; Fróis, 2010). In his work, Lacan denies the possibility of offering an objective account of the reality; instead, he believes that identity is always defined by many external elements (Fróis, 2010). In Lacanian view, our self is built up through the recognition of *the other* and the realization of *one's lack* (Barrett, 2012). His "mirrored stage" theory is designed to analyze the tension between objective images in the reality and subjective images in a spectator's minds; it also became a theoretical base from which to understand identification and alienation. The

idea of mirrored stage also complimentarily explains the perceptual split between viewers, being viewed, and viewing oneself through others' gaze (Sturken & Cartwright, 2018). Later on, I will return to Lacan's theory in relation to the gendered gaze between men, women, and lesbian bodies.

Paintings and Mirroring

Throughout the history of paintings, there has been a discussion around mirrors and paintings, from their functional uses, such as depicting self-portraits, foreshortened objects, linear perspective, and naturalistic representation, to their theoretical implications (Yiu, 2005). Starting from the early Renaissance, painting techniques tended to emphasize the role of paintings as mirrors of nature, differentiating what painters see and what mirrors reflect as well as introducing the metaphor of the painter's mind as a mirror, mediating what they feel through paintings (Yiu, 2005). But what about viewers? When a viewer looks at a painting, can the painting mirror their minds as well? If paintings represent an act of mirroring our world, can viewers feel a similar way to painters when standing in front of paintings? In considering these questions in the following section, I attempt to bridge Lacan's mirrored stage with aesthetic perceptions of paintings.

The Mirrored Stage

The mirror stage is an influential psychoanalytic theory developed by Jacques Lacan in 1936. He observed that when babies are between six- to eighteen-month-old, they start to become aware of themselves and learn to identify their own images in reflective surfaces. Human babies are born at an early stage in their development, with very limited control over their physical and mental abilities. The first time a baby recognizes "the whole" of her own image in the mirror, she experiences a jubilant 'aha!' moment, leading to an imaginary sense of mastery and

narcissism (Barrett, 2012). When, in contrast, she perceives "the part" of her uncoordinated body, she experiences a false promise and a sense of aggressive conflict because the subject does not equal to the image (Barrett, 2012). Therefore, Lacan's mirror stage is a mix of "self and other" and "self as other": The baby sees "self and other," while she sees herself being carried by an adult, like her mother in a familiar environment in the mirror; meanwhile, the baby also sees "self as other," while she is unaware of the tension between the subject and the object, which generates a sense of alienation and objectification (Barrett, 2012, p, 165). This is what Lacan declares: "Know[ing] oneself through an external image is to be identified through self-alienation" (Ward, 1997, p. 147-148). This is how and why the process of self-recognition always involves misrecognition through mirroring (Sturken & Cartwright, 2018).

2-8-2 Two-Directional Gaze

Lacan's psychoanalytical theory not only sees artworks as a source of new knowledge, links to creativity and offering solutions for individuals' sufferings, but also as a basis for art interpretation (Sharon-Zisser, 2017). In Lacan's later essays, he distinguishes a split between the "eyes" and the "gaze": Eyes direct sight at what a subject is looking at, while gaze emanates from where one looks, i.e., the object (Barrett, 2012). This kind of "uncanny sense" of looking back affects us in a similar way as castration anxiety, reminding us of our lack and desire (Felluga, 2015, p. 110). Therefore, our gaze can correspond to desire, the desire for self-fulfillment through others because "I see only from one point, but in my existence, I am looked at from all sides" (Lacan, 1998, p. 72). Lacan's gaze is not "the vehicle through which the subject masters the object, but a point in the Other that resists the mastery of vision" (McGowan, 2012, p. 11). As Lacan remarks, "you never look at me from the place from which I see you" (1998, p. 103). Lacanian thinking has influenced art criticism, film theories, and art making (Barrett, 2012). For example. Olin (1996) believes that most paintings allow viewers to both

"lay down their gaze and indulge their eye in the illusion of fullness" (p. 215). Chris Straayer (1990) uses it to conceptualize the lesbian gaze. When lesbians are looking at women, it is all about exchange; lesbians are always looking for "a returning look…it sets up two-directional sexual activity" (Chris Straayer, 1990, p. 344).

2-8-3 Inspecting Gaze

Objectification means that the society treats female bodies as sexual objects, made valuable through their use by others (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997; Kaschak, 1992). When discussing the phenomenon of objectification in relation to lesbians, the concept of internalization is often cited. For example, a study by Hill and Fischer (2008) found that women's sexualized gaze relates to their self-objectification; both lesbians and heterosexual women have similar levels of sexualized gaze. In a study by Guizzo and Cadinu (2016), it was demonstrated that objectification reduces female cognitive ability and flow experiences; flow experiences are an optimal state proposed by Csikszentmihalyi in 1990 to describe the moment of being "in the zone" or "getting lost," which is comparable to aesthetic experience (Wanzer & Finley, 2018, p. 2). It is arguable that internalization might play a psychological role in the experience of viewing one's self and perceiving this world. At this juncture, it might be useful to consider this phenomenon in relation to Michel Foucault's concept of *inspecting gaze.*

Inspired by a special prison designed by Jeremy Bentham, Foucault presented his idea of "an inspecting gaze" in *Surveillance* in 1975. The prison, or Panopticon was an annular building, where guards could observe every prisoner but not be watched by prisoners in return (Foucault, 1979). Each cell was hosted to be a single prisoner, meaning each prisoner was separated by solid walls; each cell had a small outward-facing window and an iron door that opened inward. The asymmetry of "seeing-without-being-seen" in the Panopticon embodied the essence of

power (Lee, 2003, para. 10). As Foucault (1979) remarked, the goal of Panopticons was to internalize the authoritative gaze. Through the power system of the Panopticon, Foucault defined his inspecting gaze as: Everyone who has to bear the weight of surveillance will eventually interiorize the process and start playing the role of their own guards; thus, each individual is watching over themselves, and acting against their own interests (Feder, 2011; Lee, 2003). To put it simply and change the context to sexuality, non-heterosexual people in our society might be also trained to watch themselves. They become both the subject and object under the power and gaze of heterosexuality, even when they cannot see the person who is doing the gazing, and even when there is no one gazing at them. This is what Foucault describes (1979), "she is seen, but she does not see; she is the object of information, never a subject in communication" (p. 200). In summary, this kind of self-censoring gaze can act as an internal mechanism to quarantine the function of controlling power; then the power system of our social order can ensure how things being told, understood, practiced, or even represented (Foucault, 1979).

2-8-4 Viewing Paintings in the Communicative Dimension

In Csikszentmihalyi and Robinson (1990)'s study, many participants described their encounters with paintings as a process of communication. This communicative dimension is a kind of dialogue, covering several fields. For instance, viewers can relate to painters, to the specific era or culture in which the painter was creating, or even to their own culture (Csikszentmihalyi & Robinson, 1990). In other words, communication as a dimension of aesthetic experience bridges the gap between past and present, crossing the boundary between culture and space, and viewers and artists, and opening up channels of communication within a viewer's personal history. It regards paintings as "a vehicle for stimulating fantasy and imagination" or personal development (Csikszentmihalyi & Robinson, 1990, p.66). Sometimes,

viewers can even arrive with a transcendent or outside-of-self experience, a reflection of self-consciousness, self-definition, or a loss of self in a timeless of absolute field (Csikszentmihalyi & Robinson, 1990). This kind of psychological response speaks to Lacan's writing on that specific moment of self-recognition in front of the mirror. This is why I have aligned the theory of gaze with the communicative dimension in this discussion.

Regardless of whether a viewer's gaze is reflective, inspecting, exchanging, or communicative, she is engaged in an intricate process of differentiating the self and others, of searching for and defining herself. The psychological process of experiencing paintings is a continual process of gain and loss; of collecting oneself now and then changing it with social norms at the next moment; of gaining control of images through a viewer's eyes, and then losing this autonomy under the gaze of others in paintings. During the process, viewers might consciously resist beliefs instilled by pre-existing authorities, or unconsciously internalize their rules, or end up trapped between these two states.

2-9 Viewing Paintings from a Bodily Perspective

Men act and women appear. Men look at women. Women watch themselves being looked at. ― John Berger (1972/1990, p. 47).

Paintings are the products of their time, mirroring the specific context of society, politics, religion, and gender. The history of Western paintings is almost equal to the history of female figurative paintings. Paintings have the ability to capture the relationship between art makers, patrons, and models (John Berger, 1972/1990). Paintings also have the privilege to document the power dynamics between the body standing in front of them and that depicted inside them. On most occasions, "woman is the image; man is the bearer of the look. Power is on his side"

said by Laura Mulvey (1975, p. 11). After Mulvey, male gaze and female gaze become two most common topics when discussing spectatorship. In Laura Mulvey and John Berger's discourses, both believe that women watch themselves being looked at through men's perspectives but neglect the participation of same-sex desire and spectatorship. Therefore, I discuss our way of gaze from four bodily perspectives in this section: physical, male, female, and lesbian/queer gazes. As Wentworth (2004) notes, visual experience is actually a practical experience, having both a bodily and a social dimension.

2-9-1 Looking from Physical Bodies

Looking into the different ways a painting might be experienced depending on the sex or gender identity of the viewer, I search relevant empirical studies from both statistical and physiological perspectives. Broadly speaking, these studies showed that women and men do tend to view the world differently, although some results were subtle and sometimes inconsistent (Vanston & Strother, 2017). Bernard (1972), Cupchik and Gebotys (1988), and Polzella (2000) have found that women favor Rococo and Impressionism paintings, a style of representation with blurred contours. This might respond to the perceptual style found in early studies: Women look pictorially with less depth, while men look spatially with more depth (McGuinness, 1976). Additionally, several studies concluded that women are more conscious of colour rather than men (Guilford & Smith, 1959; Greene & Gynther, 1995; Thomas, Curtis & Bolton, 1978); women can see more ranges of colour and also take less time to differentiate colours (Jaint, et al, 2010).

In the field of neuroscience, some scientists have found that Western classical paintings activate male and female brains differently, especially when the paintings in question depict bodies (Gelder et al, 2018). In terms of gender stereotypes, Bloomfield (2015) examined how

146 college and high school students in the United States rated painting images in terms of their relative masculinity or femininity. She discovers that whether participants rated paintings masculine or feminine depended on both what they understood to be the gender of the artist, as well as their own gender: Men identified an artist's gender according to the subjects of their painting, whereas women focused more on details and colours.

When it comes to lesbians, there has been no comparative study on how they view paintings. Instead, studies have focused on lesbian body image and their satisfactions. Studies show that lesbians are slightly less concerned with their own physical attractiveness and body weight compared with heterosexual women (Peplau, et al, 2008; Siever, 1994). Meanwhile, most of these empirical studies also imply the influence of social and psychological elements. For example, theories of objectification, internalization and compulsory heterosexuality are also in a complicated relationship with lesbians' visual experience on the appearance or standard of beauty (Henrichs-Beck & Szymanski, 2016; Pitman, 1999). Bloomfield (2015) reports that gender-role stereotyping is getting more neutral in the past forty years, which supports that gender and sex are not only formulated by biological factors but also influenced by social and environmental elements.

2-9-2 Looking from Male Bodies

In 1972, art historian John Berger published *Ways of Seeing*, elaborating the close relationship between men, women, and the act of looking in Western culture. In most societies with painting traditions, the dominant modes of artistic representation have been generated from a male viewpoint, on the position of producers or consumers (Harrison, 2005). Berger criticizes this kind of traditional aesthetics and hidden ideologies within the images through exploring how women are portrayed in oil paintings. In Berger's (1972/1990) article, he mentions the idea

that "men look at women and women watch themselves being looked at" (p. 47). This kind of surveillance not only illuminates how women are turned into objects but also reveals the intrinsic relationship between the two sexes. "The surveyor in herself is male: the surveyed female. Thus, she turns herself into an object—and most particularly an object of vision: a sight" (1972/1990, p. 47). Berger's idea not only emanates from male positions but also contrasts the female status. At the end, a woman is not herself anymore; she is an object; she is one of sights on the field of landscapes; she is the sexual object for the pleasure of male visuality.

The discussion about gendered gaze in feminist film theory began with Laura Mulvey's essay, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," in which she coined the term "male gaze" in 1975 (Tobin, 2010). Based on Lacan's mirror stage and Sigmund Freud's theory of sexual development about scopophilia and fetishism, Mulvey (1988) developed three main perspectives of viewing: the male creator behind the lens/camera, the male character in the film, and finally, the male spectator outside the film. She creates her critical theory intentionally to criticize the unequal social-political power constructed by patriarchal hegemony and phallocentrism; sexual difference divides the role of active and passive, viewers, and objects, looking and being looked at by the structure of gaze in the cinema (Stacey, 1994). For Mulvey, cinema seems to serve as a mirror for male spectators to objectify and simplify females. Therefore, "[g]oing far beyond highlights the women's to-be-looked-at-ness, cinema builds the way she is to be looked at into the spectacle itself," Mulvey asserts (1988, p.67). Both Berger and Mulvey pave a way for the idea of male gaze from a biological, masculine, and heterosexual viewpoint.

2-9-3 Looking from Female Bodies

Mulvey worked from the assumption that to be a spectator was to occupy a male position, a point revisited in an essay of hers from 1981. The spectator position is a masculine one, and women can only assume it through a "trans-sex identification" (p. 13). As a groundbreaking manifesto, Mulvey's theory of the male gaze attracted a lot of criticism, especially in relation to the gender issue of spectators. For example, Christian Metz (1986) argues that film is *like* the mirror but *not* a mirror because spectators can never see their own bodies being reflected on the screen. For Metz, spectators are the beholder of gazes who look actively and objectify images on screen, but he does not indicate the gender of spectators. Teresa de Lauretis (1984) proposes that there are double-identification, active and passive positions keeping involved with the female spectators; Kaja Silverman (1992) suggests that male/active and female/passive does not always go dichotomous and the gazing position can be masculine or feminine. Thus, women can control the gaze since cinema can be structured and this "sliding of position is unstoppable" (Kaplan, 1990; Cowie, 1997, p. 159). Additionally, as what Mary Ann Doane (1982) claims, the "sexual mobility" is a prominent trait of femininity and helpful for transvestism, dressing in a style of the oppositional sex because "womanliness is a mask which can be worn or removed" (p. 81). In her viewpoint, female viewers can voluntarily either over-identify the women on the screen or become the objects they desire for.

In addition to gender, race and class are also determining factors of the gaze. For example, Jane Gaines (1988/2000) criticizes that the use of psychoanalysis seals us into "modes of male/female opposition that supports mainly white-class values and prevents us from understanding the position of women who suffer other sorts of oppression" (p. 340). Manthia Diawara (1988) criticizes Mulvey's essay as colour-blind because she pays attention only to the gender issue of spectators. Feminist bell hooks (1992) casts an idea of *the oppositional gaze*

to reject Mulvey's analysis through her lens of race and, particularly, white supremacy. When viewing images, hooks (1992) believes that black female spectators are experiencing multiple marginalization: They are invisible, mis-looked, and not allowed to look at. This kind of absence and misrepresentation of black female bodies encourages hooks to use the act of gazing as "a gesture of resistance, turning away…to protest, to reject negation" (1996/2009, p. 121). Rubin (2011) complicates female gaze further by suggesting that human bodies are open to various kinds of sexual desires and pleasures. The hierarchical separation between sexual desires is socially constructed and cannot account for more fluid female spectatorship in cinema (McGoey, 2020). Sometimes female gaze is about seeing and supporting, creating a maternal community rather than looking with desire (Deveraux, 2021). In this section of the literature review, we observe a more flowing and complex gaze in the development of female gaze. We also observe that some feminist theorists emphasize the significance of merging the role of history or society into their analysis of gendered spectatorship. They recognize that females' oppression is not entirely formed by gender and Mulvey's framework gives an over-universal application to the experience of viewing and gazing.

The above discussions reveal that looking from female bodies is more complicated than it is in the case of heterosexual or gay males. Undoubtedly, Mulvey's argument exposes her restriction by heteronormative polarization between heterosexual male masculinity and heterosexual female femininity. Hence, it is important for me to ask: How about a feminine female spectator with an active look and desire for the male character on the screen? Or how about a female spectator, who is non-Caucasian, masculine, homosexual, transsexual, intersexual or otherwise? They might actively look at the women on the screen with desire instead of identifying with male spectators. Furthermore, most feminist film studies construct their female audience imaginatively, reasoning their reactions from psychoanalytic theories mostly created by male

scholars and might not talk for the actual experience of female viewers in the real world. These thoughts all touch the similar status of my participants and possibly open up another kind of gaze for lesbian bodies in the following discussion.

2-9-4 Looking from Lesbian Bodies

> A true recognition of lesbianism would seriously challenge the concept of women as inevitable objects of exchange between men, or as fixed in an eternal trap of "sexual difference" based in heterosexuality. Feminist theory that sees all women on the screen only as the objects of male desire — including, by implication, lesbians — is inadequate. This theoretical framework excludes lesbian experience, and it may in fact diminish the experience of all women. (1981, Becker, et al. p. 17)

Following the previous discussion, it seems clear that dominant heterosexual feminist discourse can oversimplify the subjectivity of women and traps our spectatorship into a field of binary opposition. At the same time, lesbians are often misassigned a male position by a heterosexual standard (Straayer, 1984). Hence, I have combed through various viewing experiences from lesbianism or queer theories in order to lay a foundation for exploring Taiwanese lesbian viewing experiences of paintings here. "Gender informs how one looks, and how one looks inform gender, particularly as it is linked to sexual identity" (Eck, 2003, p. 706). Thus, gender and sexuality have the ability to place where we see ourselves and where we are seen in this society; they embody the power of looking and also probes the look of power.

Temma Balducci (2017) used an anonymous illustration to open the possibility of the lesbian gaze in 1889. In this picture (Figure 1), there is a well-dressed lady holding a lorgnette up to her eyes, with her husband leaning over to say: "I beg you not to look at my mistress like that" (p. 80). Lesbian painter Rosa Bonheur used to hide her self-portrait with an outward gaze on

her equestrian paintings (Saslow, 2018). In both these examples, the act of looking by lesbians is happening secretly, with the assistance of other media. David Levin (1993) proposes a possible lesbian look between the black and white women in *Olympic* (1863), a painting by Édouard Manet; he believes that this kind intimate look between women, a more equal and dialogical look can pluralize vision in order to remove the authoritative gaze from colonization and patriarchy. In terms of photographic images, Lewis and Rolley's essay (1996), "Lesbian looks and lesbians looking" discussing the visual pleasure of lesbians further concludes that lesbians are "either desiring for the represented woman or desiring to be the woman who is desired by other lesbian readers" when flipping through female fashion magazines (p. 181).

Figure 2.6 Anonymous illustration, "Mœurs conjugales," *Le Fifre: Journal hebdomadaire illustré* (May 1889). Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris

Figure 1

In the field of film theory, Jackie Stacey (1987) proposes a female spectatorship full of same-sex desire in her article, "Desperately Seeking Difference." She believes that there is a strong and inherently homoerotic component about female intimate friendship in films and draws a

comparative connection between how the female characters interact with each other on the screen and how female spectators desire these female movie stars. Her essay not only includes lesbian spectators in film theory for the first time; it also deconstructs the conventional notion of binary identification. Following Stacey's thought, Lucie Arbuthnot and Gail Seneca (1990) further examined the positive self-image between actresses Marilyn Monroe and Jane Rusell, which resists male objectification and draws romantic connections between female characters via the researchers' lesbian gaze. On the other hand, Chris Straayer (1990) suggests not to confuse sexual preference with gender identity; in her empirical study, she discovers that lesbians do not consume sexist images from a male point of view and grant viewing pleasure co-existing with displeasure, which begins an important startup at studying this oppressed group. Later on, Hollinger (1998) theorizes the lesbian look, which subverts the masculinity of male gaze and locates female viewers in the spot of visual power. Jack Halberstam (1998/2018) also highlights how butch lesbians might use female masculinity to disrupt binary notions between feminine and masculine, female, and male without identifying as men.

After considering writing on the gaze by both feminists and lesbian scholars, several concerns lingering in my mind. First of all, the dominant voice mainly comes from a Western, white, and cinematic world; gazing from a perspective that is Asian, or sexual minority is markedly absent. Secondly, the appropriation of French psychoanalytic theories easily leads to contradiction because of the innate issue of ignoring the oppression of women. Mulvey (1975) also mentions this concern: Attacking our opponents with their own weapons first is a good solution until we come up with a better one. Thirdly, Lacan or Freud's ideas focus on the interrelated development of human physicality and psychology, which neglects the elements of history, culture, race, and social status. So, can we find other ways of gaze outside the body of women, men or even lesbians?

2-9-5 Looking from Queer Bodies

How about queering? The term "queer" was historically used as a derogatory slur for non-heterosexuals (Levy & Johnson, 2011). Nowadays queer can either serve as an umbrella term for a coalition that culturally sexual identifies marginal or a theoretical model which derives from lesbian and gay studies (Jagose, 1996). Apparently, queer is a category whose definition is still indeterminate (Jagose, 1996). As Piantato (2016) suggest, queer theory is no more about the binary constructions, such as man/woman, male/female, and heterosexual/homosexual; instead, it provides some principles to explore the space, cultures, and relationships outside these systems. Meanwhile, it constantly questions the hegemonic ideas of gender by problematizing the relationship between gender identity, biological sex, and sexual desire (Fineman, 2009). Cohen (2000) puts queer in this way:

> If there is any truly potential to be found in the idea of queerness and the practice of queer politics, it would seem to be located in its ability to create a space in opposition to dominant norms, a space where transformation political work can begin.

Then what is queer gaze? Kerchy (2017) defines it as a way of "hijacking the normativizing gaze" (p. 64). It might associate with a comment made by Adrienne Rich (1986), "a re-vision—the act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical direction…. an act of survival" (p. 127). While Mulvey binds our cisgender with gaze, Judith Butler (2011) contends that gender is performative and can be socially constructed:

> To say gender is performative is to say that nobody really is a gender from the start …We act as if that being of a man or that being of a woman is actually an internal reality or something that is simply true about us, a fact about us, but actually it's a phenomenon that is being produced all the time.

Thus, a queer gaze intends to provide a new and alternative perspective, moving her look away from Mulvey's focus, from dividing active and passive subjects to become a way of being, a way of challenging the boundary of female and male bodies, a way of unsettling power relations and then further opening a world full of interconnection. This kind of queer gaze is also embodied by several theorists. For example, film theorist Judith Mayne (1991) argues that there is no adequate model of lesbian spectatorship found yet; while Kobena Mercer (1991) thinks that the idea of identifications can be "multiple and simultaneous" and always belongs to partial viewing experience of women (p. 42). Evans and Gamman's (1995) argument about the queer spectatorship stresses more on the dynamic power between knowledge, gender, cultural context, and representation. They also believe that "there is no essentially 'lesbian gaze'…, but lesbian audiences can bring different cultural competences to bear on the production and consumption of lesbian imagery" (p. 36). Even Mulvey (2019) acknowledges the significance of the queer gaze, writing in her recent work that "queer spectators find their own visual pleasures and queer the gaze, playing with and against the way in which the gender rules and roles were inscribed into the language of the cinema itself…" (p. 246).

Discussions of the queer gaze sometimes relate to another ambiguous concept, that of "camp." In Newton's (1993) view, there is a united taste, flavor, and perspective among homosexual people because camp is "in the eye of the homosexual beholder" (p. 46). Camp developed as "a sensibility, a style, and a form of artistic expression," challenging conventional idea of gender, nature, and high culture (Bergman, 1993; Meyer, 1994; Nielsen, 2016, p. 118). It can be an exaggerated gesture, deviant practice, aesthetic strategy, identity performance, or a private language, which achieves through disruption and creation, transformation and juxtaposition, as well as incongruity and humor (Horn, 2017; Newton, 1993; Nielsen, 2016; Tobin, 2020). It is a queer social visibility and performance that reveals the construction of

mainstream and patriarchal hegemony (Nielsen, 2016; Tobin, 2020). As a whole, most scholars from queer or camp studies do not want to create a fixed gaze for sexual minority group, which might simultaneously create another kind of hegemony. They tend to open a queer space where each individual can talk, laugh, and fight for her own voice. This also explains the reason why I choose to examine lesbians' spectatorship within female figure paintings from so many dimensions and perspectives.

2-10 Summary of Chapter Two

In the first part of my literature review, I drew on six perspectives to explore the experience of viewing paintings. I started with Csikszentmihalyi and Robinson's (1990) aesthetic dimension of perception and emotion. Through formal elements, viewers engage with the surface of paintings, which invoke sensations, emotions, and memories. This is what Wentworth (2004) calls a "lived-relationship" between viewers and paintings, including the pictorial awareness and expressive effect of paintings (p. 234).

I then considered the act of viewing paintings as a space for addressing one's self. For example, Bourdieu (1984) emphasizes the significance of social capitals in deciding art preferences; Althusser (1971/2001) shows the influence of ideological state apparatuses; Foucault (1979) demonstrates how power-relation is internalized into the process of gazing. Theories proposed by both Lacan (1977) and Freud (1923/1989) offer insights into viewers' psychological mechanisms when viewing paintings reflectively. Phenomenologists suggest that we experience paintings with our own bodies and minds, looking for things which are present and absent. Feminists and film theorists understand gender inequality by examining female social roles and lived relationships through the act of gazing; queer scholars aim to deconstruct the

gender binary and reject forming another hegemonic way of looking. Therefore, the relation between viewers and paintings is not merely a subjective focus of experience but also a social practice. "In learning this manner of looking, we learn a manner of being…not purely personal but involves a way of interacting with others" (Wentworth, 2004, p. 231).

Meanwhile, it is clear that race, gender, culture, professional background, sexual orientation, life experience, and educational background and so on affect the phenomenon of how a person views a painting. Through my literature review, I have discovered that leaning toward any one of the six specific perspectives of viewing experiences to the exclusion of the others would be inappropriate and insufficient. Therefore, I intend to use each perspective with relative theoretical discussions and empirical studies as a reference. All in all, the experience of viewing paintings is a unique way of connecting with self, others, and our worlds; hence, our experience of viewing paintings can reveal or reflect how this society or other contextual elements interact with us.

Chapter THREE: LITERATURE REVIEW II

3-1 Introduction

Having reviewed the literature on the experience of viewing or gazing at paintings, I now turn to the literature about Taiwanese lesbians, in the context of history, social, gender, psychology, art education, and phenomenology. From the seventeenth century on, Taiwan has found itself invade, colonized, and ruled by the Dutch, the Spanish, the Zheng Family dynasty, the Qing dynasty, the Japanese, and the Kuomintang party in different periods (Wang, 2020). After the outbreak of the Korean War in 1950, Taiwan also received military and economic aids from the United States, which influenced it in social, political, cultural, and educational respects (Lin, Chang, & Lee, 2012). Here, I will briefly outline the linkage between Chinese, American, and Japanese cultures in Taiwan due to their long-term impacts. Additionally, I discuss the experiences of women in Taiwanese society, as lesbians are playing two marginalized roles at the same time, being both women and a sexual minority group simultaneously.

3-2 Looking at Taiwanese Lesbians Historically

"It takes two women, not one, to make a lesbian."

― de Lauretis (1994, p. 92)

The phrase of *homosexuality* was first introduced by a Hungarian psychologist Karoly Maria Kertbeny (1824-1882), who combined the Greek *homo* and the Latin *sexus* to mean sexual or romantic desire between people of same sex, using the term first in his private letters and then, in 1869, in a pamphlet to call for legal emancipation (Takacs, 2004). But long before Kertbeny, there is a wealth of both Eastern and Western literature mentioning same-sex desire or phenomena, especially between men. With regard to female same-sex desire, the term lesbian

originally comes from the Greek island named Lesbos, where the poet Sappho lived; it has been commonly used for women who are sexually or romantically attracted to other women since the mid-eighteenth century (Halperin, 2002; Oxford English Dictionary, n.d.). It is also worth mentioning that Sappho's poetry indicates not only the earliest recorded expressions of desire and love between women but also the most ancient term in sexuality (Halperin, 2002).

3-2-1 Female Same-sex Desire in Imperial China

In ancient China, the earliest record hinting same-sex desire can be found in the Book of Songs (Shi-jing, 詩經), one of the first poetry anthologies, dating back to between the eleventh and seventh centuries BC (Pan, 1987). Rich historical records and traditional literature provide an insight into the social culture of same-sex desire between men, while written materials relating to female same-sex desire are much sparse and tend to be more ambiguous (Gulik, 1961; Louie, 2002; Vitiello, 1994). In terms of male homosexuality, their intimacy is usually categorized as 'pi (僻),' a special or unusual hobby denoting an obsession marginalizing on Confucian family values and marriage structures (Kang, 2009; Kong, 2011). We can understand it as a submission to power hierarchies as long as men complete their social obligation, such as getting married and having children (Kong, 2016).

In terms of female homosexuality, it stays separated from the tradition of male intimacy in Chinese history (Ruan & Bullough, 1992). It usually remains invisible in the literatures but stays active in erotic writings in the imperial China (Sang, 2014). This might partially result from the unbalanced power of learning, writing, and reading between men and women in ancient times. Additionally, the female chastity in Confucianism cares more about the heterosexual participation or sexual reproduction, which regards men as a necessary part (Sang,

2014). Therefore, sexual behavior between women was not regarded illegal but a substitution or fantasy for heterosexual relationship in the traditional Chinses society.

While surveying several terms associating with female same-sex desire, "stone mill (shi-mo, 石磨)," "polishing mirror (mo-jing, 磨鏡)," and "antithesis, eating with each other (dui-shi, 對食)" are commonly used (Ruan & Bullough, 1992; Wu, 2017, p.224-225). When male writers cannot preciously portray what women feel, think, or do, they potentially create female experiences imaginatively (Ruan & Bullough, 1992). Hence, all these terms emphasize the part of female sexual gestures or behaviors, somehow ignoring and simplifying their romantic interactions. Compared with male same-sex desire, the one between Chinese women has no name, even less than a hobby or preference. As a whole, we can conclude that female same-sex desire had existed in Chinese society before the term of homosexuality or lesbian were imported from the West in the early twentieth century.

3-2-2 Female Same-sex Desire in the Republic and New China

After Sun Yat-Sen, leader of the Kuomintang ended the Qing dynasty, the Republic of China was established in 1912 (Tamura et al., 1997). Along with the invasion of Japan in the 1930s, the phrase of *homosexuality* was first introduced and translated from the West to China (Sang, 2014). Chinese intellectuals appropriated modern Western knowledge which includes pathologizing same-sex desire in order to build up a masculine image for a newborn China (Kang, 2009). At this moment, same-sex desire was categorized as unconventional sexual behavior, revealing the anxiety of Chinese male intellectuals who opposed to face the emerging characteristic of new Chinese women (Sang, 2014). Although same-sex desire had existed in Chinese social life and desire relationship for a long time, it was "decontextualized" from the original practice and reassigned into a new-found version of Western psychological sickness,

after the May Forth Movement (Sang, 2014, p. 17). These public discussions not only shaded light on female same-sex desire for the first time but also attracted many negative comments founded on the imported scientific knowledge. After Chinese Communist Party established New China, People's Republic of China in mainland in 1949, the discussion about same-sex desire almost disappeared until 1970s (Sang, 2014). Later on, the New China government officially removed homosexuality from its list of mental illness in 2001 but no civil law exists so far (Wu, 2003).

3-2-3 Female Same-sex Desire in Taiwan

Since 1895, Taiwan was under Japanese colonial rule based on the Treaty of Shimonoseki (Taiwan Document Project, n.d.). Close with the social acceptance in imperial China, Japanese society had similar cultural tolerance toward homoeroticism, which explains the reason why there was no law explicitly targeting homosexuality in colonial Taiwan (Cheo, 2014). During this period of Japanese ruling, there was not much discussion about same-sex female desire; only some suspected reports about suicide or injury cases coming from unsuccessful turnouts were shown on the newspaper (Cheng, 2018). As a whole, the public discussion of same-sex desire did not happen between Taiwanese intellects and the public attitude still treated homosexuality mainly as mental illness (Chen, 2013).

After the Republic of China/Kuomintang government retreated to Taiwan in 1949, the government appropriated Confucian and Chinses values to discipline and "heterosexualize" Taiwanese in order to strengthen and maintain his power of controlling; and this style of coercion makes same-sex desire almost invisible (Damm, 2005, p. 68). After Kuomintang government lifted thirty-eight-years of Martial Law in 1987, Taiwan has developed a different sense of self identification and Westernized gender discourses mixing with the Chinese cultural

heritage (Damm, 2005; Sang, 2014). This unique political background fosters more social, gender, and sexual minority movements occurring in Taiwan, which were much earlier than People's Republic of China in mainland (Sang, 2014). For example, the first lesbian group in Taiwan was publicly established in 1990; while the first public lesbian marriage ceremony was held in 1991 in Taiwan (Sang, 2014). The first parade for sexual minority was held in 2003 (Taiwan Rainbow Civil Action Association, 2020). The first same-sex household registration was initiated in Kaohsiung City in 2015 (Chen, 2016). In 2019, Taiwanese activists welcomed the legalization of same-sex marriages after more than thirty years of advocacy and education.

3-3 Looking at Taiwanese Lesbians Etymologically

"In the past I believed that every man had his own innate prototype of a woman, and that he would fall in love with the woman who most resembled his type. Although I'm a woman, I have a female prototype, too"

— Qiu Miaojin (1994/2017, p. 14).

3-3-1 Naming of Taiwanese Lesbians by Outsiders

The term "homosexuality" was first translated into Japanese kanji as "tong-xing-ai (同性愛)," which was then adapted by Chinese intellectuals to "tong-xing-lian (同性戀)" and "tong-xing-lian-ai (同性戀愛)" at the beginning of twentieth century (Sang, 2014, p. 111). Three phrases all denote romantic love between the same sexes but the first two have more expertise meanings than the last one (Sang, 2014). While "tong-xing-lian" and "tong-xing-ai" were interchangeably mentioned by Chinese intellects in the middle of twentieth century in mainland China (Sang, 2014), the term "tong-xing-ai" was more commonly used in Japanese newspapers during the colonial rule in Taiwan (Chen, 2013). For example, an article entitled "The incredible same-sex love" was published in Taiwan Daily News (1917), commenting on the

various forms of love: Compared with the love between opposite sexes, the love of same-sex (tong-xing-ai) is profound; the one between women is even deeply affectionate and never ends until the death. Journalist Wu (1937) discussed how to prevent same-sex love (tong-xing-ai) and concluded that it was impossible; same-sex love could not be uprooted, even after trying various kinds of corrective methods, because it is a disease.

However, most local Chinese phrases in Taiwan relating to homosexuality during colonial era did not include tong-xing-ai and mostly focused on the male homosexuality (Chen, 2013). For example, "duan-xiu-pi (cutting sleeves, 斷袖癖)," "ren-yao (ladyboy, 人妖)" and "ji-jian (sodomy, 雞姦)" were all found in local Taiwanese newspapers (Chen, 2013, p. 116). Accidentally, the long-term invisibility of female same-sex desire was discovered through Japanese writings in colonial Taiwan. Additionally, Taiwanese Hokkien is listed as the second popular spoke language in Taiwan, after Mandarin Chinese (Executive Yuan, 2010). The Hokkien euphemisms ai-shíh-mò (milling stone mill, 挨石磨) and chuan-kù-Dẹ (wearing pants, 穿褲的) are generally used to refer to lesbians (Lui, 2012; TTHA, 2020). Rather than using literature language or loanwords, these are colloquial phrases referencing explicit behaviors to name an unknown community. The two terms not only suggest how lesbians appeared in the imaginations of Taiwanese heterosexuals, they also reveal the existence of a closeted grass-root culture in the 1950s (TTHA, 2020).

3-3-2 Naming of Taiwanese Lesbians by Insiders

Another popular term for homosexulaity is "*tong-chi* (同志)", first used by film critic Michael Lin to replace a Cantonese term for gay men in his writing between 1984-1985; he borrowed this term from Chinese communists, who used it among themselves to mean comrade, mate or colleague (Lin, 2007). The term was then employed by director Edward Lam when curating

the first Lesbian and Gay Film Festival in Hong Kong in 1989 (Zhao, Guo, & Liu, 2008). Taiwan then borrowed this term from Hong Kong activists, finding its gender neutrality particularly appealing (Martin, 2003). As noted in the early independent lesbian magazine *Ai Bao,* "tong-chi" was originally used by founding Father Sun Yat-Sen, during the Republican Revolution, and Lam's artful borrowing of the progressive and encouraging tong-chi substitutes the derogatory term "tong-xing-lian" (Xiao, 1994). Compared with "tong-xing-lian," "tong-chi" has less negative and pathologizing meaning in the context of Mandarin Chinese language and Taiwanese society (Pai, 2017). My own personal experience and observation suggest that nowadays "tong-chi" is the more widely used term in Taiwan to refer to lesbian and gay people, by both heterosexual and sexual minority people.

Both "tong-chi (同志)" and "*nu-tong-chi* (女同志)," meaning "lesbians," are popularly used in Taiwan (Zhao, Guo, & Liu, 2008). Additionally, "*le-si-bian* (lace, 蕾絲邊)" and "*la-zi* (lez, 拉子)" are also common phrases within Taiwanese lesbian community (Chen, 2016). "*Le-si-bian* (lace, 蕾絲邊)*"* is phonetically translated from the English term *lesbian* into Mandarin Chinese with a literal meaning "the edge of lace"; "*la-zi* (lez, 拉子)" originates from one character's name in the Taiwanese autobiographical novel, *Notes of a Crocodile* by a lesbian writer Qiu Miaojin in 1994 (Chen, 2016; Lee, 2014). Qiu uses a story of a crocodile to symbolize the life experience of lesbians, who have to wear human-like suits in order to survive or hide in the normal society. Compared with "tong-chi," these terms are more playful, localized, less Westernized, and less easily noticed by heterosexual people. It is considered natural that these terms become more popular and common for Taiwanese lesbians to declare their own sexual identities (Zhao, Guo, & Liu, 2008).

3-3-3 T-Po Role Play in Taiwan

T-Po role playing is also a popular and important concept of lesbian subculture in Taiwan (Chao, 2000). "T (踢)," deriving from the English term "tomboy," usually denotes the butch lesbians who identify themselves with a masculine role; while "Po (婆)" represents T's feminine partner or lesbians who identify with a feminine role, coming from the term "lao-po (老婆)," meaning wife in Mandarin Chinese (Chao, 2000, 2002). According to Chao's (2001) field interviews, Taiwanese lesbians learned the idea of Tomboy from local gay male bars frequently visited by American soldiers in 1960s; this kind of T-Po identity became popular later in the 1990s. Recently, some lesbians who do not identity as T-Po or do not want to be categorized choose to be named as pure (bu-fen, 不分), meaning "no distinguishing" (Chen, 2016). The issue of sexual identity between T, Po, pure, or others is complicated and might change with age, social-economic status, education background, partners' expectation, and even environments (Hu, 2018; Su, 2005). However, this kind of distinct T-Po role-playing model has become less popular along with the development of feminism and gay movement after the 1990s (Lui, 2001).

3-4 Looking at Taiwanese Lesbians Socially

The notion of lesbian identity is culture bound as well as time bound.
— Brown (1995, p. 3)

It is important to look at Taiwanese lesbians through a social lens because, as Brown (1995) put it, a lesbian identity is part of a female identity; if we want to understand it completely, we must think it in terms of the special context in which women are located. A lesbian might be hyper-aware of sexism within, for example, cultural ideals around beauty, while the influence

of compulsory heterosexuality and objectification may surpass her self-awareness and identification of being a lesbian (Kelly, 2007; Pitman, 1999). Additionally, according to a Taiwan Youth Project conducted by Academia Sinica in 2011, 5.21% of women aged between 24 and 29 identify as lesbian and 27.65% identify as non-heterosexual. Among these non-heterosexual women, 8% of interviewees experienced desire toward other women, although relatively few had acted on these desires in the context of same-sex relationships or behaviors (Yang & Lee, 2016). Therefore, I would like to approach the lived experience of Taiwanese lesbians through the experience of being a Taiwanese woman. From the angle of lawmaking, statistic survey, and public speech, I intend to sketch a picture of how it feels like to be a woman and a lesbian in Taiwanese society.

3-4-1 Looking at Taiwanese Women from a Perspective of Law-making

Looking at Taiwanese lesbians from a legal perspective provides us with a basic idea of how a patriarchal authority positions women. The contemporary women's movement in Taiwan began during the 1970s, which linked with the lift of martial law and the growth of democracy movement (Ku, 1988). In the decades since, there have been a series of revisions and additions to Taiwanese government policy, largely thanks to the proliferation of feminist discourses and non-government organizations between the late 1990s to 2010s (Chang, 2009). At the same time, several social tragedies have demanded the government to pay more attention to women's rights and gender variance. For example, feminism activist Peng Wan-Ru was brutally killed during a taxi ride to her hotel in 1996 (Lin, 1999); and a 14-year-old feminine-presenting boy named Yeh Yung-Chih was found dead on the floor of his school restroom in 2000 (Chang, 2016). Subsequently, the Sexual Assault Prevention Act and Gender Equality Education Act were respectively passed in 1997 and 2004 in order to protect women's rights and cover different sexual orientations and identities (Law & Regulation Database of Taiwan). Simply

speaking, these laws state that an individual should not be treated differently due to their gender, gender expression, gender identity, or sexual orientation.

At one point, the act of lawmaking might not rule out discrimination based on sexual orientation in the society, but it demonstrates how unfriendly the environment might be; at another point, it does provide everyone a chance to view difference equally. Through enforcing the punitive laws, women or sexual minority people can understand that they are protected by the authority of government; they can see themselves in a healthy and positive way before others treat them incorrectly. Through implementing the education of sexual equality, students can build up more dialogues with self and peers under the guideline of teachers (Law & Regulation Database of Taiwan, 2019). Importantly, students learn to respect the way others feel comfortable, which potentially breaks the rigid binary patterns as well as decreases the possibility of future tragedies (Lin, 2020).

3-4-2 Looking at Taiwanese Women Through Statistics

Sex Ratio at Birth

The sex ratio of the Taiwanese population as of March 2021 is around 98.18, meaning one hundred women to ninety-eight men (Ministry of the Interior, 2021). This results from the longevity of women. In terms of sex ratio at birth, the number of male newborns in Taiwan is always higher than the number of female newborns, making the sex ratio a little higher than the international average; meanwhile, the control over and after the second child is extremely high (Lu, 2012). According to a recent study by National Academy of Science of USA (Chao, et. al, 2019), there are only twelve countries in the world identified as having strong statistical evidence of a sex ratio imbalance among births, and Taiwan is one of them. The Taiwanese Ministry of Health and Welfare releases a yearly report on this issue: In 2016, the report showed

that 43% of married women and 49% of married men agreed that male and female newborns were equally desirable (2019, p. 23). This survey informs us that more than half of Taiwanese adults between the age of twenty to forty-nine years old still value male offspring over female; among respondents to the survey, there were overall more men than women, and more married women than single women who agreed with this idea (Ministry of Health and Welfare, 2015, p. 147-148). Meanwhile, the long-term gender imbalance in the birth ratio implies that selective female abortions with the male preference are still taking place (Lu, 2012). These data suggest that continued importance placed on the idea of having at least one son to carry on the family name and worship the family's ancestors, indicating that male-centered traditional values are still influential in many Taiwanese minds.

Numbers Can Talk

As of 2016, numbers show that only half of all Taiwanese women were participating in the labor force and more than 75% of them held lower to middle-ranking white-collar jobs, earning only 80% of male wages (Chang, 2019). In terms of property inheritance, the percentage of male recipients was around 60%, much higher than female ones at 39.6%; meanwhile, among the number of forgoing inheritances, 56% are women (The Gender Equality Committee, 2019). In terms of domestic violence, one in four Taiwanese women have suffered abuse from partners in their lives, including mental violence (21%), economic violence (10%), and physical violence (7%) according to the Ministry of Health and Welfare (2015). These numbers reveal a fact that the social status of women in Taiwan is indeed lower than that of men, which impacts on their material and spiritual life.

The Gap between the Ideal and Reality

In addition to collecting official data from government sources, I also looked into data collected by non-government organizations. A survey conducted by the Modern Women's Foundation (2019) shows that more than 85% of Taiwanese agree that women and men are equal and deserve the same rights and payment. However, the survey also indicates that 20% of interviewees support men to be a suitable leader, earning more power and money. While talking about their personal experience, 50-60% of interviewees feel that the social position of men is still higher, and women do not receive equal treatment. Additionally, almost 30% of female interviewees had experienced sexual discrimination before. This shows that while a majority of Taiwanese have learned about the concept of gender equality, they do not practice or experience it in their daily life. There is an obvious gap between the ideal and the real world.

Public Misogyny

It is also important to discuss public misogyny because it is a concrete example of the ways in which women are rejected or rewarded on the basis of their sex. Misogyny is defined as "denigration or hatred of women," which usually manifests in objectifying or reducing women to a sexual or bodily being on a psychological base (Code, 2000, p. 346). When examining several quotes from recent speeches by well-known public figures, there is a collective misogyny around Taiwanese society. For example, in 2006, Koo Kwang-Ming, a senior member of the Democratic Progressive Party, commented that, "a person who wears skirts is not suitable for serving the Commander-in-chief" in response to the nomination of a female presidential candidate to represent his party (Yan & Wu). In 2019, Kuomintang Party presidential candidate Han Kuo-Yu said that "men regard the world as their home, while women regard their home as their world" (SETN, 2018). In the same year, Taipei mayor Ko Wen-Je declared that women who do not wear the makeup are not supposed to go out and scare people (Lee, 2018). As mentioned above, these declarations show that Taiwanese society is still

harboring hostile attitudes towards women, especially towards those who do not match traditional gender expectations or refuse to accept an inferior status. It is undoubtedly that legislation for protecting women or lesbians in Taiwan performs better than most Asian countries (Executive Yuan, 2018). Nevertheless, the discrimination or unfriendliness towards female appearance, career-choosing, body shape, marital status or sexual orientation is still happening in our daily lives.

3-5 Looking at Taiwanese Lesbians Pedagogically

Inevitably, textbooks will contain ideological biases pertaining to issues such as politics, gender, race and social class, and these biases will affect both a teacher's choices of teaching activity and student learning outcomes.

— (Lan, 2006, p. 16)

In this section, the term pedagogy not only means the method of teaching but also includes a political activity shaping the learning experiences of students (Li, 2006). It is helpful to look at Taiwanese lesbians through a pedagogical lens because one of the most common environments for viewing paintings is an educational one; this is especially true in the case of non-art specialists. The experience of viewing and knowing paintings through art-making or flipping through textbooks on campus for many years somehow constructs a certain part of their visual experience. Receiving education is a process of socialization, with the goal of duplicating mainstream values and ideology as condoned by the prevailing social system (Lan, 2006). Hence, students not only obtain the knowledge conveyed by images but are also impacted by the values and ideologies embedded through the experience of viewing, reading, and making. I aim to examine Taiwanese lesbians' lived experience from a pedagogical perspective, focusing on how the process of learning visual arts and reading textbooks might influence the

psychological perception and gender awareness of learners. Through observing the development of visual art education and textbooks, we might understand how the influence of political, cultural, and gender powers potentially shapes participants' visual experiences in Taiwan.

3-5-1 Visual Art Education in Taiwan

As Feldman (1996) remarks, all thoughts from social, economic, political, psychological, and moral aspects influence the teaching and learning of art education. Imperialism and colonization have played enormous roles in the shaping of Taiwanese culture, and art education is no exception (Yip, 2004). During the fifty years of Japanese rule (1895-1945), Taiwanese visual arts education was influenced by Instrumentalism, a dominant concept of the Japanese education system, which emphasized the importance of learning to imitate outer worlds and problem-solving (Lin, 1995). Similar ideas were continued by Kuomintang government, although it introduced specifically Chinese elements to flush out Japanese influences and establish a national identity. In the 1960s, the so-called creative self-expression approach was imported to Taiwan, centering on artmaking, creativity, emotional expression, and children's self-conceptions (Cheng, 2015). Students learned various media and practical knowledge in order to become good citizens and then prepare them for future careers.

In the late 1980s, following the end of martial law and the return of scholars from overseas, discipline-based art education (DBAE) became a major trend in Taiwan in 1980s (Lee & Hwang, 2013). DBAE sees art as an independent discipline, emphasizing the importance of art history, aesthetics, and criticism in a systematic and comprehensive way; curriculums were designed so that the proportion dedicated to art appreciation matched that of art creation (Chao, 2012). During the 1990s, DBAE was criticized, with scholars advocating multi-cultural, social-

centered, and community-based concepts instead. Visual culture art education (VCAE) became more widespread, a change of course reflected in the Taiwan Grade 1-9 curriculum, which aims to be "against centralization, subject-and knowledge-based learning and elitism" (Chao, 2012; Lee & Hwang, 2013, p. 145). Its goal is to develop students' portable and integrative abilities, generating skills that can be applied in daily life. In 2019, Taiwan made twelve years of basic education compulsory for all young people, creating a new core curriculum based on the spirit of holistic education, centering more on creativity, aesthetics, and visual literacy through inter-disciplinary learning experience in the field of visual arts.

Whether expressed as an emphasis on cultivating good characters and living habits or as an intention to improve citizens' aesthetic tastes through art education, tool-oriented thought and proposition has been a common feature of Taiwanese art education over the past century (Wang & Cheng, 2011). Meanwhile, the structure and content of visual art education has shifted gradually away from being tool- or technique-centered towards being student-centered, encouraging students to incorporate their own life experiences into art practice. The goals of visual art education range from training art experts to cultivating art lovers or supporters of art, with understandings of local social needs and broader world trends. In terms of academic research into art education, there has been greater emphasis on the topics students study in schools than on the subjectivity of students, especially with regard to gender issues and their daily lives (Chen, 2009).

3-5-2 Reading Gender in General Textbooks

How do women feel or look according to Taiwanese textbooks? In Chen (2008)'s study, she analyzed over thirty essays focusing on the issue of gender in textbooks between 1988-2007. These essays cover the levels of primary and secondary education, across diverse subjects.

Chen (2008) discovered that: First, the life examples in textbooks displays an obvious gender stereotype; namely, "men lead outside, and women lead inside" (p. 32). Men are usually entitled a superior role with authorities, while women are portrayed as inferior, negative, or supporting. Secondly, the sex ratio on presenting men and women is not even. Thirdly, there is a lack of holding positive attitude toward sexual minority people or non-mainstream families. In order to respond the voice of promoting education reform and liberalization, Taiwan deregulated national standardized textbooks and then opened up the production market of textbooks in 1996 (Huang, 2005). After this, the situation of gender imbalance did improve significantly; nevertheless, there is still a widespread gender bias existing but in an implicit way (Chen, 2008). As a whole, the images of men on textbooks are diverse and more centering on male experiences, while female images are used to being portrayed as kind, gentle, romantic, and caretaking; as for role-models or contributors, textbooks still favor men over women (Chen, 2008).

3-5-3 Reading Female Images in Visual Arts Textbooks

According to my personal experiences, having been an educator for more than ten years, most Taiwanese students enjoy flipping through textbooks that contain more colorful pictures. Hence, visual arts textbooks naturally become one of their favorites and might potentially constructs their experience of viewing artworks or paintings. First, both Lui (2004) and Chen (2008) find that 90% of artworks included in visual arts textbooks come from male artists; the frequency of introducing female artists is extremely low, less than 10% (Lui, 2004). Secondly, the figures portrayed in artworks are mostly consistent with traditional gender stereotypes, that is, being a masculine man or a feminine woman (Chen, 2008; Lui, 2004). For example, more men appeared in artworks are in the field of religion, military, or police, while most women are positioned in the setting of entertainment or family (Chen, 2008). Thirdly, there is not much

discussion on the issue of gender or sex, except for one or two specific units designed by a few publishers (Chen, 2008). Similar findings are also shared with different subjects (Chen, 2019; Lai, 2011; Tang, 2014).

On average, most Taiwanese students spend at least twelve years at schools, learning with textbooks and receiving one to two hours of visual art classes per week from elementary to high schools (Hsu & Chang, 2003). This suggests that the experience of viewing paintings on general and visual art textbooks might construct a part of their visual experiences. A male-dominant, binary heterosexuality, and rigid gender role-playing forms a homogenous picture that governs the ideology of our textbooks. The practice of viewing paintings on textbooks also ties with social ideology and political power (Chen, 2008). Being a lesbian or female student, she might be influenced imperceptibly or be surrounded by these traditional figures and combinations with confusion and doubts.

3-6 Looking at Taiwanese Lesbians Psychologically

"If thou gaze long into an abyss, the abyss will also gaze into thee."

— Friedrich Nietzsche (1914, p.146)

3-6-1 The Formation of Lesbian Sexual Identity

Many scholars confirm that the development of lesbian identification is very different from that of gay men (Brown, 1995; Lui, 2001; Ponse, 1980; Reynolds & Hanorgiris, 2000). Ponse (1980) observes that lesbians usually start to join lesbian groups after developing serious lesbian relationships; meanwhile, lesbians tend to re-interpret past events, memory, and behaviors in order to connect with their lesbian tendency, which makes their life experience more meaningful. Ponse (1980) also finds that heterosexual expectation has strong impact on

this group of women, so lesbians usually confirm and accept their sexual orientation after maintaining intimate relationships or friendships with other lesbians. Among several existing identity models of homosexuality, I choose the one constructed by McCarn and Fassinger (1996) to understand Taiwanese lesbians. Their model was designed based on examinations of previous models, adopting theories from ethnic minority and feminist studies, specifically for lesbians from both individual and group perspectives. Both perspectives experience four phases, including awareness, exploration, commitment, and internalization (McCarn and Fassinger, 1996). This model explains the process of lesbians beginning to feel consciously different from the heterosexual world and to examine their relationships with other women, which might lead to a deep self-realization and commitment; by the end, lesbians are able to embrace loving women as part of their identity after many years of struggles and clarifications (McCarn and Fassinger, 1996).

Nevertheless, it is also reported that the formation of lesbian identity does not always apply one fixed model to interpret individual experiences according to several empirical studies; some researchers even discover that participants only stay at one phase, jump from one to another directly or never complete the whole process (Chan, 2019; Lui, 2001; Lui, Huang, & Chao, 2009; Sophie, 1986; Wang, Lin, & Kao, 2010). These studies prove that the process of developing sexual identity by lesbian informants is influenced by many variables, such as how individuals define homosexuality, how they receive messages about lesbians, or whom they interact with (Lui, 2001). Therefore, each lesbian's path of forming her own sexual identity is unique and also complicated, constructed by continue interactions within the social context where she stays.

3-6-2 Seeing Lesbians from Lacanian Three Orders

Lacan is the most influential psychoanalyst since Freud; his thoughts have pervaded the field of film study, women study, sociology, education, and international relations (Homer, 2005). There are several reasons encouraging me to bring up Lacanian three psychoanalytic orders in orders to discuss the development of lesbian identification here. First, I attempt to discuss participants' viewing experiences from a more general perspective since the development of lesbian identity is not linear and cannot be fully interpreted by current existing models (Lui, 2001). Second, current study involves with the exploration of gazing and its psychological process of connecting paintings and viewers, while Lacan's idea of gazing and mirror stage belongs to the theory of three orders. Third, both Lacanian psychoanalysis and queer theory see homosexuality as a starting point of discussion, sharing twin fundaments of desire and subjectivity in order to question gender, social norms, and reproductive sexuality (Watson, 2009).

The Imaginary Order

Lacanian three inseparable orders include the Imaginary order, the Symbolic order, and the Real, which are roughly close to Freud's Ego, Super-ego, and Id (Wray, 2003). First, the order of Imaginary, where mirror stage happens is a determining point in self-identity and also the central theme for Lacanian theories (Homer, 2005). Through viewing ourselves in the mirror, we build up our initial subjectivity by generating narcissistic fantasies; this fantastic image, *an ideal ego* can be ourselves or our ideal object of desire, such as role models or love objects in order to compensate for our sense of lost and lack (Felluga, 2015). On one hand, we might feel so complete because we mis-identify the mirrored image as ourselves; on the other hand, we cannot reach her, the mirrored image, which creates a sense of unreality, distancing the real I from an idealized I (Lacan, 1977). When we look at her, we are thinking of ourselves in terms

of her. Hence, she is also looking back at us; our gazes are full of our understanding of our bodies and desires (Lacan, 1977). While placing lesbians in the order of Imaginary, we know we are different from the ideal one since we were little. We learned to show the image we are supposed to present and hide the one we really hold. During the process of growing up, we keep distinguishing if the returned look harmful or attracting through the act of gazing. Compared with heterosexual men gazing women with objectified assumption, lesbians are gazing a mirrored woman with the same images and desires. In the world of lesbians, women become both the subjects and objects simultaneously.

The Symbolic Order

The second order is the Symbolic order. Felluga (2015) defines it as "the social world of linguistic communication, intersubjective relations, knowledge of ideological conventions, and the acceptance of the law, also called *the big Other*" (p. 307). Our sexual drives are usually restrained by social laws, codes, and prohibitions when thinking subjects through Oedipus complex, the authority of phallus (Felluga, 2015). Lacan uses the term of symbolic to refer something "which is constituted through a closed system of meaning as opposed to a realm beyond meaning" (Magnus, 2001, p. 51). Only when we enter this order composed of pre-existing language and desire, we become an I and are able to deal with others (Barrett, 2012). The process of entering into language marks our transition from biological to human, from an imaginary to a linguistic order (Ward, 1997). Hence, the baby either desires to become the person whom is desired by her parents or being evoked desire toward that person (Schneiderman, 1983).

In Lacan's view, we must use language to construct our subjectivity; however, we cannot fully express ourselves because language is not ours; it already exists before we were born. "We are

constituted in language, but also alienated in it" (Wray, 2003, p. 71). Hence, there is always an infinite gap between who looks like and who am I as well as what is said and what is meant (Wray, 2003). This kind of eternal alienation also talks to lesbians' lived experience: We barely fit into this heterosexual world because we cannot find the trace of our existence since we were little; what we can do is to clumsy use others' language to portray our desire and frustration. Most of time we choose to talk insincerely or falsely in order to hide our true nature. These similar phenomena also happen in Taiwanese early lesbian literature, commonly haunted by something searching, missing, or undefined (Yu, 2016). At the end, what we want is not to regain ourselves but to escape from ourselves (Wray, 2003).

The Real

If something cannot be expressed through language, does it exist? Lacan answers it with his idea of the Real, his most mysterious and controversial statement. For Lacan (1998), the Real is different from the reality. The Real is meant to explain the being which is impossible to reach and surpasses the reality; it is opposite to the Imaginary but situates inside the core of Symbolic (Homer, 2005). "The lack of representation of the real is based on our linguistic incapability" (Yazici, 2007, p. 63). This is the realm that the subject cannot speak in the speech. And the impossibility and refusal to symbolization lead to the traumatic quality of the Real (Felluga, 2015). This is why Lacan says, "there is no absence in the Real" (Lacan, 1988, p. 313).

There are many moments in our lives that we know something existing there, but we cannot speak out properly; something is unable to be grasped by our symbolic or imaginary worlds at the time of incidents happening but only leaves trauma in our memories (Wray, 2003). In fact, it is always there waiting for the moment we encounter it at certain unsure time, such as discovering a crunch on a woman or being out by parents. Simply speaking, "the Real concerns

need, the Imaginary order concerns demand, and the Symbolic order is all about desire" (Felluga, 2015, p. 308). The experience of being a lesbian is a process of constantly questioning self and identities. Through the act of viewing paintings, we are also searching for these ambiguities, something we may not be aware but indeed exist.

3-7 Looking at Taiwanese Lesbians Phenomenologically

A lived experience dose not confront me as something perceived or represented; it is not given to me, but the reality of lived experience is there-for-me because I have a reflective awareness of it, because I possess it immediately as belonging to me in some sense.

— Dilthey (1985, p. 223)

Phenomenology is a qualitative study that concentrates on the commonality of lived experience shared by a specific group. Its primary goal is to arrive a descriptive essence of the natural of a studied phenomenon (Creswell, 2013). Van Manen (2016b) refers essence as "the essential nature of lived experience, a way of being in the world" (p. 39). Since phenomenological studies aim at what participants have in common when they experience a phenomenon from a first-person viewpoint, I discover some common meanings between different studies found on lesbian participants' similar lived experience, such as suffering from social pressure and stigmas. There are many studies focusing on lesbians' life experiences in Taiwan but only one or two studies taking the methodology of phenomenology. Consequently, I investigate twelve phenomenological dissertations or articles in the West, centering on the lived experience of lesbians or queer people.

Among fourteen papers, seven of them purely focus on the lived experience of lesbians (Bourne, 1990; Duffy, 2011; Goldberg, Harbin, & Campbell, 2011; Lee, Taylor, & Raitt, 2010; Mulick,

2016; Pfeiffer, 2018; Spidsberg, 2007); two of them include both lesbians and bisexual female participants (Huxley, Clarke, & Halliwell, 2011; Nielsen & Alderson, 2014); and five of them cover both lesbians and gay men (Bryan, 2017; Bullard, 2013; deLeon & Brunner, 2013; Goettsche, 2014; Surdovel, 2015). All of them apply the methodology of phenomenology, mostly the hermeneutic approach. As for their topics, five of them discuss the lived experience happening on health and medical sites; while six of them explore their experience on the education environment. After reading through all of them, there are some patterns coming up through their writings.

First, lesbians seem to be sensitive to social or physical interaction, because they had to scan their environment for self-protection since they were young. They can detect something visible or invisible more easily than non-lesbians, especially when engaging in eye contact with others. For example, in Spidsberg's (2007) study, a pregnant participant mentions having an odd feeling when a healthcare provider glanced at her medical record; an ignoring gaze was described by a non-birthing lesbian mother in birthing rooms (Goldberg, Harbin, & Campbell, 2011); another lesbian patient saw gazing and physical touching as a form of communication with nurses (Duffy, 2011). Several participants emphasized the significance of reading body languages and signals during interactions. Except for easily feeling negativity and prejudice from others, lesbians also have a heightened sensitivity, awareness, and empathy for others due to their experience of marginalization (deLeon & Brunner, 2013). "Being lesbian has given me a better understanding of what it is like to be other," commented by one participant (deLeon & Brunner, 2013, p, 190).

Secondly, lesbian participants seek a sense of feeling comfortable, both physical and spiritual. This might be embodied in accepting diverse body shapes, sizes, and appearances as well as in

resisting one singular idealization of what beauty is (Huxley et al., 2011; Surdovel, 2015). Huxley and her colleagues (2011) define comfort as the distance between outside appearance and inside self, an "imaged or true self" (p. 422). Feeling comfortable means being authentic, being close to a true self, or knowing who I am and who I want to be or being. It also means being loved, accepted, or protected by family, friends, and a legal environment (Mulick, 2016). Once lesbian participants feel comfortable about themselves or being out to others, the diverse space they create can bring more diversity back (Bullard, 2013).

3-8 The Challenge for Taiwanese Lesbians

'Knowing who one is' is to know where one belongs, a sense of rootedness, a sense of community which encapsulates a sense of self.

By Duffy, Mel (2011, p. 335)

3-8-1 Multiple Invisibility

Lesbians were born to be women first and then lesbians. In addition to facing the misogynic pressure and prejudice against women, lesbians have to deal with the struggle and confusion from the issue of sexual identity (Chang, 1999). The individuality of Taiwanese lesbians is placed into close layers of networks between family, society, and countries through Confucianism (Hu, 2017). For example. Cheng (1997) who conducted the first field research on Taiwanese lesbians, comments that lesbians do not practice sexual behavior for the purpose of reproduction; they neither provide service for patriarchal families nor display their sexuality for attracting men. After interviewing fifteen Taiwanese lesbian couples, Pai (2017) concludes that Taiwanese lesbians face multiple difficulties on identifying themselves as a lesbian from teenage to adulthood, such as merging intimate partnerships into their biological families, and being in a committed relationship without legal recognition. Additionally, the ambiguity

between a single woman also generates a gray area for lesbians who do not disclose their sexual identity (Pai, 2017). This ambiguity might result in a way of denying the visibility of lesbians and depressing the existence of their families and relationships (Kamano & Khor, 2008). Accordingly, as a woman, a lesbian is not acknowledged as an independent sexual individual; while as a lesbian, her desire and private relationship are devalued as unreal (Kam, 2013) because the intimacy between same-sex women is not seen as erotic, but rather a kind of sisterhood or friendship (Sang, 2014). This kind of multiple invisibility forms all kinds of contradictive and oppressed experience under the domination of Chinese heterosexual hegemony (Pan, Yang & Lin, 2012). It does become a discrimination but more in an implicit and secret way in Taiwan.

3-8-2 The Politics of the Reticent

Taiwanese lesbians become particularly powerless because they violate what Confucianism traditional ethics and values expect women to be and to do (Cheng, 1997). Due to the patriarchal structure of Chinses society, female same-sex desire is too subtle to have been considered a threat. In Lui and Naifei (2005)'s words, homophobia is "re-figured through 'silent words and reticent tolerance', passing for the most 'traditional' of virtues in modern 'democratic' guise" (p. 30). They believe that Taiwanese lesbians intend to practice a low-key and silent identification in exchange for the tacit consent to their unconventional desire from the society and families. However, this kind of compromise and silence might also reinforce the hegemony of heteronormativity and lead to the erasure of lesbians' self-identity or to lesbians feeling demoralized (Bond, 2014). Along with the legalization of same-sex marriage in Taiwan, this kind of lesbian invisibility and implicit silence might be challenged more frequent. When getting marriage becomes a legal right and option, Taiwanese lesbians have to

learn how to open this inconvenient discussion and then face the potential conflict which had been concealed by mutual reticence before.

3-8-3 Hybrid Culture in Taiwan

As mentioned earlier, Taiwan has a unique historical and cultural setting, originating from its special geographical location. When surveying the history of Taiwan, imperialism (one country executing power over another) and colonization (a practice of controlling over others with the aim of economic dominance) have largely shaped Taiwanese culture (Kohn & Kavita, 2017; Yip, 2004). Since the relocation of Kuomintang government in 1949, Taiwan has developed a kind of hybrid culture, which involves with various cultural and political elements; hence, the culture of Taiwan is a mix of Taiwanese indigenous culture, Western culture after the age of discovery, Japanese ruling culture, transplanted modernity from New Culture Movement in mainland China, post-war American cultures, and local Confucianist Han cultures (Sang, 2014).

On one hand, large amounts of Han people, including Holo (河洛) and Hakka (客家) immigrated from southeastern provinces of China since the seventeenth century, which comprises 97% of current Taiwanese population (Executive Yuan, 2014). In the history of Taiwan, Confucianism was promoted through the establishment of Zheng Family Dynasty (1661-1683) and rooted with its education system (Wu, 2012). After it, Taiwanese generally inherits patriarchal values of traditional Han families and filial piety from Confucianism (Sang, 2014). As what Evans (2008) points out, "filiality—the requirement that children fulfil expectations of material care and ritual respect of their parents—has long been considered a pillar of China's cultural and social tradition" (p. 172). This kind of filial piety also results in the men-center tradition which is continued and maintained by carrying out the paternal bloodline and family names through having male offspring.

On the other hand, the United States of America provided political and economic supports for Kuomintang government to stand against Soviet Union after 1949, which results in significant influence in the theories of homosexual identity culture and gender discourses in Taiwan (Chang, 1993). Comparatively speaking, Taiwan is more Americanized than any other Chinese societies; this is why Altman (2001) describes Taiwan as "the Americanization of the homosexual and the globalization of sexual identities" (p. 238).

3-9 Summary of Chapter Three

Women loving women is a natural instinct, while being a lesbian is acquired (TTHA, 2020). Adapting Simon de Beauvoir 's (1949) well-known saying "[o]ne is not born, but rather becomes a woman" (p. 267), we may say that *one is not born, but rather becomes a lesbian.* "Lesbian is a label invented by the man to throw at any woman who dares to be his equal, who dares to challenge his prerogatives, who dares to assert the primacy of her own needs" (Radicalesbians, 1970, p. 2). No matter how successfully a lesbian builds up her identity, she still has to fight along her path of becoming a woman and a lesbian simultaneously in this hybrid and patriarchal society. The playing of double roles inevitably provides more difficulties and challenges to sharpen their sensitivity and viewpoints more frequent. Except for facing the pressure of entering heterosexual marriages, these difficulties partially root in the yin-yang harmony of Taoism and filial piety value from traditional Confucian philosophy (Cheng, 1997; Tang & Wong, 2004).

When lesbians desire to be accepted by the mainstream society, they cannot find their own images. The state of feeling different from the mainstream values might provide a space for lesbians to stay away and feel distant; therefore, they might be looking for something diverse,

comfortable, or supportive. The realization of same-sex marriage might bring some conflicting discussions under the spotlight as well as produce more legitimate challenges in the public domain, because laws cannot unroot the ingrained prejudice and hidden misogyny shortly. The execution of equality laws, promoting education courses or textbooks containing gender awareness might equip Taiwanese people with more senses of respect and diversity, but it indeed takes a longer time to make a real change.

3-10 Summary of Literature Review

In ancient times, humans painted on cave walls to symbolically capture the spirit and lives of animals they saw in the world around them. During the Middle Ages, the nobility used paintings to remind the lower classes of the existence of Gods and kings, as well as of the promise of Heaven. During the Renaissance, wealthy businessmen commissioned painters to preserve their youthfulness on panels. Throughout history, paintings have served as a means of connecting human beings to something intangible, invisible, or desirable. It might be something that we do not really understand, or cannot hope to possess, but nevertheless desire a connection to. Nothing lasts forever but painted images come close. Painters have the privilege of representing what they have seen in whatever way they choose. Nevertheless, the position of painter-viewer-owner has been overwhelmingly occupied by men, who possess the power of making and viewing; women have been mostly in the position of being captured, painted-viewed-owned, a passive existence in service to men in the history of paintings. Roland Barthes (1980) writes, "What I see has been here, in this place which extends between infinity and the subject (spectator)" (p. 77). Historically speaking, both paintings and women exist only when they are gazed upon by others.

Gazing theories and aesthetic experience of paintings have both been studied broadly by academic researchers, but seldom have they been connected to lesbian spectatorship of paintings. This study intentionally borrows Csikszentmihalyi and Robinson (1990)'s interpretation as a starting point from which to design a theoretical framework including the six perspectives of experiencing paintings: formally, emotionally, socially, psychologically, bodily and phenomenologically. The formal and emotional perspectives are fundamental aspects of an aesthetic reactions to a painting, whereas the formal aspect requires a higher threshold of art training or knowledge. The social perspective emphasizes the context in which painters, paintings, viewers exist and the way in which this specific context influences their viewing experiences. Bourdieu (1984) believed both aesthetic responses and artistic preference to be a type of class identity, developed through learning and cultivating. Foucault (1979) associates the act of viewing or gazing with power relations and knowledge distribution. The discussion of psychological spectatorship has been largely guided by Lacan (1977) and Freud (1923/1989)'s ideas of self-identification and psychological development. Both voyeurism, "the desire to have the other" and narcissism, "the desire to be the other" formulate the pleasure of gazing from male bodies, while female viewers have nothing to rely on except for taking a male or masochistic position of viewing (Smelik, 2016, p, 2). Consequently, feminist scholars coined the term "female gaze" to defend women's viewing pleasure and position, which also encourages a gaze from queer and non-white women. Queer or lesbian perspective may provide a non-binary way of destabilizing and decentering fixed gendered bodies. Their margined position subversively generates a systematic "queering" way of inquiring.

As Waterhouse (1993) describes, "lesbians have become the role of 'inverts' or 'perverts,' satisfying the curiosity of medicine and criminology, but rarely entitled the ability of making decisions or acting rationally" (p. 115). In our society, lesbians are invisible to the patriarchal,

heterosexual, and male-centered world (Cheng, 1997; Rogers, 1994). In the female community, lesbians are marginalized and rarely represented in public discussion (Kam, 2013). In the context of the traditional nuclear family, the existence of lesbians is a moral taboo and represents a refusal of a seemingly compulsory life model (Rich, 1986). In Taiwan, the formations of lesbian identification and lived experience are significantly influenced by both the Confucian/Han tradition and Western cultures. Bensimon (1992) believes that a lesbian viewpoint is valuable because it examines the public sphere as constructed by compulsory heterosexuality from the perspective of people who are on the margins of it. This viewpoint not only expands our understanding of lesbians, but also provokes a self-reflection of heterosexuality and the space heterosexuals have created for others (Harding, 1991). A unique contribution of this study is the connection I draw between lesbians and visual arts, specifically. My intended contribution is to deepen our understanding of Asian lesbians, as well as to help lesbians find their voice in the field of visual culture and art education. Taiwan stands at the intersection of Western influences, values of equality, and traditional morality espoused by local Taiwanese cultures, which places lesbians in a complex situation. As such, I have sought to understand how Taiwanese lesbians experience the phenomena of viewing and interpreting paintings from multiple perspectives during this literature review.

Chapter FOUR: METHODOLOGY

4-1 Introduction

Qualitative research is a process-orientated research method, which employs inductive approaches to reach descriptive or interpretive meanings relating to a specific group of participants in a particular time and place. Qualitative study regards researchers as a key instrument of collecting data in order to present a relatively small-scale but more comprehensive account of meanings (Maxwell, 2013; Fairbrother, 2007). To conduct qualitative research is to seek to empower and give voice to individuals, thereby decreasing the inherent imbalance of power in the researcher-participants relationship, in order to capture a holistic and complex picture of the issue studied (Creswell, 2013). Ultimately, qualitative research is seeking to "explore, explain, or describe a phenomenon" (Marshall & Rossman, 2006, p. 33). There is a clear gap in the current literature when it comes to studies of lesbians and their spectatorship of paintings. The goal of this study is to begin to address this gap by describing and interpreting what the experience of viewing paintings containing female figures means for Taiwanese lesbians. I have settled on a qualitative approach as the most suitable and effective way to do so.

In this chapter, I will discuss my philosophical and methodological framework. First, I address the philosophical paradigm of interpretivism with a reference to its epistemological and ontological perspectives. Second, I introduce phenomenology, my chosen research methodology, briefly outlining its history, principles, and various schools. I place particularly emphasis on the school of hermeneutic phenomenology, which provides an interpretative, text-based, and contextual approach to understand the lived experience of Taiwanese lesbians.

Lastly, I touch on issues related to the rationality, reliability, validity, and significance of my chosen methodology.

4-2 Theoretical Framework

When developing a study, researchers usually need to go through several phases. As Denzin and Lincoln (2011) suggest, the process starts with researchers considering what they can contribute to an area of study, what theories and perspectives can support their inquiry, what strategies and methods are used to collect the data, and how they can evaluate and interpret the data. The philosophical and theoretical frameworks that underlie these steps are called paradigms, a paradigm being a "basic set of beliefs that guides action" (Guba, 1990, p. 17). The philosophical positions or assumptions behind studies are the beliefs related to ontology, epistemology, and methodology (Creswell, 2013). To put it simply, a paradigm is a particular standpoint or window through which we look onto the world. It is a knowledge-building process, an understanding of "what can be known, who can know, and how researchers should do" about studying this world (Hesse-Biber, 2017, p. 21).

From among the several philosophical paradigms applied to research, I will focus here on two: positivism and interpretivism. Positivists consider the world to be objective and external, and independent of researchers. They tend to focus on facts themselves, looking for causal relationships and fundamental laws; they prefer to formulate research questions as hypotheses for testing and then examine its reliability and validity (Hesse-Biber, 2017). An insistence on "explanation, prediction, and proof" is a defining characteristic of positivism (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994, p. 4). Accordingly, a positivist approach mainly supports quantitative research undertaken by natural scientists. Interpretivism, on the other hand, assumes that knowledge and truth are subjective and situated in culture and history (Ryan, 2018).

Considering their own background and lived experience, interpretivist researchers aim to "stand in the shoes" of participants in their studies, in order to gain an empathetic understanding of how these participants interact with the world. Hence, interpretivist studies generally involve direct observation of a small number of people in natural settings with many details (Neuman, 1997). Interpretivism intends to make sense, understand, or interpret observation made within the context of a researcher's own values and beliefs, and as such is an approach largely applied to qualitative studies. From an interpretivist perspective, as asserted by Heidegger (1953/1962), understanding is inseparable from the human condition.

The eighteenth century Italian philosopher Giambattista Vico wrote *The New Science* to challenge the dominant philosophy of Descartes, arguing that simplifying all facts into a paradigm of mathematical knowledge is a form of excessive pride (Costelloe, 2018). There is a difference between the natural and social world and that our perceptions of reality and truth are shaped by our individual social configurations and experiences (Ryan, 2018). In response to this, I designed my study of Taiwanese lesbian viewing paintings to be interpretivist, drawing integrated theories such as concepts of aesthetic experience, the gaze, internalization, feminist film studies, heterosexism, and phenomenology. The interpretivist paradigm was not only developed as a critique of positivism but also served as a new worldview, focusing on how individuals seek an understanding of the world we live in (Given, 2008). In the following section, I will discuss the ontological and epistemological implications of an interpretivist approach.

4-2-1 Ontological Context

Ontology is about "the nature of reality" (Creswell, 2013, p. 39). It is the value that researchers hold in their minds; it concerns what is known to be real or believed to be factual (Bryman,

2012). Ontologically speaking, there are two main ways of approaching reality: realism and relativism. Realism holds that the world exists to be discovered, remains the same realness for everyone, and exists outside the influence of researchers. Relativism, on the other hand, holds that the world exists through the views and experiences of individuals, and is therefore relative to each people (Ryan, 2018). In other words, realists perceive reality as "singular, tangible, and fragmentable", while relativists consider it to be "multiple, constructed, and holistic" (Lincoln & Guba, p, 37, 1985). A relativist ontology under the interpretivist paradigm suggests that reality is constructed intersubjectively through gaining meanings and understanding in the context of society and individual experience instead of persisting as a singular shared reality.

4-2-2 Epistemological Context

Epistemology is "the theory of knowledge and how we know things" (Hesse-Biber, 2017, p. 23). Which is to say, epistemology is how reality is known, and how researchers may approach their subjects in order to "minimize the distance or objective separateness" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 94). Epistemologically speaking, positivists believe that researchers are independent from reality; while interpretivists think that a person who knows is inseparable from the thing that is known and look for the internal reality of interactive experience (Ryan, 2018). A positivists inquiry is epistemologically grounded in objectivism, asserting only one version of reality exists regardless of the researchers; conversely, an interpretivist inquiry is epistemologically grounded in subjectivism, asserting that reality derives from our own feelings, experiences, and perceptions (Hesse-Biber, 2017). At the root of interpretivist studies is how researchers explain, understand, and assign meanings to the world (Ryan, 2018).

In contrast to the quantitative way of seeing realities in a closed system, qualitative studies usually adopt an interpretative epistemology of "an open system" (Collier-Reed, Ingerman, &

Berglund, 2009; Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 329). Working from the premise of no separation between subjects and objects, interpretivism emphasizes the value of researchers. For it is the interaction between researchers and their participants that, from an interpretivist perspective, enables them to collaboratively generate a more thorough and refined understanding of reality. This understanding will be situated within a particular moment and context, both of which are open to negotiation and re-interpretation through dialogue (Cohen & Crabtree, 2006). For my own study, I adopted a paradigmatic assumption of interpretivism, which includes a relative ontology, a subjectivist epistemology, and a hermeneutic methodology.

4-3 Methodology

As a researcher, I am present in my own research. The phenomenon I sought to describe is an interpretation and presentation of both myself and my participants. The following section describes my methodology, which was chosen with the intention of giving voice to individuals who have been historically ignored and marginalized for a long time.

4-3-1 The Philosophical Foundation of Phenomenology

While Edmund Husserl (1859-1938), a German mathematician and philosopher, is often considered to be the father of phenomenology, phenomenological thought can be identified in various religions and philosophical schools in the West and East. In brief, phenomenology is an umbrella phrase covering both a philosophical movement and a disciplinary field in philosophy (Smith, 2016). Therefore, the philosophy of phenomenology is "not a doctrine, nor a philosophical school, but rather a style of thought, an open and ever-renewed experience having different results" (Farina, 2014, p. 50).

4-3-2 Phenomenological Approach

What is Phenomenology?

The term "phenomenology" is a combination of the Greek words *phainomenon* and *logos*, meaning respectively "appear" and "word or study," signifying the activity of "giving an account, giving a *logos*, of various phenomena" (Sokolowski, 2000, p. 13; van Manen, 2016a, p. 27). Literally, phenomenology is a study of phenomena (Finlay, 2009). And what are phenomena? Smith (2016) defines them as the "appearances of things, or things as they appear in our experience, or the ways we experience things, thus the meanings have in our experience" (para. 4). Phenomena are conscious experiences known through human senses and explanation (Denscombe, 2003). Hence, phenomenology is a study focusing on "what all participants have in common as they experience a phenomenon" from a subjective or a first-person viewpoint (Creswell, p. 92, 2013). The purpose of a phenomenological study is "to construct a possible interpretation of the nature of a certain human experience" (van Manen, 1984, p. 44). Therefore, phenomenological work concentrates not on predictions, explanations, generalizations, or theoretical knowledge of the study (Morris, 2013), but rather on looking at 'what' and 'how' participants experience (Moustakas, 1994). What phenomenologists intend to achieve is a deeper understanding of the lifeworld as well as to capture the essence or meaning of human experiences, that is how a group of participants "make sense of their everyday world" (Eddles-Hirsch, 2015, p. 251). In keeping with this, the goal of my research was not to find a solution or to elucidate a causal relationship behind Taiwanese lesbians' spectatorship. Instead, as what van Manen (2016b) describes, I aimed at "re-achieving a direct contact with the world of living…by awakening the soul to its primordial reality" (p. 50).

What is Essence and Lived Experience?

Merleau-Ponty defines phenomenology as "the study of essences" (1964, p. 2) and van Manen (2016b) further refers essence as "the essential nature of lived experience, a certain way of being in the world" (p. 39). Accordingly, phenomenological essence focuses on "back to the thing themselves…to turn toward phenomena which had been blocked from sight by the theoretical patterns in front of them" (Spiegelberg, 1965, p. 658). Hence, the task of phenomenological researchers is to find a way of elaborating all participants' experiences into a condensed essence, converting their lived experiences into a textual expression and then providing a thick description of their lived experience through a linguistic construction (Creswell, 2013; van Manen, 2016b). Meanwhile, the focus of phenomenological research is neither on the participants themselves nor on the world where they exist but on the meaning of the interrelationship between these two parts (Eddles-Hirsch, 2015).

Van Manen defines phenomenology as "a systematic, explicit, self-critical, and intersubjective study of our lived experience" (2016b, p. 11); while Dilthey (1985) also illustrates what a lived experience feels like in his book, *Poetry and experience:*

> A lived experience involves a reflexive or "self-given" awareness which is an immediate, reflective consciousness….. [it] does not confront me as something perceived or represented; it is not given to me, but the reality of lived experience is there-for-me because I have a reflexive awareness of it, because I possess it immediately as belonging to me in some sense. (p. 16, p. 223)

Therefore, "[p]henomenology is the study of human experience and of the way things present themselves to us in and through such experience" (Sokolowski, 2000, p. 2). Phenomenology, as van Manen (2016b) concludes, both starts with and ends on lived experience. Such an approach is suitable for studying various types of experience such as desire, perception,

emotion, memory, and imagination, as well as different sorts of social activities such as embodied action, bodily awareness, and linguistic activity (Creswell, 2013; Smith, 2016). Thus, phenomenological studies are commonly applied in nursing, health, sociology, psychology, and education (van Manen, 2014).

What is Intentionality?

"Intentionality" is the term closely associated with phenomenology (Sokolowski, 2000). According to the *Blackwell Dictionary of Western Philosophy*, its etymological roots are in the Greek word *noema,* meaning "thought" or "what is thought about" (Bunnin & Yu, 2004, p. 473). Brentano's student, Edmund Husserl employed the term to mean "the directedness of mental states" (Crane, 1998, p. 817). In van Manen's usage, intentionality denotes "the way we are 'attached' to the world and how consciousness is always being conscious of something" (2016a, p. 62). In other words, if a person has intentionality, it means the person is about, directed toward, and representing something, because "[e]very act of consciousness is directed toward an object of some kind" (Sokolowski, 2000, p. 9). As Merleau-Ponty (1964) describes, "the unity of world…is 'lived' as read-made or already there" (p. xix). So, intentionality is about how our feeling, thinking, and acting connects to this world as it is given and appears to us. Phenomenology leads us from conscious experience into conditions that help giving experience its intentionality (Smith, 2016).

4-4 Main Tenets of Phenomenology

After Husserl, followers such as Martin Heidegger, Jean-Paul Sartre, and Maurice Merleau-Ponty recast his views into different philosophical arguments (Creswell, 2013). Broadly speaking, within the Western tradition of phenomenology, there are three major approaches (Creswell, 2013). They are: (1) empirical, transcendental, or psychological phenomenology;

(2) hermeneutic and interpretative phenomenology; and (3) existential phenomenology. Each approach employs different philosophical methods to different ends but all three share fundamental phenomenological ideas, such as those pertaining to description, reduction, imaginative variation, and essences (Moustakas, 1994).

4-4-1 Transcendental

Transcendental phenomenology is the original form of phenomenological philosophy, as was established by Edmund Husserl (Kafle, 2011). The basic concept of this approach is that "experience is to be transcended to discover reality" (Kafle, 2011, p.186). A defining characteristic is that transcendental phenomenology applies "epoche/bracketing" to purposefully set aside our prejudgment and presupposition so "everything is perceived freshly, as if for the first time" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 34). Husserl's phenomenology is built on the idea of reduction, suspending one's opinion to achieve an essence of the experience (Creswell, 2013). The basic purpose of this approach is to "discover and describe the 'lived world'" (Kafle, 2011, p. 186).

4-4-2 Hermeneutic

After Husserl, his student Martin Heidegger (1889-1976) resisted Husserl's turn to transcendental idealism and established the base for hermeneutic phenomenology. In his *Being and Times*, he wrote, "our being is being-in-the-world, so we do not study our activities by bracketing the world" (cited in Smith, 2016, chapter 4, para. 7). Van Manen (2016b) adds that, "[p]henomenology describes how one orients to lived experience, [while] hermeneutics describes how one interprets the 'text' of life" (p.4). Hermeneutic phenomenology is not only about description; it is "an interpretative process" where researchers make an interpretation to mediate between meanings (Creswell, 2013, p. 95; van Manen, 2016b). Unlike transcendental

phenomenology, a hermeneutic approach rejects the idea of suspension and seeks to "unmask what is hidden behind the objective phenomena" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 9). Gadamer (1984) concludes that, in a hermeneutic approach, "interpretation is not an isolated activity but the basic structure of experience" (p. 58). This is to say, hermeneutic phenomenology emphasizes the process of interpretation within the social, cultural, and historical context that creates the foundation of our lived experience.

4-4-3 Existential

In Husserl's final work, he turned phenomenological analysis from the transcendental ego to the lifeworld experience. Heidegger, Sartre, and Merleau-Ponty theorize this tendency into an existential world that we live in (van Manen, 2011). As stated by van Manen (2011), basic themes for existential phenomenology are "lived experience, modes of being, ontology, and lifeworld" (para.1). Existential phenomenologists include descriptions of "the meaning of being" from Heidegger as well as "the role of the lived-body in perception" from Merleau-Ponty together (Wrathall, 2005, p. 31). The stated purpose of existential phenomenology is "re-achieving a direct and primitive contact with the world" (Merleau-Ponty, 1945/2005, p. vii). Comparatively speaking, existential phenomenology is concerned with being and refers to an ontological phenomenology, unlike Husserl's transcendental phenomenology, which is more epistemological and concerned with knowledge and the cogito (van Manen, 2011).

In conclusion, Husserl's philosophy of phenomenology focused on the meaning of individuals' experience and required the suspension of all suppositions relating to consciousness, while Heidegger accepts ontology, the science of being by extending the philosophy of interpretation (Creswell, 2014). Heidegger focused on the idea of being in the world rather than knowing the world, which moves from describing the core of experience to searching for meanings in

everyday life (Lopez & Willis, 2004). Different from Husserl, he believed it to be almost impossible to bracket or suspend our experience of phenomena, as personal awareness is inherent to phenomenological studies (Dahlberg, Drew, & Nystrom, 2008). What Heidegger believes mainly constitutes the basis of my own research methodology.

4-5 Rationale of Selecting Phenomenology

What is the defining characteristic of phenomenological research? van Manen (2016b) suggests it to be, "'borrowing' other people's experiences and reflections in order to come up with a better understanding toward a specific experience in the context of whole human experience" (p. 55). This is exactly how I intended my own research. My research is not only about the consciousness of viewing and interpreting paintings but also about self-consciousness, a consciousness of a self in these experiences: The meaning of living life is to view, interpret and being a lesbian in her lifeworld. The aim of my research was to understand the lived experience of Taiwanese lesbians as well as to re-discover my lost experience of being a lesbian in Taiwan. This is in keeping with what van Manen asserts, a phenomenological question has to be clear, comprehensible, and "lived by the researcher" (2016b, p. 44). The arrival of experiential meanings or beings is transacted between the researcher, her background, her experience, her interpretation and the contextual knowledge throughout the whole process (Hellman, 2016). My intention was to dig out what is hidden inside "the ontological core of our being" (van Manen, 1984, p. 39).

4-5-1 Why Hermeneutic Phenomenology?

Greek verb *hermeneuein*, meaning "to interpret" and the noun *hermeneia*, meaning "interpretations." Likewise, hermeneutics possesses a pedagogic ambition to make audiences understand what is unfamiliar to them (Davey, 2017). Through linking hermeneutics and

phenomenology together, Heidegger made his phenomenological approach an interpretive one, asserting that all descriptions are perception, a form of interpretation (Boyd, 1993). For Gadamer (1984), interpretation is not isolated but the fundamental form of experience. That is, our understanding of lifeworld is rooted in interpretation. The idea of such an intimate, enthusiastic, and scientific approach to philosophical interpretation compelled me to seek to understand the experience of viewing paintings. At the end, I saw how research connects to lived experience and writing, producing a rich textual reflection.

4-5-2 Specialty of Hermeneutic Phenomenology

Hermeneutic phenomenologists believe that knowledge is reached through language and understanding. Understanding and interpretation interweave; interpretation is an evolving process, one in which hermeneutic phenomenology values the use of cultural and artistic works; hermeneutic phenomenology also emphasizes the opinion of researchers and the process of co-creation between participants (van Manen, 2016b). Through reading, reflecting, writing, rewriting, and thematic analysis, a researcher can, as closely as possible, describe and interpret the meaning of a lived experience as close as possible. As van Manen (2016b) states, this process is not rigid but more "a process of insightful invention, discovery, or disclosure," that is, a free action of 'seeing' meanings" (p. 79). Phenomenology, especially hermeneutic phenomenology, does not aim to provide a universal explanation or generalization (Morris, 2013). Instead, it looks for an insightful description of *what* and *how* participants in relation to a phenomenon. Phenomenologists seek to know how a specific group of people "makes sense of their everyday world" in order to obtain the essence or meaning of human experiences (Eddles-Hirsch, 2015, p. 251). Hence, the trustworthiness of a phenomenological study usually depends on whether it invokes agreement and recognition in readers, who ideally would find themselves nodding along to what researchers describe, suggest, and understand (van Manen,

2016b). For phenomenologists, meaning is not outside the human being, but within; for lesbians, "it is this capturing of life as it is lived, that frames the articulation of understanding and meanings that lesbian women derive from the situations they find themselves in" (Duffy, 2011, p. 337).

4-6 Trustworthiness

In traditional research, the criteria of reliability, validity, or generalizability are important criteria to distinguish good science from poor science in order to achieve a point of "scientific holy trinity" (Kvale, 1996, p. 229). However, "trustworthiness" has been proposed as a more suitable criterion for evaluating the value and implications of a piece of research, especially for interpretative studies (Collier-Reed, Ingerman, & Berglund, 2009). Since qualitative researchers often serve as both data collectors and interpreters, there is a risk that a researcher's bias might impose their interpretation on participants. To reduce this likelihood, it is necessary to explore the rigor of a study. Whether or not a study is trustworthy relates to whether a researcher can "persuade his or her audiences that the findings of an inquiry are worth paying attention to and worth taking account of" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 290).

4-6-1 Qualitative Criteria by Lincoln and Guba

In order to enhance the quality of this research, I applied the Lincoln and Guba (1985) model of qualitative criteria, which cites credibility, transferability, dependability, and neutrality as the four essential criteria for establishing the trustworthiness of a phenomenological study. Credibility means that the result of a qualitative study is believable from the perspective of participants (Dangal & Joshi, 2020). It is equal to internal validity in quantitative studies and determined by whether the research findings and interpretations are true and accurately

reflected participants' original views (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). In this study, it was achieved through prolonged engagement, persistent observation, intersubjective reflexivity, and thorough member checking. Transferability or applicability refers to whether the result can be transferred or generalized to similar situations (Dangal & Joshi, 2020). The judgement of transferability is made by potential users/readers to their own settings through thick description (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). Dependability or consistency is decided by examining whether "the process of study was consistent, reasonably stable over time and across researchers and methods" (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 278). In this study, I used three tools at three different timings to analyze the same data. Explicit procedures were also used to guide and promote its consistency. Confirmability or neutrality means that the result is confirmed or verified by others, clearly derived from data rather than the researchers' imagination (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). Hermeneutics aim to recognize the existence of previous knowledge and assumptions; using field notes can help identify its potential bias (Dangal & Joshi, 2020). Table 3 below was adapted from two essays (Dangal & Joshi, 2020; Guba & Lincoln, 1985). It seeks to demonstrate the rigor of research in quantitative, qualitative, phenomenological studies, and ethical respects; my corresponding strategies are also provided.

The Rigor of Study

Quantitative	Qualitative	Hermeneutic Phenomenology	Ethics
Internal validity	Credibility	• Prolonged engagement (20 participants) • Persistent observation (3-time interviews) • Member checking • Intersubjective agreement (more than 14 phenomenological essays)	Informed consent Information sheet
External validity	Transferability	• Thick descriptive data • Positive reactions from participants • Nod of agreement and faint smiles from readers	Approval from HREC, Level of risk
Reliability	Dependability	• Analysis at different timings (Manual collage in November 2019, Excel in February 2020, Nvivo in April 2020) • Explicit research procedures	Anonymous Confidentiality
Objectivity	Confirmability	• Field notes • Non-intrusive process • Free imaginative variation	Storage of information

Table 3

4-6-2 Two Phenomenological Evidence

Pollio, Henley, and Thompson (1997) also propose that a phenomenological study can achieve its validity through examining two kinds of evidence. The first one is *methodological evidence*, such as the research procedure or process of collecting and analyzing data. The second one is *experiential evidence*, such as checking whether readers agree with the findings or resonate with the insights therein. In the following section, I examine different means of determining "evidence" of trustworthiness, both theoretically and in the context of my own research.

Methodological Evidence

In this section, I provide four kinds of methodological evidence to examine the trustworthiness of my study. First, Maxwell (2013) considers, *member checking*, also known as participant or respondent validation, to be the most important way to reduce misinterpreting what participants say or do, as well as to identify misunderstanding and bias on the part of the researcher. Member checking was fully executed throughout the whole study. In addition to emailing interview transcripts to participants immediately after I had written up, I also shared my findings with all twenty participants. Several responded with comments, suggestions, or simply gratitude. In cases where a participant expressed confusion or doubt, we communicated back-and-forth through social media messages, emails, or phone calls until both of us were satisfied.

Secondly, a phenomenological approach calls for a relatively non-intrusive process of data collecting (Creswell, 2013), which makes it appropriate for the study of an historically stigmatized sexual minority group. In phenomenological studies, participants usually feel more comfortable expressing their feelings and opinions with little pressure or obligation. The experience of viewing paintings is too subtle to measure with general qualitative questions or quantitative instruments. Phenomenological ways of inquiring and conversing elicits their true voice. The retrospective nature of how the participants phenomenologically reflect on their experiences of viewing female figures in paintings helps to establish the trustworthiness of the result obtained in the current study.

Thirdly, I went into greater detail about an intersubjective agreement founded by other phenomenologists, focusing on the lived experience of lesbian participants. This part was discussed in Chapter Three, the second part of literature review. Simply put, an understanding between persons can be achieved by "bringing a 'fusion' of their different horizons into a new

understanding which they hold in common…, shared reality" (Smith, 1991, p. 193). Furthermore, I interviewed a relatively higher number of participants than is average for a phenomenological study, with an intention of building a solid foundation for data collection and analysis.

Fourthly, rich data and thick description were incorporated into my analysis. As Creswell (2013) comments, "when qualitative researchers provide detailed descriptions of the setting…the results become more realistic and richer" (p. 192). The unique voice of each one of my twenty participants is at the core of my research process and my study aims to offer an accurate portrayal on how lesbians view and interpret paintings containing female figures in Taiwanese social context.

Experiential Evidence

In the process of interviewing and member checking, I received many surprising and positive reactions from participants. Most importantly, their feedback supported the trustworthiness of my study. The following are excerpts of their responses:

> *As a whole, I can feel that your text is very gentle and is willing to understand others. For me, it is extremely considerate to be understood with intention but not to be invaded in such a way. It's really a special thing to see myself, the self who is observed by you through the reflection of your texts; It gives me an opportunity to leave myself and then see myself with others' eyes. (Yang)*

> *It's pretty awesome that you can condense more than three-hour interviews into such an essence; it really well presents what I want to express faithfully. Thank you so much. (Huang)*

Thank you for taking participants' opinions very seriously after each interview. (Liao)

Additionally, Finlay (2009) cites Polkinghorne's writing in 1983 to draws the issue of trustworthiness in phenomenological studies:

> He [Polkingthorne] offers four qualities to help the reader to evaluate the power and trustworthiness of phenomenological accounts: vividness, accuracy, richness and elegance. Is the research vivid in the sense that it generates a sense of reality and draws the reader in? Are readers able to recognize the phenomenon from their own experience or from imagining the situation vicariously? In terms of richness, can readers enter the account emotionally? Finally, has the phenomenon been described in a graceful, clear, poignant way? (Finlay, 2009, p. 7)

Ultimately, phenomenological studies are looking for participants and readers to agree or resonate with findings, creating what van Manen describes as a "validating circle of inquiry," or a kind of phenomenological "nodding" (2016b, p. 27). In other words, if this study can successfully obtain the essence of participants' lived experience, readers will find themselves nodding at the plausibility of the statements, recognizing something that they might have experienced, thought of, or even have never experienced. They will do so whether they belong to the sexual minority group or not. Their "nod of heads and faint smiles" display approval of what a researcher is describing, an understanding of what a researcher is suggesting, and also the "dialogical, intersubjective, and conversational nature of human experience" that is shared between self and others (Jardine, 1992, p. 58; Smith, 1991, p. 32). Thus, a good and trustworthy phenomenological study usually starts by reflecting and describing the lived experience of its participants and ends by returning readers' own lifeworld reflectively and empathetically.

Chapter FIVE: RESEARCH METHOD & PROCEDURE

5-1 Introduction

In this chapter, I elaborate on how I conducted my research, discussing my methods for recruiting participants, collecting data, arranging interviews, choosing instruments, analyzing data, and presenting my findings. To obtain in-depth, thick data relating to how Taiwanese lesbians experience paintings, I conducted a minimum of two interviews with each participant. In the first interview, I asked participants to recall their previous experiences of viewing paintings; in the second, we explored their experiences of viewing paintings images provided by me during the interview, each image containing one or more female figures; in the third, I sought to clarify with participants themes that I had identified in previous interviews. While there are no concrete or procedural steps for analysis in hermeneutic phenomenological studies, the methods of hermeneutic circle and four guided existentials (van Manen, 2016b) played an important role on my data analysis. In the following chapter, I will present one paragraph from an interview to demonstrate the wholistic, selective, and detailed perspectives I took to interpretation. Through the eyes of researchers, interpretation becomes subjective and situated. Hence, I concluded this chapter with a discussion of my own role in this research.

5-2 Data Collection Method

For phenomenologists, interview is the primary method of data collection (Merriam, 2009; Van den Berg, 2005). Phenomenological interviews serve specifically as a means for collecting experiential narrative materials as well as a vehicle to build up a conversational relationship with participants (van Manen, 2016b). The intention of conducting hermeneutic interviews is to "co-create" findings through a process of "fusion of ideas" creating an engaged and interactive dialogue through which narrative texts can emerge (Vandermause & Fleming, 2011,

p. 370). In accordance with this, I used semi-structured interviews to collect data; during the interviews, I also took extensive field notes relating to the expressions, physical gestures, and vocal intonations of participants, and added these observations to my transcripts later on. As suggested by Vandermause and Fleming (2011), field notes might provide additional sources for analysis and assist deeper navigation of narrative meanings.

Phenomenologists usually conduct interviews by asking participants concrete but open questions about personal experiences, such as "What was it like to experience that phenomenon?" and "Can you think of a specific instance, situation, person, or event?" The idea is to promote participants to explore each experience to its fullest (van Manen, 2016b, p. 67). During the interview, remaining appropriate silent and framing open questions for participants are also useful (van Manen, 2016b; Vandermause & Fleming, 2011). This kind of active listening allows researchers a better chance of understanding both what is being said and what might be being hidden or left unsaid. Both researchers and participants work together to produce and interpret meanings, where "phenomena occur in a dialogic context that is reciprocal, multi-faceted, historical, and dynamic" (Vandermause & Fleming, 2011, p. 371). Yee and Hsu (1993) suggest that there are three layers of knowledge for researchers to consider in relation to a particular phenomenon: the world of actors, the world of observers, and the world of evaluators. Based on this suggestion, I also identified three layers in my own data collection process. The first related to the narrative world created by a participant. That is, to the participant as an actor, telling her story, building her own world by talking. The second related to the lifeworld presented by a participant, as heard by the researcher. A participant pre-reflectively transferred her memories into narrative information through languages to the world of observers (Yee & Hsu, 1993). When the contents of these interviews were transcribed, a participant's experience became the object, texts, read by both researcher/me and

participant/her as part of the world of evaluators. Therefore, both I, as the researcher, and my participants became the subjects of the study, arriving at an open interpretation through the dialectical relationship between these worlds. This is a key difference between phenomenological interviews and other forms of qualitative interviews.

5-3 Ethical Review

Ethical consideration becomes relevant when research contains production, storing, and reporting data directly from and about people (Johannessen, Tufte, & Christoffersen, 2010). Ethical approval for this study was obtained from the Education University of Hong Kong, Research Ethics Committee in 2019 (appendix A). All participants were given a basic introduction to the study through social media or email before our face-to-face interviews. At our first face-to-face meeting, they were provided with information sheets and consent forms directly prior to the commencement of data collection. The information sheet described the purpose of my research and the research process (appendix B); the consent form asked participants to confirm that they had been informed about the study and agreed to take part this study (appendix C). All participants were given the opportunity to ask questions about the study and were given honest answers. Most importantly, all participants consented to being audio recorded, understood that their participation was voluntary, and knew that they were free to withdraw at any time without giving a reason.

Being a researcher, I am extremely grateful to those participants who were willing to offer me their valuable time and effort. I consider each one of them a precious contributor, and I was very conscious of interacting with integrity and sensitivity throughout the whole process. Since sexual orientation is a private and sensitive issue, I took special care of both confidentiality and anonymity: Everyone participant in this study is protected using a pseudonym; all collected

data were stored on a password-protected computer; and original, anonymized hard copies of my questionnaires are stored in a folder inside a locked drawer, where they will continue to be stored until at least five years after publication of this thesis.

5-4 Participant Selection

Immediately after receiving approval from the Research Ethics Committee, I started to recruit candidates from local lesbian communities. My criteria were:

(a) Participants identified themselves as lesbians at the moment of accepting to do the interviews.

(b) Participants were female adults who had been born and raised in Taiwan, and who had spent over half their lives living in Taiwan.

(c) Participants had experienced viewing original paintings prior to our interviews.

Considering the aforementioned issues of sensitivity and confidentiality, criterion (a) was determined via a multiple-choice question on an information sheet, presented in the following format: Which of the following terms can best describe your sexual orientation? Possible answers were: (A) heterosexual, (B) lesbian, (C) bisexual, or (D) others. Participants were only allowed to choose one of the four options.

My method for selecting participants in this study was both snowballing and purposive sampling. The method of snowballing is used for the first round interview in order to initiate the study; after it, the purposive sampling is applied for selecting various background and age of participants. My first interview were with four friends of mine from Taipei. After completing these interviews, I invited my participants to introduce me to friends of theirs who might be suitable to join the study. In addition to spreading news through word of mouths in this way, I also posted calls for participants on social media platforms, including Facebook and Line, and

in local independent bookstores. Ultimately, over twenty Taiwanese women identifying as non-heterosexual volunteered to meet in person. All interviews lasted between one and two hours. I selected participants with the aim of presenting diverse experiences even from within a comparatively small minority group (Bryan, 2017) .

5-5 Participants Profiles

From June 2019 to February 2020, I recruited twenty-eight participants through friends and social media. Two participants dropped out after the first-round interview, citing personal issues. Among the remaining twenty-six participants, I excluded six women who did not identify as lesbians but instead used labels such as bisexual, pansexual, or queer. This left me with twenty participants who self-identified as lesbian, generating forty-five interview transcripts. In terms of both quality and quantity, these transcripts provided a sufficient and ample basis for a phenomenological study.

The ages of my twenty participants ranged from twenty to sixty years old (Table 4 & 5). Among these participants, six were under 30; seven in their 30s; five in their 40s; and two were over 50. The term "out" refers to whether or not a participant is "out the closet", i.e., whether or not they openly disclose and share their sexual orientation or gender identity with others. In terms of educational background, all twenty had a bachelor's degree and eight had or were working towards a master's degree. All but one participant lived in the Taipei metropolitan area, with the exception living in eastern Taiwan. Most participants had never received any education or professional training in visual arts or related fields; two had a bachelor's degree in visual arts and one a high school diploma in applied art.

While all participants had previous experience of viewing paintings before, less than half of

them chose paintings as their favorite genres. I provided five options for frequency of museum or gallery visits: (A) very often, meaning at least once a month; (B) sometimes, meaning once every six months; (C) seldom, meaning once a year; (D) almost never, implying less than once a year; and (E) other. The overall frequency with which they claimed to visit museums or galleries was low, generally ranging from "sometimes" to "seldom"; only three participants responded that they made these visits "very often." The average visiting frequency was around once a year. There did not seem to be any significant correlation between a participant's educational background, their interests in paintings, and the frequency with which they visited museums or galleries. Only four participants were my personal friends; the remaining sixteen I came to know during the study. The diverse ages and occupational backgrounds of my participants was intended to reflect, so far as possible, a broad cross-section of Taiwanese lesbians.

As previously mentioned, all participants were interviewed twice and five were selected for a third round. When summarizing details about participants in Table 4 and Table 5, the asterisk (*) marks the five participants who completed three rounds of interviews. The third interview was designed to clarify parts of our previous conversations. This involved inviting participants to talk in more depth about their experiences of viewing paintings and to elaborate on themes I had identified during my analysis of the preceding two interviews. These additional interviews not only involved data-collecting, member checking, and analyzing, they also led to the following research stage of finding and discussion. Thus, I present brief descriptions of these five participants, to use as a reference:

Participant Summary I

No.	Pseudonym	Age	Sexual Identity	Favorite Art Genre	Frequency of Visiting Museums	Education Level	Occupation	Residency
1	**Tong**	57	Tomboy (Out)	Visual arts	Seldom	Bachelor	Service	Taipei
2	**Lin**	55	Tomboy	Visual arts	Sometimes	Master	Design	Taipei
3	**Wang**	48	Tomboy	Visual arts	Sometimes	Bachelor	Information Technology	Taipei
4	**Liu**	45	Pure	Literature	Sometimes	Master	Law	Taipei
5	**Yu**	45	Tomboy	Movie	Sometimes	Bachelor	Service	Taipei
6	***Zhang**	42	Pure	Music	Sometimes	Master	Education	Taipei
7	**Fei**	40	Other	Visual arts	Sometimes	Bachelor	Medical	Taipei
8	**Guo**	38	Pure	Movie	Sometimes	Master	Design	Taipei
9	***Huang**	37	Pure	Music	Very often	Bachelor	Design	Taoyuan
10	**Wu**	36	Pure (Out)	Literature	Seldom	Bachelor	Service	Taipei
11	**Xi**	34	Pure	Movies	Very Often	Master	Student	Taipei

Table 4

Participant Summary II

No.	Pseudonym	Age	Sexual Identity	Favorite Art Genre	Frequency of Visiting Museums	Education Level	Occupation	Residency
12	**Lee**	32	Pure	Visual art	Sometimes	Master	Medical	Taipei
13	**Bao**	31	Other	Movies	Almost not	Bachelor	Marketing	Taipei
14	**Li**	30	Femme	Movies	Every three months	Master	Admin	Hulian
15	***Xia**	29	Femme	Visual art	Sometimes	Bachelor	Design	Taipei
16	**Ban**	29	Pure (Out)	movies	Seldom	Bachelor	Service	Taipei
17	***Yang**	27	Pure	Visual art	Sometimes	Bachelor	Admin	Taipei
18	**Liao**	27	Femme	Visual art	Very often	Bachelor	Design	Taipei
19	**Luo**	25	Femme	Performing Art	Seldom	Bachelor	Admin	Taipei
20	***Fang**	24	Pure	Literature	Very often	Master	Student	Taipei

Table 5

Zhang identifies herself as a pure lesbian and admitted to being deep in the closet, meaning that she does not share her sexual orientation with others. She is single in her middle 40s and was introduced to me by other participants. She has a master's degree and currently lives and works in Taipei. Zhang is sensitive to texts, and passionate about both literary and visual arts. She visits museums and exhibitions very often and prefers to do so on her own. She told me that she once spent eight hours in the Taipei Fine Art Museum because she enjoyed the vibe and environment there so much. Zhang said that she found participating in this study quite helpful, as it helped her to clarify her relationship with paintings.

Huang is between thirty-five to forty years old and identifies as a femme lesbian. She disclosures her sexual orientation to her friends and family but not to colleagues. Until a few years ago, she used to work for auction houses and galleries, but stopped due to problems with her health. She is now a freelance designer and works from home. She has a bachelor's degree in literature and a high school diploma in the applied arts. Comparatively speaking, she was the participant with the more formal art education of these five participants; she also visits galleries and museums more often than the other four participants. She was introduced to me by other participants.

Yang is in her late 20s and identifies as a pure lesbian. She contacted me about taking part in the study after seeing a Facebook post. She currently works for an education organization because she loves children and enjoys spending time with them. At the time of our interviews, Yang's most recent experience with paintings came from her current job, where she had been tasked with uploading digital images of donated paintings for a fundraising auction. She has a bachelor's degree, but she did not enjoy her major at all; as a result, she spent a lot of her time at college exploring herself and her interests. She likes visual arts but does not often visit

galleries or museums. She is close to her mother and, for the past year, has been in the process of opening to her mother about her sexual orientation.

Xia is in her late 20s. She identifies as a femme lesbian. She currently works as a self-taught graphic designer in Taipei. I recruited her on the recommendation of my sister. She has a bachelor's degree and visits galleries and museums sometimes. In addition to viewing paintings, she occasionally doodles or draws for her own entertainment. Of these five participants, she is the only one who was in a serious romantic relationship at the time of the study. She is out to most of her friends but within her family only to her mother, due to the issue of traditional values.

Fang is in her mid-20s and identifies as a pure lesbian. She is currently in her final year of a master's degree in literature in Taipei. I recruited her through participating a workshop about gender issues at a local independent bookstore. Of these five participants, she is the most well-versed person in feminist theory. She is passionate about art and literature and visits galleries or museums very often. She is eager to learn new things and likes to form her own opinions. She was friendly towards me and enthusiastic about participation in my study, following up on our interviews with detailed emails or social media messages about her thoughts. At the time of the study, she was not out to anyone other than her siblings and some of her friends.

5-6 Arrangement of Interviews

Interviews were conducted in places where the participants felt safe and comfortable. Most choice of locations were quiet local coffee shops or restaurants, close to where the participants work, study, or live—i.e. places that were convenient for them, and made the interviews easy to combine with their schedules. Each participant was interviewed individually. All interviews

were conducted using a semi-structured approach. Each interview started with me introducing myself, then asking participants to talk about their educational backgrounds, jobs, or mutual friends. After this warm-up section, I provided a brief explanation of the study and of related ethical issues that participants needed to know in advance. Each participant understood that they would be interviewed face-to-face two times and that each interview would last between one and two hours. Interviews were all conducted in Mandarin and audio-recorded to facilitate transcription after our meetings (transcription was also in Mandarin). Each participant signed a consent form, stating that they were joining the research as a volunteer and understood that they had the right to withdraw from it any time; meanwhile, all information they provided would be kept anonymous and confidential.

5-7 Interview Procedure

5-7-1 Pilot Study

Before conducting formal interviews, I ran one pilot study in Taipei. I asked a participant to randomly choose two paintings from a selection of painting images that I had provided and to talk about her viewing experience. Her response remained largely about the formal aspects of the painting, which meant the data I collected was not particularly rich or deep. Learning from this, I decided to alter the format of my second-round interviews, in the hope of obtaining more extensive, reflective data: I asked participants to select several paintings for a mock show. There were no specific professional requirements or limitations on the exhibition setting in terms of space, location, or the number of paintings. Participants were free to choose any painting they selected for a show. The mock show concept was intended as a starting point for participants to begin to focus on their lived experience of viewing art.

5-7-2 First Interview

I collected most of my data from interviews with twenty Taiwanese lesbians. Polkinghorne (1989) recommends that researchers interview between five and twenty-five individuals when using a phenomenological research method. The number of twenty seems to me a manageable and feasible number. My first-round interviews aimed to explore participants' previous experiences of viewing paintings. Questions included: *What do you think of when you think of paintings? How do you feel? Where did you usually encounter paintings? What do paintings mean for you? What is the most common location and format in which you remember encountering paintings? What has been your most impressive experience of viewing paintings?* The idea of viewing paintings sounds abstract and philosophical, but most participants responded in surprisingly articulated and poetic ways. At the end of the first interview, I gave participants a folder with printed painting images and verbal instructions to select two to four paintings for a mock show before our next interview.

5-7-3 Second Interview

In our second interviews, I wanted to explore how participants interpreted and made sense of their chosen paintings. The interval between the first and second interviews ranged from two to four weeks. I invited each participant to talk about her experience of selecting and viewing the paintings she had chosen. Questions included: *How did you select these paintings? Why did you choose these paintings, rather than others? What do these female images mean to you? How do these painting make you feel?* All participants claimed to have chosen paintings instinctively, without any difficulty at all. Most participants selected two and five paintings from the folder of painting images; three participants (Zhang, Tong, and Guo) selected paintings from outside the folder, based on their own pre-existing preferences or research.

5-7-4 Third Interview

Although I wrote a list of open-ended questions (Appendix E) to help guide discussion, I kept my phrasing and question order extremely flexible, allowing participants to take the lead (Merriam, 1998). I transcribed all digital audio files myself immediately after each interview. As close as possible, the finished transcripts faithfully documented not only a participant's exact wording, but also their pause and emotions during our interviews. I then sent out participants their completed transcripts through email or Line, asking them to confirm the accuracy. After receiving confirmations from all twenty participants, I began a close reading of each transcript repeatedly and carefully. After this initial analysis of all forty transcripts, I discovered several themes which seemed to link to my first research question: *What is it like to view paintings for a Taiwanese lesbian?* However, patterns were less forthcoming for my other two research questions: *How does this group of women interpret and make sense of paintings containing female figures*? and *What does such an experience mean for Taiwanese lesbians in the context of Taiwanese society?* This encouraged me to schedule a third round of interviews. I deliberately chose five of the original twenty participants to take part. My selection was based on their willingness to participate, first and foremost, as well as on their previously established familiarity with paintings and ability to articulate their personal feelings about doing so, thereby providing me with rich descriptions. Eventually, I completed these third-round interviews at the beginning of 2020, and the data offered me a more comprehensive foundation for analysis.

5-8 Research Instrument

5-8-1 The criteria of selecting painting images

At the end of first interview, I provided a folder to facilitate the selection process for those participants from non-art backgrounds, which was the majority. Since the main goal of applying the research instrument is to obtain rich experiences of talking, feeling, and interpreting paintings, I began with famous paintings commonly shown in Taiwan according to my personal experience. Then I purposively chose one or two images to represent each major school in the history of Western paintings: Renaissance, Romanticism, Realism, Impressionism, Post-Impressionism, Expressionism, Cubism, Surrealism, and the contemporary era (Figure 2). From this pool of images, I chose ones which predominantly portrayed female figures, in a representative way. Rather than focusing on specific artworks or artists, I instead aimed for a diverse range of painting styles from different time periods, which displayed different forms of interaction between their depicted figures. Some were individual portraits, others showed figures interacting with one another, others were group poses. The women depicted were of varying ages, in a great variety of outfits, and varied greatly in terms of nudity, appearance, social status and even location.

The reason I selected these painting images is that paintings with representative content gains higher values on comprehension (Jagnow, 2019; Leder, Belke, Oeberst, & Augustin, 2004). Additionally, due to Taiwan's particular historical and political context—explained in the third chapter— Taiwanese people are used to seeing Western paintings in textbooks, houses, classrooms, and museums. I also included several local paintings I knew to be popular in Taiwan, which contained female figures with looks more reflective of Taiwanese culture. The aforementioned process of selection left me with more than thirty images. In order to simplify the selection process for participants, I deleted some images containing repetitive themes and then cut down the total number to thirteen. My decision to include thirteen painting images

was both purposive and exploratory. If participants preferred, they were free to select paintings not included in the folder.

Here are the painting images included in the folder given to each participant:

(Order from left to right)

*Sandro Botticelli. (1485). Birth of Venus, tempera on canvas, 172.5x278.9 cm, Uffizi Gallery, Florence, Italy.

*Raffaello Santi. (1505). The Madonna of the Meadow, oil on board, 113x88 cm, Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna, Austria.

*Leonardo Da Vinci. (1503-1519). Mona Lisa-Portrait of Lisa Gherardini, wife of Francesco del Giocondo, oil on paper panel, 77x53 cm, Louvre Museum, Paris, France.

*Eugène Delacroix, (1830). *Liberty Leading the People,* oil on canvas, 260x325 cm, Louvre Museum, Paris, France. Musée d'Orsay, Paris, France.

*Jean-François Millet. (1857). *The Gleaners,* oil on canvas, 83.8x111.8 cm, Musée d'Orsay, Paris, France.

*Édouard Manet. (1863). *Olympia,* oil on canavs, 130.5x190 cm, Musée d'Orsay, Paris,

France.

*August Renoir. (1892). *Girls at the Piano,* oil on canvas, 11.8x86.4 cm, Musée d'Orsay,

Paris, France.

*Pablo Picasso. (1907). *The Ladies of Avignon,* oil on canvas, 243.9x233.7 cm, Museum of

Modern Art, New York, USA.

*Henri Matisse. (1908). *The Dessert: Harmony in Red,* oil on canvas, 180x220 cm,

the State Hermitage Museum, Saint Peterburg, Russia.

*Frida, Kahlo. (1939). *The Two Fridas,* oil on canvas, 173x173 cm, Museo de Arte Moderno,

Mexico City, Mexico.
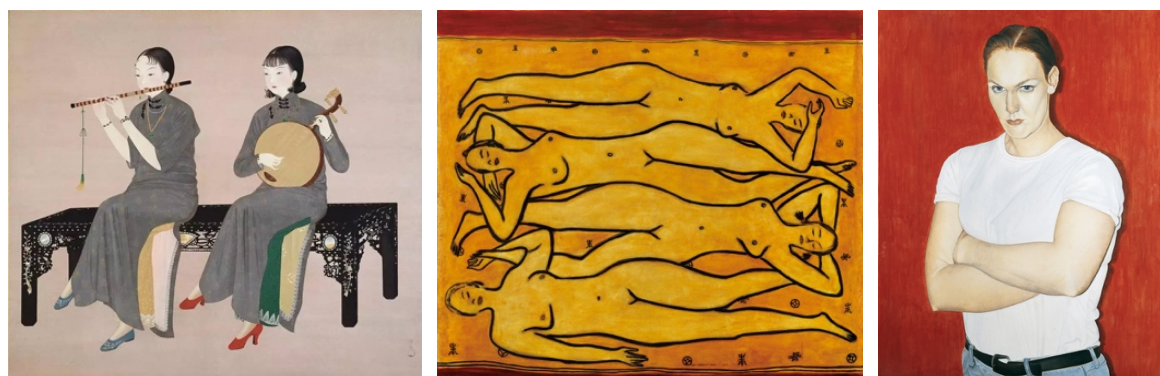
*Chen Jin. (1934). *Ensemble,* Nihonga, 200x177 cm, private collection.

*Chang Yu. (n.d.). *Four Nudes,* oil on canvas, 123x141.5 cm, National Museum of History,

Taipei, Taiwan.

*Sadie Lee. (1992). *Raging Bull,* oil on canvas, 150x120 cm, private collection.
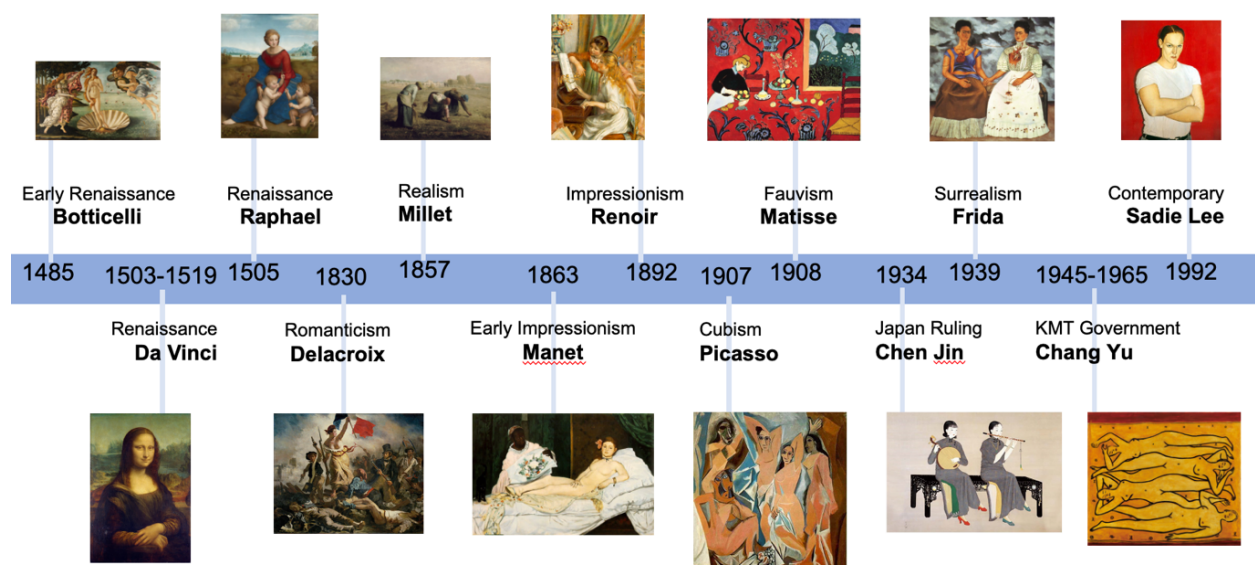
Figure 2

Thirteen hard copies of selected paintings were printed out in colour and given to participants immediately following our first interview. During the second interview, in addition to the hard copies, I displayed high-resolution digital copies of the selected paintings on my laptop. This latter display provided participants with a better quality of spectatorship and freedom for viewing and surveying. Undoubtedly, the experience of sitting in front of a computer screen is different from that of standing in front of an original painting. However, for my research purpose, I was interested in how a participant's reactions towards paintings shown during the interview could communicate their lived experience. As van Manen (2016b) remarks, phenomenological studies are more about retrospection than introspection. Additionally, "art is represented as a form of cultural production"; social and cultural issues are the primary base for discussing aesthetics in the context of postmodern world (Efland, Freedman, & Stuhr, 1996, p. 38). Therefore, for the purpose of my study, a participant's memory of having viewed

original paintings combined with their experiences viewing reproduced images of paintings during our interview was enough to elucidate their lived experience in Taiwan.

5-8-2 Permission of painting images

Most museums and galleries in Europe and the USA grant the fair use permission. Take these three museums for example:

> Fair use is permitted. Fair use of copyrighted material includes the use of protected materials for noncommercial educational purposes, such as teaching, scholarship, research, criticism, commentary, and news reporting. In accordance with scholarly practice, users of materials (whether copyrighted or not) in publications, etc., should cite the author/artist as well as the source (The Museum of Modern Art, n.d., Terms of use, Section 2, para. 6).

> The reproduction of artworks is free only if realized for non-profit activities, for study, research, free manifestation of individual thought, creative expressions, support of the knowledge of cultural heritage (The Uffizi Gallery, n.d., para. 2).

> The downloading and re-use of medium-format photographs published on the collection website representing works that are not protected by copyright are permitted, free of charge, for any non-collective use within a strictly private context and for the following exhaustively-listed museographic, scientific and educational purposes (Louvre Museum, n.d., Article 4-1).

Similarly, in Hong Kong I found that "Hong Kong SAR allows fair dealing in any type of copyright work for the purpose of research or private study" (Hong Kong Intellectual Property

Department, 2007, Section 41A). Despite the fair use permission to reproduce the images, I contacted Sadie Lee, the painter of *Raging Bull,* as this painting is the only in my study to be made by a living artist (Figure 3).
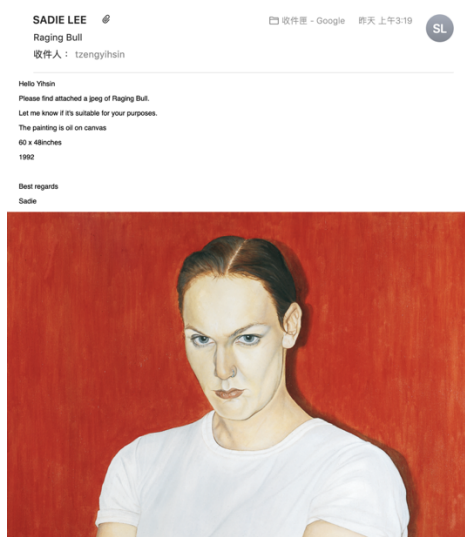
Figure 3

5-9 Data Analysis and Presentation Method

From among various phenomenological approaches, I chose to take that of hermeneutic phenomenology for my data analysis. I hoped to develop a composite description of the essence of all individuals' experience of encountering paintings. That is, a composite description of how they approached, perceived, and interpreted paintings. These descriptions responded to questions of both *what participants experience* and *how participants experience* (Moustakas, 1994). The idea was to reach a better understanding of what it means to be a Taiwanese lesbian standing in front of paintings, or talking about paintings, taking into account of the sociocultural and historical traditions that generate meanings and determine ways of being in Taiwanese society. In addition to drawing on van Manen's ideas to analyze my data, I also used the computer programs NVivo and Excel, as well as a system of manual collaging, to

assist with coding and identify areas of vagueness. The overall goal of this phenomenological data analysis was to "transform lived experience into a textual expression of its essence – in such a way that the effect of the text is at once a reflective re-living and a reflective appropriation of something meaningful" (van Manen, 2016b, p. 36).

5-9-1 Process of Data Analysis and Interpretation

Texts can be considered as both the raw data and final product of phenomenological research (Smith, 1991). When the verbal responses of participants are transformed into written texts, these texts become a primary resource for conducting hermeneutic phenomenological analysis. When researchers want to make sense of texts or interpret the meaning of a lived experience, they are seeking to identify themes. The sufficiency of participants' responses and researcher's interpretation will partly depend on the generation of rich interviews. In the preface of van Manen's (2016b) book, *Research Lived Experience*, he states that "a hermeneutic phenomenology method does not offer a procedural system; rather, its method requires an ability to be reflective, insightful, sensitive, to language, and constantly open to experience" (p. 6). Flexibility, therefore, was integral to my process of hermeneutic phenomenology analysis (Koch, 2006). In addition, both the concept of the "*hermeneutic circle*" and "*guided existential methods*" assisted me in uncovering meaningful themes with my collected data.

5-9-2 The Wholistic Approach

According to van Manen (2016b), there are three approaches to unearthing and isolating thematic statements from texts of a phenomenon: the wholistic, the selective, and the detailed. To my mind, the first "wholistic or sententious" way of interpreting texts is a kind of "naive reading"; it involves scanning through all printed transcripts as a whole with the aim of obtaining an overall impression of meanings (van Manen, 2016b, p. 92). Employing it during

the process of reading back my transcripts, I kept asking myself: *How do Taiwanese lesbian experience paintings? What sententious phrase can capture the fundamental meaning of their lived experience as a whole?* The idea of naive reading is to simply feel the texts, without any intention of analyzing them. The following is an excerpt from my second interview with Fang, in which she explained why she chose her two painting images:

> I: *Which painting would you like to talk about?*
>
> Fang: *I would like to talk about paintings made by Cheng-Yu and Picasso, but I do not have any professional knowledge of their background. Most women (in the painting made by Picasso) are not facing front and these two are facing with their sides. At the same time, their faces are relatively dark or unclear. Their facial features are not so "good-looking".*
>
> I: *So, does "not-good-looking" catch your attention?*
>
> Fang: *Using the phrase of "not-good-looking" might sound weird but I cannot find other adjectives to describe it. It is supposed to mean not so normal. What I try to express is that the appearance or the look of human beings can be diverse; it is unnecessary to face front; eyes do not need to look like what they should be; the nose does not need to look like what it should be. Not only one normal look would be categorized as good-looking. Women are usually given more restrictions or requirements under the traditional concept. She may have to know how to dress up or how to make herself look better. However, I do not really like that kind of image. All the paintings I chose earlier do not belong to this kind of female images.*
>
> I: *So, the reason you like this painting is because it displays an image of an unconventional woman?*

> *Fang:*   *I mean that she does not match conventional and popular aesthetics. For example, look at her sitting position. She is sitting in an undignified or good-looking way. The women in Chen-Jin's paintings are sitting more properly, with legs leaned together, elegantly playing instruments. However, this woman is definitely not. I think that she is just a person, regardless of her gender. She just presents herself with a natural look, which might become a burden under such a secular concept.*

After reading Fang's texts several times over, I gained a sense of the whole. This was not based on a systematic assessment of, for example, the frequency with which certain words appears, but instead was a kind of intuitive understanding. It seemed clear that Fang was dissatisfied with the traditional portrayal of women and that she sought an escape from this gendered social stereotype. In my note, I wrote:

> *As a Taiwanese lesbian, Fang appreciates aesthetics that diverge from the norm, which offers her more space and opportunities to be her true self.*

5-9-3 The Selective Approach

Following van Manen's second "selecting and highlighting" method (2016b, P. 94), I divided each interview transcript into several meaningful units—namely, phrases, sentences, or paragraphs. I then read them serval times while asking myself: *Does particularly any phrase or sentence stand out in this paragraph? Can I select some sentences which seem particularly thematic or essential?* Throughout, I noted down or highlighted these statements on my transcripts print-outs. In the preceding excerpt of my interview with Fang, I highlighted the following statements:

* Regardless of her gender, she just presents herself with a natural look, which might

   become a burden under such a secular concept.

* Not only a normal look would be categorized as good-looking.

* The standard of beauty could be diverse.

5-9-4 The Detailed Approach

Van Manen's third "detailed" approach to data interpretation is more structured than the preceding two stages. First, I read every single sentence or sentence cluster carefully and then asked myself, *what does this sentence reveal about the phenomenon being studied*? The intention behind isolating sentences or phrases in this way was to reveal or point at something deeper and more reflective in regard to a participant's experience of viewing paintings. In the case of the interview with Fang, I identified the following key sentences or sentence clusters that drew my attention in the order they appear in the excerpt:

(Sentence 1)   *I would like to talk about paintings made by Cheng-Yu and Picasso, but I do not have any professional knowledge of their background.*

(Sentence 2)   *Their faces are relatively dark or unclear. Their facial features are not so "good-looking".*

(Sentence 3)   *Using the phrase of "not-good-looking" might sound strange but I cannot find other adjective words to describe. It is supposed to mean not so normal.*

(Sentence 4)   *What I try to express is that the appearance or look of human beings can be diverse.*

(Sentence 5)   *It is unnecessary to face front; eyes do not need to look like what they should be; the nose does not need to look like what it should be. Not only one normal look would be categorized as beauty.*

(Sentence 6)   *Women are usually given more restrictions or requirements under the traditional concept.*

(Sentence 7)   *She may have to know how to dress up or how to make herself look better.*

(Sentence 8)   *However, I do not really like that kind of image. All the paintings I chose earlier do not belong to this kind of female images. I mean that she does not match conventional and popular aesthetics.*

(Sentence 9)   *She is sitting in an undignified or good-looking way. The women in Chen-Jin's paintings are sitting more properly, with legs leaned together, elegantly playing instruments.*

(Sentence 10)   *I think that she is just a person, regardless of her gender. She just presents herself with a natural look, which might become a burden under such a secular concept.*

Preliminary Theme-like Statements

After repeatedly reading these sentences or sentence clusters, I summarized and interpreted each sentence in a descriptive way, using some of Fang's own words. Meanwhile, I asked myself what each sentence was trying to reveal about the nature of viewing paintings that contains female figures. Building my list of sentences, I generated ten initial theme-like statements:

(Sentence 1)　　shows that Fang does not think professional knowledge is the premise of viewing or interpreting paintings.

(Sentence 2)　　shows that Fang enjoys viewing female figures who are portrayed by artists in a "not-good-looking" way.

(Sentence 3)　　reveals that the meaning of not-good-looking represents being abnormal, unconventional, or non-mainstream.

(Sentence 4)　　denotes that Fang prefers to see variety in the way women present themselves.

(Sentence 5)　　shows that there is no fixed rule or model to define beauty.

(Sentence 6)　　tells us that the patriarchal society imposes more expectations and requirements on women.

(Sentence 7)　　shows that the women feel pressured or obligated to make themselves look better.

(Sentence 8)　　shows that Fang prefers to view images of unconventionally attractive women.

(Sentence 9)　　shows that the traditional representations of women depicted them as demure and restrained.

| (Sentence 10) | asserts that women should present themselves as they are, rather than feeling obligated to conform to gender stereotypes. However, this kind of behavior might sometimes make their lives more difficult. |

Using this detailed approach to data interpretation, I generated a total of 127 of these theme-like statements from all my transcripts.

Merging Theme-like Statements

I noticed some overlaps and similarities. Several of the above theme-like statements are clearly related to one another. For example, sentences 2, 3, and 8 all talk about what "not-good-looking" means, while sentences 6, 7, 9, and part of 10 all touch the traditional image of Taiwanese women. In response to this observation, I merged repeated parts and re-organized the sentences, creating preparatory and descriptive theme-like statements for the experience of viewing female figures in paintings.

(Sentence 1)	Fang feels that professional knowledge is not necessary for viewing or interpreting paintings.
(Sentence 2, 3, 8)	Fang prefers to view paintings that contain unconventional or non-mainstream women.
(Sentence 4)	Fang prefers to see variety in how women present themselves.
(Sentence 5)	Fang believes that beauty has multiple aspects.
(Sentence 6, 7, 9)	Fang dislikes viewing traditional images of women, in which women are required to present or act in prescribed ways.
(Sentence 10)	Fang enjoys seeing women as they truly, genuinely are, rather than as when they conform to gender stereotypes.

After arriving at these initial theme-like statements, I considered each of them one by one. In each instance, I returned to my texts as a whole, assessing whether a description really represented the mutual and common experience of my participants viewing paintings that contain female figures. At the end of this process, I was left with forty-nine merged theme-like statements.

Formulating and Condensing Themes

I call the above statements "theme-like" rather than themes, as they do not quite count as themes; they are more like "topics" in need of further consideration. What do we mean by "theme"? According to van Manen (2016b), a theme is the experience of focus, a means of describing a reductive notion, a form of capturing the shape of phenomenon, and a portrayal of certain aspects of lived experience. A theme is also a process of inventing, discovering, and disclosing (van Manen, 2016b). After reading and re-reading many times over, and writing and re-writing many times over, a finer description emerges of a particular side of the Taiwanese lesbian viewing experience. After generating many theme-like statements and then merged theme-like statements from my interview transcripts, I reformulated the six merged theme-like statements in the preceding section as the following themes:

(Theme 1) The experience of viewing and interpreting paintings is instinct and innate.

(Theme 2) Participants praise atypical gender expressions and bodily presentations, which steps outside traditional frameworks.

(Theme 3) Participants would like to convey an idea of valuing diversity through presenting different looks of female figures.

(Theme 4)   Participants resist idealized images of women that conform conventional values.

(Theme 5)   The participants' ideal female representation is one who is comfortable in her own skin and acting according to her own interests.

After several rounds of re-reading and re-writing, going back and forth between the parts and the whole, I deleted or merged three of these themes. The remaining two I adjusted and refined in a consistent writing style:

(Theme 3)   Feeling a sense of diversity is conveyed through the process of viewing and interpreting paintings with female figures.

(Theme 5)   The participants' ideal female image is one who is comfortable with herself and acts in accordance with her own interests, without being beautified or objectified.

At this stage of data analysis, I deleted, condensed, and simplified all forty-nine theme-like statements into thirty-one themes. In the following chapters about my findings, readers will find a complete list of themes and further discussions on this topic.

5-9-5 Hermeneutic Strategies - the Hermeneutic Circle

The hermeneutic circle (Figure 4) is a metaphor for "reading, reflective writing, and interpretation" as a process of data analysis (Laverty, 2003, p. 30). This process involves researchers moving "from the parts of the experience, to the whole of the experience, back and forth again and again to increase the depth of engagement with and the understanding of texts"

(Laverty, 2003, p. 24). The aim of this circle is to identify common themes through reading and re-reading, examining and re-examining the interpretation of texts (Hellman, 2016). As Nicholas Davey (2017) describes, an understanding of the part requires a grasp of the whole, while the understanding of the whole also requires a grasp of the parts. This circle is fluid, designed without specific steps; after repeatedly analyzing until no new theme emerges, researchers reach a point called "saturation" (Hellman, 2016, p. 77).

In the initial stage of my analysis, I looked for patterns by annotating transcripts print outs and creating paper collages as a way to summarize and reflect. Due the large volume of interview data, I relied more on Excel and Nvivo 12 to organize statements as the process progressed. After interpreting and identifying significant statements derived from participants' narratives, I clustered similar statements together, formulating twenty-three thematic statements in response to my three research questions. Having returned to my literature review and theoretical framework, I modified my interpretation and formulation of themes in a more contextualized way from time to time. Throughout the process, I constantly referred to the field note I took during the interview and my reflective journals, which facilitated me to make adjustments and arrive the final interpretations. Additionally, I used van Manen's (2016b) four existential methods as the basic structure for presenting my findings.
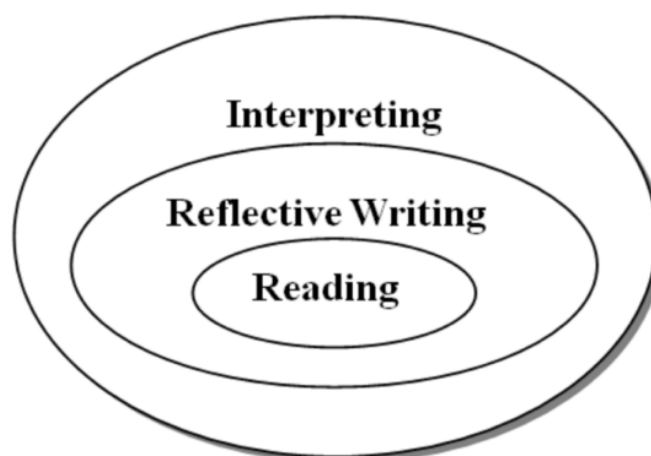
Figure 4: Hermeneutic Circle (Ghosh, 2016).

5-9-6 Hermeneutic Strategies - the Guided Existential Methods

According to van Manen (2016b), a possible approach to do the reflective inquiry is to employ the guided existential methods from different universal themes of life, such as lived relation, lived body, lived space, lived time, or lived things and technology. They are existentials based on relationality, corporeality, spatiality, temporality, and materiality, which belong to the everyday lifeworld (van Manen, 2016b). Van Manen (2016b) also observes that we are all experiencing the meaning of our world through these existentials in a very heuristic manner. Therefore, I intend to analyze and present my interview data using these existential methods as a guide, exploring meaningful structures of the lived experience of Taiwanese lesbians on viewing, encountering, and interpreting paintings that contains female figures.

In Chapter Six, Seven and Eight, I will quote extensively from my interview transcripts in order to enhance the transparency of my interpretations and also to offer readers an opportunity to reflect upon what the participants and I discussed. The written word is not only a document of transactions between persons but also the "precondition of a people's historical record" (Davey, 2017, para. 3).

5-10 The Role of Researcher

Phenomenological research encourages researchers to use their own personal experience as a starting point (van Manen, 2016b). Hence, I have not reflected on my texts as a professional scholar, a phenomenologist, or a critical theorist. Instead, I reflect phenomenologically on the experience of viewing paintings as a Taiwanese lesbian, a visual artist, and an educator in this study. In other words, I have attempted to grasp the pedagogical essence of a certain experience, which also talks to me and to my readers. Being an insider in this way not only ensured a fundamental commonality, but it also helped to establish a stronger sense of trust between me and my participants. As a result, my insider role decreases the hierarchal relationship that can sometimes be perceived between researcher and participants (Dunne, 1997). This, in conjunction with the relaxed, familiar settings in which I held my interviews, helped to cultivate conversations that accessed more private parts of participants' lives. One participant, Zhang, expressed that she would not have been willing to share as much with an interviewer who was a man or a heterosexual woman; she would not have trusted them in the same way, and would have questioned their ability to understand or empathize with her experiences.

> I: *If I were not from this community, would this make any difference for you?*
>
> Zhang: *Yes, definitely. You may not know where my contradictory point locates.*
>
> I: *If I were not from this community, you might not trust me?*
>
> Zhang: *This must affect.*
>
> I: *How about if I were a man?*
>
> Zhang: *I will not say anything at all, because I have a sense of precautions. I definitely have it because doing this kind of interview about painting… I mentioned this at the first-time interview, I was relatively indifferent on*

painting. I knew I had feelings, but I did not know why this happened. However, I found that I become sensitive and self-explanatory on many paintings now; I began to think about why I think so and how it relates to my life experience, after being interviewed twice by you. (the 3rd interview)

On the other hand, it was important to consider how my insider status might cause my perception to be "clouded by my personal experience" and how I might have difficulty separating myself from participants (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009, p. 58). During the interview process, I was aware of my position as a researcher. I aimed to maintain a neutral and unjudgmental attitude in front of participants. I avoided revealing my sexual identity or expressing any personal opinions unless a participant specifically inquired. I attempted not to identify any patterns or similarities in response while conducting interviews. However, I also understood and acknowledged that I could not completely suspend my previous knowledge and experiences. As Dwyer and Buckle (2009) suggest, more important than whether a researcher is an insider or outsider is that a researcher can possess "an ability to be open, authentic, honest, deeply interested in the experience of one's research participants, and committed to accurately and adequately representing their experience" (p. 59).

I am not a someone who usually builds up close relationships with strangers on the first meeting. Through this study, I was impressed by how quickly the interaction deepened between me and my participants. Via the instruments, painting images and questions of this study, participants seemed to feel comfortable and relaxed when talking about paintings. That is to say that talking about paintings made it easier for participants to make personal disclosures, even after only a short acquaintance with me. Throughout the interview process, I constantly reminded myself to leave as much time and space as participants felt ready to talk or pause, with an aim to let them talk for themselves. The feedback I received from participants was mostly positive. The

majority enjoyed having the opportunity to deepen their understanding of their relationships with paintings. Most acknowledged that they had seldom contemplated the issue in any depth prior to our meetings. Some seemed truly astonished to discover how intimate their relationships with painting really were; some were amazed at the unexpected and private stories they found themselves willing to share with me; some even remarked that talking about paintings with me felt like some kind psychological consultation. And through these in-depth conversations, it seemed to me that both my participants and I came to more thorough understandings of ourselves, both individually and collectively.

Chapter SIX: FINDINGS I

6-1 Introduction

The purpose of this study was to investigate the experience of Taiwanese lesbians viewing and interpreting paintings that contain female figures. The research questions of this hermeneutic phenomenological study were:

> *Question 1: What is it like to view paintings for Taiwanese lesbians?*
>
> *Question 2: How does this group of women interpret and make sense of paintings containing female figures?*
>
> *Question 3: What does sch an experience mean for Taiwanese lesbians in the context of Taiwanese society?*

Through analyzing the data I collected in response to each research question, I developed an insight into the lived experience of being a Taiwanese lesbian viewing and interpreting paintings. My findings relate to how and what participants felt and thought while viewing paintings containing female figures, as well as the associations they made.

Van Manen (2016b) proposes four existential methods for examining the experience of viewing paintings, and I have used them in my analysis to explore the phenomenological significance of the lived experience of Taiwanese lesbians viewing paintings. Van Manen's methods are the existential inquiry of *lived space* (spatiality), *lived time* (temporality), *lived relation* (relationality), and *lived body* (corporeality). Under the existential inquiry of lived space, participants tend to feel the viewing process and the paintings themselves are spaces in which to experience a unique on-site viewing experience. Under the existential inquiry of lived time, temporality is felt as contextualized, as individual moments, and a growing process for participants. Under the existential inquiry of lived relation, the relationality with self, women,

and our society form three themes. Under the existential inquiry of the body, while viewing paintings participants may feel bodily confused, comfortable, diverse, and positive. Four fundamental existential methods are purposively selected for the current study. Each existential method can be differentiated but none is completely separated from the others. All major themes and their delineative sub-themes are closely intertwined and, in the context of this study, have joined together to create the structure of the lived experience of being a Taiwanese lesbian viewing female figures in paintings.

6-2 Structure of Presenting Findings

To present my findings, I have divided into three chapters the twelve major themes I developed using van Manen's four existential methods (Table 6). In the first part, I discuss what it feels like for lesbians to reflectively experience paintings, which constitutes most parts of Chapter Six. The second part presented in Chapter Seven relates to how participants make sense of paintings containing female figures. The third part is about how participants feel about female figures they encounter in paintings presented in Chapter Eight. Meanwhile, I also have organized my identified major themes and sub-themes in tables for each chapter for the convenience of the reader (Table 7, 8, and 9). In the following three chapters, each theme is presented with a brief introduction, quotations from participants or the literature, and then followed by a discussion of my interpretation.

Structure of Presenting Findings

The Chapter of Findings	Three Findings	Major Themes	Existential Dimensions
SIX	How do Taiwanese lesbians feel and experience paintings?	Paintings as spaces	Lived Space
		Viewing process as a lived space	Lived Space
		Feeling time being contextualized	Lived Time
		Feeling confused when starting to view paintings	Lived Body
SEVEN	How do Taiwanese lesbians interpret and make sense of paintings containing female figures?	Through echoing individual life moments	Lived Time
		Through feeling a process of changing and searching	Lived Time
		By relating to their own sense of self	Lived Relation
		By relating to the women depicted inside them	Lived Relation
		By relating to wider society	Lived Relation
EIGHT	How do Taiwanese lesbians feel about female figures in paintings?	Being at ease	Lived Body
		Being diverse	Lived Body
		Being positive and empowered	Lived Body

Table 6

6-3 How do Taiwanese lesbian feel and experience paintings?

When viewing paintings, Taiwanese lesbians experience both paintings and the process of viewing paintings as space; they also feel time being contextualized and, often, physical sensation, such as being bodily confused. Four major themes arise from the dimension of lived space, time, and body with respect to this phenomenon. Lived space might include the physical space of painting canvas stretched across its frames, the pictorial space painted on the surface of paintings, or the actual painting exhibition space. Lived time implies that participants position a specific painting in the timeline of art history, an artist's career, or an exhibition curator's thoughts. Lived body describes how participants feel or react in the presence of paintings. This chapter is about how spatiality, temporary, and corporeality shape participants' visual experience when recalling their most impressive experiences of viewing paintings.

Themes of Finding I, relating to the experience of viewing paintings

Major Themes	Sub-Themes	Existential Dimensions
Paintings as spaces	Viewing paintings is like being taken in a painter's world and entering into a dialogue with the painter.	Lived Space
	Viewing paintings feels like to finding a quiet, secluded place in which to contemplate one's self and others.	Lived Space
Viewing process as a lived space	Viewing on-site paintings creates a unique sense of artistic presence.	Lived Space
	Viewing paintings is to feel a painting, and to interact with the physical space in which the painting is exhibited, in a specific time and place.	Lived Space
Feel time being contextualized	The experience of viewing paintings is like entering into art history itself, or else stepping into the life of the artists, or the curator.	Lived Time
Feeling confused when starting to view paintings	They feel confused about the images.	Lived Body
	They feel confused about the self.	

Table 7

6-4 Participants experience paintings as spaces

6-4-1 Viewing paintings is like being taken in a painter's world and entering into a dialogue with the painter

Viewing a painting can feel like entering a tunnel that leads participants into a painter's world. Participant Bao described her experience as follows:

> *It is like arriving in another country. You stand in front of a painting and listen to the painter's story.... It feels like entering the painter's reality, as if she is living in front of you and doing the things you imagine for her. You are experiencing the life of an artist, entering into an artist's mind... (Bao)*

Through painters' eyes, through the figures they created on the canvas, participants described seeing painters' "*backgrounds, thoughts, mental states, illnesses, and viewpoints*" (Ban) as well as "*how people lived their lives in the past*" (Xi). In other words, participants feel what a painter saw, felt, thought, imagined, and was surrounded by at the moment of creating their paintings. Through viewing paintings, participants catch a glimpse of a particular moment in a painter's life.

Painting is something alive that condenses and compresses a painter's perspective on the world, both subjectively and objectively. It allows participants access to a perspective that they would not otherwise have; it is an invitation to see the world through the eyes of someone else. This is reflected in Zhang's response: "*Appreciating paintings is an immersive, emotional experience.... It's about experiencing the lives of different people, experiencing the lives of others, and experiencing your own life.*" Ultimately, it is a process of connecting souls and building up conversations between viewers and creators. Several of my participants described feeling as though a painter had opened his or her heart to them. In Yang's words, "[*let us] see*

how wonderful his or her world looks like." Yang went on to describe this kind of experience as "irreplaceable."

6-4-2 Viewing paintings feels like finding a quiet, secluded place in which to contemplate one's self and others

When participants experienced paintings as lived space, they experienced two states of quietness. First, a painting is a space that participants stated that they preferred to approach alone, to contemplate quietly without interruptions. When participants need to think, they view paintings. Paintings represent a place of security, comfort, and contemplation; a place where participants can relieve stress, draw inspiration, or recharge their energies. Lui mentioned preferring to view paintings alone because it allows her to spend time by herself, and be fully present with her own thoughts, without the pressure of discussing them with others. She said:

> *It's peaceful, just paintings and me. Both of us reflect something to each other. I do not need to explain why I like this painting. The way paintings move me is one direction, because I cannot influence the painting. She is already done and just over there. She will not be influenced ... I talk to myself through viewing paintings. (Lui)*

Paintings are made to be seen. A painting is a pure medium made up of still images; all it requires of a viewer is to look. Talking is unnecessary. Participants described feeling relaxed and comfortable around paintings, because paintings do not speak or respond to a viewer in any physical way. There is no limit to how long one can spend looking at a painting. After spending long periods of looking at a painting, some participants even reported feeling that "[*they could] see something at the end*" (Luo). In many cases, this was an experience that participants noticed but they could not articulate. During these periods of quietness and aloneness with paintings, participants found themselves wondering what a particular picture

was attempting to express? Why were the figures within moving or interacting in the way that they were? How did this picture relate to them?

The second state of quietness related to participants feeling realized within themselves through the action of looking. While viewing paintings, participants described a process of seeking stillness and quietness both in their own minds and within the images, simultaneously. Viewing paintings thus became a process of thinking deeply and understanding about one's self and others, leading to a deeper connection to the world. In this context, I use "others" to refer to anyone other than the person viewing a painting. Others might include the painter themselves, the figures shown in the painting, or anyone the viewer is reminded of through the process of viewing the painting in question. Participants commented on obtaining a feeling of returning to themselves, reaching what Tong described as "*a moment of being quiet, finding her inner peace and calm.*" This is also what Fang claimed to be looking for. She says, "*My ideal state of viewing a panting is that the outside world is not noisy and then I can reach another state of calmness in my soul…There is no judgement interrupting. Maybe it's closer to stillness... It is the state I most want to achieve.* "

Based on this theme, we understand that viewing paintings is a way for participants to discover their own quietness and calmness, both physically and spiritually. As a spectator, she is able to enter a state of being by herself, pondering, thinking upon herself, others, and the many connections in-between. In the end, she expects to calm her mind, finding a peace of mind.

6-5 Participants experience the viewing process as a lived space

6-5-1 Viewing on-site paintings creates a unique sense of artistic presence

When viewing paintings, participants stated a preference for their experiences to be in-person—that is, to see paintings on site, in settings such as museums or galleries. The experience of viewing reproduced images of paintings can be restricted by factors, such as the screen size of mobile phones, the colour of display monitors, and the resolution or printing quality of books, and so on. Hence, in this study, when participants were asked to view reproduced images, these images were intended as vehicles for the real paintings: as a reference points, or ways to jolt a participant's memory of a previous in-person viewing experience.

The original part of paintings

Being "on-site" means to be in the presence of the original painting; to experience its full authenticity and physicality. When viewing paintings on site, participants recalled searching for traces or marks left by painters, pertaining to features such as texture, stroke, colour, detail, pigment, or grain. Stroke, texture, and the size of paintings were the features most often mentioned by participants in relation to on-site viewing. Take Huang's response for example, on the topic of painters conveying their feelings through brushstrokes:

> *I can feel the moment that artists move their brushes…. I can feel what artists want to express, knowing their current moods…I can sense the surge and the coldness coming from their colours. I can feel all their feelings from their inner worlds because brushstrokes cannot deceive people at all. (Huang)*

When standing in front of a painting, the texture of the paint is clearly visible on the canvas. The texture is usually three-dimensional, comprised of the trajectory of lines, the buildup of

brushstrokes and the flow of paint against the grain of the canvas. Studies have shown that brushstrokes can elicit responses in viewers (Taylor, Witt & Grimaldi, 2012); they suggest that the performance of hand movements, echoing the bodily gestures made by the artist during the process of painting, and this can make a viewer feel more favorably towards a piece of painting (Leder, Bar & Topolinski, 2012). Thus, the original texture of a painting not only demonstrates a sense of authenticity but also activate a strong aesthetic response in a viewer. It is tangible evidence that a painter was once present, a presence which several of my participants experienced as a kind of resonance.

At times when they had been able to experience paintings on site, in their original size, participants were able to better comprehend the painters' concept of space, and to feel how the artists have interacted with their creation. While on site, participants could recall and relive the moment which had ever happened between painters and paintings. Wang described seeing a Monet painting in person for the first time:

> *I did not think the painting looked good in the photo, but it was really good when being viewed in person…From the photo, you did not really get a sense that it was a lake; you did not get much sense of the setting at all ….But in real life, you can really get a sense of the lake and water – it is a huge painting, and you feel that you are seeing the same scene that Monet saw, and feeling the same feelings he did; what you see is not a painting. It is the moment that you are right in front of the lake …. It might be because the painting is large enough that I feel being on the scene through the painter's eyes, from his perspective. You feel the lake, and the flowers floating on the water. (Wang)*

Experiencing the materiality of paintings in person not only gave participants a feeling of the painting really exists; in a way, it also brought the spirits and gestures of the painters back to

life. During on site viewings, something special and mysterious seems to happen. This is something Fei described as "*the spirit of author appearing*" no matter how many centuries ago the painting might have been created. Luo compared viewing reproduced paintings and on-site paintings to seeing someone in a photograph versus seeing them in the flesh:

> *Seeing the real thing in front of me is just magical. I do not know why but this is beyond my description. When you see a man in a photo, no matter how exactly his photo looks like the real him, no matter how little difference there is, it's magical to see him in person rather than in his photo. (Luo)*

Both Fei and Luo's responses illustrate the term of "aura" used by philosopher Walter Benjamin in 1936. Benjamin defined aura as "the presence in time and space, its unique existence at the place where it happens to be located," which cannot be found in the field of mechanical reproduction (1968, p. 220). This concept of aura not only suggests the value and authenticity of original paintings but reveals the uniqueness of the experience of viewing them in person.

6-5-2 Viewing paintings is to feel a painting, and to interact with the physical space in which the painting is exhibited, in a specific time and place

The experience of viewing paintings not only resides on the surface of paintings but also about what exists beyond them: the physical space that accommodates paintings and viewers. The nature of this space depends upon many variables, such as lighting, framing, sounds, wall colour, room temperature, interior design, number of visitors, the order in which paintings are displayed, and even a viewer's interaction with facilities or museum staff. When a viewer experiences the viewing process as lived space, it is an experience of all these aforementioned

factors, a kind of immersion. Sometimes the space in which a painting is displayed can come to feel more prominent than the painting itself, as for Fang when she commented, "*I just want to experience paintings and exhibitions in THAT place*." Hence, feeling paintings in a particular time and space plays an influential role on the experiencing of viewing and interpreting paintings.

When interacting with the physical space where a painting is exhibited, participants described sensory memories relating to all their bodily senses. The experience of viewing paintings is not limited to a traditional white cube built by concrete walls. Instead, it is an active process, during which a viewer interacts with a specific painting in a specific time and place. This spatial dimension makes viewing experiences unique, profound, immersive and sometimes even holy. Two examples from my interviews vividly illustrate this point. One is Wang describing a climb up a long, tiring set of some stairs to reach an exhibition. The other is Huang describing an unforgettable, multi-sensory viewing experience at the Katsushika Hokusai Museum in Kyoto.

> *Before arriving at the museum, I had to climb very long, very high stairs ... I had exhausted all my physical strength ... Finally, I entered the museum and I felt extremely tired ... but there were so many surprises in store. I was really impressed by the painting. I do not know why... might be because of its colour and lighting... I was so tired when I saw the painting, and still it was such a wonderful experience, and I was so impressed by it. I felt like I had climbed a high mountain to get there ... and it was so interesting. I do not remember how long I stood there; I only remember that I was very moved. The painting is quite often seen. When you see it with your own eyes, you find that it is completely different. Its size, lighting, thickness of paints, gloss ... they are all different. (Wang)*

The people who visited the museum all dressed in kimonos, as if they had just stepped

out from that era, exactly as they were. Everything remained from that era except me,

in modern clothes ... The light and atmosphere were natural, very natural. The

museum was using natural light to illuminate the space. We had to take off our shoes.

It was very quiet and there was no music. The only sound was water flowing through

a bamboo tube, nothing else; it was very, very quiet. There was a little perfume… it

permeated the room; visitors could smell it everywhere. This was an experience that

engaged all five senses. You felt that you were inside the painting, not a viewer ... No

one disturbed anyone. I felt that there was no difference between the painting and the

environment. You were part of the painting. This kind of atmosphere and vibe

impressed me deeply. (Huang)

6-6 Participants feel time being contextualized

6-6-1 The experience of viewing paintings is like entering into art history itself, or else stepping into the life of the artist, or the curator

The experience of viewing paintings is not merely about seeing physical paintings, an object coated with pigments but also about seeing paintings from multiple perspectives. Contextualizing painting implies that viewers are provided with relative information that connects with what they see in a painting with its creator, such as when and where it was made, why and how it was made, which school or style it was affiliated with, or what the exhibition statement intended to reframe and so on. Participants remarked that this kind of contextualization helps them feel closer to paintings and their painters. Leder, Gerger, Dressler, and Schabmann's (2012) study also shows that the interrelation between emotion and

understanding paintings is stably high, especially for non-experts. During a visit to see paintings on the Berlin Wall, Li felt a strong reaction to knowing the history of the wall beneath:

> *In each of his paintings, something like this, people came to West Germany from East Germany. They were eager for freedom ... when I saw the image, I felt quite shocked; many people, many heads…. big and small, gruesome and very crowded expressions. His colour tone is dark and grayish blue. When I saw it [on the Berlin Wall] in real life, I felt quite shocked... It brought home the issue of war, and how many people were dying for freedom, especially when I saw their faces. You do not need to know the whole thing too well, but it does make me feel nice and touched. (Li)*

Viewing paintings from a contextualized angle may not have changed participants' first impressions or their preferences, but it did deepen or improve their understanding of paintings. When viewing a painting with additional information regarding its cultural, historical, geographical, political, or curatorial context, participants felt more aware of where they were, of what lay behind the picture and of how to connect with others through paintings. Ultimately, participants described feeling richer and deeper connections to paintings as a result, and an ability to see individual paintings as part of a bigger picture. This is similar as a comment made by Wu, on the topic of visiting museums:

> *In museums, there are many hundreds of thousands of years of paintings and historical objects. You can see why artists choose to express themselves this way and how they use paintings to record the society and culture of their times. (Wu)*

6-7 Participants feel confused when starting to view and interpret paintings

6-7-1 Participants feel confused about the images

It is common to feel confused when first viewing a painting. Resolving this confusion requires a viewer to desire to do so; they need "a desire to unpuzzle" to gain a deeper understanding of a painting's content and why it might be making them feel a particular way. Paintings are not an easy medium to comprehend, which means they often offer more space for imagination. We usually do have this sense of wanting to unpuzzle paintings, but sometimes we cannot no matter how hard we try. In these instances, we might experience "*a sense of drifting*" (Lee), which encourages us as viewers to seek more information to move past this feeling. Nevertheless, in many cases such clarity remains elusive. Therefore, maintaining a certain distance from the painting, and allowing oneself to simply feel confused is sometimes a good choice for viewing paintings. This is what Xia realized when describing her previous viewing experience:

> Xia: *I cannot figure out what he is doing...even after four years. It is still unsolved.*
>
> I: *Do you enjoy it?*
>
> Xia: *I think it is not too bad. If this confusion happened in my real life, I would definitely want to solve it...but with paintings, I am not so eager to.*
>
> I: *A mysterious experience?*
>
> Xia: *I think so. You do not really know what the painter wants to express, but you can guess. If you guess it right, it is good; if you get it wrong, it does not matter. The distance in between is pretty nice. It seems really*

ambiguous (laughing). I may want to stay close with her, but it does not mean that I can. If she allows me to stay closer, I think it is good; if she rejects me, I will just maintain this distance, which also feels good and enjoyable.

6-7-2 Participants feel confused about the self

The confusion a viewer experiences while viewing a painting may be also the beginning of a new understanding their own self, reached through a consideration of their reactions to the painting. Participants noted that when viewing a particular painting, they were often searching for reasons to support the feelings evoked by paintings—such as why they liked or disliked it, why they felt attracted to it or surprised by it, why it made them feel comfortable or repelled them, and so on. In this context, participants were seeking to further understand themselves and the connection between themselves and this specific painting. Yang was one of the participants who seemed most engaged with her feelings in response to different paintings. She told me:

> *if I go to visit an exhibition today, I might stop in front of a painting and then wonder: Why does this painting attract me? The painting makes me pause and think for a moment about how I am. If I was lingering, I would ask myself why – is it because I like this painting? Is there something relative to it making me feel especially comfortable, unpleasant, or uncomfortable? I would keep thinking about these kinds of questions. (Yang)*

My participants found that their experience of viewing paintings encouraged them to think more and to think more deeply. In some cases, they were drawn to consider things they had never thought of before or to understand something that they had not managed to puzzle out in the past. Their viewing experiences provided them with opportunities to understand themselves

better. In these cases, it was not about finding a "standard" answer; it was more about the process of how participants made sense of a painting to satisfy their confusion. As Xia's said, "*I do not really need to think the same way as creators do. Once I can make sense of paintings in my own way, I feel satisfied*."

Chapter SEVEN: FINDINGS II

How do Taiwanese lesbians interpret and make sense of paintings containing female figures?

7-1 Introduction

To explore the experience of viewing paintings as a lesbian, I purposively prepared a folder containing thirteen hard copies of painting images as my primary instrument. Each of my twenty participants received this folder at the end of our first interview. For the second interview, they were asked to put together a mock art exhibition, using paintings selected either from the folder or, if they preferred, outside it. All painting images I selected for the folder all contained female figures, dating from the period of Renaissance, Romanticism, Realism, Impressionism, Cubism, Fauvism, Surrealism, to the contemporary. The principle of selecting these painting images was a broad and diverse range of relatively well-known pieces in order to collect rich responses from participants.

When compared with experiences of viewing paintings more generally, viewing paintings that contained female figures shed light on the dimension of temporality and relationality. While viewing this group of paintings, participants were more likely to make sense of what they saw through making reference to events in their own lives or through talking about their own processes of self-discovery. The experience of viewing and interpreting paintings felt like looking into a mirror, where they saw reflections of their own images and ideas. Participants expressed a desire to see who they were in that moment, who they had once been, and who they might one day go on to be through these reflection on paintings. Sometimes paintings seemed to reflect a self-image or an idealized self; other times they reflected others, such as

intimate partners or family members. Finally, many participants also commented on how paintings reflect the heterosexual, patriarchal norms around which our society has been constructed.

Themes of Finding II, relating to the experience of viewing paintings containing female figures

Major Themes	Sub-Themes	Existential Dimensions
Through echoing individual life moments	The experience of viewing paintings that contains female figures echoes different moments of a participant's life.	Lived Time
Through feeling a process of changing and searching	The experience of viewing paintings that contain female figures is about the process of changing and searching, from an expected self to a true self.	Lived Time
By relating paintings to their own sense of self	Viewing paintings that contain female figures is like viewing oneself in a mirror—in our reflection, we see who we are, who we were, and who we might one day be.	Lived Relation
By relating paintings to the women depicted inside them	Viewing paintings that contain female figures makes participants talk more, unexpectedly revealing their intimate relationship or secret stories.	Lived Relation
	Participants enjoy seeing the invisible relation between women when viewing paintings containing female figures.	Lived Relation
By relating to wider society	Participants can easily sense a power imbalance in relationship or social classes when viewing paintings containing female figures.	Lived Relation
	Participants care not only about how women are perceived by viewers and other people in paintings, but also notice subtle differences from heterosexual community when viewing and interpreting paintings containing female figures.	Lived Relation

Table 8

7-2 Participants make sense of paintings through individual life moments

This existential theme leads us to inquire how time is being experienced with regard to viewing paintings that contain female figures. According to van Manen (2016a), time can be experienced as both objective and subjective—that is, clock time and phenomenological time. For example, when we take a bus home and have a nice chat with friends, the traveling time may feel shorter than when we take bus home on our own, even though the distance and time are objectively the same. This means how we experience objective time influences how we sense and perceive time. For van Manen (2016b), the way we feel time is "our temporal way of being in the world" (p.104).

7-2-1 The experience of viewing paintings that contains female figures echoes different moments of a participant's life.

Time passes and people change. The experience of participants viewing and interpreting paintings will be deeply influenced by their individual memories, daily experiences, or encounters with someone or something that they are associated with. The way people perceive things changes as they age. What they see, how they feel, why they like, and what they like might diverge enormously at different points in their lives. Even when viewing the same painting, what they feel today might be different from what they felt yesterday. During my conversations with the participants, I noticed that their interpretations of paintings often depended on how the painting connected to their own real-life experiences. They tended to see paintings as corresponding to a specific moment in their lives, as though the artwork was a capsule for a particular, temporally situated emotion. This temporality could be observed at Huang's viewing experience with Chen Jin's painting *Ensemble* (1934). The traditional female

image in Chen's painting reminded Huang of her grandmother, who moved to Taiwan from mainland China after World War II.

> *When I saw this painting in person before, I felt that Wow! The painter could even paint this mosaic shell and reflection. I was really moved by her artistic talent. When I see this painting now, I will be brought into that era by its aesthetics and war stories. My grandmother is getting older, almost ninety. I am used to listening to her telling her stories. (Huang)*

For Huang, an accumulation of time and affections clearly altered how she perceived this painting. Yang provided another good example of this theme. When Yang viewed Frida Kahlo's painting *Two Fridas* (1939), in which two Mexican women sit holding hands three times, her interpretation differed in each time. The first time Yang encountered the painting was several years before our interview, while she was going through a painful break-up with her first girlfriend. In this context, she interpreted the two women in the painting as soulmates and seeing the broken hearts and blood vessels in the image caused her grief and pain. On our second interview, she felt less sure about the connection between two women. Her first break-up now felt a long way in the past, and she had no longer felt any particular emotional reaction to the painting. On our third interview, Yang suddenly realized that the two women represented two sides of the same person. She interpreted that the one on the left had tried to staunch her unpleasant feelings with a hemostat, a surgical tool used to control bleeding, while the one on the right was not willing to let go of the source of pain by clinging to a picture of her lover. Ultimately, Yang did not really enjoy Frida's choice and confidently concluded that she had done a better job of overcoming her past relationship than Frida. Yang believed that taking good care of oneself is important—a belief that, at the time of our interview, she was

prioritizing in order to move on from the peaceful dissolution of her second intimate relationship.

Yang's different interpretations of *Two Fridas* is an illustration of how participants made connections between paintings and their own daily lives or experiences. Clearly, there is a relationship between what we see, what we feel, and what we associate with over time. Sometimes, paintings even seemed to talk to participants. In another of Yang's response, she mentioned her previous experience of viewing a painting of melting snow and finding that it soothed her during a difficult moment in her relationship with her mother:

> *I sat in front of that painting and stayed there for a long long time. I felt the same way as the painting. I mean, in that moment, the way I felt, my whole mood, was the same as the feeling the painting was provoking in me. So, I understood why I liked this painting so much – it was because I needed it. I needed a painting to express my mood at that moment. That was my state of mind. (Yang)*

When participants viewed paintings containing female figures, they found that the paintings spoke to specific moments in their lives. Which is to say that each painting spoke to a particular mood, in a particular moment, for each participant. Perhaps a moment when a participant was in need, or a moment they wanted to remember, or a moment in which they had connected or disconnected with someone or something. Viewing paintings is a time when what we feel is expressed by what we see; what we see is informed by what we associate with; what we associate with is remembered by what we see. This is echoed in a statement by Parson (1987): "there is no one painting touching on all our questions about art, but each painting makes us think about some issues and about others" (p. 39).

7-3 Participants make sense of paintings by feeling a process of changing and searching

7-3-1 The experience of viewing paintings that contain female figures is about the process of changing and searching, from an expected self to a true self

We spend our whole lives trying to figure out who we really are. The process of experiencing paintings with female figures sometimes reflects such a desire. From the moment we are born, conventional standards and social morality tend to mold us, directly and indirectly, according to their expectations, constructing a so-called expected self. Meanwhile, what we might consider our "true self" grows increasingly hidden. Discovering our true self means becoming aware of what really makes us happy and what does or does not feel good about ourselves. It is a process of self-realization and self-discovery. The experience of interpreting paintings could be understood as a transitional process of looking for a concept of self, changing from an expected self to a true self.

This experience is also a learning process, during which we see and empathize with ourselves and others from various perspectives. During our interviews, some participants grouped several painting images together, constructing a kind of timeline of changes or growth. For example, Guo described viewing paintings as a way for her to spend time and have conversations with herself. For her, making sense of paintings was akin to a process of finding herself. While viewing and interpreting paintings, she told me that she asked herself a series of questions:

> I've been wondering... what kind of person will we be? What kind of person will we be in other people's eyes? And then... when we reach a certain age, what kind of person are we supposed to be? Have we become who we really want to be? (Guo)

With these kinds of thoughts in mind, Guo interpreted Georgia O'Keeffe's blue sky and skull paintings as representative of birth and growing older, respectively. Guo talked about how, when we are born, we are pure; we know no fear. As adults, after searching our positions in the world, identifying our looks, and exploring the distance between ourselves and others, we realize that returning to that infantile state of being might be one way to free ourselves from the judgement of others. It seemed clear that, for my participants, the experience of interpreting paintings that contained female figures often mimicked the process of growing up, their line of questioning tending to evolve from "Who was I expected to be?", "Who am I really?" to "Who do I want to be?". Viewing was therefore experienced as a process of growth, in which participants grappled with the tensions between their true selves and their idealized selves, as well as with the distance between their reflective selves and imagined selves.

Another example. When Lui saw Egon Schiele 's paintings at two different points in her life, and the way she experienced them each time was influenced by her realization of her own sexual identity. Lived time shaped how she experienced both the paintings and the painter. Lui told me:

> *When I went to the Egon Schiele 's Museum, I felt a connection with a younger self after seeing his artworks. I was very shocked when I saw his paintings for the first time. They were all female private parts ... Later on, when I was older, I found out that Ah! I was a lesbian and his painting were no longer shocking at all. Instead, I felt very tender towards his paintings...I came to know more about him, including that he died at an early age. After more than ten years passing, I saw Schiele's works for the second time. It was a very different experience from the first time. The paintings were the same, but my feelings were different. The first time I was shocked but the second time I was not. For the second time I felt very very soft. (Lui)*

This theme somehow talks to the forming process of lesbian identity. According to McCarn and Fassinger (1996), lesbian identity is often developed at both personal and group levels, which usually contains the process of being aware, exploring, committing, and internalizing. It is uncertain if lesbians go through each stage by sequence or not, but this process does require a woman to acknowledge her difference and is willing to explore her inner feeling for another woman (Chow & Cheng, 2010). Before naming and accepting her sexual orientation as a lesbian, individuals often have to get involved with heterosexual practices (McCarn & Fassinger, 1996). This might explain why and how my participants experience the process of changing and searching while viewing paintings containing female figures.

7-4 Participants make sense of paintings by feeling them to their own sense of self

Van Manen (2016a) writes that "the etymological meaning of relation includes reference to what people return to" (p. 303). This existential theme directs our attention to how lived relation of self-others is experienced with regard to the phenomenon under study—that of how Taiwanese lesbians experience viewing female figures in paintings.

7-4-1 Viewing paintings that contain female figures is like viewing oneself in a mirror—in our reflection, we see who we are, who we were, and who we might one day be

Relation with paintings

When talking about their relationship with paintings, most of my participants said that they enjoyed paintings but had a realization at a young age that they had no talent for it. Fang remembered loving to paint as a child. As she grew up, she found herself "[*keeping] some*

distance with paintings but trying to establish another relationship in other ways." Gradually, she found her focus shift from creating paintings to appreciating them as a viewer. Only a few participants expressed any kind of confidence in their painting skills. Some mentioned colouring-in or copying images in a realistic style, for what Lui described "a sense of accomplishment." In these cases, the intention was to enjoy the process rather than to serve any kind of commercial end. Additionally, most participants considered paintings to be important but felt somewhat distanced from them, due to a lack of contact. Lui made an interesting analogy at her relationship with paintings: "*It is just like you might go worshiping when passing by the temples, but you will not go every day…. It is not the part that I pursue with a purpose. It is important, but not deliberately important.*" Most participants felt similarly: Paintings were a part of their daily lives, to lesser or greater extents, but were relegated to the category of leisure time or hobbies. However, certain comments stood out, suggesting the bond was sometimes deeper than this:

> *If I cannot make any paintings one day, I will feel sad. (Li)*
>
> *I have no way to point out specifically when I become familiar with paintings…. but she never leaves. (Zhang)*
>
> *It is only until the moment that you like a painting and then you feel fulfilled by her completely." (Lui)*

In these comments, paintings are clearly significant, even if they have not necessarily seemed so in the first instance. Paintings are ordinary and quiet; it seems that these participants did not pay much attention to them until the specific moment when they were in need. In this sense, paintings have given them a sense of fulfillment, which they would not have been able to achieve without the painting.

Exploration and discovery leading to self-understanding

Compared with other art media, paintings can be relatively hard to understand. The bar for creating and understanding paintings is often higher than for other art forms. Through continuously reflecting back and forth between a viewer and a particular painting, the participants were viewing and searching for meanings. They were often drawn to reflect on the images and stories in the painting that resonated with experiences they themselves had had. Essentially, viewing paintings is like viewing ourselves in a mirror. No matter what we might think we are looking at, we end up looking at ourselves.

In the Middle Ages in Europe, mirrors were used for divination; a mirror was a place for fortune tellers to see into the future, and for other people to contact the dead and ghosts (Ridley, 2012). In terms of human development, the ability to recognize oneself in a mirror corresponds to self-awareness and the development of other features, such as "art, creativity, philosophy, story-telling, the appreciation of beauty, and a sense of humor" (Pendergrast, 2009, p. 10). Hence, the mirror can serve as a visual bridge, linking a viewer to their lived time as well as to themselves and others. After all, the experience of viewing and interpreting paintings is also an experience of exploration, reflection, and discovery, which leads to a place of self-understanding. Both Xia and Yang realize the invisible sides of themselves through the reflective experience of viewing paintings. Xia had been searching the source of her negative feelings, while Yang had been questioning her sexual orientation.

> *I do not remember which paintings but what I connected with were very negative. I tried to ask myself what was going on. I thought maybe I was in a bad place back then, but it turns out that I had not been in a great mood either. I started to think of what made me become like this... After some soul-searching, I realized what it was – I had a secret! I did not even know that I had one ~ so abstract!!! (Xia)*

I think it was the time for self-exploration. I was not very sure about myself ... I mean my sexual orientation ... What kind of person am I? Am I weird if I become this kind of sexual orientation? When I saw this painting, I actually had a guess in my mind, in my inner world. Is this a good friendship between friends? or is it a partnership? When I was thinking of these questions, I knew myself. (Yang)

Reflections of viewers' past, present, and future

According to Heidegger, our experience of the world takes place "within a horizon of past, present, and future" (Smith, 1991, p. 33). Van Manen (2016b) also comments, "the temporal dimension of past, current, and future constitute the horizon of a person's temporal landscape" (p.104). Both mean that understanding something we encounter as new or unknown is made possible through the pre-understanding of what was already in us through past experience (Smith, 1991). This mirror-like experience of linking past, present, and future, known and unknown, is also true of the experience of viewing and making sense of paintings that contain female figures.

While viewing Renoir's *Girls at the Piano* (1892), Fei connected an unpleasant memory: a strong fear of piano practice as a child, accompanied by a resistance to participate in music competitions. Guo interpreted the two women in Marie Laurencin's *The Kiss* (1927) as a speaker and a listener; this was a reflection of her current life situation, in which she feels tired of her passive role in both her family and close relationships, as the person always in the position of accepting and receiving. In Matisse's *The Red Room* (1908), Zhang saw a woman waiting for her future partner to come home and enjoy a dinner with her in the painting, even though she was aware of that her interpretation differed from what she knew about the painting

or what Matisse originally intended to express. For my participants, viewing paintings was a way of seeing moments from their own histories. When the images they saw in the paintings clicked with their own lived experiences, they felt echoed; when the images they saw did not click in this way, the viewing experience remained superficial, merely a visual pleasure— "water under the bridge" as Xi put it.

7-5 Participants make sense of paintings by relating to the women depicted inside them

7-5-1 Viewing paintings that contain female figures makes participants talk more, unexpectedly revealing their intimate relationships or secret stories

Viewing paintings seemed to make it easier for participants to talk and open up about their lives. They felt more relaxed when talking about paintings. During the relatively short periods of time that we were in conversation, participants grew comfortable enough to disclose intimate details about their lives. As a lesbian myself, I was an insider to this community, and I feel this helped establish a sense of security and trust between me and my interviewees; it also helped me notice unintentional or subconscious signals given by participants. The significance of my being insider in this way was addressed directly by Zhang, who said: "*If the interviewer is probably not someone who shares the same life experience as me, these sentences might be difficult for me to express.*"

Participants tended to disclosure their lifeworld through answering my questions responsively and sometimes unexpectedly. While looking at and interpreting paintings, they would usually pause, recall, and then talk. Sometimes they seemed to become someone else, talking about someone else's stories relative to the images at hand. They shared their experiences of going

through a breakup, having a crush on someone, suffering domestic violence, arguing with mothers, receiving chemotherapy, and so on. I, the lesbian researcher, and they, the lesbian participants, in conjunction with the female figures in the paintings—we all co-created a unique environment to accommodate our private conversations together. I felt as though I was walking into their private rooms and then listening to their murmurs softly and closely. In many cases, participants might have been unaware of it themselves, or else have never revealed these bitter-and-sweet memories to anyone else; in their silent way, paintings were helping me to access these parts of my participants' experiences.

For example, Fang was not aware of her confession of love until I reminded her during our conversation about Chang-Yu's *Four Nudes* (n.d.):

Fang: *For me, she might be a special person in the painting; she is someone I really care about, but we do not have a direct connection in the real life.*

I: *A specific person?*

Fang: *Yes.*

I: *So, these four girls remind you of someone?*

Fang: *Yes.*

I: *Is she a girl?*

Fang: *Yes.*

I: *Do you know her?*

Fang: *Yes.*

I: *You usually do not contact each other?*

Fang: *Because we are not ...and then there is an age gap.*

I: *Why do you think of her?*

Fang:　　Just intuition…., um

I:　　What is your relationship …?

Fang:　　Kind of…a special friend.

I:　　Does she look like the female figure in the paining?

Fang:　　No. She is a person who seeks a peaceful life.

I:　　Similar as you?

Fang:　　Maybe…a little bit.

I:　　Do you like her? If you don't mind….

Fang:　　Yes, hahahahahaha (laughing shyly). I really want to talk with a mask on (blush).

I:　　Can I count this as a crush?

Fang:　　I guess so...we contact each other but no routine messages, such as greeting about eating or sleeping every day…Yes, I am not sure about our relationship … I know that she does care about me, because she will send a long text message to reply to me.

I:　　Hence, this painting reminds of someone whom you like?

Fang:　　YES.

Through reflectively conversing with me, participants not only re-portrayed and re-defined their relationship with paintings but also with the people in the associations the paintings evoked. In this case, they are Fang and the girl she likes. The power of language, carried through our conversations, offered participants a new way of re-discovering and re-positioning themselves in relation to others. Bao shared her experience of connecting with her grandmother through talking about paintings:

When I said something related to my grandmother, you know… It was like, after talking to you on that day, it turned out that this is what she was like in my mind…even though I had never thought about her like this way. For example, I usually do not think of how important this cup is to me. It is just a cup. I accidentally discovered such a different thought and feeling.

It happened quite often that a participant would be reminded of a close partners or female family members while viewing or interpreting a painting that contained female figures. First of all, as women, they found it easier to connect with women they saw in paintings. Secondly, they often made links to women with whom they had spent significant amounts of time, either recently or in the past. The chance of a participant mentioning previous partners or girlfriends was high.

7-5-2 Participants enjoy seeing the invisible relation between women when viewing paintings containing female figures

Something between women

Participants seemed to adore seeing something that suggested an interaction, or relationship of some kind, between women in paintings, precisely because of the many possible interpretations. As Yang put it, "*girls' thoughts are more detailed, whether it is with the family members, partners, or with her friends ... these are very subtle, and you can always find something in paintings*." Yang did not really elaborate on what she meant by "something" but it might be useful to turn to the dictionary. It reminds us that "something" may be defined as "some indeterminate or unspecified things" (Oxford University Press, n.d.). Merleau-Ponty also observes that, "the appearance of 'something' requires both this presence and this absence" (1964, p. 16). In Gilles Deleuze's (1981/2003) book about Francis Bacon, he mentions that the

main purpose of painting is the action and expression of invisible forces rather than the visible world. Thus, when there is "something" going on between women we see in paintings, we may interpret it as some unknown, unspecified, and indeterminate relationships, which could be shown through something present or not present. Accordingly, the relationship between women in paintings is sensitive, delicate, or even invisible because paintings never promise a certain answer.

Seeing something in nothing

While viewing Renoir's *Girls at the Piano* (1892), Lin primarily focused on something that was not there, a kind of non-figure: The space around and in-between the two young women are the subject of the painting.

> *The distance between her body position and this standing girl forms a triangle area. The key point is here. I can feel the intimacy expressed in this painting because of the distance between this sitting and the standing girls. It is a very obvious theme. When looking at a painting, we usually see the front ground as the focus. However, I think the person in the back is the key point, because her body gesture forms the strongest relationship in the whole painting.*

Phenomenology encourages researchers to search for presence and absence, parts and whole, which constitute the essence of our lived experience. For Lin, the message communicated through the space between figures was more attractive than anything immediately visible. She could sense tension and intimacy from the space constructed by two female bodies. For her, it was tangible and interactive. Many of the possible connections between women in paintings might not be obvious or distinct, but they were nevertheless observed or fantasized by lesbian participants who noticed the depiction of eye contacts, body gestures or, as in Lin's case, surrounding space.

Take another example. Lui detected a dynamic exchange of eye contacts through the lighting design and composition of a panting, *Olympia* (1863) which implicated both the people inside and outside the frame.

> *This maid, she is watching Olympia, but Olympia is watching me. The right half of the painting is about the maid while the left half is about Olympia. The right side is darker. I can feel that the maid is watching her secretly; the left half is brighter, and I can feel that Olympia is watching me openly. So, I think that the maid is looking at the lady from a peeping perspective. It maybe because Olympia is very confident. She has some aura, so the maid looks at her with fear. (Lui)*

Through these kinds of physical suggestions, participants were able to intuit the relationships and personalities of painted figures in an insightful, detailed way. Some decided on a figure's psychological states by observing their facial expressions, while others detected social status from outfits, flows of desires from eye contacts, or gender expression through their makeups, and so on. Essentially, participants created narratives that made sense according to their own internal sense of logic—they were seeing something *in* nothing, which is another way of saying that they were making nothing *become* something. Nothing does not literally mean a total absence of something. Nothing connotes subtle, indirect, implicit, or unnoticeable things that cannot be perceived immediately or directly. Paintings are always open for interpretation because nothing about them is truly concrete or confirmative. Paintings are by nature ambiguous and indeterminate, which provides viewers with a stage onto which to perform their own stories.

7-6 Participants make sense of paintings by relating them to wider society

7-6-1 Participants can easily sense a power imbalance in relationship or social classes when viewing paintings containing female figures

The following description is how Xi observed Manet's *Olympia* (1863):

> *Clothing shows the difference in social status. There's the contrast of race, because black people were slaves in the past. However, you see, she can look directly at this person, so the painter gives her the power to look at this woman. (Xi)*

Xi perceived an imbalance of social status in the painting, as well as a difference in race. She was far from an exception. Most participants were sensitive to the suggestion of imbalance, or inequality, especially in the context of gender, race, or social status. Most of them quickly pointed out these issues and were not willing to seem complicit in the oppression. They showed sympathy and understanding for those who seemed to be ignored, rejected, working class, or otherwise subjected to unequal treatment in the society. In response to Sadie Lee's *Raging Bull* (1992), Bao said:

> *The emotion that this painting gives me is that I feel a little sad… This society does not accept her, so she is angry. I think she is very tangled in her inner world, because she knows that there is no way to be recognized by this society. However, she really wants to be true to herself… I had that period of time before. It is a feeling of being unrecognized. (Bao)*

At the same time, many participants preferred to view female figures as equals rather than as offering services or being involved with in interest exchanges. Bao chose to understand Delacroix's *Liberty Leading the People* (1830) as a depiction of a woman taking the lead: "*The right she is fighting for is very common, but it takes her lots of efforts to make it.*" On the other hand, she also comprehends the mindset of feeling confused and deprived from a male perspective:

In our stereotype, men are superior to women. When a woman has this power, he looks at her with confusion ... Meanwhile, she is taller than him and occupies the largest space in this painting. Why does she have such a power? He is scared, because he is not used to having a female leader. Their relationship ... is a hostile relationship. I think their status is quite different ... What they are fighting for is not only women 's sovereignty, but also other things. (Bao)

It was intriguing to see how participants determined power dynamics between figures in paintings. Their interpretations tended to be expansive and nuanced, rather than black and white. Furthermore, they were willing to pay more attention on particular issues addressed by exhibitions or paintings, such as women's rights, gender equality, or social justice. Interestingly, a participant's perception of power imbalance also seemed to inform their preferences for specific styles or genres of paintings. Fang, for example, was not interested in photorealistic paintings because they require a high level of professional techniques. She saw this requirement as a kind of elitist "attack," which deliberately distances a painting from its viewers. Tong, on the other hand, had similar thoughts about abstract paintings, considering them so illusional that not everyone can understand and enter them, which might also feel like a gesture of rejecting communication with the untrained viewers.

Of my twenty participants, more than half expressed a dislike for abstract paintings. Many admitted to difficulties reading or interpreting this kind of style. Participants who worked in the arts or who had received art training, on the other hand, expressed appreciation for the beauty of its formal elements. Several studies also prove that non-experts tend to prefer representative paintings over than abstract ones (Belke, Leder, & Augustin, 2006; O'Hare & Gordon, 1977). Although this is somewhat in contrast Greenberg's (1948/1961) proposals that the "all-over" feature of abstract paintings might exhaust and invalidate all hierarchical

distinctions so that "no area or order of experience is intrinsically superior" (1948/1961, p. 157). Nevertheless, my Taiwanese lesbian participants seemed to side more with the former opinion, expressing that they felt blocked out and excluded from abstract or photorealist paintings, which felt to them like a reinforcement of a broader elitist hierarchy.

7-6-2 Participants care not only about how women are perceived by viewers and other people in paintings, they also notice subtle differences from heterosexual community when viewing and interpreting paintings

Who is watching?

> *Everyone else is wearing clothes, only she has her breast out. When I saw this painting for the first time, my first reaction was like: WTF! Why is only the girl showing her breast? And the painter has even designed a spotlight on here and there, focusing on her significant part. Although she does not stand in the center of the painting, you can see her chest at first glance. This is such a male perspective!! (Xi)*

This was Xi's first reaction to seeing Delacroix's *Liberty Leading the People* (1830)*,* in which a woman is shown leading the French Revolution. A question that participants often raised about the paintings we looked at was: *Who is watching*? In asking this question, they were acknowledging the power of spectatorship, the important relationship of the viewer and the viewed. This became especially relevant when the female figure in question was nude. Participants drew distinctions between nudity for the benefit of others, and nudity that seemed to be for the pleasure of the woman herself. In the first scenario, the priority was of course pleasuring spectators; in the second one, participants spoke of free will and independent thinking. In this latter instance, the women seemed more self-aware, sometimes even making confident eye contact with those who looked upon them.

Awareness of the patriarchal hegemony

Participants were aware of the hegemony of heterosexuality and patriarchy, but even so they knew they could not really escape its impact. As Taiwanese lesbians, they are marginalized for deviating from the mainstream values; accordingly, they do not risk for fighting back or being open about their differences. Many described feeling constantly watched and restricted by "the gaze of the public"— as Xi put it— as well as by their own inner gaze. While viewing a painting depicting a butch woman, Zhang shared how she arms herself with a feminine appearance in order to avoid being hurt by the society:

Zhang: *I think it is a kind of arming. In the course of my life, many things have required me to be armed.*

I: *So, have you ever had such a moment in your life?*

Zhang: *Quite often, it seems... after pretending for a long time. Look at her, if everyone sees her like this every day – I mean, if she is like that for a whole year, who would dare to bully her?*

I: *I do not dare... but I think she might feel tired.*

Zhang: *So, I am very tired...hahahaha (laughter).*

I: *You mean that having big differences between inner and outer world?*

Zhang: *I do not know. Actually, I am really not sure. After all these years of pretending, I'm confused about what's real.*

During our conversations, participants seemed to subconsciously separate themselves from the mainstream, heterosexual world. They were actually aware of the distance between them. It was a distance that they were unable or unwilling to get close. They felt as though they were speaking their own private language, which outsiders would not understand. In Fang's case, she was staunchly against conventional beauty standards, considering anyone who benefits

from them to be boring and uninteresting. Fang explains while viewing Picasso's *The Ladies of Avignon* (1907):

> *Fang:*   *Of the five figures, she's probably the one who most meets the requirements of live drawing. Her figure, her face, and her body all match …what the general imagination of what women should be.*
>
> *I:*   *The most standard beauty?*
>
> *Fang:*   *Yes, … so she can get more job opportunities offered.*
>
> *I:*   *Besides? What kind of person is she?*
>
> *Fang:*   *She is very ordinary (laughing), and there is nothing special or unexpected. Actually, I barely have interaction with these group of women because I do not really like them, although they still appear in my daily life (laughing)….*

Chapter EIGHT: FINDINGS III

How do Taiwanese lesbians feel about female figures in paintings?

8-1 Introduction

After several rounds of phenomenological analysis, my findings relating to how Taiwanese lesbians experience viewing female figures in paintings concentrate predominantly on the dimension of the lived body. Phenomenologist van Manen (2016a) describes the relationship between humans and the world as "corporeal" because "we know the world bodily and through our embodied actions" (p. 128). The implication is that we already know what to do and how to do even before we consciously know it. Meanwhile, Valverde (1985) writes that, "to think and talk about sexuality is first of all to think and talk about bodies" (p. 29). In the following chapter, I present how participants used their bodies to feel paintings that contain female figures. For example, they often expressed preferences for viewing women who appeared to be comfortable and who were physically and spiritually divergent from social norms. My participants were also quick to reach positive, empowered interpretations of these women's actions. All in all, comfort, diversity, and positivity are three themes central to this part of the discussion.

Themes of Finding III, relating to how Taiwanese lesbian participants interpret female figures in paintings

Major Themes	Sub-Themes	Existential Dimensions
Being at ease	The ideal female figure, according to participants, is one who is comfortable with her own body, and acting in accordance with her own interests, for her own sake, without being beautified or objectified	Lived Body
Being diverse	Feeling a sense of diversity is conveyed by participants through the process of viewing and interpreting paintings containing female figures.	Lived Body
Being positive and empowered	Discovering positive messages and emphasizing certain strength of empowerment through bodies is often experienced by participants when viewing paintings containing female figures.	Lived Body

Table 9

8-2 Participants feel that female figures are at ease with their bodies

8-2-1 The ideal female figure, according to participants, is one who is comfortable with her own body, and acting in accordance with her own interests, for her own sake, without being beautified or objectified

Participants' ideal female images

Through discussing their experience of viewing paintings, the participants co-created an outline of their ideal female image. They resisted conventional feminine beauty standards, thereby indirectly shaping their own counter-image of an ideal woman. This woman is not required to look great, perfect, or fabulous according to conventional standards; she does not need to signal traditionally feminine virtues through the way she dresses or holds her body. As Fang commented:

> *I think that it is a human being, regardless of gender. She can present her natural appearance. However, in the kind of world we live in, this idea usually becomes a burden for women. (Fang)*

Li explained why she chose Chang Yu's nude women (n.d.) as her ideal female image thus:

> *They are cozy and comfortable with their nakedness. When I saw them, I felt that they were closest to me. For me, their nudity is not so much a physical state as it is a kind of confession – an admission that they are 'at ease', they are true to themselves. (I said: Disclosure?) Yes, let's say so. It is you. You can stay at your real condition, which makes you feel very comfortable. (Li)*

The state of feeling comfortable

Most participants were not willing to get along with or accept the positive or negative stereotypes that are often applied to women in paintings. Instead, they preferred to see these women as acting of their own volition and being true to themselves. In this reading, a woman in a painting could do anything for their own sake; she might be beautified or objectified, but the implication is that she has consented to it. The *state of feeling comfortable* refers to how such a woman feels about herself, in mind and in body. She feels comfortable physically, meaning that she is relaxed, cozy, and free from pains or danger; she is also comfortable spiritually, meaning that she is at ease, rested, secure, and free from stress or anxiety. For example, Zhang noted on a painting that she chose outside the folder in an interview. She commented that a woman smoking in a painting was a clear announcement and rebellion against traditional feminine values. The woman is doing something that makes her feel comfortable and confident, even though smoking may not be beneficial to her health.

> *I care about this painting. One reason is her eye contact; another one is the courage she holds a cigarette. The courage of holding a cigarette is not necessarily less than the courage of being a Statue of Liberty. It is not about charging and breaking through enemy lines. When she chooses to smoke against the world, and not to care about other people's judgement, I think her self-confidence is much stronger. This self-confidence comes from her inner, the deeper part. When she holds a cigarette, she poses a gesture like: This is what I look like. Accept it! (Zhang)*

8-3 Participants feel that the female figures are diverse

8-3-1 Feeling a sense of diversity is conveyed by participants through the process of viewing and interpreting paintings with female figures.

What does diversity mean?

When viewing and experiencing paintings containing female figures, participants often mentioned the kind of female images constructed by traditional or mainstream social values. These women are usually soft, passive, obedient, considerate, feminine, etc. They usually adhere to rigid gender roles, binary sexual identities, and a singular standard of physical attractiveness. This kind of image, as my participants pointed out, potentially risks curtailing freedom of exploration, reinforcing fixed gender stereotypes, and silencing non-mainstream communities. Rather than accepting the portrayal of homogenous, heteronormative images, my participants enjoyed seeing women who presented themselves differently; that is, seeing a diverse range of women. In terms of what exactly "diversity" meant for my participants, their response was often informative:

> *It might be beyond what you imagine ... she can be uneven; she can be ugly; she can be unreal. …. It does not have to be this way and still becomes a good-looking body. None of their facial features are particularly "good-looking." It is a little bit weird to say so, but I cannot think of other terms. It means that the women who are unusual and do not conform the popular aesthetics of beauty. For example, she is not sitting in a modest way. (Fang)*

> *I like the idea of diversity. There is no need to be the same completely…. You can express your anger, discomfort, or anything. You can just give a try. (Eva)*

There are many possibilities in this painting. I mean…you can think whatever you want. If you think he is a man, he can be a man…. It can be a female breasts or male chests. You cannot think of anything to refuse it. Having long hairs does not mean that she is a woman…. There is more room for interpretation. (Yang)

Diversity means inclusion, acceptance, and embracing others

For Fang, Eva, and Yang, "diversity" means that something is different, outside the popular standard; diversity might refer to something imperfect or experimental, or something open to interpretation, giving various viewers equal opportunities to have their voices heard. What they were describing in the excerpts above was something atypical: a type not representative of the typical female presentation in paintings. Atypicality is something that potentially steps outside the traditional frameworks. It follows that diversity means a range of different things, values, or people being included, accepted, and embraced. It is a state of involving different values, contrasting units, or ambiguous content. When talking about her perception of a butch woman painted by Sadie Lee, Li acknowledged her appreciation for this kind of contrast:

Originally, when seeing her face, I thought she must be a biological woman. But then I saw her body, and she is way too strong. It is a state that breaks your thinking, a contrast… I kind of like this. It is a little surprising. There is no way to make assumptions and intuitive connections. You will be interrupted by this contrast and that thing surprises me a little, but I really like this feeling of contrasting and mixing. (Li)

The first thing I notice is the composition of their bodies. I enjoy seeing smooth and sharp lines at the same time. Their bodies seem very open ….at first glance they seem like girls…. but it does not mean they are necessary women. (Li)

For my participants, masculinity and femininity were not generally interpreted as two mutually exclusive states at opposite ends of an axis; instead, participants viewed them as scattered spots that a person could possess simultaneously or transitionally. In the meantime, participants were keen to avoid emulating mainstream society, and resisted giving in to stereotypical categorizations. As Bao noted during our second interview:

> *She is an unusual woman. The muscles on her both arms are giant, and her sex characteristics are not obvious…. If wearing make-up represents women, this becomes a stereotype for women…. So, I am wondering if she might be a "he"? Or a transgender woman? A transgender man? (Bao)*

A preference for unusual bodies

The female bodies that participants selected to interpret were usually unusual, abnormal, or even in chaos and participants seemed to enjoy being presented with these inconsistent, unbalanced, and hybrid conditions, which could not be defined by a single aesthetic standard. For instance, all participants described that Frida Kahlo's *Two Fridas* (1939) as unpleasant and hard to understand. Nevertheless, this painting still received the most attention and responses throughout our three rounds of interviews. Participants liked to see female bodies that were in some way ambiguous, undefined, or non-binary. I noticed that during discussions of these unusual bodies participants usually open up, empathizing with the women in paintings and exploring their feelings in a comparative way.

> *I like something having exaggerated proportions, or some bodies being folded in a strange way, just like what artist Egon Schiele did. (Guo)*

The feeling of strangeness actually comes from the way you think. When you feel something strange, it means that she is outside the framework of your thinking. (Li)

The value of diversity

A sense of diversity was also reflected in participants' aesthetic responses. They cared more about the meanings or messages conveyed by paintings than their formal or technical aspects. For example, Xia praised the beauty of Sadie Lee's *Raging Bull* (1992) because it seemed to advocate the value of diversity. She comments that, "*A boy dresses like a girl. This way is very good, so everyone can be true to herself.*" Yang expressed a similar feeling in relation to a Picasso painting. She did not pay much attention to Picasso's technique but appreciated "*that kind of disharmony but it does not make you feel uncomfortable…. a kind of abstract beauty, projecting the possibility of diversity.*"

8-4 Participants feel that the female figures are positive and empowered

8-4-1 Discovering positive messages and emphasizing certain strength of empowerment through bodies is often experienced by participants when viewing paintings containing female figures

Discovering positive messages

During our interview, it was common for participants to recognize or discover a positive message for the female figures in paintings. Participants tended to read images in an optimistic, favorable, or desirable way, even when the images were presented in negative contexts. Bao said:

> *Although this painting is darker and there are some corpses laying here, I feel a little happy. The reason is that witnessing someone standing up for themselves, especially a woman, is always nice.*

This is to say that participants might be good at seeing the positives in any given situation. Take Sadie Lee's painting, *Raging Bull* (1992), for example. Most participants described the figure depicted in the painting as a brutal butch woman, a mixture of femininity and masculinity. They described her as tough, fierce, and defensive but at the same time reliable; she is frowning, staring at viewers with her arms crossed over her chest, perhaps in an attempt to protect someone she really cares about. The tension between her womanish face and muscle-bound body creates a sense of distance, representing the conflict between her and society. As another example, when talking about Picasso's *The Ladies of Avignon* (1907), participants did not perceive this group of nude figures as vulnerable or intended to be seductive for the male gaze. Instead, participants interpreted them variously as brave warriors, as transgender women, or as life models striving to make a living. When discussing *Two Fridas* (1939), Wu felt a warmth between the two female figures:

> *You know there is still a support, a connection, a mutual understanding, a feeling of not being able to give up. I am not alone. I still feel the support. Even if it hurts, there is still a self who accompanies me. She is in the middle of the painting, and her hand gesture has so many meanings. It includes one touch, one connection, one companionship, one comprehension…all coexisting peacefully. Many of them are tied together. I want to stop bleeding .... so, blood no longer flows out of my heart. There will be some injuries coming from the past, which is a consumption. If you can stop bleeding, you can keep the blood and the energy inside your body. (Wu)*

Empowering through bodies

This phenomenon of discovering positive messages in paintings happened most often when the women in the paintings did not conform to the traditional ideas of femininity. It seemed to me that this was a kind of performance of positivity on the part of participants, and that it suggested a certain strength of empowerment. When "empowering" is used in the context of women's empowerment, it denotes that women have been granted the authority or power to do something; that they are entitled to claim their rights and be in charge of their own lives (Oxford University Press, n.d.; Online Etymology Dictionary, n.d.). It is also a process through which women become strong, confident, and independent. All these patterns can be identified in the conversations with participants now and then. In fact, the experience of viewing and interpreting paintings empowered both participants and the female figures in the paintings. Participants were given the power to interpret paintings, to speak for both the figures and themselves. They were more confident of talking about paintings after our first interview. They started to understand themselves, shifting from a puzzlement to understanding. With regard to the physicality of the bodies present in the paintings we looked at, participants were always positive—whether they were the owner or spectator of female bodies and regardless of whether the body in question was dressed or nude. When asked which role they saw themselves playing in relation to a scene in a painting, they tended to identify with figures they saw as having leadership skills or who seemed to be in charge of their own lives or initiating social change. Xia's interpretation of the body language present in *Two Fridas* (1939) empowered both Xia herself and Frida Kahlo:

> Xia: *There is a wall between you and her. You cannot touch her, but her*
>
>   *side is actually very warm and cozy; there's no malice there, although*
>
>   *maybe she acts a bit aggressive….*
>
> I: *Which figure is close to you?*

Xia:	*The left one, because she is holding scissors, pressing her hands ...I am personally good at this role, comforting others or stabilizing myself.*
	What do scissors represent?
I:	*It represents the attitude of facing difficulties.*
Xia:	*So, are you the person who faces problems directly?*
I:	*Yes.*
Xia:	*No escaping?*
I:	*No, there is still a problem to be solved.*
Xia:	*Does the painting remind of you anything?*
I:	*I will connect with my mother and myself. Both of us belong to this*
Xia:	*role, who need to break through, stabilize, and face difficulties (hahahahaaaa, laughs).*
	How about the other side?
I:	*It is another self who is at a loss. When facing difficulties, we have to*
Xia:	*solve them; if it could be avoided, I would also want to escape from it because it is such a hassle. However, the problem is that you cannot avoid it. So, just face the problem.*

To my surprise, most participants were highly articulated and capable of decoding paintings that contained female figures. They were able to break through initial barriers of ambiguity and complexity.

Chapter NINE: DISCUSSION

9-1 Introduction

This phenomenological study examined Taiwanese lesbians' previous experiences of viewing paintings and their experiences viewing images paintings specifically containing female figures by Taiwanese lesbians. Three findings, spanning twelve major themes, emerged regarding how this group of participants felt and reacted to the aforementioned paintings (Table 6). My results correspond three research questions. They are:

Finding One: How do Taiwanese lesbians experience paintings?

Finding Two: How do Taiwanese lesbians interpret and make sense of paintings

containing female figures?

Finding Three: How do Taiwanese lesbians feel about female figures in paintings?

The following discussion of my findings is through a highlight of each finding chapter, followed by a contextualization of the highlight in relation to literature regarding aesthetic reactions and lesbian studies. The social and cultural context of Taiwan is also discussed.

9-2 Discussion of Finding One: How do Taiwanese lesbians feel and experience paintings?

9-2-1 The current study shares some similarities with existing studies

When participants were recalling their most memorial experiences of paintings, most of their described encounters had taken place in museums or galleries. The aesthetic reaction of museum visitors is a topic that has been explored in many previous studies; therefore, there is some overlap between these studies and themes in my research, such as the issue of spatiality,

temporality, and corporeality in relation to both art-world professionals and non-art professional participants (Csikszentmihalyi &Robinson, 1990; Falk & Dierking, 1992/2016; Joy & Sherry, 2003; Rubiales, 2014; Tam, 2010). The phenomena of valuing being in the presence of original paintings, emphasizing the interaction of viewers with the exhibition space, building conversations with painters, and finding a quiet place for pause are all mentioned in both this study and pre-existing ones.

9-2-2 Porous bodies prefer to experience original paintings on site

In Tam's (2010) study, his non-art professional viewers prefer to visit museums alone and view original paintings rather than reproductions; they see paintings as an expressive representation of a painter's personality, emotion, and experience. Rubiales (2014) states that the aesthetic experience is remembered with high intensity only when individuals view the original painting and build a connection with it. She regards the act of viewing original works as a ritual or channel of paying homage to their creators. In terms of exhibiting space, Joy and Sherry (2003) see it as fluid while visitors' bodies are "porous and permeable, taking in light, images, and touch" (p. 274). For Falk and Dierking (1992/2016), the memory of having experienced artworks at museums is strongly influenced by their physical context, including "the architecture, ambience, smell, sounds, and the 'feel' of the place" (p. 147). As stated above, it is clear that viewing paintings in person at a site-specific location strongly influences the way participants feel about paintings, resulting in rich, impressive, and memorable viewing experiences (Brieber, Nadal, Leder, & Rosenberg, 2014; Locher, Smith, & Smith, 2001; Specker, Tinio, & van Elk, 2017).

9-2-3 Contextualized time improves the experience of viewing paintings

In my study, participants tended to feel time as contextualized, positioning paintings within a particular timeline—of the world, of the artist, or their own life. They connected a painting to things that they had seen, known, and thought, either in the past or at the moment of viewing, and through this began to build a meaningful narrative around it. In a recent study, Falk and Dierking (1992/2016) also found that interviewees consistently recalled their viewing memories in both a temporal and geographical context. The perception of viewing paintings also depends on intention and context (Lagerspetz, 2016). Similarly to what Csikszentmihalyi and Robinson (1990) found in their research, some of my participants saw historical context as essential; while others considered it as an obstacle. Participants with more extensive experiences of viewing paintings tended to avoid reading information or labels about paintings in advance. Nevertheless, they all agreed that understanding paintings from historical, art historical, or biographical aspects is generally beneficial and helpful.

When participants were asked to pick their favorite styles or artists, the same style and names came up repeatedly: Impressionism, Surrealism, Salvador Dali, Vincent van Gogh, and Pablo Picasso. These artists are respected, well-known name in Taiwan, which frequently appear in the context of mass media, public exhibitions, or school art classes. As stated in previous chapters, Western art has featured prominently in Taiwanese classrooms since the Japanese colonial period, when it was imported as part of the Japanese education system. Regardless of the changing trends in art education, the appreciation of Western masters has been consistently taught in Taiwanese art classes. Impressionist and post-impressionist paintings are of course renowned around the world, and Asia is no exception in this regard.

9-2-4 Emotional response is the salient feature among other aesthetic perception

Among the various forms of aesthetic perception, the participants were most responsive to the discussions of their emotional reactions. Emotional response as a salient feature of aesthetic perception has been widely discussed (Csikszentmihalyi &Robinson, 1990; Leder, et al, 2012; Martin & Leder, 2018; Roald, 2008; Starr, 2020; Tam, 2010). This suggests that feeling connected to the emotional content of paintings, or having personal associations invoked by paintings is a significant part of viewing paintings and a reaction commonly shared by viewers regardless of their sex, sexual orientation, professional trainings, or education backgrounds. As discussed above, similar discoveries have been made in correlative studies. In terms of what it feels like to view paintings as a lesbian in a general sense, it seems that there are not too many differences between non-lesbian and lesbian viewers. Overall, most human beings share a similar, reflective way of feeling and understanding paintings, notably through contextualizing them in terms of space, time, and body.

9-3 Discussion of Finding Two: How do Taiwanese lesbians make sense of paintings containing female figures?

In this exploration of the phenomenon of how lesbians make sense of female figures in paintings, lived time and lived relations are prominent themes. They refer to the specific way Taiwanese lesbians experience paintings in the context of their own personal timelines and relationships. According to several studies (Falk & Dierking, 1992/2016; Malott, 2018; Mechner, 2017; Starr, 2020; Tam, 2006), aesthetic response is affected by two main factors: social or cultural context, and the individual history of a viewer. Most viewers tend to derive meanings based on their previous knowledge, experience, and beliefs; this is especially the case for non-art specialists. More precisely, Malott (2018), in writing about viewers responding to American figure paintings from the 19th and 20th centuries, states that a viewer's aesthetic reactions will be influenced by their knowledge, personal connections to the figures, emotional history, and associated cultural factors. In a similar manner, the meaning Taiwanese lesbians derive from paintings can be said to be generated by a process of self-searching, building relationships, and assessing social positions. Viewing and talking about paintings that contain female figures is a way for a Taiwanese lesbian to contextualize and affirm her identity—as a lesbian, a partner, a daughter, a sister or simply a woman living in the specific social-cultural context of Taiwan.

9-3-1 Understanding paintings is an on-going process of finding oneself

Both art education theorists Michael Parsons (1994) and Abigail Housen (2002) reason that the process of understanding paintings is on-going and long-lasting throughout the lifetime of viewers. Housen (2002) says:

Each new viewing of a work of art is a new episode, an invitation to begin the spiral of meaning making all over again. With each new moment of noticing, the work invites the viewer deeper into its world. With each step, new connections are made, the learner grasps more and is drawn another step forward in understanding (p. 122).

Since life experience is such a crucial element to how viewers interpret paintings, can we discover any shared life experience among the Taiwanese lesbians who participate in this study? A thorough survey of the past twenty years of studies relating to lesbians in Taiwan, as collected on the database of National Digital Library of Theses and Dissertation in Taiwan, reveals that issues of sexual identity, disclosure of sexual orientation, and relationships with family and intimate partners almost makes up the whole picture of the existing scholarship relating to Taiwanese lesbians. From these studies, we can understand that, while Taiwanese lesbians might have varying levels of knowledge and feelings about paintings, they indeed share common life experiences, such as encountering homophobia and stigmatization. While viewing paintings, the process of shifting from questioning oneself to finding something within paintings that confirmed some elements relating to their identity was noticed.

9-3-2 Connecting with other women is a significant part of viewing paintings

"Through my relation to 'things' that I know myself," remarked by Merleau-Ponty (1945/2005, p. 445). A lesbian begins to realize her relation to "things"—her difference—when encountering other women to whom she feels attracted. There is always a vivid "her," mirroring the deepest desire and love of a lesbian (Chiu, 2005). Through connecting with others, lesbians understand themselves better. In Shieh's (2016) study, she discovers that lesbians tend to be more emotionally entangled and emphasize maintaining a "pure" intimate relationship with a high degree of devotion due to their mutual social experience of being a woman. "The desire

for a close emotional connection seems to be the primary mark of lesbian relationships" (Burch, 1997, p. 93). Giddens (1992) and Shieh (2010) also mention that the close relationship of lesbians easily falls into a difficult position of double vulnerability created by the heterosexual hegemony and patriarchal system. These studies might explain why the lesbians I interviewed for this study often touched on the topics of close relationships and female connections when viewing female figures shown in the paintings. Therefore, for lesbian viewers, connecting and building relations with other women is a significant part of viewing paintings and making sense of female figures within them.

9-3-3 Lesbians are sensitive to hierarchical structures

Participants in previous studies relating to gay men and lesbians have talked about the idea of heightened sensitivity and empathy (Brunner & deLeon, 2013; Fraynd & Capper, 2003; Griffin, 1992). This phenomenon was also shared by my participants when viewing paintings with female figures. Being empathetic for others means having the ability to understand and identify with the experiences of others. This kind of sensitivity helps people on the margin become more aware of the discriminatory signs, words, actions, and attitudes of heterosexual privileges (Kumashiro, 2000a, 2000b). The feeling of being 'others' gives lesbians not only a better understanding of being marginalized but also a greater sensitivity to detect hierarchical structures. These structures might be the power dynamics between educators and students, parents and children, care-providers, and patients (Duffy, 2011; Kuo, 2020; Nielsen & Alderson, 2014), or, as in this case, those between spectators and female models in the paintings from various studies.

In conclusion, lesbians' lived experience, being bound up with concerns including self-identity, relationships with other women, and the heteronormative patriarchy, is closely and collectively

reflected in their contextual experience of viewing paintings that contain images of female bodies. Essentially, the experience of viewing and deriving meaning from female figures in paintings is a retrospective social experience.

9-4 Discussion of Finding Three: How do Taiwanese lesbians feel about female figures in paintings?

What do Taiwanese lesbians feel when presented with paintings that contain female figures? What common meanings do participants derive from their experiences of viewing and interpreting these female figures? In the following sections, I elaborate on these questions from three bodily perspectives.

9-4-1 The diversified sense of aesthetics

There are two strands to the diversity discussed in this study. One relates to the ability of participants to accept women with unconventional styles or looks to embrace the beauty of nonconformity. The other one is a reluctance to embrace conventional female gender roles. Furnham and Walker's (2001) study shows that a viewer's level of conservatism can be predicted by their painting preferences, as conservative individuals tend to have a greater fear of the new. Conversely, viewers who are less conservative show more appreciation for novel or ambiguous paintings with a high degree of pleasure. I do not assume that all Taiwanese lesbians are non-conservative people; however, the experience of belonging to minority group does result in a higher possibility of challenging one's own pre-conceived notion or sympathizing with others in this study. A similar diversified sense of aesthetics can be noted in lesbians' perceptions of the female body in current study. In several previous studies (Sebasco, 2009; Striegel-Moore, Tucker, & Hsu, 1990), researchers have found that lesbians

tend to be resistant to female beauty as defined by mainstream culture, as well as resistant to overemphasizing the importance of a woman's physical attractiveness. Their conclusion is very much echoed lesbians' visual experience in my own findings. My participants display a greater flexibility to various presentations of both gender and painting styles.

When I asked participants to select paintings for a mock show during our second interview, choices were fairly distributed across the painting images I provided. The exception was the *Mona Lisa* (1503-1519) by Leonardo Da Vinci, which received very little attention. Most participants comment *Mona Lisa* as too common, traditional, or even boring. When I asked them to choose two paintings at random, for further discussion, *The Two Fridas* (1939) and *Raging Bull* (1992) were popular choices. *The Two Fridas* by Frida Kahlo (1939) is chosen a total of ten times by different participants throughout the study. In addition to Kahlo's nontraditional way of portraying women, I believe that the release of the American biopic *Frida* in 2002 has also raised her profile in Taiwan. The film's plot strongly hinted at Kahlo's bisexuality, which did not go unnoticed in the Taiwanese lesbian community. While many participants came to the study unfamiliar with Kahlo's artworks or artistic career, most were aware of her queerness, which constitutes parts of a self-explanatory subculture.

9-4-2 The formation and performance of desire empowers positive interpretation of paintings

Freud (1923/1989) proposed that the human mind is made up of three parts: id, ego, and superego. The impulsive and childlike id is driven by pleasure principles; while the superego is formed of social morals and regulations, which usually depresses or prohibits the original object of sex. Being a lesbian, the rational ego attempts to keep a balance between the hedonic id of desiring other women and the moralistic superego imposed by the heterosexual society.

In Lacan (1977)'s mirror stage, a child establishes her identity through recognizing herself in a mirrored image. Growing up, we complete an ideal self by admiring or emulating someone whom we regard as a mirror for ourselves. When the superego of heterosexual hegemony leaves little space for someone on the margin, lesbian desire is usually objected as shame or fear (Sedgwick, 2003). Hence, queer theorist Sedgwick (2003) believes that this sense of shame is "the first, and the remains a permanent, structuring fact of identity" for sexual minorities and then proposes an idea of "shame transformation," which transfers the internalized shame into the source of endless power (p. 64).

One of the most common ways that lesbians and other queer people appropriate from the heterosexual codes of popular culture in Taiwan is to "pass" or smuggle their fantasies and desires (Luo, 2004, p. 14). This can be observed in Fei's response toward Chen-Jin's painting, *Ensemble* (1934).

> *I just hope these two girls can be together, and their story might be made into a movie (hahahahaha); the pictures of their plot are already running through my mind. It might be family or friendship, but I prefer a romantic love because it is very interesting.*

In Sedgwick's words, we see this kind of queer reading, distorting original contents in order to satisfy personal pleasure as "queer performativity" (2003, p. 61). In my own study, viewing female figures in a positive way or enjoying invisible fantasies of relationships between women can be regarded as certain sort of queer performativity. Eventually, lesbians can construct the queerness of their resisting culture through their mutual lived experience, while remaining invisible to the mainstream world.

9-4-3 Lesbians prefer to be comfortable

"Comfortable" has two interpretations with regard to this study. One refers to female figures in paintings being perceived as physically at ease; the other to them being perceived as psychologically at ease, with no external hardships or pressures. Under the gaze of another woman, participants felt comfortable expressing their true opinions and had little need to pleasure the male gaze like heterosexual women. According to Huxley, Clarke, and Halliwell's (2011) study, lesbian relationships have the potential to encourage women to feel happier with their bodies. When lesbians are not the subject or object of the male gaze, they have more freedom to codify their own type of lesbian gaze (Sebasco, 2009). Under the lesbian gaze, women find it easier to be comfortable and to exchange gazes with other women. In this context, to be comfortable means to be oneself and to communicate with others on equal terms. It means that a woman can wear whatever she likes, lie down wherever she pleases, and love whomever she feels attracted to. A true human being is to be who she is without the labeling of heterosexuality, homosexuality, or something else.

In conclusion, for Taiwanese lesbians the mutual phenomenon of viewing female figures in paintings is to pre-reflectively construct an ideal image of a woman as someone who understands herself, embraces the values of diversity and nonconformity and has the courage to show it. While some preferences and opinions on viewing female figures were shared among participants, yet there was no one fixed type or look that they all unanimously favored. As lesbians, they resisted imposing a universal standard in this way, or generalizing, perhaps for fear that the act of generalization might erase their individual thoughts and preferences.

Chapter TEN: CONCLUSION

10-1 Introduction

I am interested in discovering how and what Taiwanese lesbians experience paintings. Responding to John Berger's (1972/1990) claim that a woman's presence is "manifested in her gestures, voice, opinions, expressions, clothes, chosen surroundings, and taste" (p. 46), I listened carefully to twenty Taiwanese lesbians talking about their experiences of viewing paintings. Taking a phenomenological approach, I then analyzed the words and phrases participants had used to talk about female figures in paintings, looking for underlying meaning. Then, adhering to van Manen's (2016b) four existential methods, I organized my data into key themes. Ultimately, as a result of forty-five face-to-face interviews and a process of hermeneutic analysis, I identified twelve major themes and seventeen sub-themes relating to the topic of Taiwanese lesbians viewing female figures in paintings. This following chapter discusses the conclusions I have drawn from my research, along with its contributions, implications, and suggestions for future studies.

10-2 Conclusion of Findings

My literature review points out that most experiences of viewing paintings focus on the experience of museum visitors, or differences in viewing experiences of art experts versus non-art experts, or women versus men. In the field of visual education, most attention is paid to the creative performance of young students or to the significance of introducing female or queer artists. In terms of homosexual spectatorship, there is an emphasis on literature, cinema, photography, and body images, and greater attention paid to gay men than to lesbians. Lesbian spectatorship of paintings is quite clearly under-researched. This has encouraged me to take a comprehensive, phenomenological approach to exploring the experience of twenty Taiwanese

lesbians viewing paintings specifically containing female figures. One kind of perspective is how viewers receive paintings, discussing how viewers feel and react in front of paintings; the other relates to where viewers stand, focusing on how they are addressed by paintings. The findings of my study talk to both perspectives of the literature review on the experience of viewing painting, especially on the dimension of emotion, society, psychology, and body.

Following van Manen's theory of the four aspects of lived experience led me to identify seventeen sub-themes, which in turn enabled me to reconstruct Taiwanese lesbian experiences of viewing paintings. Six of these themes related to lived space, time, and bodily reactions constitute what it feels like when viewing paintings (Table 7); seven themes related to lived time and relation speak in the context of how my Taiwanese lesbian participants made sense of female figures in paintings (Table 8); four themes relating to the lived body, elaborate how my participants felt about the presentations of the women depicted in the paintings (Table 9). It is important to note that not all these themes are unique to Taiwanese lesbians reflecting on the phenomenon of viewing paintings containing female figures. Some themes have been identified in studies researching participants with different backgrounds and inform readers the experience of viewing paintings in a more general way (Findings I). Some of my identified themes, however, do speak specifically to the fundamental structure of Taiwanese lesbians viewing paintings that have female figures (Finding II and Finding III). In this section, I would like to conclude the former phenomenon as *the sameness of difference* and the latter one as *the difference of sameness*.

10-2-1 The sameness of difference

I observed certain similarities between viewing experiences described by my participants and those presented in existing studies. That is to say: similar themes were generated by different

viewers from diverse backgrounds. These similarities were mainly presented in Chapter Six. Firstly, in my study and others, most viewers appreciated being in the presence of original paintings and the associated on-site experience, regardless of whether or not they had professional art training. In these circumstances, viewers tend to use their bodies and bodily senses to create and memorize their impressive experiences of viewing paintings. For most viewers, the experience of viewing a painting goes beyond simply viewing the painting; it involves a process of interaction, for example between the viewer and the space that accommodates the paintings, or in the conversation held between a viewer and the people around her.

Secondly, most viewers describe viewing a painting as engaging in a conversation with the artists, time, society, or even their own memories. In my study, participants preferred to connect with artists through the physical aspects of paintings and were most likely to interpret paintings based on their own emotional connections or life experiences. In previous studies, most participants had memories of viewing paintings defined by both when they viewed them and where they viewed them. It might be concluded that viewers tend to contextualize paintings within their own experienced time and space. Some aesthetic responses and preferences are shared by lesbians and other individuals when viewing paintings, especially experiencing original paintings. Lesbians are also human beings. It follows that there would be some similarities between lesbians and viewers of different cultures and backgrounds with regard to how they feel and interact with paintings.

10-2-2 The difference of sameness

Lesbians are women, but they are different from heterosexual or otherwise identified women in certain respects. Through the device of paintings containing female figures, this study set

out to describe lesbians' visual experience which is rarely explored. In our patriarchal society, men have typically been the arbitrators or owner of what is considered beautiful and their standards have typically disregard female perspectives, especially those of lesbians. Historically, portrayals of lesbians in art or other media have been intended to please and satisfy the male gaze (Halperin, 2002; Ruan & Bullough, 1992; Sang, 2014). Individually, lesbians have long struggled to see themselves reflected in the heterosexual environments that surround them, such as their families, classmates, and friends; most of time, their reflections are also lacking in popular visual culture, such as social media, publications, and also paintings.

Bodily experience

As Sebasco (2009) notes, lesbians see women differently from men or heterosexual women see women because they do not always fit the standards of beauty constructed by the majority. While less lesbian representation in visual culture, lesbians have been forced to create their own images of female bodies (Kelly, 2007). For lesbians, what a woman should look like is also influenced both by heterosexual society's expectation and lesbian subculture (Kelly, 2007). Thus, lesbians might become "resisters to culturally imposed norms of femininity" (Brown, 1995, P. 9). I observed that participants experience this bodily, feeling the body of female figures in the paintings as their own. The theme of the lived body is a prominent one when considering how my participants viewed these painted women, in both a reflective and pre-reflective way. This kind of bodily experience creates a kind of non-conventional aesthetics, central to which are notions of diversity, comfort, and positivity. To my participants, diversity means something that lies outside of traditional, popular, or mainstream values. It means to include, to accept, and to embrace differences. Outside of the expectations of heterosexual society, both viewers and the painted women they view can feel comfortable for their own sake,

closer to themselves, and positively empowered. Lesbian viewers are disrupting the pattern of objectification and binary division by creating diverse and queer sense of aesthetics.

Intimate connections with self and others

Lesbian gaze in my study not only has a more flexibility with physical attraction and gender presentation but also reveals other distinctive traits on viewing female figures in paintings. For example, they demonstrated a strong interest in connecting with their inner worlds and other interpersonal relationships, searching for the evidence of beings when viewing paintings. Since lesbians were little, they were aware of their differences and learning to accept them. Thus, they tend to turn their thoughts inward in search of oneself secretly. Through identifying their own relationships in depicted female figures, and through articulating their disagreement with heteronormative values, participants were able to obtain an enhanced awareness and existence of themselves. As painter Mark Rothko once commented, "A painting is not a picture of an experience; it is an experience" (Seiberling, 1959, p. 82). In other words, my participants are not only viewing an image reflecting their life experiences but also revealing their lived experience through feeling and talking these female bodies to me. Basing on our conversations, I discovered that the visual experience of my participants is influenced by the confluence of personal history, heterosexual culture, and lesbian subculture they contact with.

10-3 Contributions to understanding how Taiwanese lesbians experience viewing paintings that contain female figures

During the process of analyzing and writing up this research, I have been constantly returning to my three main research questions, asking myself: *What is it like to view paintings for*

Taiwanese lesbians? How does this group of people interpret and make sense of paintings containing female figures? What does such an experience mean for Taiwanese lesbians in the context of Taiwanese society? In addition to guiding my writing, these questions also illuminate the unique contribution of this phenomenological study. I consider its significance and contributions to be as follows:

(1) First of all, this study points out a research gap in the literature regarding the link between the spectatorship of lesbians and aesthetic perception of paintings. By shedding light on the experience of Taiwanese lesbians, this study extends the discussion of queer aesthetics and, more broadly deepens our understanding of what it means to experience paintings, which also responds my first research question. Additionally, rather than exploring the explicit performance of lesbian behavior patterns, this study takes a more retrospective approach, drawing on both Sinophone and non-Sinophone literature to study the essence of a Taiwanese lesbian lived experience. This study expects to initialize the beginning point of studying this gap, which may leave more potential space for future discussions in this aspect.

(2) In previous studies, discussions on the aesthetic experience of viewing paintings have often been approached from the perspective of either philosophical traditions or psychological accounts. The former approach focuses on the nature of artworks and beauty, while the latter one cares more about the embodied process between our bodies and outer worlds. This study has sought to re-locate these aesthetic responses through an in-between approach, taking into account the links between a viewer's mind and body as perceived through a phenomenological lens. For example, my findings cover the themes originating from the spatiality, temporality, corporeality and relationality between viewers, paintings, and

painted female figures, which constitutes the experience of viewing paintings by my participants. Simply put, taking a phenomenological approach to understanding how Taiwanese lesbians experience viewing paintings is a unique characteristic of this study.

Additionally, this study is made possible from an insider perspective. When participants feel secure with someone from their same community, they more easily disclose details about themselves and their lives. I start from my own life as a Taiwanese lesbian and then co-construct the essence of experiencing female figures in paintings with my participants. This study contributes a valuable opportunity to approach and understand the visual experience of Taiwanese lesbians in a true, close, and multiple way.

(3) Csikszentmihalyi (1990) says, "information in the work of art fuses with information in the viewer's memory, followed by expansion of the viewer's consciousness, and the attendant emotional consequences" (p. 18). When viewers have less experience with art, they bring fewer art-related memories and are stimulated to have more free and personal associations around the images (Clover, 1995; Housen, 2007). Hence, the experience of viewing female figures in paintings might be regarded as a microcosm of a viewer's life experiences and emotional connections, which provides us with unique and intimate access to the lived experience of lesbians in Taiwan. This study has intended to create a mirrored environment where participants were able to perceive reflections of their own feelings and experiences easily. Its result facilitates our understanding of what the experience of viewing paintings means for Taiwanese lesbians, which also answers my third research question.

(4) Fourthly, this study has sought to increases the visibility of a sexual minority group and to promote paintings as a space for the discussion of gender issues and social justice in the visual arts. Currently, the visual experiences of non-conforming minorities are rarely

brought up in art classes or exhibition spaces (Weick, 2010). Thus, this study has attempted to give a voice of women currently underrepresented in the fields of visual arts and art education. Meanwhile, this study also offers a possible chance to observe a cultural shift among different generations of Taiwan lesbians. For example, younger participants mentioned learning about paintings in school, whereas older participants tended to have obtained their knowledge and experiences of paintings mostly on their own, outside the classrooms. The younger generation talked less about experiences of oppression or homophobia compared with the lesbians aged forty and over. Coming out was a universally difficult topic, and most older participants, especially over fifty did not really see coming out as an option in their lifetime; younger participants, however, were more willing to face it. Furthermore, gender roles seemed less defined among younger lesbians, with increasing numbers rejecting the binary style of tomboy-femme and identifying as "pure" or others, instead. The result not only indirectly reflects how feminism and lesbian movement influence the gender performance of lesbian identity but also recognizes the change of art education scene in Taiwan.

(5) This study recognizes the complexity of viewing and experiencing paintings, highlighting the interrelation between gazing, identification, and social context. Csikszentmihalyi and Robinson (1990) remind us of Bourdieu's comment that "a person can never have a pure immediate aesthetic experience… it is historically grounded, inseparable from ideologies and social values" (p. 17). This study has shown that while the heteronormative insistence on a gender binary reinforces heterosexual privileges in society at large, it has also incited a kind of lesbian resistance, resulting in alternative modes of viewing female figures among lesbians. For example. Taiwanese lesbians in my study generally displayed a higher-than-average awareness of gender inequality; they tended to favor diverse, unconventional, or

even eccentric-looking women; they also enjoyed ambiguous, undefined, or non-binary images and to arrive independently at their own messages of empowerment. Hence, this study reveals some experiences that seemed to be unique to Taiwanese lesbians viewing female figures in paintings. The aesthetic perception of Taiwanese lesbians, as established, is influenced by social, cultural, educational, and personal context, which leads to responding my second research question.

(6) In terms of pedagogical contribution, this study is empirically and experientially significant for the way it addresses the topics of sexual identity and queer artists in art classrooms. The study also shifts our focuses from understanding the intention of queer artistss to exploring the contextual experience of queer art-viewers, who constitutes most of the sexual minority population. The inclusion of same-sex perspectives in art classes provides an equitable, comprehensive visual art education to students. By encouraging students to use their imaginations and express themselves through paintings, we might help lesbian and other sexual minority students to clarify their sexual identities, learn about their authentic selves, and be protected in their physical and emotional health, even without disclosing their identities to peers.

10-4 Suggestions for the Future

10-4-1 Suggestion for teaching practice

The results of this study and literature review show that viewing paintings is a thought-provoking and rewarding activity, which creates a phenomenological space for viewers to rest, contemplate, and introspect regardless of their sexual identity. Therefore, I would like to suggest that art educators and teachers pay more attention to the quality and quantity of art appreciation in art classes. As Fei mentions, "*from your questions, I start to observe my way of*

viewing this painting...I also realize that art classes back in schools could have been interesting." Through the process of viewing paintings, students can have more opportunities to expand their imagination and bodily experiences, reflect on their life events, and then search for who they really are and what they truly want.

Secondly, several themes in this study make it clear that lesbian participants tend to empathize with portrayed figures, contextualizing them in the timeline of their selves and others. This echoes what Fang says, "*the aim of viewing paintings is to see oneself and also others.*" From an individual perspective, I suggest art educators and teachers use the experience of viewing paintings as a safe place for lesbian students to initiate self-discovery and self-awareness since they might have more sensitivities surrounding their identification. The discussions in art classrooms may be enriched with diverse observations or topics since lesbian students are more aware of imbalanced relationship and issues relating to female representation. From a collective perspective, I suggest art educators and teachers explore in greater depth themes relating to gender, identity, and body images, which not only explicitly dispel negative images connected to sexual minorities, but which also implicitly turns paintings into a platform for the discussion of gender awareness and equality in visual arts. Viewing paintings potentially enhances critical thinking abilities, historical empathy, and tolerance for disagreement, especially for disadvantaged students (Greene, Kisida, & Bowen, 2014). The act of viewing paintings can make viewers more aware of the feelings and needs of others by transferring feeling through images. In the end, appreciating paintings is to make viewers communicate with one another emotionally and thereby to bond with one another, leading viewers to treat each other better with more respect (Eaton, 1988).

Thirdly, I suggest art educators and teachers concentrate on students' subjectivity and life experiences, linking with their cultural and social contexts of viewing paintings. The result of this study discovers that except for applying authoritative information and visual qualities of paintings, contextualizing paintings with a personal connection makes the viewing experience become more influential and memorable. The literature review of this study also advises art educators to try to understand minority students through various means, such as by incorporating various approaches to examine their experiences of viewing paintings. These approaches can be both optical and structural, verbal and text-based, modernist and postmodernist. For example, art teachers can raise gender-related topics and encourage students to arrive at meaningful narratives, emotional connections, or personal comparisons through selecting and interpreting painting images. Additionally, art teachers can remind students of the heteronormativity inherent to mainstream textbooks and scholarship, and encourage them to do more exploration on their own in order to develop a critical eye and visual literacy.

10-4-2 Suggestion for museum education and professionals

As Xi comments, "*I hope these group of paintings can encourage viewers to think. There is no decided answer because it exists in everyone's mind.*" Wang says, "*most people are not used to thinking…if we prepare some guidelines, viewers can understand the historical background of artworks as well as prove to themselves that she can find her own happiness.*" "*Paintings provide a chance of seeing different sides of the world. The real beauty exists when two persons are happy together. There is no need to judge or criticize others,*" said Fei. When viewing several paintings together for a mock show, many participants talk about their desire for extending their imaginations or fantasies to the painting images, their expectation for virtual audience to understand oneself deeper, as well as their goal for presenting different kinds of

beauty. Based on my participants' reflections, I observe that an inspiring, atypical, open for interpretation, and instructional exhibition is expected. Thus, I would like to make several recommendations for museum curators, educators, or professionals.

First, I propose a focus on curating a series of exhibitions, talks, or seminars focusing on gender and sexual minorities as well as designing some self-guided programs with museum collections. Museums should demonstrate an institutional awareness of having multifaceted and inclusive responsibility. Since sexual minorities are a part of human history, authoritative institutions have a duty to document and visualize its existence. Curating relevant exhibitions or events not only brings the value of inclusivity to museum visitors but also displays a respectful recognition of sexual minority communities. Take the British Museum for example: Since 2018, it has had a trail named "desire, love, identity" running across the museum's permanent collection (the British Museum, n.d.). Through following a tag and related information on the exhibit cards of artworks with a same-sex desire connection, visitors can easily identify and explore the history of sexual minority in more depth. This kind of strategy not only underlines the importance of understanding people on the margins of society but also deliver a positive message: Just as many of these artworks existed hundreds or even thousands of years ago, so too did sexual minorities. Both art about or by sexual minorities and sexual minorities themselves have always existed.

Second, museums or galleries should leave more space for audiences to raise gender awareness and express themselves. The museum can welcome visitors to explore their own queer narratives by sharing their own stories or images inspired by their collections through participating physical or virtual exhibitions. Additionally, the museum can provide some on-site sessions of sexual health education specifically for school groups. By working with artist-

educators, these relative events aim to use museum collections to generate more discussions on contemporary issues as well as complement the visual art and sex education at schools. The act of marking this or otherwise pointing it out, shows a sense of daily life, which lays a foundation for developing mutual respect and equality. As a result, students or viewers may feel more comfortable expressing, facing, or even sharing their own sexual identities.

Bourdieu (1998/2001) proposes that men and women are given a specific role in our society and the most effective way of changing it is to make modifications to our educational systems and family structures. When museum professionals work to articulate the inarticulated parts of an art collection and history, visitors may find themselves resonating with something that they did not notice before but which is in fact an experience shared by all human beings. When art teachers are willing to lead a discussion on atypical images or mention same-sex perspectives in artworks, students might have better chances of conversing with and understanding one another. When a female student, especially a sexual minority one, has more opportunities to explore her relationship with gender, identity, and her own body through viewing and talking about paintings, she might become more confident about deconstructing the social stereotype imposed upon her and find it easier to build up her own self-image. As citizens, we have to make sure that all students are supported to learn, contribute, and participate in an inclusive environment.

10-5 Limitations of the Study

A first limitation of this study might be the issue of translation. I conducted and transcribed all my interviews in Chinese, while for the purpose of data analysis and citation I translated the transcripts into English. There might, therefore, have been some meaning lost during the

process. To minimize this risk, I asked a professional Chinese-English translator to review my work.

Secondly, many of my participants had completed higher education, worked in white-collar professions and lived in the Taipei metropolitan area. This is likely to mean that they have better access to art education while at school, have easier access to exhibitions, and inhabit an environment more open-minded toward sexual minorities than lesbians from elsewhere. This homogenous sampling means that my findings may not be representative of the diversity of lesbian communities outside this particular circle in Taiwan.

Thirdly, the issues of gender roles and varying levels of comfort among lesbians with regard to disclosing their sexual orientation have not been taken into consideration, largely due to the difficulty of recruiting participants for this study. Several studies have suggested that tomboy and femme lesbians might have different processes of identifying themselves, facing the outer worlds, and desiring other women (Hu, 2019; Su, 2005). Meanwhile, whether a lesbian chooses to be "out" or to remain closeted to others might influence how she comes to know and understand herself (Riggle et. al, 2008; Sebasco, 2009). How and onto whom she projects her desire might also vary as a result. Exploring these distinctions was not the scope of this study, yet it might be a potential topic for future research. Clearly, however, this study cannot claim to fully present a comprehensive picture of how every Taiwanese lesbian experiences viewing female figures in paintings. Rather, it is an attempt to portray the viewing experiences of twenty Taiwanese lesbians in a particular place, at a particular time in their lives.

10-6 Conclusion

In the beginning of this study, I surveyed literature relating to different kinds of visual

experiences, including the aesthetic experience of viewing artworks or paintings, the female experience of viewing films and popular images, the psychological process of viewing self and others, and the social relation of gazing and so on. I understand that the act of viewing images or paintings is a complex phenomenon, dependent on any number of individual and environmental variables.

Several studies indicate that lesbians tend to want to become or to possess female figures displayed in films or fashion magazines (Hollinger, 1998; Lewis & Rolley, 1996; Tobin, 2010). In the current study, the experience of viewing paintings usually gave viewers more space for imagining and cultivating personal thoughts. Viewing paintings turned out to be a process akin to one of seeing one's own self and connecting with one's history. The Taiwanese lesbians I interviewed did not express desire to be or to possess the female figures they viewed in the paintings. Conversely, they mainly saw these figures as either other women that they knew or had known or as themselves. They felt these women, sensed their emotional states, and then sympathized with them. The experience of viewing paintings relied more on participants' personal interpretations, revealing more about each viewer's individual circumstance and personality. At the end, viewers can talk to paintings and then paintings can speak out for them. Instead of being a case of viewing film and fashion images, the relationship between paintings and viewers was more equal, interactive, and retrospective. This was potentially a reflection of how my participants viewed this world genuinely.

"When I hear myself speak, I hear myself think" (van Manen, 2016a, p. 129). Through a phenomenological approach of talking and sharing, the Taiwanese lesbians in this study drew personal, meaningful connections with female figures they saw in paintings and came to understand themselves better as a result. "We know or discover ourselves, and reveal ourselves

to others, by the stories we tell" (Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach, & Zilber, 1998, p. 7). We are the words that we choose to say. "Language bears the meanings of thought as a footprint signifies the movement and effort of a body" (Merleau-Ponty, 1964, p. 44). For lesbians, the approach of making meaning is an effective strategy to cope with their issue of identity (Abes & Jones, 2004). Hence, through exploring how they engage in the act of gazing paintings, we understand that Taiwanese lesbians are sympathetic to unconventional portrayals of women, that they reject conventional beauty standards as they apply to women, and that, in viewing paintings containing female figures, they are seeking strength and empowerment. Additionally, they tend to interpret paintings in a queer way, seeking comfort, pleasure, or compensation as they do so. The lesbian way of gazing and aesthetics exist at the margin of society, and I would like to propose that lesbians are becoming who they are; her gaze is born out of the male gaze yet grows her own look and strength gradually, without taking transvestitism or a masquerade.

A lesbian viewer has been carefully walking on her own path from as early as she can—since she noticed her difference from her peers, since she discovered her first lesbian film, since she had her first crush on a same-sex friend, since she experienced her first heartbreaking. Very often, it will have felt like a long journey without seeing a destination. "By lacking clear rules about how to be lesbian and gay in the world, we have made up the rules as we go along" (Brown, 1989, p. 451). Hence, as a lesbian, the only thing she can do and she must do is to keep writing, talking, viewing, loving, and living. I hope that this study provides readers with a more accurate portrayal of how twenty Taiwanese lesbians view female figures in paintings and, beyond this, I hope that applying a phenomenological lens to the study will help this marginalized group become both visible and more comprehensible. It is my deep and sincere wish that, one day every student, in every classroom will feel able to talk freely about their experiences of viewing paintings and this world—and, by extension themselves. I believe the

experience of viewing painting can help viewers understanding who they are, as students, as

citizens, as daughters, as wives, and as sexual or political beings.

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Appendix A: Approved Letter of Ethical Review

香港教育大學
The Education University
of Hong Kong

9 May 2019

Ms TZENG Yi Hsin
Research Postgraduate Programmes
Graduate School

Dear Ms Tzeng,

Application for Ethical Review <Ref. no. 2018-2019-0318>

I am pleased to inform you that approval has been given by the Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) for your research project:

Project title: A Study of the Experience of Taiwanese Lesbians Viewing and Interpreting Paintings with Female Figure Images

Ethical approval is granted for the project period from 1 July 2019 to 31 July 2020. If a project extension is applied for lasting more than 3 months, HREC should be contacted with information regarding the nature of and the reason for the extension. If any substantial changes have been made to the project, a new HREC application will be required.

Please note that you are responsible for informing the HREC in advance of any proposed substantive changes to the research proposal or procedures which may affect the validity of this ethical approval. You will receive separate notification should a fresh approval be required.

Thank you for your kind attention and we wish you well with your research.

Yours sincerely,

Patsy Chung (Ms)
Secretary
Human Research Ethics Committee

c.c. Professor CHOU Kee Lee, Chairperson, Human Research Ethics Committee

Appendix B: Participants Sheet

Participant Information Sheets for

A study of the experience of Taiwanese lesbians viewing and interpreting paintings with female figure images.

Before taking part in this study, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. The researcher can be contacted if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Please take time to decide whether or not you wish to take part.

1. **Purpose of the study:** First, this study would like to fill a critical gap in current research by providing an in-depth understanding of viewing painting experience on Taiwanese lesbians. Second, this study can help raise the awareness and visibility for the sexual minority group. At the end, the findings will be helpful for professionals in museum curating, art education, and gender studies.

2. **Why have I been chosen?** In order to achieve our intention, there will be twenty adult participants involved in this study. They must be Taiwanese females, who were born, raised, and living in Taiwan currently. They are non-art specialists who do not have art or design related degree. Most important of all, they need to identify themselves as lesbians.

3. **Do I have to take part?** Participation in this study is entirely voluntary and that refusal or withdrawal will involve no penalty or loss, now or in the future.

4. **What will happen to me if I take part?** This study will mainly use interviews to collect research materials. The location of conducting interview will be the place which makes interviewees feel safe and comfortable. Most locations will be in quiet coffee shops or restaurants close to participants' working, studying or living places according to their convenient schedules. Each participant will be interviewed face-to-face two-times individually and each interview will last for one to two hours. The interval between two interviews will be around two to three weeks.

5. ***What do I have to do?*** There is no lifestyle restrictions as a result of participating. The first interview will mainly talk about participants' previous viewing painting experience; while

the second interview will focus on the paintings participants select under the theme and their thoughts behind the decision. Audio-recording will be identified only by a code, and will not be used or made available for any purposes other than this research project. All audio-recording digital files will be destroyed at the end of the study.

6. ***What are the possible benefits of taking part?*** This study involves no potential risk and participants will obtain basic information and art knowledge in relation to the sample paintings at the end of interview. Through participating this study, interviewees might potentially increase their interest of art and ability in appreciating artworks as well as understand their own thoughts about female figures.

7. ***Will my taking part in this project be kept confidential?*** The participant's permission will be needed to allow restricted access to information collected about them in this project. All data will be identified only by a code. All information collected about participants will be kept strictly confidential and anonymous. Entered data will be stored on a password-protected computer, while original, anonymized hard copies of the questionnaires will be stored in a folder, inside a locked drawer until 5 years past publication.

8. ***What will happen to the results of the research project?*** The result of this study will be completed as part of the researcher's doctoral degree dissertation before summer, 2020. The project will be mainly presented in digital format and the result will be shared with researcher's supervisory committee, the Education University of Hong Kong library, and other academic institutions. Results will also be presented at conference and written up in journals. Results are normally presented in terms of groups of individuals; if any individual data are presented, the data will be totally anonymous, without any means of identifying the individuals involved. After finishing the study, the researcher will email a complete soft copy to all participants.

*The project has been reviewed by the Education University of Hong Kong, Research Ethics Committee.

*If participants have any question, feel free to contact researcher, Yi-Hsin Tzeng for further information:

Appendix C: Consent Form

香港教育大學
The Education University
of Hong Kong

Consent Forms for

A study of the experience of Taiwanese lesbians viewing and interpreting paintings with female figure images.

Conducted by researcher: Tzeng, Yi-Hsin, candidate for Doctor of Education
Name of Organization: The Education University of Hong Kong
Name of principle supervisor: Dr. TAM, Cheung On, Department of Cultural and Creative Arts

- I confirm that I have read and understand the Participant Information Sheet.

- I have had the opportunity to ask questions and had them answered.

- I understand that all personal information will remain confidential and that all efforts will be made to ensure I cannot be identified (except as might be required by law).

- I agree that data gathered in this study may be stored anonymously and securely, and may be used for future research.

- I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving a reason.

- I agree to take part in this study.

I have read the foregoing information, or it has been read to me. I have had the opportunity to ask questions about it and any questions I have been asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I consent voluntarily to be a participant in this study

Print Name of Participant   **Participant's signature**   ***Date***

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Statement by the researcher/person taking consent
I have accurately read out the information sheet to the potential participant, and to the best of my ability made sure that the participant understands this study. I confirm that the participant was given an opportunity to ask questions about the study, and all the questions asked by the participant have been answered correctly and to the best of my ability. I confirm that the individual has not been coerced into giving consent, and the consent has been given freely and voluntarily.

Print Name of Researcher   **Researcher's signature**   ***Date***

TZENG, YI-HSIN_____

Appendix D: Interview Questionnaires

(1) <u>The First Interview</u>

1.   Have you ever viewed paintings before?

2.   What is the definition of paintings in your opinion?

3.   Where do you usually view paintings?

4.   What kind of format did you encounter paintings?

5.   What was the experiential difference between viewing paintings and other media? For example, calligraphy, poster, advertisement and so on.

6.   What kind of painting do you appreciate the most?

7.   What was the most impressive viewing paintings experience like?

8.   Where did it happen? What kind of show was it?

9.   How did you feel about it? Could you tell me more details about the show and the paintings you viewed?

(2) <u>The Second Interview</u>

1.   How did you make a decision for choosing these paintings?

2.   Why did you choose these paintings, instead of others?

3.   Is there any commonality between these paintings?

4.   Could you choose one painting from your selection and then talk more about it?

5.   Have you even seen this painting before? Where did you see it before?

6.   At the first sight, which part of this painting did draw your attention? Why?

7.   Which character did draw your attention first? Why?

8.   Would you please guess who she is? What is she doing?

9.   What is your feeling about this female figure?

10. Who is the second figure that you will pay attention in this painting? Why?

11. What is the relationship like between these figures?

12. From an emotional perspective, do you have any feeling aroused by this painting?

13. What does this painting remind of you? Or is there anything/story you feel connected with the painting and you would like to share with me?

14. Which part of this painting do you appreciate the most? That is, the best part of this painting?

15. All in all, do you have other thoughts or feedbacks that you would like to share with me?